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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

PROJECT TOPIC

WHAT'S UP WITH WHATSAPP PROFILE PICTURES AND
STATUSES? A MULTIMODAL APPROACH.

BY

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This project is submitted to the Department of English and Communication Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Master of Arts in Applied English Linguistics.

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ABSTRACT

The development of social networking sites as linguistic and communication platforms is rising across all age groups in Zimbabwe. Amongst a plethora of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, WhatsApp is the most common in Zimbabwe. Consequently, this research examined the essence of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. The research was guided by four main objectives which are to: 1. Analyse the Significance of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses. 2. Explain the nature of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses. 3. Examine the messages portrayed by WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses. 4. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses. Different scholars' perspectives on social media semantics in general and WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses in particular were looked at. A case study qualitative design was used. It involved the administering of in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions as research instruments. Participatory observation complemented interviews and focus group discussions. Convenient sampling technique was used to select 60 respondents for the research. The participants in this study were the WhatsApp users (18-65 year olds) enrolled or recruited by Midlands State University (MSU) Harare Campus who were willing to participate in the study. The data was analysed using axial coding and comparative analysis. The study was informed by the multimodal discourse analysis theory. The research found out that WhatsApp profile pictures are linguistic communication affordances associated with the multimodal portrayal of identity, emotions, ideology, personality and events in one's life. Opportunities and challenges were discovered and participants emphasized cultural awareness and caution as measures to mitigate cited challenges.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Parents, Mr and Mrs G.T Nyambo, Wife, Theresa Nyambo, Uncle, Dr. W Nyambo and children: Munyaradzi, Racheal and Mukudzeyi. They all inspired me to further my education.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The subject of this research relates to the meaning and implication of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. It is a multimodal approach that taps into the semiotic element of this relatively novel approach to discourse analysis. As such, it is very much compatible with the reality that WhatsApp supports sending and receiving an assortment of media that includes text, photos, videos, documents, location and voice calls. At the centre of linguistics is the communication aspect and therefore profile pictures and statuses are communication agents. WhatsApp Inc (2017) vows; “Behind every product decision is our desire to let people communicate anywhere in the world without barriers.” Being an apparatus that facilitates people to communicate using Instant Messaging, there is a plethora of research and analysis of the somewhat conventional two-way communication and, in the context of WhatsApp use, there has been concentration on (textese) language (spoken or written). Despite the acknowledgement of the consequent understanding of the extent to which WhatsApp shares most of its linguistic and discourse essentials with electronically mediated language, the essence of the fundamental features of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses are interpreted. At the heart of the multimodal approach is what Mead (1974:182) acknowledges in his assertion that “The self is not something that exists first and then enters into relationship with others, but it is, so to speak, an eddy in the social current and so still a part of that current.” Typical of multimodality, the research neutralises language by integrating an abundance of modes without assigning supremacy to any of them. This is done by accepting the variety through which WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are set. Albeit such multiplicity, meaning is assigned to each peculiar status and picture hence the core of this

research. The chapter covers preliminary study and rationale; problem statement and focus, aims, goals and hypotheses; research questions and objectives, and impact.

1.2 Preliminary study and rationale (Background)

Social media semantics have been centred more on how online exchanges construct and convey meanings but there has been dearth of literature on the essence of profile pictures and statuses, especially those of WhatsApp. Kress (2003) in fact acknowledges that Multimodal discourse analysis is a relatively new and phenomenally developing approach which accepts that meanings are created interactions and texts in a complex chemistry of semiosis across multiple modes which include but not restricted to written and spoken language. In relation to WhatsApp, of interest is the observation to the effect that albeit it's small history, multimodal discourse analysis has had great impact on digital literacies and the field of human-computer interaction as confirmed by Kress and Jewitt (2003).

The way different aspects of identity interact and affect one another in conversations have been explored by Norris (2004). The author focuses on how embodied and disembodied modes in interaction show identity. Of interest is the way WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses can be analysed in relation to how identity elements can be constructed before an interface and preserved in the 'historical bodies' of participants who have an unswerving stimulus on new identity elements that are co-constructed by participants in real time.

Norris (2004) also applies discernments from multimodal standpoint to psychological issues. Since Profile Pictures and Statuses can be pregnant with emotional connotations, analysis of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses becomes expedient. Kress and Jewitt (2003) observe that multimodal semiotics help to unveil 'silent' discourses of power which are sometimes even more potent than those expressed more explicitly in writing and speech. Of interest is

the fact that Kress and Jewitt (2003) analyse classroom interactions and show how local practises of posture, gesture, gaze and object handling can be linked to bigger aspects of politics and policy. As such, a social semiotic multimodal analysis of profile pictures and statuses may also embody people's inclinations with regard to politics, humans being political beings as understood from as way back as the Aristotolian era. According to Vijay et al (2008), it is the practical potential of the communication rendered by the 'silent' pictures and statuses that intrigues the researcher. Actually, the recent shift in multimodal discourse analysis from abstract and often de-contextualised notion of 'text' towards the idea of discourse as integrated in the flow of concrete social actions that go to make up ordinary and professional human practices is worth celebrating as it can also befit a contextualised analysis of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses. Due to the multiple modes of settings that characterise WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses (text, emojis, photos, videos etc), a multimodal analysis of the pictures and statuses is rendered conceivable. This should be complemented by the analysis that has been invariably exploring the relationship between multiple and interacting semiotic modes used in specific settings such as schools, workplaces and villages. As such, there can therefore be the interpretations of different kinds of identities, power relationships and opportunities for social action profile pictures and statuses avail to social actors. The analysis therefore assumes practical potential in assisting WhatsApp users to redesign their Profile Pictures and Statuses settings according to their respective discourse communities with regard to culture, workplaces, political environment, and identity.

Essentially, in relation to power and Social Media Profile Pictures and Statuses, it has been observed that there are issues to do with 'Teens, Gender and Self Re-Presentation' as confirmed by Herring (2006). The focus was on Facebook and Twitter and the context, the western world. As such, it is worth emphasizing that contemporary Zimbabwe's use of

WhatsApp is phenomenal as it cuts across social categories; be it race, gender, age, creed, and educational background.

The use of language nowadays can be termed revolutionary (Crystal, 2006). Every revolution comes with pros and cons. As such, the WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses have brought controversy on user's constituency's interpretations of the same. Of contention is whether the interpretations offered are correct or incorrect since there are largely agreed notions to do with self-representation, positivity bias, arousal and virality, and social comparison and envy. Such issues are explored and exemplified in researches done in mostly Information Systems university departments. Panger's (2017) 'Emotion in Social Media' is a typical illustration. It seems applied linguists cast a blind eye on the language of social media which is invariably characterised by Profile Pictures and Statuses whose effects and meanings bear substantial semantic significance.

WhatsApp Inc. (2017) confirms that the internet and its universal appeal have afforded use of WhatsApp by an astronomical number of the world population, and, Zimbabwe is no exception. Users of the internet usually send mails, check e-mails, search for information on past research works, surf for entertainment, and do some social networking. Social networking is arguably the chief purpose of WhatsApp. Indeed, the internet is one of the greatest things done by human beings.

According to WhatsApp Inc, (2017), WhatsApp is a type of technology that is commonly used on specific mobile phones and computers. Since the smart phones became popular, many messaging services were launched but WhatsApp has become the most popular among all. This application is highly addictive and can create a great impact on regular users and, apart from that, becomes difficult to control and cure.

According to WhatsApp Inc, (2017), WhatsApp messenger functionality has recently been improved upon. It is available on Blackberry, Nokia Symbian 60, Windows phone, Android and iPhones. For users to get started, they enter the telephone number of the device into the App, and it then sorts through the contacts on the phone to figure out who else also has the application already installed. Users can then invite other contacts and start sending messages to those the application discovers. People often press their phones while walking, in buses, on their beds and everywhere; they are chatting on WhatsApp. It is also confirmed that WhatsApp is one of the first ten chat applications in the world today.

In Zimbabwe, many if not most possessors of smart phones have thousands of chatting messages, photo, video and audio attachments on their WhatsApp. Consequently, a multimodal analysis of respective Profile Pictures becomes necessary as these are pregnant with implications that can be more far-reaching than anticipated by both parties in the ‘communication’ process. No wonder why in an American publication, Burke (2011) wrote about “Reading, Writing, Relationships: The Impact of Social Network Sites on Relationships and Well-being.”

The development of digital technology has facilitated easier communication between people and organizations. WhatsApp is used for various purposes like commercial, teaching of students, and friendship interaction among others. It allows direct interactions (WhatsApp Inc (2017). Of interest, however, is the way Profile Pictures and Statuses may not be as unambiguous as the common texting in the common interpersonal communication afforded by the same social media platform. In fact, WhatsApp was created by Brian Acton and Jan Koum in 2009 (WhatsApp Inc (2017). The main objective behind its creation is to make communication and the distribution of multimedia easier and faster than short messages service (SMS). It is a cross platform mobile messenger that works on an internet data plan. It is cheaper; all that is needed is user’s time-framed subscription. That being its primary

objective, one does not forget the impact of the assortment and diverse frequency with which different people set profile pictures and statuses.

In order to bring some researches that have been done to context, Zimbabwe has been no exception with regard to many of the publications on Social Media being centred on direct interpersonal communication where users send each other instant messages. One such kind is by Chiridza (2016) who looks at “Social Media and Society: A case of WhatsApp in Zimbabwe.” The research has shown that though WhatsApp has brought an affordable communication platform, it has become subject to abuse by those who take advantage of its distinct features. Its ability to offer one on one chats and one to many chats in real time has made it become a platform of choice in communicating all sorts of information that range from being useful, insulting, abusive; to outright jokes and absolute trivia, hoaxes and porn.

Again, Malleus and Muchena (2015) examine student cell phone use on one Zimbabwean university campus, using questionnaire data from 179 volunteers, answering the research question "What are students on campus doing with their cell phones to meet their needs? The results pointed more to the higher degree of students abusing WhatsApp.

It is in this vein that this research considers pros and cons of social media. WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses have been seen to result in social malaise that includes; misleading users to illicit relationships, cyber-crime, and break up of relationships, conflicts, divorce and hypocrisy (Chiridza (2016).

From the researches cited above, one can deduce that due to the inexpensive and ubiquitous nature of WhatsApp, people of different cultures, educational backgrounds, religious persuasions, political proclivities and so on use profile pictures and statuses to communicate with their discourse communities. As suggested by Panger (2017), even if someone is not texting messages because of different reasons that could include want of data bundles, Profile

Pictures and Statuses invariably carry semantic value. Of interest is what is communicated by the pictures and statuses as well as the notion on whether people communicate what they intend to. Affirmations and disapprovals may be passed on some Pictures and Statuses, much to the effect that they contribute to the sustenance or disintegration of relationships. Curiosity is on the dialectic nature of interpretation hence need for the Zimbabwean community to be exposed to various interpretation possibilities so that the borrowed culture of sharing of moods, feelings, likings, philosophies and respects from the digital world can be qualified with information. Such ideas are buttressed by Panger (2017) who wrote about Emotion in Social Media.

In the wake of such glaring problems emanating from the communicative potential of Pictures and Statuses, linguists have a role to explore the communicative competence of WhatsApp users. No wonder why in United States of America, Cottle (2016), ironically from a mental health perspective posed the motion, “Is Social Media Hurting or Helping.” Linguists therefore have a long journey to explore the linguistic implications of Profile Pictures and Statuses. Since WhatsApp is ubiquitous and most accessible, it is a convenient starting point of further linguistics research on social media.

1.3 Problem statement and focus

WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses have become abundant communicative agents in Zimbabwe where more than half of cell-phone owners put up Profile Pictures and Statuses to convey meanings. Nevertheless, the dearth of literature on this revolutionary linguistic semantic entity is inexcusable. Most of related researches on social media are from Computer Science, Management and Information Systems and yet the profile pictures and statuses are self-contained meaning making resources that can be analysed from a linguistic perspective

(Kress 2003). Actually, the research focuses on the Social Semiotic Multimodality (SSMM) framework to describe and analyse WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses as meaning making resources as determined by social media producers and allows interrogation of the extent of understanding by consumers and proprietors of Pictures and Statuses. As confirmed by Vijay et al (2008), the multimodal approach to discourse/genre analysis is one of the rarely understood faculties and yet it positions communication in the realm of reality, bringing about representativeness from the individual to the society at large. Interpretations of the semantic value of Profile Pictures and Statuses ranging from interpersonal, family, social, political, economic, emotions, psychological, power, gender, identity, self-presentation and narcissism are focus areas of this research.

1.4 Aim

The study aims to find out the semantic and communication manifestations of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyse the Significance of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.
2. Explain the nature of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.
3. Examine the messages portrayed by WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.
4. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

1.6 Research questions

In carrying out this research, the researcher will have the following Research questions:

1. Why are WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses significant?
2. How do WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses differ in nature?
3. What is the meaning of the messages portrayed by WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses to users?
4. What are the advantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses to users?
5. What are the disadvantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses to users?

1.7 Assumptions

The study assumes the following:

- the respondents will cooperate and provide all the relevant information as the information is personal and sensitive
- All the research ethics and considerations are going to be adhered to. No information is going to be provided under duress or undue influence.
- The political environment will be conducive for the researcher to conduct the research.

1.8 Impact

The research is projected to be highly effective in as far as it validates one of the vastly researched field of culture; yet this, in the context of the Zimbabwean (as much as elsewhere)

culture has been rendered revolutionarily dynamic in the wake of new social semiotic multimodal electronic platforms of communication. In other words, the study helps the nation with insight on some social malaise that emanate from social media. Essentially, social cyber semiotics is very much concerned with ‘‘culture’’ and what it is to be human. Interestingly, the study shows that semiotics goes beyond cultural boundaries. Consequently, it acknowledges its distinctiveness as well as its commonness.

The research builds upon what readers already know intuitively about signs, and then leads them to think critically about the world in which they live – a world saturated with cyber images and texts of all kinds that knowledge of social semiotic multimodal approach can help filter and deconstruct.

Human communication is understood not solely to be characterised by verbal expression but also by non-verbal, which offers enrichment of an understanding of the complex nature of language, communication and social media – a platform where in the case of WhatsApp, the implications of Profile Pictures and Statuses are often taken for granted.

1.9 Definition of Terms:

1.9.1 *Linguistics*

Linguistic can be defined as the scientific study of language as it involves an analysis of language system, language meaning and context.

1.9.2 *Discourse Analysis*

This relates to an overall term for a plethora of methods used to analyse written, verbal, semiotic event, or sign language.

1.9.3 Social Media

Social Media refers to websites and computer applications that make it possible for users to create and share information and to participate in social networking.

1.9.4 Communication

Communication is the act of conveying meaning from one place to the other.

1.9.5 Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

This refers to any form of communication amongst humans making use of two or more electronic gadgets.

1.9.6 WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a type of communication technology that is commonly used on specific mobile phones and computers.

1.9.7 Profile Picture

This refers to an image that signifies a social media account in all its connections across a podium. This is displayed as an avatar adjacent to the name and differs from platform to platform.

1.9.8 Profile Status

The old version of WhatsApp Status is a feature that allows only texts to show people if one is available to chat. The new and additional feature uses photos, text, emojis, sketches and videos that disappear after 24hours.

1.9.9 Semiotics

This is the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation. Actually, it is concerned with meaning-making, sign process and communication that is meaningful.

1.9.10 *Semantics*

This is the branch of linguistics that deals with meaning.

1.10 Delimitations

The study will focus on Midlands State University Harare Campus' students and members of staff. Undergraduate and post-graduate students, lecturers, administrators and ancillary staff members will be involved in the research that involves the exploration of significance, meanings, genres, advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

1.11 Limitations.

The research will have the following limitations:

1.11.1 *Limited Cooperation.*

The interviewees are busy people who put concentration on bread and butter issues and have no much attention to non-rewarding discussions and interviews. Again, WhatsApp profile Pictures and Statuses are particularly personal and sensitive hence participants can be susceptible to reluctance As such; the researcher may not get his best. The researcher will exercise extra tolerance and patience to gain cooperation from the interviewees.

1.11.2 *Travel costs*

It is impossible to cover hundred per cent (100%) visits to all stakeholders at the Midlands State University Harare Campus. The researcher is not sponsored but shall sponsor himself as

much as possible to make the research as valid as possible. The research will concentrate on a sample of twenty five (25%) of the population which will be conveniently selected from Midlands University Harare Campus.

1.11.3 *Clearance and Authorization*

Some interviewees insist on political and administrative clearance or approval before they can participate in the study. As such, responses may be limited, delayed, restricted, or incomplete. The researcher has sought for a confirmation and approval letter from Midlands University Department of English and Communication Studies.

1.11.4 *Subjectivity*

Some interviewees are naturally subjective and sentimental and this causes additional probing and prodding requirements to verify data from the respondents. The researcher will use triangulation to mitigate bias.

1.12 Summary

Chapter one has laid the foundation upon which the research is grounded. It covered preliminary study and rationale; problem statement and focus, aims, goals and hypotheses; research questions and objectives, definition of terms, assumptions, delimitation, limitation and impact. The ensuing chapter two of this dissertation parades the general contemporary understanding of social media profile pictures and statuses then moves to the specific WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses interpretation dimensions. In chapter three, the dissertation moves from reviewing existing knowledge to contributing to the already foreshadowed gap in knowledge. The third chapter presents the research questions subject to this dissertation. It explains the methodology by the author-researcher to answering these

research questions. Chapter Four offers the outcomes found by the study's enterprise to answer the study's research questions while chapter five discusses these findings and tries to explain why they may have been found and it ends with recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The concern of this chapter is to review available literature on WhatsApp, especially its profile pictures and statuses features and the linguistic-semantic signification of that communicative resource. The research is geared to unravel the essence of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. The evaluation particularly focuses on the significance of profile pictures and statuses, their difference in appeal, semantic value as well as challenges and opportunities. Of interest in this chapter as well are theorists' views on the multimodal nature of profile pictures and statuses and communicative linguistic features. Due to the interdisciplinary characteristic of (CMC) computer mediated communication, much of the literature comes from varied authorities who acknowledge the unrestrained multimodal-linguistic power of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

2.2 Conceptual Analysis

According to Church and de Oliveira (2013), WhatsApp is a cross-platform instant messaging application for smartphones. It uses the Internet to send text messages, images, videos, user location, audio messages to individuals or groups in real-time at no cost and of late, making calls. One of its most important features as acknowledged by Jisha and Jebakumar (2014) is that it is quick in status updates and photo uploads. As such, one marvels at the signification of such profile pictures and statuses. Due to such captivating superfluities, WhatsApp has become so popular that it handles over 10 billion messages per day. Since the adoption of multiple currencies in Zimbabwe in 2009, the mobile phone

penetration rate has been rising. As of 30 June 2015, Zimbabwe had 11 949 741 active mobile subscribers (POTRAZ 2015: 6). Subscription to the Internet on which WhatsApp rides on stood at 5 648 922 (POTRAZ 2015: 11). This means that the majority in both rural and urban areas are now connected in one way or the other. Coupled with the availability of broadband Internet connectivity across the country, people with smart phones are now able to connect to various social network sites on the go. Its affordability and uncomplicatedness has inevitably influenced Zimbabweans to embrace WhatsApp as site of choice, both at home and in the diaspora. Actually, according to Jisha and Jebakumar (2014), WhatsApp commenced courtesy of Jan Koum in 1999 with the buzz words, “Simple. Personal. Real Time Messaging.”

In the wake of such a scenario in Zimbabwe, there are a number of researches on WhatsApp text messages but very few on WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Most of the researches, typical of elsewhere in the world are from Media studies, Education, Psychology and Information Systems perspectives. According to Moya (2015), the few linguistics oriented researches have been centred more on youths and the effects of WhatsApp use as well as textual interpersonal communication.

According to Melleus and Machena (2015), there is scarcity of literature on language and communication in relation to the new phenomenon of social media. Such a scenario prevails in a context where use of electronic social media has become ubiquitous. Social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook have become buzzwords for mostly teenagers and the middle-aged. Of interest is the idea that as for WhatsApp, its use is across the board in as far as age and educational background is concerned. Herring & Kapidzic (2015) confirm that research on the implication of profile pictures/statuses is long overdue, especially in the wake of the inevitability of users spending considerable time watching other’s profile pictures and statuses.

Bere (2012) examined the motivational factors with regard to WhatsApp usage among university undergraduates in South Africa and discovered that it was more social than anything else. Norris (2004) explored the challenges and opportunities of using WhatsApp messages in the teaching of English for Speakers of other languages. The results confirmed that most students were interested in reading English WhatsApp messages. Devi and Tevera (2014) found out the usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp in sharing academic information. In India, Jisha and Jebakumar (2016) carried a research in Chennai region to the effect that students spent 8 hours per day using WhatsApp and they remain online for about 16 hours per day. Albeit many of such studies, it has been observed that most investigations did not scrutinise the signification of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses and therefore this research fills that gap. Some of the related literature reviewed is from different context from Zimbabwe and also from other humanities and scientific disciplines. The few Zimbabwean observations similar to the cited above ensues. Thereafter, citations stem from all over the globe.

As hinted earlier, most publications on social media are centred on direct interpersonal communication where users send each other messages and one such kind is by Chiridza P et al. (2016) who looks at “Social Media and Society: A case of WhatsApp in Zimbabwe.” The research has shown that though WhatsApp has brought an affordable communication platform, it has become subject to abuse by those who take advantage of its distinct features. Its ability to offer one on one chats and one too many chats in real time has developed it into a platform of choice in communicating all sorts of information. The information ranges from being useful, insulting, abusive; to outright jokes and absolute trivia, hoaxes and porn.

Previously, Malleus and Muchena (2015) examined student cell phone use on one Zimbabwean university campuses, using questionnaire data from 179 volunteers, answering the research question "What are students on campus doing with their cell phones to meet their

needs? The research unearthed some disadvantages of WhatsApp use as some of the information shared was tantamount to obscene.

Consequently, this research seeks to further such researches so as to touch on some such communication modes that are somewhat taken for granted yet causing real life outcries. A case in point is the drama by Felitus Edwards who is popularly known as “Mai Tititi”. She dramatizes a burning need for her husband to display her photo on his WhatsApp profile. Several Zimbabwean musicians have also sung about the effects of WhatsApp. As a result, this enquiry is a necessity.

According to Calero-Vaquera (2014), regardless of the under-researched situation of WhatsApp, particularly from a discursive point of view, there are some existing studies that explore some linguistic features of WhatsApp. Less attention has however been given to profile pictures and statuses, especially the new 24hour status feature which is largely multimodal in nature. That comes in spite of the fact that similar types of communicative outcome have extensively been examined in other systems of online communication. Examples are Facebook (Garcia and Sikstrom 2014, Eisenlauer, 2014), and, Twitter (Zappavigna, 2012; Gillen and Merchant, 2013).

Many studies have proven the popularity of WhatsApp and of interest is the notion that it is popular among youths as hinted earlier. Such a scenario is confirmed in the researches; “The impact of WhatsApp messenger usage on students’ performance in tertiary institutions in Ghana ” by Yeboah and Ewur (2014) and , “Smartphone application usage amongst students at a South African University.” Due to the user-friendliness of WhatsApp, one is made to realise that its use has transcended being used by youths alone. Adults are also using it.

Albeit a plethora of researches reminiscent of the above cited, WhatsApp has one exclusive characteristic commonly known as the profile picture and status yet very few researches have

been carried out to ascertain its semantic implication. According to Wells (2016), the profile picture is an image which is chosen by the user to show his or her identity and/or feelings. As such, one can deduce that profile pictures have semantic value hence a form of language and communication instrument worth analysing.

Minhas et al (2016) observe that social media users attach significant importance to their choice of profile pictures and that a profile picture can carry an unexpected meaning. As a result, they can express different messages dependent on a specific social platform. For example, according to Segalin et al (2017), social media profile pictures reveal something about the user's personality. Segalin et al (2017) asserts that people make considerable efforts on impression management and the organisation of such impersonations is dependent on user's disposition.

In the same vein, WhatsApp Status content is loaded with semantic value. The old version of WhatsApp Status is a feature that allows only texts to show people if one is available to chat. The new and additional feature uses photos, text, emojis, sketches and videos that disappear after twenty-four hours. Dhar, Chamoli and Kumar (2017) wrote about "WhatsApp Status Content and Frequency as a Predictor of Personality Trait." Consequently, one realises the complementariness of profile pictures and statuses as emanating from two different researches agreeing on the link between pictures and statuses as personality indicators.

In as much as WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses' denotation appear simplistic, it is important to admit that WhatsApp as a new social media platform makes use of a plethora of media modalities where language can be combined with kinetic, visual and auditory resources in order to create highly sophisticated texts. According to Mehmet, Clarke and Kautz (2014), for one to comprehend what a social media communication might mean, it is imperative to commence with an observation of the media modalities used in order to

determine the semiotic resources to be considered. As such, a social semiotic multimodal approach is applicable to the analysis of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

In the wake of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses being part of social media, Langmia and Tia (2016) researched on 'Social Media, Culture and Identity.' The text explores the effectiveness of social media in the creation of a plethora of identities and cultures. Emphasis was placed on the omnipresence of social media and issues to do with gender, sexting; cyber bullying and race were explored. WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses correspondingly reflect related issues as cited earlier.

In the same vein, Vodanovich (2017) penned "Introduction to Social Media: Culture, Identity, and Inclusion Minitrack." The discoveries made are very insightful to this study as there is acknowledgement of social media changes from the traditional computer-mediated social media to mobile media. The accompanying changes in culture and identity are captivating and relevant to WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses which have brought new cultural forms. Emphasis was placed on culture kaleidoscope and the intersections of culture and identity. The metropolitan nature of some WhatsApp groups renders that study informative of the current study. "Mapping Articles on China in Wikipedia: An Inter-Language Semantic Network Analysis" was quoted by Vodanovich (2017:5) as a text that illustrates how culture of diverse language groups influence the diversity and inclusion. Such an observation resonate the communicative aspects of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

An interesting study that is akin to the multimodal nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is Calzada-Perez's (2017) "The Impact of Symbolic Culture on the Understanding of Visual Figuration in a Cross-Cultural Environment." The research diverts from the ordinary social use of social media as it focuses on the appreciation of visual rhetorical figures as they

appear in contemporary universalised advertisement. Interestingly, the findings points to culture as an important aspect for image conceptualisation in cross-cultural milieus. Such an observation comes contrary to the view that visuals are universal hence understandable in all world cultures. What is fascinating is not limited to the cultural aspects but also visual rhetorical figures which are analogous to the multimodal characteristic of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. In addition, the research is an index of how WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses can be used to send messages beyond social.

According to Gunduz (2017), “social media platforms have a growing importance in our lives since they are the places where we ‘showcase’ our living experiences. They also reflect a variety of dimensions regarding our position in the virtual and physical social life.” Social media was also identified as enabling expression of identity, experimentation and exploration. This completes the other more specific researches cited in the ensuing sections.

Social media has also been discovered to carry transformative power. According to Hariss and McCabe (2017), social media has the capacity to democratise and generate action through horizontal networks. An interesting discovery relates to the political impact of social media and the irony of its failure (as a discourse arena) to bring about lasting solutions in terms of empowerment, social justice and equalities. In the context of this research, it becomes motivating for the researcher to endeavour at finding out the essence of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

2.3 Significance of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are alluring complimentary features of WhatsApp Messenger. Pictures and statuses enable users to share information through the multimodal nature of the combination of emoticons, images and pictures, voice notes and web-links -

(Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015). In fact, it has been observed by Sponcil (2007) that although people communicate with friends and family by posting information on social media, they spent a lot of time viewing information (WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses) without interacting in any way. That is clear testimony of the significance of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Adami (2017) suggest that profile pictures and statuses invariably carry semantic value in relation identity, power, ideology and culture. He however brings an interesting notion on multimodality and super diversity- a superb observation that takes cognisance of the world-wide appeal of the internet based WhatsApp Profile pictures and statuses.

According to Maiz-Arevalo (2018), emotional self-presentation is one of the most important aspects of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Yang and Brown (2015:404) define self-presentation as “the process through which individuals communicate an image of themselves with others.” One can deduce that the process of self-presentation is crucial for communication amongst humans, more so when it is ‘on-line’ where several barriers are broken.

Maiz-Arevalo (2018) focuses on emotional self-presentation in profile statuses and the data was gathered from a Spanish community. The results of the research testify to the significance of statuses with regard to emotions connoted in the displayed statuses. Of interest is the observation to the effect that gender and age are determinant factors regarding choices of emotions portrayed.

Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015) are arguably the first researchers to focus on the discursive significance of WhatsApp profile statuses although the attention was limited to the age variable in terms of the inclinations that users show when they edit their profiles. In that vein Maiz-Arevalo (2018) complements Sanchez-Moya and Cruc-Moya by observing that

profile pictures and statuses can be analysed as emotive speech acts and are self-presentation strategies. The gap that this research then clearly fills is the use of a multimodal approach that takes consideration of implicature and humour as other forms of self-presentation strategies.

According to Mckiernan (2016), WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses reveal some latent socio-cultural values affecting the way users make linguistic resource choices in online pictures and statuses. In a Corpus-based analysis of Jodanian Society by Al-Khawaldeh et al (2016) , the juxtaposition of that society and Zimbabwean can illuminate a great deal of information pertaining personal values, social ideals and that interplay controversies surrounding the relationship between an individual and the society. From the same research on Jodanian Society, it was revealed that female status updates are more personal, religious and social while males are concerned about political, national and international themes. Such an observation carries semantic value with regard to gender stereotype. It therefore stimulates the researcher to unravel the situation in Zimbabwe where the country is presumed to be more liberal and gender sensitive than some Islam countries.

2.4 Nature of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

Most researches on WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses have discovered that there are different themes with regard to what users prefer to share with interlocutors. The landscapes of profile pictures and statuses are as varied as the multimodal nature of profile pictures and statuses. Of interest are the observations that have been made with regard to specific profile picture/status types being used in accordance with difference in users' gender, age, educational and cultural backgrounds.

The following tables have been taken from a research by Malekhosseini et al (2017). In their research focussing on privacy issues with regard to use of profile pictures and statuses, they

outlined different themes that are somewhat prototypical of the different kinds of profile pictures and statuses that users post. The first one (A) is based on types based on gender and the subsequent one, themes based on age.

(A).The frequency percentage of themes/prof pic/status type based on user gender.

Themes	Users/Count/ % of		Total
	Total		
	Female	Male	
Emotional	29	28	57
	15.3%	17.4%	16.3%
Poetics	19	11	30
	10.1%	6.8%	8.6%
Engagement moment/connection options	12	25	37
	6.3%	15.5%	10.6
Personal Information	13	19	32
	6.9%	11.8%	9.1%
Advertising	8	15	23
	4.2%	9.3%	6.6%
Political	8	13	21
	4.2%	8.1%	6.0%
Religious	21	15	36
	11.1%	9.3%	10.3
Special event	11	4	15

	5.8%	2.5%	4.3%
Default	36	17	53
	19.0%	10.6%	51.5%
Empty/Meaningless	32	14	46
	16.9%	8.7%	13.1%
Total	189	161	350
			100.0%

Adopted from Malekhosseini, Hosseinzadeh and Navi (2017).

B) The percentage of use of themes by different age groups.

Age groups/count/ % of Total

Theme	Less Than 22 Years	23 to 35 Years	36 to 50	Over 50 Years	Total
Emotional	16	21	15	5	57
	20.5%	20.0%	16.5%	6.6%	16.3%
Poetics	6	7	9	8	30
	7.7%	6.7%	9.9%	10.5%	8.6%
Engagement moment	12	19	5	1	37
	15.4%	18.1%	5.5%	1.3%	10.6
Personal Information	19	11	1	1	32
	24.4%	10.5%	1.1%	1.3%	9.1%
Advertising	2	8	10	3	23

	2.6%	7.6%	11.0%	3.9%	6.6%
Political	1	11	5	4	21
	1.3%	10.5%	5.5%	5.3%	6.0%
Religious	3	6	13	14	36
	3.8%	5.7%	14.3%	18.4%	10.3%
Special Event	2	3	3	7	15
	2.6%	2.9%	3.3%	9.2%	4.3%
Default	9	10	16	18	53
	11.5%	9.5%	17.6%	23.7%	15.1%
Empty/Meaningless	8	9	14	15	46
	10.3%	8.6%	15.4%	19.7%	13.1%
Total	78	105	91	76	350
					100.0%

Adopted from Malekhosseini, Hosseinzadeh and Navi (2017).

In addition to the different themes as categorisation method of profile pictures and statuses, Sanchez-Moya and Cruz Moya (2015) observe that WhatsApp profile statuses can be grouped into different kinds according to their linguistic realisations. They noticed in their research that the statuses can be; Automatically-generated, Self-generated, Purely verbal (Common feature with old status version), Hybrid, Purely Iconic and Blank.

Sanchez-Moya and Cruz Moya (2015) aver that automatically generated statuses are more associated with the elderly who are less concerned with re-shaping their digital world. Inversely, the younger generation tend to use the Hybrid self-generated statuses and it is justified by their massive exposure to multimodality in their communication practices.

Consequently, this research fills the gap by exploring the unexplored complementariness of the new 24 hour status function as it comes as additional to the old version.

With regard to the different nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, it is important to note, as acknowledged by Malekhosseini (2017), that variances are determined by specific conditions of a community with regard to political, cultural, and social dimensions. Of interest is that Malekhosseini's research is based on Iranian WhatsApp users whose cultural background is remarkably different from Zimbabwe's.

Actually, Shivshankar (2016) comes up with an interesting view on cultural and social dimensions. He asserts that one of the observable aspects of WhatsApp users is that most of the pictures shared and displayed as profile pictures conform to the normative standards of the contemporary society.

Shivshankar (2016) agrees with Boyd (2007) to the effect that another determinant factor to the choice of a type of profile picture or status is a sense of inferiority or superiority cultivated in user. The user's environment is very important as users are influenced by the circumstance that they create an idea of self "by looking at others' profiles." Teenagers "get a sense of what types of presentations are socially appropriate from others' profiles" for they "provide critical cues about what to present on their own profile" – (Shivshankar (2016).

2.5 Meaning of messages portrayed by WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

Mehmet et al (2014) observes that from a multimodal perspective, there is growing need to understand how messages and online conversations construct and convey meanings especially when they are depicted through multiple modes typical of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

As captured on the two tables cited from Malekhosseini (2017) above, the meanings of profile pictures are as varied as to highlight; emotions, poetics, engagement moment, personal information, advertising, politics, religion and special events. Of interest are the default and empty/meaningless themes which upon a closer analysis could be ironically meaningful as one of the axioms of communication is “you not not communicate.’ The axiom is evocative of Bahktin’s concept of answerability because other users may still react to the emptiness of their relations’ WhatsApp profile picture and status.

Orsatti and Riemer (2014) observe that identity is at the centre of meaning making of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. It is only through an appreciation of specific philosophical and theoretical underpinnings that one appreciates both the abstract and practical realisations of the meaning of profile pictures and statuses. According to Orsatti and Riemer (2014), social media is not merely a place for self-presentation but an active part of how people understand themselves and form identities. Therefore, the multimodal approach makes it possible for one to analyse identity from the individual to the social and manifold nature of identity. It also illuminates on how identity is shaped by everyday acting in the world. No wonder why there is the phenomena of dualities with regard to ‘offline self’ versus ‘online presentation’. Orsatti and Riemer (2014) emphasise the notion of the concept of nuanced understanding of self, identity and self-presentation.

Minhas et al (2016) avers that the profile picture provides both open and hidden hints about a WhatsApp user. The open category relates to the messages that are deliberately chosen to be communicated through a selected picture and that is tantamount to impression management. A typical example is a wedding picture may carry semiotic signification to the effect that the user wants to be seen as a grown up person geared to move forward in life. In addition, such people are declarative with regard to their non-availability as mates. They may also mean that they value their spouses more than anything else in their lives. In the same vein, Minhas et al

(2016) observes that a picture with family or children may mean that the user is close to his or her family and that he considers them as a strong support.

Panger (2017) opines that despite the over simplistic analysis of profile pictures and statuses given above, the most important aspect to remember about meanings created by profile pictures and statuses is that interpretation should not be limited to face value denotation. From many researches cited in this study, WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses have a semantic bearing on personality, emotions, identity, intimacy, culture, ideology, power, age and gender. However, due to the inherent phenomenon of self-presentation that characterises WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, it is important for one to appreciate that there are plenty of situations where users put up a facade with regard to intended meanings. Amedie (2015) observes that social media encourages the assumption of positive portrayal of self. Panger (2017) aptly describes the same phenomenon as positivity bias.

A typical example of a façade is the status cues that users post. According to Si (2012), status cues are failing and from time to time, WhatsApp users are interrupted with negative results. In order to avoid interruptions Si (2012) discovered from his research that forty per cent had to use fake status and indicate that they were either away or offline when in fact they were not. As a result, one realises that the meaning of profile pictures and statuses can be quite misleading.

Segalin (2017) gives an example of the meaning of profile pictures in relation to personality. He avers that approximations of extraversion and agreeableness are dependent on profile picture friendliness while estimations of neuroticism are related to profile picture unfriendliness. In the same vein, extraversion is associated with photo expressiveness.

According to Adami (2017), when communication takes place in super-diverse milieus, with people sharing minimal background knowledge, we can predict that the multimodality of

messaging is enriched. The assumption is that when language and culture are no longer assumed to be shared, there will be use of whatever non-verbal resources available to meet a common ground. Consequently, the profile pictures and statuses meaning making process should take consideration of how semiotic resources circulate, transform, and appropriate from one context to another in the world today. In addition, how semiotic resources are used to make meaning in times when everyone is potentially a semiotic 'other' for some aspects and yet 'kin' for others is crucial to consider – (Adami (2017)).

In light of the super-diversity environment that characterises WhatsApp communication as observed by Adami (2017), this research contextualises WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses in Zimbabwean so that a trend of signification portrayed can be established. At the same time, the super diverse nature of WhatsApp has to be considered since the communication through profile pictures and statuses can transcend cultural boundaries.

2.6 Advantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

Research on WhatsApp is plenty but features that make it alluring have been neglected. Shivshankar (2016) observes that the concept of Profile Picture or DP is an object both mental and pragmatic and thereby adopts an aura of enigma. In other words, it is one feature that makes WhatsApp as powerful as it is today. As acknowledged by Shivshankar (2016), profile pictures have a bearing on how we understand each other and ourselves as we relate to each other in a unique socio-political environment.

According to Gerbando (2015), profile pictures and statuses can be used to express support for various causes and this can show somewhat collective identity as users share similar pictures and statuses. A typical example is the recent death of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader, Morgan Tsvangirai; whose death was followed by a plethora of

identical profile pictures and statuses amongst users who supported his party. In extreme cases, profile pictures can be a stimulant for change. Typical examples are photos of Egyptian martyr Khaled Said that featured as protest posters taken as profile pictures and statuses; the result was the famous Egyptian revolution. Gerbando (2015:117), aptly describes one such a scenario; “participants experience a collective fusion in an online crowd, whose gathering is manifested in the very “masking” of participants behind protest avatars.”

According to Dhar, Chamoli and Kumar (2017), WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses can be used as predictors of personality trait. In fact, Dhar et al (2017) focused more on status content and frequency and realised that subjects who change their status habitually and with dispirited content are high on neuroticism and extraversion. Inversely, users who are matured and have encouraging content have rated highly on cordiality and meticulousness. Dhar et al (2017) admits that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, especially content and frequency of change can be used as information gathering means with regard to mood, personality trait and thought process. More importantly, that information can be used to make psychological therapeutic practice successful. Consequently, profile pictures and statuses are not merely platforms for information sharing amongst users but can be used to ascertain the success of other disciplines additional to the linguistic value they inherently carry.

From the observations given above, one can deduce that Information Sharing is definitely one of the biggest advantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. The information varies from user’s emotions, momentary identity, political affiliation, personality, social ideology and cultural positioning. The modes are just as varied as the information themes as they are multimodal; text, videos, images and emojis. Of interest is the somewhat broadcast way of sharing the information since users with one’s contact details can access someone’s profile pictures and statuses and make semantic interpretations. Many a times profile pictures and statuses trigger one on one communication.

2.7 Disadvantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

One of the biggest disadvantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is the issue of violation of privacy. Malekhosseini et al (2017) made an “Evaluation of user’s privacy concerns by checking of their WhatsApp status.” The study interrogates privacy controversies with regard to communication made through statuses. In their study, it was discovered that 77.7% of users were stalked because of the disclosure of their profiles. One can therefore deduce that profile pictures and statuses are linguistic resources whose recipient’s interpretation results in the stalking mentioned earlier. In fact, Malekhosseini et al (2017) admits that the status feature in WhatsApp affords users to express opinions, ideas and emotions. The status feature allows users to post content of choice without restrictions but concern has been raised regarding privacy issues since “access to the content of a user’s status by unauthorised friends and interpretations of the user’s status content may violate his/her privacy” – (Malekhosseini et al (2017:86).

WhatsApp has also been associated with social malaise. Since it is associated more with the youth, Bruneau (2016) discovered that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are determinant factors of value systems and currencies around sexual status hence the sharing of nude and semi-nude pictures all of which are “inherently self-destructive.” This was revealed in a research on Swazi youth where the pictures and information they share is an index of their destructive attitude towards life. No wonder why the title of the research is “YOLO so Party like a Swazi.”

Amedie (2015) asserts that one of the side effects of social media typical of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is the experience of false intimacy and wellbeing. That has been established to be a result of the tendency of social media to encourage putting up a façade

that illuminates all the fun, excitement and success rather than the struggles that people largely endure in daily lives.

According to Amedie (2017), catfishing is another disadvantage of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Catfishing is the process of befriending strangers online while using a fake or stolen identity. It has been observed to be a form of deception which has led to the ruining of marriages, relationships, and emotional well-being of many people. Although this may not seem to be as rampant as it is with Facebook, it is a possibility, especially with the advent of WhatsApp group chats that sometimes involve people who do not know each other well enough.

2.8 Theoretical framework

The theory underpinning this research is Multimodal Discourse Analysis which was chiefly developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). It is a new and rapidly developing approach to discourse. It states that meaning is created in texts and interactions across multiple modes which are not only limited to written and spoken language. Multimodal discourse analysis was strongly influenced by Gunter Kress around 1970. It is a model of analysing discourse that recognizes that communication and representation are more than just ordinary language (verbal/written). Over the years, it has developed to systematically address societal changes like new media and technology. Multimodal discourse enables one to clearly see how human beings communicate. Kress (2003) implies that the ecological perspective of the multimodal approach makes it compatible with the interactive axiom of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. This research utilises all the three components of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses entail use of modes beyond written and spoken. WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses also involve a depiction of societal changes

due to new media and technology which has brought about unprecedented communication self-determination. In the same vein, WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are ecological in nature as there is an element dialogism and interactivity.

According to Jewitt and Kress (2003), despite its relatively short history, multimodal discourse analysis has had an important influence on other approaches and fields, most notably in the area of digital literacies and the field of human-computer interaction. The Multimodal approach incorporates the analysis of modes additional to text. Lassen et al. (2005) expounds on how ideology is mediated through text and image. Consequently, the theory is tried and tested and therefore well-suited to the analysis of WhatsApp Profile pictures and statuses as these are multi-modal in nature. WhatsApp profiles can be in varied linguistic affordances to include images, audios, videos and text.

Norris (2002) argues that the prioritisation of text and spoken forms of language may limit comprehension of human interaction. Therefore, due to the multimodal nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, MDC is more appropriate to the analysis of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Multimodal approach looks beyond focused interactions when gaining insight into the implications of chosen profile pictures and statuses.

Norris (2002) carried out a research on personal identity construction using the multimodal discourse analysis. He compliments many researches on social media profiles as identity emblems as cited earlier. Norris (2002) notes that multimodal discourse analysis helps in the way one understands personal identity construction. If language is viewed as the primary mode of communication, identity construction will be confined to what is written and said about the social actor.

In fact, as hinted earlier, the major strength of multimodal discourse analysis over its predecessors is that it does not only focus on language for meaning making but it also focuses

on semiotic expressions. In Multimodal discourse analysis, textual (linguistic) is considered as one of the many modes of communication in interaction. Written and spoken forms of language are not regarded as the primary resource of data like in other discourse analysis approaches. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) rightly point out that textual data is not the only mode that can be used to construct and interpret social meaning. Kress (2009) highlights the fact that meaning is produced in so many ways and no medium including language is more privileged than other mediums in conveying meaning. Everything is available to make meaning. Multimodal discourse analysis analyses semiotic modes which are not confined to text only and these include visual images, gestures, document layout, postures, music and architectural designs as well as proxemics. Multi-modal analysis is the realisation of discourse analysis to the semiotic mode of the image. Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) observe that the visual is a structured, independent and organised message which has connections with the verbal text. These semiotic modes are tools in achieving communicative meaning. Multimodality is vital in Computer Mediated Communication such as WhatsApp because the profile pictures and statuses feature exploits text, image, video and audio.

One of the most fascinating observations made by Norris (2002) that the researcher finds inexplicably applicable to WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is that multimodality offers a way to explore what might be seen as silence – which is frequently taken as not textual. In other words, multimodality affords convenience especially with regard to research questions on aspects that are rarely discussed. The most significant aspect with regard to social media in general and WhatsApp in particular is its liberating power since it has generally been agreed that the mode of spoken and written language is etymology of those in power. Thanks to multimodal approach that breaks down this position. Earlier discourse analysis theories such as Critical Discourse Analysis presupposes exclusive power dynamics enshrined in

language use but Multimodality acknowledges the liberating effects of social media whose use is rarely restricted to exclusiveness – (Lassen et al (2005).

In the same vein, in 2003, Schmit, the then Chief Executive Officer of Google superbly asserted that “in every two days, we create as much digital content as we did from the dawn of civilization to 2003.” He explained:

“The internet is the largest experiment involving anarchy in history. Hundreds of millions of people are, each minute, creating and consuming an untold amount of digital content in an online world that is not truly bound by terrestrial laws... Never before in history have, many people, from so many places, had so much power at their finger -tips. And while this is hardly the first technology revolution in our history, it is the first that will make it possible for almost everybody to own, develop and disseminate real time content without having to rely on intermediaries.”

From the above observation, one can deduce that every WhatsApp user has been liberated and therefore empowered to create meaning through Profile pictures and statuses. Of interest is the observation made by Mehmet et al (2014) that different media modalities allow the creation of new meanings.

The signification of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses can however only be made possible by one of the important aspects of multimodality. It is evocative of Bahktins’ concept of inter-textuality. Norris (2002) concurs with Wodak et al (1998) that every social actor transports with them a historical body. The historical body influences people to co-construct themselves in specific ways; much so with regard to virtual communication where pictures and statuses are creations of respective users.

It is from the foregoing that that multimodal research has been applied in the analysis of social media similar to WhatsApp. One example is Mehmet's et al (2014): "Social media semantics: analysing meanings in multimodal online conversations." In this study, the writers focus on how messages and online conversations construct and convey meanings especially when they are likely to be distributed across multiple social media platforms. Orsatti and Riemer (2015) researched on "Identity-Making: A Multimodal Approach for Researching Identity in Social Media." They focus on a framework that describes identity making as an active achievement involving active, narrative and reflective modes. Of interest is the revelation of the similarities and likely differences that can be there between people's offline 'real' identities and their 'online' self-presentations.

Adami (2017) comes closer to filling the gap by his observations on "Multimodality and super diversity: Evidence for research agenda." The research discusses sign-making practices in the super diverse context of Leeds Kirkgate Market (UK). There being dearth of literature on WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses; particularly from an applied linguistics perspectives; Adami's and similar researches are sufficing benchmarks for the application of a multimodal approach to the analysis of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Most researches on WhatsApp have been carried out from psychological, medical and information systems disciplines. Where applied linguistics has been useful, focus has been largely on textual analysis. Of interest, however, is the way the researches still illuminate valuable data on WhatsApp Profile pictures and statuses signification; the current research filling the gap from an applied linguistics multimodal perspective.

2.9 Summary

The chapter discussed the concept of WhatsApp, profile pictures and statuses and the multimodal theoretical framework. From different perspectives, an analysis of the significance of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses was offered in the context of an abundance of literature on social media applied linguistics. WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses taxonomies were discussed as revealed in relevant studies. In addition, the meaning of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses was explored in the context of the opportunities and challenges that the pictures and statuses avail. For convenience; separate sections on advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses were offered with exciting views from divergent authors. The salient semantics discovered to emanate from WhatsApp Profile pictures and statuses relates to issues related to identity (dual or otherwise), emotions, self-presentation, culture, relationships, ideology, personality, gender and age reflections and socialisation. The next Chapter will look at the research methodology, research tools, research design, data collection methods, population and techniques of sampling data that is used by the researcher.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The chapter reveals how the research was executed. It outlines the research methodology. It was geared to select a method which is the most befitting in answering research questions. Methodology refers to a system of procedures and principles upon which the research is based. Therefore, methodology gives reasons for the type of research design, research participants and the research instruments. Data collection method, data analysis, data presentation as well as ethical considerations are explained in this chapter.

3.2 Research methodology

There are two main methods of research which are used in research work. Research methodology provides the guidelines and approaches which are used to obtain data in the research. The two methods are quantitative and qualitative. After the consideration of the compatibility of either of the research methods, the researcher settled for the qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research provides in-depth descriptions or understanding of phenomena (Hurberman (-1984). According to Hancock (1998), to understand a situation, it is done through a holistic perspective that takes note of constant interaction between standpoints. WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are understood from diverse perspectives. It is in that vein that the researcher opted for a qualitative research methodology. Some of its advantages are elaborated in the associated subsequent section.

3.3 Research design

Leedy (1997) views a research design as the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. Actually, research design is the conceptual structure within which the research is conducted. This research is based on a qualitative case study design. This was selected after several research designs were explored. When addressing more personal zones such as WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, much of the manifestations of the profile pictures and statuses' choices is subconscious and requires in-depth exploration. In order to better examine the signification of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, qualitative research proves most suitable. Kozinets (2002) asserts that "qualitative methods are particularly useful for revealing the rich symbolic world that underlies needs, desires, meanings and choice." Consequently, the topic of this study finds itself in qualitative research. Qualitative research allows the researcher to appreciate people in terms of their personal definition of their world. In other words, insider perspective is superior to outsider perspective. It allows the assessment to be done in a natural setting where WhatsApp users, principally the participants display WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Saunders (2001) defines case study as a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular phenomenon with its real life context using sources of evidence. According to Yin (2009), case studies usually answer what?, how?, which?, and why? questions and that is characteristic of this research. In the context of multiple communicative opportunities afforded by the multi-modal reality of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, one is bound to think about the concept of 'poly-media' to stress the way users choose among different affordances and norms offered by WhatsApp to negotiate different kinds of personal meanings.

3.4 Population and sample

Murimba and Moyo (1995) define a population as any group of individuals that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher. The researcher concurs with Murimba and Moyo (1995) who further asserts that a population is the totality of persons, events, organisation units, case records or other sampling units with which a specific research problem is concerned.

In this research, the population is any WhatsApp user but data was collected from a sub-population of convenient volunteer WhatsApp users from MSU Harare Campus students, lecturers, administration and ancillary staff.

Mcmillan and Schumacher (1989) observe that a sample consists of individuals selected from a larger group of persons called a population. Therefore, a sample consists of actual individuals to be studied – a small proportion of a population selected for observation and analysis. The chief purpose of a sample is to generalise to the whole population as it is invariably impossible to study the whole population. The researcher gathered data from 60 participants using participatory observation and profile analysis, interviews and group discussions.

3.5 Sampling

The researcher opted for convenience sampling. Bryman (2012) clarifies that “convenience sampling is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of accessibility” Farrokhi (2012) concurs with Dornyei (2007:87) as he defines convenience sampling

“as a kind of non-probability or non-random sampling in which members of the target population are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such a geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer.”

Thus, the participants of this study are the WhatsApp users (18-65 year olds) enrolled or recruited by Midlands State University (MSU) Harare Campus who were willing to participate in the study. Call for participation was done through the Campus Administrator.

The sample included teenagers (18 and 19year olds) as well as young adults in their 20s (mostly undergraduate students), middle aged between 30 to 50years old (students, lecturers, administration and ancillary staff) and the senior citizens ranging from 51 to 65years old (senior academics and staff). The difference in age groups and academic level was pertinent in assessing group difference in perceptions between ‘digital natives’ and ‘digital immigrants’. All participants were considered key subjects as they were all WhatsApp users with similar or divergent discernments on the signification of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

The qualitative case study explorative approach used was effective as it catered for individual’s opinions and it produced in-depth comprehensive information on WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. The information can therefore be representative of the current trends in Zimbabwe with regard to semantic notifications of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. The approach made it possible to carry out interviews, group discussions and observation and profile analysis (Gerring (-2000). The approach, as hinted earlier is confirmed by Yin (2009) to the effect that it allows empirical inquiry into the phenomenon done within its real life context. Yin (2009) emphasises that qualitative study is important when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly obvious.

3.6. Sources of data

In this study, the methodology followed necessitated the use of both primary and secondary data to address the main objectives.

3.6.1 Primary data

According to Patton (1990), primary data is that collected by the researcher himself through techniques such as interviews, observations and focus group discussions that this researcher made use of. In other words, this is data that is collected directly from participants (WhatsApp users) through interviews, observations and focus group discussions before being analysed to reach conclusions concerning the issues covered in the interview guide. Hair et al (2003) buttresses Patton's notion by observing that primary data relates to information structures of variables that have been specifically collected and assembled for the current research problem or opportunity situation as they represent first hand structures.

3.6.2 Secondary data

Patton (1990) opines that secondary data is the one which already exists as found in journals, dissertations, books, newspapers and government reports. This information was chiefly used to build the background to the study and therefore complements primary data in coming with inferences. Hair et al (2003) defines secondary data as information that was not originally gathered for the inquiry at hand. It is that data which is readily available although collected for a different purpose. The researcher used the data to compare with some of the findings from the primary data.

3.7 Data collection techniques and instruments

The study is an exploratory qualitative case study of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. The aim was to find out the signification of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses as well as to ascertain the nature of pictures and statuses. As well, it sought to ascertain the potential or existent challenges and opportunities of WhatsApp Profile pictures and statuses as forms of linguistic or communicative affordances. The epistemological standpoint of the research was multimodality in tune with the multimodal nature of profile pictures and statuses. According to Gerring (2000), the approach makes it possible to carry out in-depth analysis of WhatsApp profiles and interviews. Through the case study approach, “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within real-life context” is afforded (Yin (2009:18).

In using the case study approach, the researcher used qualitative research methods as follows:

3.7.1 Participatory observation

According to Reinharz and Davidman (1992:68), participatory observation is worth it because it instigates personal connection with participants in as far as it affords “openness to intimacy and striving for empathy, which should not be confused with superficial friendliness.” The researcher managed to give participants information sheets and consent forms before the research began. The researcher got phone numbers from volunteering participants hence the subjects became part of the researcher’s WhatsApp contacts. As such, the researcher, with the consent of the participants was able to access the participant’s WhatsApp profiles for Observation and analysis. The researcher also willingly availed his WhatsApp phone number for the participants to access his WhatsApp profile as well. According to Kember and Zylinska (2012:74), participation observation is about partaking in

everyday activities and recording and analysing those activities. As confirmed by Hine (2015:107), notes recorded from observations of profiles are helpful “to capture researcher’s interim thoughts about what these observations may mean; her ideas about what to look at next, and her concerns about aspects that puzzle her or frustrate her.”

The researcher positioned self as observer participant and that appears to be the primary purpose of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses unless one has developed acquaintance enough to trigger commentary and further communication emanating from the observed profile pictures and statuses. Berg (2009:81) witnesses that when they assume the role of observer participant, researchers “move away from the idea of participation but continue to embrace the overt role as investigator.” As a result, the researcher disclosed that he was a Masters student investigating the essence of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. The researcher’s experience as a WhatsApp user assisted in contextualising and deepening of analysis. Markam (1998) researched virtual environments and discovered that online participant observation exposed her to learning about the traditions, culture and conventions of communities. His research therefore complements the effectiveness of online observation used by the researcher.

Participant observation was not limited to observation of participants’ profiles, but was also used as an accompanying technique during the course of interviews and focus group discussions. That was meant to check the participants’ behavior and personality. That was crucial in correlating ‘online’ identities versus ‘off’ line identities. Where participants were willing to embark on WhatsApp interviews, the researcher got more insight from their WhatsApp profiling practices.

The analysis of profile pictures and statuses is an inevitable process that accompanies the participatory observations that the research partakes. Actually, according to Ferreday

(2013:97), user profiles remain in servers for a long period of time and because of that, they can be taken as archive of feelings or affect. Analysis of user profiles is important for the researcher to appreciate “the specificities and contingencies of online and offline life.” Consequently, the researcher copied and kept profile pictures and statuses in his gallery for analysis. This was done subsequent to the notion that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are artefacts. For ethical reasons, the researcher sought written consent from all participants.

According to Miguel (2016), communication through social media can be synchronous or asynchronous. The symbolical interactionist standpoint typical of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses corresponds with Hogan’s notion that self-presentation through social media platforms is made up of performances and artefacts (Hogan (2010). The assertion is akin to the analysis of the multimodal effects of user’s profile pictures and statuses. For that reason, the researcher had to combine profile observation and analysis to mitigate the problem identified by Hine (2015) to the effect that analysis of data recorded on files instead of online is sticky due to its tendency to disembody the researcher from the setting. Hine (2015) believes that a full appreciation of virtual identity communication cannot be afforded by solitary analysis of user profiles, but also direct observation of how users connect using social media.

The advantages of the observation technique have been given in the context of this research on WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses but it suffices to summarise the largely observed advantages and disadvantages of the observation method.

According to Christesen and James (2001), observation provides direct information about groups’ and individual’s conduct and it permits researcher to get into and understand the context or situation. Above all, observations exist in flexible and spontaneous environment.

Observation can be time-consuming and expensive. One has to be highly trained and qualified because it may affect the behaviour of participants. Selective perception of the observer may misrepresent data. In addition, the researcher has little control over the scenario and observed phenomena might be uncharacteristic (Christesen and James (-2001). To mitigate the observed challenges of observation, the researcher uses interviews and focus group discussions as discussed below.

3.7.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

The researcher used other data collection techniques but interviews played a pivotal role in the research. Semi-structured interviews are helpful in the exploration of the experiences of individuals from their viewpoints. Hine (2015:19) assert that ‘‘interview offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher.’’ Hine (2015) opines that interviews are a way of digging into a particular user’s involvements and understandings. Consequently, the interviews were dedicated to gather information about the signification of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses with regard to message meaning, genres choice, advantages and disadvantages. In as much as Hine (2015) observes that semi-structured in-depth interviews follow a guide, the researcher added questions to assist the account of the interviewee – something that permits the exploration of emerging trends.

All interviews took place over a month’s timeframe. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The length varied from participant to participant but averaged 10 to 20 minutes. There was room for participants to go through their profiles during and after interviews and that was helpful in eliciting greater discussion on the WhatsApp sensitive issues. According to Miguel (2016), allowing informants to go through their profiles is a method reminiscent of auto-driving. Auto-driving entails participants bringing and explaining

personal videos and pictures brought to an interview. A more interactive interview is allowed as auto-driving made it easier for informants to remember their experiences.

In the wake of the appropriateness of interviews for this research, it is crucial to acknowledge that this research data collection technique has both advantages and disadvantages. No wonder why the researcher employed triangulation for the disadvantages of each technique to be mitigated by the other.

Patton (1990) summarises interview advantages and disadvantages in the following paraphrase.

Interview usually harvests the richest new insights, data and details. They permit face-to face interaction with participants hence provides the researcher with opportunity to explore topics in depth. In addition, interviews allow the researcher to experience the affective (feeling) as well as perceptive superfluities of responses. Again, interviews afford flexibility in the administration of a particular conversation with specific individuals. Above all, interviewer can explain and assist by clarifying questions and thereby enhancing the likelihood of useful responses (Patton (1990)).

According to Patton (1990), interviews are expensive and time-consuming in addition to the fact that they require experienced and trained interviewers. The volume of information can be too voluminous hence transcription of data becomes complicated. Distortion of ideas due to memory lapse and the desire to please the interviewer as well as flexibility rendering inconsistencies across interviews are some of the challenges.

3.7.3 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussion is a unique interview form that involves a small homogenous group of people discussing a topic. According to Patton (1990), focus group discussions consist of

between 6 and 12 participants discussing selected topics on guidelines of the facilitator. They are a qualitative method of data collection which prioritises group interaction and dynamics. The intention is to have easy demographic and educational background assessment of influence on user's choices of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. It is also meant to cushion the researcher from the laborious and time-consuming nature of one to one interviews. According to Patton (1990), the technique can be efficient because the researcher can collect information from several participants in one meeting. Groups were categorised into first and second year undergraduate students (roughly 18 to 30 year olds), post-graduate students (31 to 40year olds), lecturers, administration and ancillary staff.

Assessing the advantages of a Focus Group Discussions, Patton (2002) asserts that they can serve to avoid extreme or false opinions as they provide quality control from the checks and balances offered by group members on one another. They are more enjoyable than one to one interviews. The group setting may mitigate fearfulness of being examined by the interviewer. Group members are subjected to personal evaluation hence some may be stimulated to change their opinions.

There was no need for the researcher to push participants to reach an agreement since individual perceptions were being sought for.

According to Tellis (1997), the limitations of Focus Group Discussions are power struggles and unwillingness to state opinion in public. The disadvantage was mitigated by one to one interviews that were also carried out.

3.8 Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out to ascertain whether the instruments would capture the rudiments of the inquiry. The pilot study was also intended to measure the effectiveness of the lexical and phrasal choices used in the instruments. It was established that the structuring of the instruments was clear to the participants.

3.9 Data collection procedure

The researcher got written clearance from Midlands State University (MSU) authorising the researcher to conduct the study. The researcher used an introductory letter from MSU English and Communication department to ascertain him as a bona fide MSU Masters student. The letter was availed to the administrators at MSU Harare campus as well as to the participants. To check on the validity and reliability of the instruments, a pre-test was done with researcher's Masters Colleagues who assisted by making necessary corrections and adjustments. The researcher firstly introduced himself to MSU Harare campus students and staff through one to one approaches as well a call for participants through the campus Administrator. Volunteer participants exchanged WhatsApp phone numbers with the researcher after an explanation of the research methods to ensue.

After a week, the researcher booked for interview times through the WhatsApp platform after which interviews were carried out on availability and accessibility basis. Most of the interviews were done at the friendly and academic environment of MSU Harare campus. A few were done in town; at venues varying from homes and restaurants. In order to get data in a quicker manner, the researcher also embarked on Focus Group Discussions that proved

more entertaining to participants as they shared peculiarities of their WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses' experience.

Participants were all asked to fill in consent forms after full explanation concerning the study had been given. After each interview and focus group discussion session, participants were acknowledged and thanked for their participation in the study.

3.10 Reliability and validity

Leedy (1997) defines reliability as, “the extent to which similar information is supplied when a measurement is performed more than once – for, unless a measure is reliable, it cannot be valid.” The pilot-study referred to earlier was used to assess the reliability of the interview and focus group discussion guides. Reliability therefore alludes to a measure of consistency and accuracy.

Validity is defined as the extent to which a test measures what is supposed to be measured (Leedy (-1997). **Triangulation** was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the gathered data. According to Schwandt (2001:257), triangulation relates to a “means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws” and can involve the execution of “multiple data sources” to do so. This research had triangulation of data from online observations of WhatsApp profiles, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

3.11 Data presentation and analysis procedures

According to Tellis (1997), data analysis is a process of gathering, modelling, and transforming data with the goal of emphasising beneficial data, suggesting conclusions, and supporting decisions to be made. The researcher collected data through online observation, interviews and focus group discussions. Axial coding and comparative analysis was used to analyse data. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), axial coding relates to the idea of looking at codes that are “crosscutting” or relating concepts to each other. In other words, axial coding assists to polish and separate conceptions and to develop the connections that exist in the data. Creswell (2013) asserts that comparative analysis is important in determining similarities and differences in participants’ opinions. Consequently, the researcher used the method to understand how the participants’ views compared and contrasted with each other. The researcher made notes on the participants’ saved WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses and coded them accordingly. The researcher decided the data would be presented in Chapter 4 chiefly in narrative form and where statistical data counted, tables and pie charts were used.

3.12 Ethical considerations

The researcher ensured that he followed established standards for work with human participants in a bid to protect participants. The Midlands State University (MSU) research protocols were followed throughout the dissertation process. The most important initial move was the clearance to carry out the study offered by MSU English and Communication department in August 2017. All participants were asked to sign consent forms and these were brought for the interviews as well as focus group discussions. Actually, consent forms were signed before participants’ exchange of WhatsApp contact numbers with the researcher.

Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research; which is to understand the signification of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Participation was voluntary as participants offered neither monetary nor non-monetary benefits. The aspect of confidentiality was emphasised and ensured as researcher walked the talk of using collected data exclusively for purposes of the study. Anonymity of respondents was also ensured by insisting on use of pseudo names rather than their real names for interviews and focus group discussions. Being fully aware of the sensitive nature of WhatsApp profiles, the researcher guaranteed professionalism with regard to respect for participants' opinions on the issues under exploration.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodology used in the study. It covered research design, population sample, research instruments and procedure, data analysis and presentation. Important issues to do with validity and reliability were also dealt with. Emphasis was placed on triangulation as the researcher used multiple data collection methods namely observation, interviews and focus group discussions. Ethical concerns were also elucidated. Chapter 4 deals with Data Presentation and Analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The chapter addressed all the research questions by presenting participants' understanding of the essence of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Drawing on Multimodal discourse analysis theory by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), the chapter examined the semantic manifestations of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Existing literature acknowledge the significance of identity, culture, information sharing and ideology. Some of the researchers are Maiz-Araveira (2018), Yeboah & Ewur (2014) and Church & Oliveira (2013). In this research, participants' views on WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses were generally consistent with the notion that profile pictures and statuses are niceties hence need for restraint due to cultural norms and expectations. Tapping from the qualitative nature of the research, the findings were presented in narrative form and data analysis entails the researcher's description, delineation of similarities and differences and the highlighting of significant discoveries. The chapter focused on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data collected through participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Of interest is the standing of the researcher as an 'insider' (user of WhatsApp) as that afforded him to the opportunity for simultaneous observation and analysis. Again, comparative analysis of participants' responses to interview and focus group discussions questions became easier. The chapter is organised according to research questions which were used as the basis of the interview and focus group discussions questions as well as observation guidelines.

4.2 Response Rate

The researcher carried out interviews and focus group discussions with the participants under study. The sample included teenagers (18 and 19year olds) as well as young adults in their 20s (mostly undergraduate students), middle aged (30 to 50years old students, lecturers, administration and support staff) and the senior citizens ranging from 51 to 65years old (senior academics and staff). The response rate was 55% as out of the booked of 55 interviews and 5 focus group discussions, 30 interviews and 3 focus group discussions were carried out to make an overall response rate of 33/60. The group of interviewed teenagers constituted 6 out of 30 to make it 20%, young adults 10 out of 30 to make 33% thereby matching the middle aged group at 33%. The senior citizens' group response was 4 out of 30 to make 13,3%. There was a welcome coincidental balance of gender among the participants as there was 50% for females and males respectively. The response rate was compromised by lack of incentives for potential participants coupled with their busy schedules as members of university proceedings.

The study revealed that the responses from the age groups were a reflection of the setting of the case study, with few teenagers at University and few senior citizens interested in social media. The three age groups comprising teenagers, young adults and middle aged was informative as they reflect consistent users of WhatsApp. Of interest were the views of the teenagers and young adults who happen to be 'digital natives' as opposed to the 'digital emigrants' of the middle aged and the nihilistic senior citizens. The conglomeration of diverse backgrounds as determined by age was insightful.

4.3 Presentation of Research Findings

According to Tellis (1997), data analysis is a process of gathering, modelling, and transforming data with the goal of emphasising beneficial data, suggesting conclusions, and supporting decisions to be made. Axial coding and comparative analysis was used to analyse data. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), axial coding relates to the idea of looking at codes that are “crosscutting” or relating concepts to each other. In other words, axial coding assists to polish and separate conceptions and to develop the connections that exist in the data. Creswell (2013) asserts that comparative analysis is important in determining similarities and differences in participants’ opinions. Consequently, the researcher used the method to understand how the participants’ views compared and contrasted with each other. The researcher made notes on the participants’ saved WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses and coded them accordingly. It is in that vein that findings are discussed using thematic analysis which is one of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research. According to Hine (2015), thematic analysis involves pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (themes) within data. Themes are arrangements across data groups that are important for the description of a phenomenon and are associated with specific research questions. Hine (2015) assert that themes become taxonomies for analysis and they represent a level of patterned response or signification from the data that is related to the research questions at hand.

It goes without saying that qualitative researchers should choose the most appropriate method of analysis as it should be motivated by both theoretical assumptions and the research questions. Consequently, benefiting from initial axial coding and comparative analysis, the researcher executed thematic analysis as it provides a flexible method of data analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to develop answers to questions through the examination and interpretation of data. An analysis of qualitative data collected through observation, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions revealed the following:

4.4 “*Why are WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses significant?*”

4.4.1 The Concept of WhatsApp Profile pictures and statuses

The majority of the participants were of the view that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses communicate what the user wants the audience to know. Many agreed with the ideas of emotions, temperament, personality and identity as embodiments of the communicative affordances of the profile features. Overall, the essence of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses was summarised by two participants who said, “WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are a mode of self-expression used by people to communicate their feelings and views to people on their contact list.” “WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses portray emotions from experiences, expectations and memories over one life time lines.” One of the most nihilistic participants ushered a somewhat contradictory statement about his personal understanding of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses by saying “they mean nothing but at time reflect my mood or feelings.” Albeit some nihilism and optimism, acknowledgement of mood and emotions was evident in most of the participants’ views on WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

In that vein Maiz-Arevalo (2018) observes that profile pictures and statuses can be analysed as emotive speech acts and are self-presentation strategies. One participant wrapped up the concept by explaining that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses “are a reflection of a person’s current emotional, physical and mental state and well-being.” Interestingly, one

participant prefigured the issue of the messages being subjected to misinterpretation by saying that “Profile pictures depict the prevailing circumstances in people’s lives or what the user wants his/her intended audience to believe but that is not always true.”

Consequently, most of the participants’ understanding of the WhatsApp concept resonate Maiz-Arevalo’s (2018) on emotional self-presentation which is one of the most important aspects of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Yang and Brown (2015:404) define self-presentation as “the process through which individuals communicate an image of themselves with others.” One can deduce that the process of self-presentation is crucial for communication amongst humans, more so when it is ‘on-line’ where several barriers are broken. The notion of self-representation echoes one of the multimodal discourse analysis axioms. According Kress (2003:210), multimodal discourse analysis is “a model of analysing discourse that recognizes that communication and representation are more than just ordinary language (verbal/written)...” It is in that vein that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses exploits multiple modes that include text, audio, video and images.

4.4.2 The Importance of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and statuses

Most of the participants agreed that people no longer visit each other as they used to do prior to the digital era. As such, one of the most significant aspects of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses regards sharing information about what will be happening in one’s life. One participant summarised the idea by saying: “I think pictures and statuses have relevance in keeping in touch with loved ones and friends. It reduces the distance between people if one is constantly updated of the happenings in a loved one’s life. It is also important to see the actual image of friends and associates as it brings a closeness and intimacy that was not there before the WhatsApp era.” The researcher determines that as suggested by Kress (2003), the

ecological perspective of the multimodal approach makes it compatible with the interactive axiom of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses

In addition, profile pictures and statuses were seen as crucial with regard to how they are an identity emblem. A number of participants agreed that it was annoying to receive a message from someone who may not be in your contact list and then fail to positively identify them. Many said that at some point, they have lost contact numbers and several times they got positive identification of users through profile pictures. Positive identification of an interlocutor was said to be an advantage as it would facilitate use of appropriate register as dependent on age, gender and personality and mood. 100% of the participants agreed to the importance of identification. In the exact words of one participant, “if used correctly, WhatsApp profile pictures should communicate the identity of the users. They should tell other users the current situation of the user. They may communicate when to and when not to contact a user.”

In as much as it was generally agreed that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses define and convey the mood, character's traits and attractions or distractions of users, an aspect analogous to identity formation is the notion of self-promotion. In the words of one of the participants, “Photo represents my personal brand.” Actually, in the words of another participant's argument, “Some WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are an exaggeration of life styles, circumstances or mood of the person and some users.” Consequently, just like other social media platforms such as twitter, Marwick and Boyd (2010) observe that WhatsApp profile is a form of personal branding.

In the focus group discussions, there was a general consensus on how WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses were important in ensuring the possibility of hushed discourses whose manifestations emanate from the ambiguities of some profile pictures and statuses. Asked

about the importance of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, one participant said that they can provoke further communication especially when the pictures are indeterminate. An example was given by one participant who explained, “I saw a picture of beautiful sneakers displayed on my sister-in-law’s profile and I initially thought that she had bought them and that she really liked them. But, upon asking her ‘What’s up with the sneakers?’ she coyly said that she was looking for someone to buy the sneakers for her.” Another participant buttressed the same notion by saying that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, “...depending on where we are with our relation, usually some are quick to enquire. That is a clear illustration of latent discourses afforded by WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. In fact, Kress and Jewitt (2003) observe that multimodal semiotics help to unveil ‘silent’ discourses of power which are sometimes even more potent than those expressed more explicitly in writing and speech. Norris (2002) also applies discernments from multimodal standpoint to psychological issues – an interesting application analogous to how WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are indexes of personality and emotional features.

4.5 “How do WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses differ in nature?”

4.5.1 Types of Profile Pictures and Statuses (Commonly displayed profile pictures and statuses)

When asked about the kind of profile pictures and statuses that users frequently display, most (90%) participants alluded to the idea that the elderly usually select automatically generated statuses while the youths are fond of editing statuses so as to show their mood and emotions. Memes and jokes were also highlighted as common especially when it comes to the new 24hour status feature.

The themes of the profile pictures were observed to be quite varied as they included events in one's life, thus social, political, business and emotions. Nevertheless, the most common types were summarised by some participants, who, having been asked about commonly displayed profile pictures and statuses, said, "I see pictures of achievements, loved ones, feelings of love and disappointments. I also see religious quotes as people have resorted to religion in order to cope with life's hardships." Inspirational messages, personal and family photos were also cited as common genres of profile pictures and statuses. Of interest are the cited family and religious motifs that characterises the majority of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. That seems to suggest that Zimbabwe is largely a Christian country with a lot of respect for the sanctity of family. The participants' observations somewhat concur with Shivshankar's (2016) observations concerning social media cultural and social dimensions. He asserts that one of the observable aspects of WhatsApp users is that most of the pictures shared and displayed as profile pictures conform to the normative standards of the contemporary society.

In as much as random pictures of themselves, family, favourite football teams or memes were agreed to be part of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses types, one participant, after having been asked about how she felt about some of the WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses displayed by some users in her contact list declared; "I feel some of the profile pictures and statuses display too much of personal and intimate information. Some people have misused the platform because some of the messages they disseminate are not culture friendly. Some people have used them to communicate their blues and to indirectly confront or attack their enemies which I think is very wrong and it shows high levels of insecurity."

Asked about the nature of profile pictures and statuses the participants display, there was an observed difference between female and male participants. Somewhat reminiscent of a Corpus-based analysis of Jodanian Society by Al-Khawaldeh et al (2016) , data gathered illuminated a great deal of information pertaining personal values, social ideals and that

interplay controversies surrounding the relationship between an individual and the society. The focus group discussions revealed that female status updates were more personal, religious and social while males were concerned about political, national and international themes. Such an observation carries semantic value with regard to gender stereotype which seems to be a universal theme. Confirming the need for fulfilling societal expectations and having been asked about what she thinks about other user's views on her profile, one participant said, 'Other user's views can matter because one does not live in a vacuum . Some can comment and the comments matter in my life.' Contrary to the social conforming nature of most female participants, one male participant averred, "I believe in statuses that are inspiring to me and others. I am not worried about other people's views as my status is what I am and what I believe in." The divergent attitudes abridged in the two quotations explain why most female profiles are more social, religious and personal while most males are concerned about political, national and international themes.

Complementing the ideas cited above, another female participant said, "I display pictures of myself and my family members, celebrations, messages of love and appreciation, verses in the hope that they will benefit those who view my status – so I use it to evangelise." Hinting on some of the advantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, the participant added, "... by posting biblical messages of encouragement, motivational messages, some people have actually phoned in response to the messages that would have encouraged them either asking for the pictures or appreciating the messages. One such a status message she quoted was "God will make a way where there seems to be no way." Such observations were quite common in the interviews and focus group discussions. Of interest is that they confirmed the researchers' observations on common profile pictures and statuses themes. One can also deduce a reflection of the Zimbabwean community as more of a Christian environment as

much as there are religious minorities whose communities presumably post more of their respective religion's messages.

Another interesting finding that was availed by participants relate to the modes of profile pictures and statuses. It was clear that the young undergraduate students make full use of the multimodal nature of profile pictures and statuses while respectively, the older ones use mostly text and ordinary photos. Such an outcome seems to be determined by each user's discourse community. According to Kress and Jewitt (2003), the scenario is a reflection of the relationship between multiple and interacting semiotic modes used in specific settings such as schools, workplaces and villages. Consequently, the different modes and themes used by different age groups and gender point to different kinds of identities, power relationships and opportunities for social action that profile pictures and statuses avail to social actors. In fact, the multimodal discourse analysis model comes in handy as the novel attitudes and ethics of the youth as shown by their preferred pictures and statuses genres reflects the MDA has over the years developed to systematically address societal changes like new media and technology (Kress (-2003).

4.5.2 Effects of profile pictures and statuses on other users

Most respondents agreed to the two fold effects of negativity and positivity. Responding to the question on how profile pictures and statuses affect other WhatsApp users, one participant aptly responded, "Updates may have a positive effect on my contacts because they get to share my joys and positivity as they see my posts and read my updates. However, this also works negatively as some users can use WhatsApp statuses to address other users and solve disputes. This enables WhatsApp users to abuse others whilst the recipients become prone to abuse. It also has a downside communication wise as people resort to hints instead of approaching each other and solving their differences in person."

One participant replied to the above question by asserting that, “there are two parties to WhatsApp usage, the viewers/readers and the viewed/read. The viewers may feel despised, liked, remembered and or repelled by messages construed from the statuses of certain users.” Another participant carried a pessimistic view of the reality that people spend time viewing other people’s profiles, “people can waste time viewing my new updates which doesn’t concern them. Interestingly, it has been observed by Sponcil (2007) that although people communicate with friends and family by posting information on social media, they spend a lot of time viewing information (WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses) without interacting in any way. In a more balanced vein, another participant said, “Positively they will get an impression of my mood at that time. And negatively, some people might think I am being showy especially if i am wearing something trendy.” In the same vein, one respondent said that through WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, “users have an impression of your well-being and some end up being competitive and create pressure on themselves. Others also start believing some messages are meant for them.”

In the focus group discussions carried out with university students, there was consensus that through WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, people become part of one’s life and sometimes it triggers gossip, jealousy and in the worst case scenario, some screen shots can be taken without the owner’s consent and pictures can go viral. A case in point mentioned relates to a picture (at a wedding) of father in law dressed in shorts and a jacket. The picture suggested inappropriateness of dressing hence was a mockery yet upon close scrutiny, it was not a picture of the bride’s real father.

Light-hearted as the above illustration seems, most participants acquiesced to the possibility of downloaded personal profile pictures being used for cult and ritual rites hence choice of profile pictures and statuses can make users vulnerable to the unverifiable spiritual world executed some the green-eyed users.

Such negative manifestations of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses were summarised by one of the participants who, quoted verbatim said, “Some pictures and status updates are too detailed and make strangers privy to one’s personal information because a contact list is not restricted to loved ones and friends only but other people who are not well meaning.” The reality of jealous that comes with certain perceptions on certain photos and statuses was confirmed by one participant who said that some profile pictures and statuses “irritates me especially those who want to show off on the level of life they lead.”

Regardless of the observed negative effects, as hinted earlier, participants agreed with the idea that the effect can either be negative or positive. Many referred to how inspirational profile photos and statuses served to motivate some depressed and desolate WhatsApp users. Complementing this is the idea of the capability of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses to spread information fast and wide; in a Focus group discussion held, a case in point was that of bereaved WhatsApp user who posted profile pictures of her deceased mother and complemented it with “Rest in Eternal Peace” status upon which a friend learnt about that funeral through profile picture and status. The friend had to pay her condolences as a result of the information spread through WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Similarly, as discovered from the participants, a friend had to congratulate another after having seen profile pictures and statuses displaying graduation event.

The effects of profile pictures and statuses can therefore be construed as either negative or positive depending on one’s ideology and personality. As illustrated above, pessimists invariably seem to get negative effects while optimists appear to benefit from WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. With regard to the applicability of the multimodal discourse analysis theory, Lassen et al. (2005) expounds on how ideology is mediated through text and image.

4.6 “*What is the meaning of the messages portrayed by WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses to users*”

4.6.1 The semantics of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses

Asked to say something about the meanings attached to WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, most participants pointed out to the themes of love, betrayal, aspirations, family, politics, sports and religion.

It was also generally agreed that one of the most important aspects to do with WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is how they signify someone’s personality and temperament. Summarising the views from interview responses, having been asked about the meanings frequently attached to profile pictures and statuses, one participant hastened to say, “they give a clue of one’s personality and attitudes.” Another participant listed a more comprehensive angle by saying that they mean: “One is bothered/worried, one is happy/ecstatic, one has achieved, one believes in God and one is happy to be at of a group.” In the same vein with regard to the diverse meanings of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, Segalin (2017) gives an example of the meaning of profile pictures in relation to personality. He avers that approximations of extraversion and agreeableness are dependent on profile picture friendliness while estimations of neuroticism are related to profile picture unfriendliness. In the same vein, extraversion is associated with photo expressiveness.

Of interest is one participant who, upon having been asked about his opinion on the nature of profile pictures that he displays said that he did not feel like sharing pictures and statuses with his contacts but did not have problems with those who do. Such a tendency can be construed as introversion as agreed in the focus group discussions. Most participants accepted the notion that WhatsApp users who share a lot of information by more frequently changing

profiles were generally more of extroverts than those who take months and months to change their profiles. Such opinions compliment Dhar, Chamoli and Kumar's (2017) observations in "WhatsApp Status Content and Frequency as a Predictor of Personality Traits."

The diverse meanings of profile pictures and statuses established in this research are reminiscent of Malekhosseini's (2017) observations where the meanings were as varied as to highlight: emotions, poetics, engagement moment, personal information, advertising, politics, religion and special events. Of interest are the default and empty/meaningless themes which upon a closer analysis could be ironically meaningful as one of the axioms of communication is "you not not communicate." The axiom is evocative of Bahktin's concept of answerability because other users may still react to the emptiness of their relations' WhatsApp profile picture and status.

About 20% of the population in the sample said that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses do not carry any real meaning but acknowledged that they sometimes save as comic relief as people may get amusement from plenty of funny videos, texts, pictures and audios that are posted especially on the 24hour status platform. One respondent put it aptly by asserting that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses "... do not have a real meaning but something light to make the day funnier." As cited earlier, some participant presented a paradoxical view by averring that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses "mean nothing but at time reflect my mood or feelings." Consequently, regardless of different perspectives with regard to the meaning of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, 100% of the participants agreed to the emotional signification of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Picked randomly from a focus group discussion, three participants responded to the question: What are the meanings frequently attached to WhatsApp profile pictures? Quoted verbatim, they respectively and briefly said, ""Feelings of love and gratitude," "Emotions, reactions and responses to situations and past experiences," and "Happiness like with beloved ones and sorrow at times

like after death people usually say RIP to someone.” It is in this vein that Maiz-Arevalo (2016) researched on Emotional Self Representation on WhatsApp: Analysis of the Profile Status. The results of the study highlight the influence of gender and age as determinant factors in user’s choices of the emotions displayed. In this research however, presentation of emotions was seen to cut across all age groups save for introverts elderly who do not believe in the sharing of emotions.

60% of the participants agreed to the notion of deception as a theme portrayed by WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Actually, the majority of the participants pointed out the issue of positivity bias. One participant summarised her personal view of the meaning of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, much to the agreement of the majority of the focus group discussion members. He said that most of the profile pictures and statuses represent; “I’m happy and my life is good, i have all the material things one can want.” From such an observation, one gathers that self-re-presentation is a motif in WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Amedie (2015) observed the same trend with other social media platforms as he asserted that social media users always try to construct desirable online identities by hiding the ugly side of their offline realities. No wonder why some WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are responded to with envy, especially when observed by users unsuspecting of the possibility of online and offline dualities.

In the wake of different interpretations that characterise WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, it was discovered from the participants’ responses that there was a division in terms of opinions regarding the exercise of caution on what can be posted. Teenagers and young adults have a generally carefree attitude while the middle aged and senior citizens have a more restrained attitude. Representing the view held by most teenagers and young adults, some participant said, “A person can put whatever status or profile picture she or he likes. It does not matter what people think because one does not live for people. Choices are made,

not given. It's just a platform to express whatever message one wants to convey to others.” Contrarily, an elderly participant responded to the same question: Do you think other user's views on your profile certainly matter? She said, “I think it's not okay to display whatever you feel because not everyone is interested in your personal problems. This also leads to being stalked and some people knowing about your private things. Other people's views matter because you might not know their motives in your life so sharing some information won't be necessary.”

The caution that many participants concede to reflects power of restraint in communication. As a result, in relation to multimodal discourse analysis, Norris (2002) avers that MDA offers a way to explore what might be seen as silence – which is frequently taken as not textual. Actually, in the user's conservative stance, meaning is invariably conveyed. As hinted in chapter 2, the most significant aspect with regard to social media in general and WhatsApp in particular is its liberating power since it has generally been agreed that the mode of spoken and written language is etymology of those in power. Thanks to multimodal approach that breaks down this position

4.7 What are the advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses to users?

4.7.1 “Are WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses Hurting or Helping?”

90 % of the participants agreed to the notion of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses having both opportunities and challenges. Discussing this issue in a focus group discussion of mostly post-graduate students, one participant said, “I think there should be a measure of caution on what we disclose on WhatsApp because not everyone holds good intentions for us

and they will be able to see intimate details about us which we freely volunteer through social media. A reasonable measure of privacy would be an advantage to all users.”

In the same vein of the existent balance between advantages and disadvantages, one participant responded to the question: Do you think other people’s views on your profile matter? Quoted verbatim, she confidently said, “I think other people’s views do matter because a status update is something you put to the world so that people can see, so their opinions would definitely matter otherwise you would not update. Some pictures should be censored as well because they communicate with people. An example of this is a picture which can be interpreted by one as attractive, may be too revealing too much skin and be construed as trashy. One should not share updates which taint their character or how people see then.” The same idea was raised by another participant who aptly said, “Yes other users’ views certainly matter as a man is not an island on its own, we live in society and society does have an effect on our lives.”

From the above findings, it can be observed that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses can only yield desirable semantic value if users adhere to cultural norms of their respective discourse communities. Most participants acquiesced to the idea of rather hiding part of one’s identity in order to conform to cultural norms. Some participant said that in as much as he is a bear drinker, he will never display a profile that shows that habit because of professional reasons since some organisations and even individuals judge others on the basis of the type of profiles they display. Another participant talked about how difficult it is to manage WhatsApp discourse community since anyone may have access to one’s profile unless one executes private settings that very few understand. She talked about how she was once reprimanded by her sister for having displayed a picture of herself revealing what was construed as too much of her chest. She said that she had to change the profile picture in

order avoid confrontation hence a clear testimony of how norms can stand stubbornly against the freedom of self-representation.

The need to be cautious with one's profile was a buzz term with most mature (25years and above) users and in a focus group discussion, two participants responded to the question pertaining the kind of profiles they display and they respectively averred; "I use basic information to enable positive identification, avoid obscenity and offending other users, but at the same time protecting my personal image and security. I don't agree with showcasing your private life for all to see, you invite unnecessary scrutiny and prying and danger as well to your life and that of your loved ones."

The above observations stand in tune with the inter-textuality of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. No wonder why users are cautious about what they display as their profile pictures and statuses. In the contest of the multimodal approach, Norris (2002) concurs with Wodak et al (1998) that every social actor transports with them a historical body. The historical body influences people to co-construct themselves in specific ways; much so with regard to virtual communication where pictures and statuses are creations of respective users.

4.7.2 WhatsApp Profile Pictures and statuses Opportunities

99% of the participants agreed that WhatsApp is one of the most unconventional yet effective ways of sharing information. It was observed that in the wake of many people not affording to visit each other, visits have become cybernetic, as important information about one's life is being shared through WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. In the exact words of one participant whose idea was eye opening to the focus group discussion members, the participant said, "Life is different from what it used to be, we don't visit each other often as we used to, so people get to know and familiarise themselves with their family or friends

through WhatsApp pictures and statuses.” Another participant talked about WhatsApp profile pictures being convenient for one-to-many message dissemination. In his exact words; “It can be a way of communicating a message to many people who are able to see it at the same time and the message remains there for 24hours, that is for daily updates or until you remove, that is for profile pictures and statuses.” It can therefore be observed that the multimodality nature of profile pictures and statuses serve as a convenience for mass communication to a specific discourse community. The choice between videos, text, emoticons/emojis, audio and pictures as well as old text status and the 24hour new status is at the disposal of WhatsApp users.

Quoting verbatim the narration of one of the participants talking about the opportunities of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, the respondent said, “One advantage is that I am able to pick a loved one’s mood and feelings by what they constantly update. When this is done frequently we can avoid major problems like suicide. I have a case of a colleague who committed suicide and quite a number of people mentioned that his status updates were showing that he was troubled. Had we taken action and spoken to him about his depression, he might not have ended up killing himself. WhatsApp would have worked positively and helped us intervene before a life was lost.” The real life anecdote is made more tragic because the deceased’s WhatsApp users’ friends and relatives did not embrace the opportunity that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses had offered.

Positive identification of an interlocutor was raised as an advantage by 75% of the participants and as a result, participants agreed that users would benefit more from WhatsApp if users would consistently display personal pictures. Many undergraduate university students acknowledged group communication afforded by WhatsApp and many asserted the view that it can be disconcerting to communicate with a group member one is unfamiliar with. As a result, if profile picture and status can positively identify the member, it makes the whole communication process easier. The metropolitan setup of universities makes the whole

identity issues even more important. According to Adami (2017), when communication takes place in super-diverse milieus, with people sharing minimal background knowledge, we can predict that the multimodality of messaging is enriched. The assumption is that when language and culture are no longer assumed to be shared, there will be use of whatever non-verbal resources available to meet a common ground. Consequently, the profile pictures and statuses meaning making process should take consideration of how semiotic resources circulate, transform, and appropriate from one context to another in the world today.

It is in the same vein that one participant said, “The WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses should facilitate positive identity as well as understanding of the person. This helps to apply the appropriate communication tone and accent.” Such an observation was agreed to by most of the participants who said that they had several times regretted having used an inappropriate tone with some WhatsApp users after having misconstrued their identities mainly because users had used ambiguous profile pictures and statuses. In addition, one participant suitably said, “If someone doesn’t recognize you, seeing your picture will help them make a first impression about you. If they like your picture and get positive feelings from it, chances are that they will approach you friendly and so having an interaction with them will be much easier.”

25% of the participants said that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses can enhance healthier relationships and effective communication. An example in the words of one of the participants is as follows: “WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses preserve marriage like if you display the words HAPPY MARRIED then obviously someone will know what to post and when to do that.”

Despite the largely social, emotional and psychological issues raised concerning the communicative potential of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, most of the participants

agreed with the opinion that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are slowly being used as platforms for advertisement for business opportunities. In fact, more mature WhatsApp users confirmed the advantageous use of profile pictures and statuses for business promotion. That came as no surprise as participants correspondingly noticed the rise in the acceptance of WhatsApp communication even in formal organisations. Somewhat formal groups were said to exist in many organisations hence the multimodal nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses were agreed to be a beneficial aspect used for business communication. Interestingly, according to WhatsApp Inc. (2017), the development of digital technology has facilitated easier communication between people and organizations. WhatsApp is used for various purposes like commercial, teaching of students, and friendship interaction among others. It allows direct interactions.

Another interesting discovery was the idea that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses provide a unique way of expressing esteem that people largely lack in off line context. Many youthful participants pointed out to the freedom, supremacy and choices they have with WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses communication platform. Complementing that notion, Schmit, Google Chief Executive Officer averred, “Never before in history have, many people, from so many places, had so much power at their finger -tips. And while this is hardly the first technology revolution in our history, it is the first that will make it possible for almost everybody to own, develop and disseminate real time content without having to rely on intermediaries.”

The way identity issues came out as the most outstanding advantage matches similar successful researches that have been guided by the multimodal theory. An example is Orsatti and Riemer (2015) who researched on “Identity-Making: A Multimodal Approach for Researching Identity in Social Media.” They focused on a framework that describes identity making as an active achievement involving active, narrative and reflective modes.

Comparably, WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses make use of audio, text, images, videos and emoticons to create meaning.

4.7.3 WhatsApp Profile Pictures and statuses Challenges

100% of the participants agreed with the idea that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses can bring about disadvantages emanating from abuse. Most participants attributed abuse to teenagers yet some real life experiences given indicate that abuse cuts across all ages, the only difference being the nature of abuse. Firstly, participants raised the idea that most teenagers display socially unacceptable pictures that are tantamount to obscenity. One participant wrapped it up by asserting, “Some unruly people use WhatsApp to display undesirable behaviour whilst pretending to be enjoying the right to express themselves freely.”

Respectively, Bruneau (2016) discovered that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are determinant factors of value systems and currencies around sexual status hence the sharing of nude and semi-nude pictures all of which are “inherently self-destructive.” This was revealed in a research on Swazi youth where the pictures and information they share is an index of their destructive attitude towards life. No wonder why the title of the research is “YOLO so Party like a Swazi.” In this research, however, it was discovered that many young users in this case (19 to 21years old) are digital natives who are conversant with private settings which are used to conceal their profiles from some users whom they deem unsuitable to observe their indecent profile. Nevertheless, due to the inherent difficulty in determining WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses’ discourse community, such pictures end up getting known by the other parties. The bottom line is that profile pictures and statuses are propagating the sharing of indecent photos, videos, audios, texts, emojis; the multimodal nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses enhancing the obscenities. Some participant

talked about her sister having displayed a profile picture of herself and her boyfriend kissing. Knowing as she did that the sister was not supposed to see that, she blocked her but ironically, the sister got to know that through other WhatsApp users.

Participants also noted that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses can be associated with the ruining of relationships. One participant said, “Other people resort to WhatsApp statuses when faced with a crisis or disagreement instead of engaging the other party. This has seen many aggrieved people posting status updates of revenge pornography, and pictures of spouses in compromising positions. This has led to the breakdown of many relationships which could have been mended without the interference of people who would have been fed information whilst one is angry or intoxicated.”

One of the middle-aged participants shared an incident in which he displayed a profile picture of his new girlfriend a month after the death of his official wife. The reaction of the in-laws was acrimonious as the profile picture was construed as disrespectful of the deceased and her family. He regretted having displayed such a profile picture as they can no longer see eye to eye with his in-laws hence the family destructive nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

In a focus group discussion, one participant said that the biggest challenges of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are social media conflicts and conveyance of obscenities by aggrieved or over-zealous and vengeful users. Such manifestations are akin to the disintegration of relationships as observed above but the findings from the focus group discussion conjure one of real life sad situations reported in the Sunday Mail through the Mai Chisamba show. The letter to Mai Chisamba is quoted as follows: *“I’m married to a bully – SUNDAY MAIL 21 FEBRUARY I am married to a divorcee. I love my wife with all my heart and would want to spend the rest of my life with her. We have one child in this marriage but*

she has another one from her former marriage. If we happen to have any misunderstandings she quickly puts her ex-husband who used to physically abuse her on her WhatsApp profile and the status will be I miss you. This is breaking my heart. In our marriage she wants to be the one who has the last voice on anything, she even dictates when we can be intimate or how we should budget or whatever. Mai Chisamba, I do not know what to do because of the love I have for her but inwardly ndatambura.

Ndotangira papi kuti nyaya iyi ipere. I want to speak to her in a way that will not make her angry. As I write this letter she took the children to her family's home because she was upset with me, I miss my son so much but ndodiniwo?" This is apparently one of the biggest challenges of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses whereby users become latently abusive, vindictive and implacable, much to the emotional hurting of individuals as revealed in the letter."

Another illustration was given by one of the participants. She talked about having warned her unmarried cousin against displaying intimate photos of herself with her boyfriend as that would bring negative judgement from other would be suitors and the whole discourse community. Ironically, that relationship crumbled upon which the boyfriend started posting profile pictures of him and his new girlfriends much to the emotional turmoil of the former girlfriend.

80% of the participants talked about lack of privacy as one of the disadvantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. It is because of the same issue that 40% of the participants said that they will never display photos of their persons, loved ones or anything that they cherish. They said that anyone with one's number can access and download profile information without the owner's consent and in the wake of the belief in traditional magic, 20% pointed to the possibility of such photos being used for cult purposes to the detriment of the user. Not

only was privacy issues based on cult issues but participants disapproved the idea of people downloading information without the owner's consent. Respectively, Malekhosseini et al (2017:78) made an "Evaluation of user's privacy concerns by checking of their WhatsApp status." The study interrogated privacy controversies with regard to communication made through statuses. The study discovered that 77.7% of users were stalked because of the disclosure of their profiles. One can therefore deduce that profile pictures and statuses are linguistic resources whose recipient's interpretation results in stalking. No wonder why 80% of participants in this research expressed worry about privacy issues.

Cyber bullying was a recurrent concern raised by most of the participants. Some of the manifestations of cyber bullying related to posting vindictive profiles and leaking of downloaded private pictures. One participant said that "some people may use them as a way of humiliating other people, like you post pictures of some people you see at some social event, without their concern." In the same vein, identity theft was raised and exemplified by one participant who averred, "People can use profile pictures and statuses of other people in a bid to commit some immoral acts or trying to lure certain people for different reasons."

Another real challenge of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses messages as agreed by most participants is the issue of misinterpretations. In the words of one participant, "Some people will think a certain foul message is directed at them. Some will believe a person's wellbeing just by looking at pictures posted." Amedie (2015) asserts that one of the side effects of social media typical of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is the experience of false intimacy and wellbeing. That has been established to be a result of the tendency of social media to encourage putting up a façade that illuminates all the fun, excitement and success rather than the struggles that people largely endure in daily lives. Therefore, the dualities of on line and off line identities as hinted earlier do contribute to misinterpretations. 20% of the participants said that the multimodal nature of profile pictures and statuses added to the

ambiguities of profile pictures and statuses, especially with the advent of the new 24hour status that exploits affordances as varied as text, videos, audio and pictures.

Following the disadvantages discovered in this research, one recognises the diversity that characterises one's WhatsApp contacts. No wonder why the youths represent a different group from the middle-aged and the senior citizens. It is in that vein that multimodal discourse analysis comes in handy. Using the multimodal discourse analysis approach, Adami (2017) hints on how the challenges cited above can be avoided through the acceptance of the super-diverse nature of WhatsApp users. Adami (2017) penned "Multimodality and super diversity: Evidence for research agenda." The research discusses sign-making practices in the super diverse context of Leeds Kirkgate Market (UK).

4.8 Discussion

This research was geared to unravel the essence of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses through findings that answer research questions derived from four fundamental research objectives. The first objective was to analyse the significance of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses. Social mass information sharing, identity, foundation of effective communication was established as the hallmarks of the significance of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Such findings are very important as they raise WhatsApp to a pedestal where users become aware of the extent to which WhatsApp linguistic affordances can result in meaningful communication practices. Of interest is the affordance of silent discourses afforded by WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Its liberating power is very effective as it makes user communities assume some communicative power and freedom that transcends the limitations of off line situations. In the same vein, Kress and Jewitt's (2003) observation of multimodal semiotics capability of unleashing 'silent' discourses is compatible with the significance of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

The second objective was to explain the nature of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses. The findings have it to the effect that there are several genres as determined by content and form. In terms of content, it has been discovered that the themes include social, emotions, political, religious and business. The multimodal nature of was also discovered to render form genres that range from text, pictures, videos, emojis and more interestingly; a combination of this. The most interesting discovery pertaining to the varied nature of profile pictures and statuses relates to culture, gender and age. Most types of profile pictures and statuses conformed to the social norms of Zimbabwean culture that castigates obscenity. The findings are in line with the research objective. It resembles Khawaldeh et al (2016) research as hinted earlier. Females were discovered to be more conservative while males were more political. ‘Digital natives’ age group of the youths was found to make use of the multimodality of profile pictures and statuses while the elderly simply opted for automatically generated statuses. Such a finding is influential as it parades the social and cultural aspects of the society. Subsequently, one can be able to discern social and cultural trends through observation of the nature of WhatsApp profile pictures commonly displayed. It may also be a positive thing if ‘digital emigrants’ may also be advised to learn to fully exploit the power of the multimodal nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses

Examination of the messages portrayed by WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses was the third objective. In other words, the research inter-alia sought to understand the semantic value of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. In the context of many themes that include (as cited earlier) love, betrayal, aspirations, family, politics, sports and religion; the most significant meaning of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses relates to portrayal of personality and attitudes. Nevertheless, this research somewhat differ from the straight-jacked nature of Segalin’s (2017) research which established certain types of pictures as associated with certain types of personalities. The difference emanates from this research’s discovery of

misinterpretation as one of the major disadvantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Despite the misinterpretation revealed personality, attitudinal and habit meanings are effective as they entail that other disciplines such as sociology, psychology and business can make use of WhatsApp profile pictures to make decisions pertaining to individual WhatsApp users. Users might therefore need to know that they are susceptible to being judged (negatively or positively) on the basis of their respective WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

Last but not least, the enquiry was also intended to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses. In the wake of the acknowledgement of opportunities and challenges, users may indeed have to be cautious about what they post on their profiles. The communication affordances of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses seem to fall under any of consciously manipulated meaning creation procedures. Formal or non-formal organisations and individuals may have to full advantage of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses chiefly because the impact of challenges can be abated by caution as hinted in the preceding sections of this research. Awareness of the reality of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses allows users to take full advantage of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

4.9 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented the results of the interviews and focus group discussions carried out. The online observations by the researcher enhanced insightfulness in the analysis of findings from interviews and focus group discussions. Typical of a purely qualitative research, the findings were presented in narrative form with large chunks of direct quotations from participants included. A discussion section was also included in order to contextualise findings and impact within the research objectives paradigm. The next chapter is centred on conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The research was directed to unravel the essence of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses by using the multimodal approach that acknowledges the multiplicity of communicative affordances availed by WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. The title was in form of a question: “What’s up with WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses?” The answers to that inexplicable question were guided by the research objectives set out in chapter one. This was a case study of Midlands State University Harare campus students, lecturers, administration and support staff. The chapter focuses on the summary of salient findings of the study. It discusses the findings from the research to arrive at conclusions and recommendations to WhatsApp users, and scholars who may want to pursue further study.

5.2 Summary

The basis of this enquiry were the research objectives and questions that were set out in Chapter one. For clarity purposes, the research objectives shall be repeated here as follows:

1. Analyse the Significance of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.
2. Explain the nature of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.
3. Examine the messages portrayed by WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.
4. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

In order to obtain findings from participants, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were carried out. The researcher's insider stance as a WhatsApp user afforded participatory observation that enhanced perceptive analysis of the data gathered from interviews and focus group discussions. Qualitative data was thematically coded and categorised according to research objectives' leitmotifs. The results were analysed and typical of a purely qualitative research, they were presented in narrative form. Triangulation was ensured through the use of more than one data collection instruments to enhance the validity of the results. The researcher made relevant reference to literature connected to the findings in this study and such comparative analysis enabled elaborate analysis of variables. Although the research was very motivating, the researcher faced problems with responses as some potential participants were either too busy or considered the research too sensitive for their liking. Regardless of the limitations, the researcher managed to unravel insightful findings. Summary of research results and conclusions were taken from the research findings presented in chapter 4.

5.3 Conclusions

5.3.1 The Concept of WhatsApp Profile pictures and statuses

The study found out that WhatsApp users understand a WhatsApp profile picture as an image that represents an individual's account and that it is an identity emblem. The status was conceived as a message that can be in multimodal code and it serves to reveal the user's current thoughts, emotions and views. Overall, it was discovered that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are ways of self-expression used by WhatsApp users to communicate their feelings and views to people on their contact list. One can therefore conclude that users have accepted of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses as discourse affordances.

From the above findings, one can further conclude that there is self-determination that characterises the concept of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses as communication methods. Users have a choice to present themselves the way they feel they should.

5.3.2 The importance of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses

From the research findings, the researcher can conclude that the most significant aspect of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is the sharing of information about what will be happening in one's life. From the findings, emphasis was placed on how pictures and statuses have relevance in keeping in touch with loved ones and friends – particularly in a Zimbabwe where people can no longer afford to visit each other frequently. Consequently, one can conclude that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses reduce the distance between people if one is constantly updated of the happenings in a loved one's life. The identity motif kept recurring as researcher found out from participants that, if used correctly, WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses should communicate the identity of the users. They tell other users the current situation of the user so as to determine how and when to and when not to contact a user. Akin to one-to-many information sharing and identity, inciting of further communication was found out as an accompanying important aspect of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

Based on the preceding findings, one can further conclude that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses subject users to being judged by other users. In other words, the user profiles invariably communicate something regarding identity, attitude, and temperament. These are important aspects that determine the nature of further one on one communication that may emanate from profile pictures and statuses. Users are therefore bound to consciously portray what the other users are intended to construes from WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

5.3.3 Types of Profile Pictures and Statuses (Commonly displayed profile pictures and statuses)

The study found out that the types of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are varied both in terms of content and form. The themes discovered were as varied as to include social, political, business, religious, motivational and emotional. Based on responses from participants, the researcher can determine that the most outstanding themes were feelings of love, religion and inspirational. An interesting conclusion in the wake of the varied themes connoted on WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is that most of the pictures and messages displayed conform to the normative standards of the Zimbabwean society. Two interesting findings regard gender influence on user profile themes. Firstly, female status updates were discovered to be more personal, religious and social while males were concerned about political, national and international themes. Secondly, young participants in the teenagers and young adults' age-group categories showed a carefree attitude towards themes and modes used on their profiles while the more mature were found to be more conservative. Such a discovery could point to the inevitable difference in perspectives between 'digital natives' and 'digital emigrants'. One can also conclude that there is an inclination to social malaise associated more with the youths who somewhat abuse the linguistic affordances of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Another interesting finding about types of profiles displayed relate to the modes of profile pictures and statuses. It was clear that the youths (digital natives) make full use of the multimodal nature of profile pictures and statuses while respectively, the older ones use mostly text and ordinary photos. The new 24hour status was seen to be used mostly by the digital natives who are conversant with its multimodal nature.

It is in the wake of the above findings and conclusions that the researcher can determine that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses genres differ as result different factors. These include

the multimodal nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, user age and gender as well as user personality. Such a scenario has been exemplified by woman being more interested in social themes while males are more interested in political themes. Similarly, ‘digital natives’ make full use of the multimodal nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses while ‘digital emigrants’ generally use automatically generated statuses and rarely change their profile pictures.

5.3.4 Effects of profile pictures and statuses on other users

A fascinating finding about effects of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses is the idea that the influence can either be negative or positive. Many participants referred to how inspirational profile photos and statuses served to motivate some depressed and desolate WhatsApp users. Inversely, issues to do with jealous, gossip and vengefulness were discovered as some of the major negative effects.

The researcher can safely conclude that a lot of WhatsApp users have benefitted and can continue to benefit from inspirational messages conveyed through WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Remaining optimistic, one can conclude that in as much as there are negative effects emanating from jealous and some such vices, awareness of such as a reality can make users more cautious in their use and interpretation of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses messages.

5.3.5 The meaning of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses messages

In as much as the findings of users’ views on meanings assigned to WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses were wide-ranging, it was discovered that themes of love, betrayal,

aspirations, family, politics, sports and religion were the most common. Issues to do with personality were also discovered in a very interesting manner. In the context of different modes of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, the researcher can conclude that each profile mean something to other users. Ironically, this includes the default or empty or so called meaningless profiles. Such users who do not display any messages were said to be unwittingly showing their introversion. Inversely, users who frequently change profiles were observed as extroverts. The meanings of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses were also subjected to scrutiny as findings points to users' appreciation of the concept of self-presentation. Self-presentation results in misinterpretations since some users, especially the youths are bound to display profiles that contradict on line and offline identities. WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses as comic relief strategy were also discovered. That comes in the wake of the 24 hour status facility that allows full exploitation of the multimodal nature of WhatsApp. The researcher can also conclude that although many users post positive aspects about their lives, the sordid reality of life is that it is full of problems and therefore the memes and jokes are a well-received meaningful function of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses.

The researcher can further conclude that albeit specific ideas conveyed through WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses, comic relief is one of the major connotations. No wonder why many participants pointed out that they spend considerable time viewing other user's profiles. In addition, due to self-presentation concept, the researcher can conclude that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses will always be susceptible to misinterpretation. As a result, users can make use of other WhatsApp linguistic affordances to ascertain meanings conveyed through profile pictures and statuses.

5.3.6 Advantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses

Based on findings of this research, the researcher can safely conclude that WhatsApp is one of the most unconventional yet effective ways of sharing information. As hinted earlier; in the wake of many people not affording to visit each other, visits have become cybernetic, as important information about one's life is being shared through WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. Another advantage is that a user can be able to pick a loved one's mood and feelings by what they constantly update. That helps to apply the appropriate register. Positive identification of an interlocutor is actually a motif as it recurred at this and every other stage of the inquiry. WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses were also found to enhance healthier relationships and effective communication as they can be used as 'public' signs of affection even for people who are too shy to show love through conventional offline methods. Closely linked to that is the outcome that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses provide a unique way of expressing esteem that people largely lack in off line context. In other words, it offers freedom of expression that rarely exists in offline settings. Lastly, and arguably more attention-grabbing is the conclusion that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses are slowly being used as platforms for advertisement opportunities. Akin to that is the finding that WhatsApp is now being used for various purposes such as commercial, education, and of course, friendship interaction among others. The way users have embraced it to include multifaceted communication needs makes WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses reach a higher pedestal than ever before.

It can be additionally concluded that WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses have bridged the distance between loved ones as contact is consistent and one to many. Another conclusion relates to the way WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses can be used beyond social settings; to include formal organisations varying from politics, religion to business.

5.3.7 Disadvantages of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses

Teenagers were discovered to be prone to displaying socially unacceptable pictures that are tantamount to obscenity. Nude and semi-nude pictures all of which are fundamentally self-destructive have been associated with the carefree attitude of the youth. Users who are prone to obscenities were discovered to be disposed to hide the profiles from other users. Nevertheless, the inherent difficulty in determining WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses' discourse community was discovered to expose such WhatsApp users. In addition, it was discovered that many aggrieved people post status updates that are revengeful, hurtful, vindictive and contemptuous. Linked to that is the finding that relationships are vulnerable to ruin especially when users profile pictures and statuses which are unaccepted by their partners or friends. Privacy was found as a huge disadvantage of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses. That is because anyone with someone's contact number can access the other's WhatsApp accounts unless privacy settings are available. Again, cyber bullying was a recurrent concern raised by most of the participants. The last and arguably the most profound challenge is misinterpretation. Depending on the nature of relationship with a WhatsApp user, some users have been found misconstruing some messages as having been meant for them. Worse still, some users have been erroneously misled by some WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses due to its self-promotion tendencies that sometimes render a huge difference between online identities and offline identities.

The researcher can therefore safely conclude that issues to do with identity and culture are important in determining the acceptability of certain profile pictures and statuses. In addition, there is always a difference between online and off line identities. Above all, the researcher can conclude that WhatsApp users can mitigate cited disadvantages such as cyber-bullying, privacy violation, misinterpretation and obscenity by engaging privacy settings as well as follow-up open communication.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of research and the conclusions, the researcher recommends quite a number of proposals. Firstly, there should be a measure of caution on what users disclose on WhatsApp because not everyone holds good intentions for them. In that vein, where a user can learn how to use privacy settings, such should be learnt to curb stalking from haters. Cyber laws should also be enforced to mitigate obscenity, cyber bullying and incitation of violence. In addition, users should try to avoid tainting their characters because organisations and the general public may use one's profiles to judge their personality. In addition, users should try as much as possible to adhere to cultural norms of their respective discourse communities to avoid unnecessary conflict that may arise. Use of profile pictures for positive identification is also recommended as it enhances effective communication. Social, political, religious and business organisations are also recommended to take advantage of the advertisement power of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses which have been discovered to be used in as diverse environments as commercial, education, and of course, friendship interaction among others.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

This study has limited itself to the analysis of profile pictures and statuses but other linguistic communicative affordances of WhatsApp deserve attention. Examples are “last seen”, “blue and black ticks”, emoticons and the informality of language used on texting. Research on the effectiveness of WhatsApp communication in religious, social, political and business organisations would be welcome. In addition, this research was a case-study focusing on MSU Harare campus students, lecturers, administration and support staff. As such, in the course of this research, it became apparent that other settings beyond the scope of this study

require investigation. In this connection, it is recommended that research be carried out in the following areas: Comparative research of WhatsApp use in different provinces with different cultural inclinations. Alternatively, an investigation into gender and age influence on WhatsApp usage. Consequently, it is apparent that the forgoing study has opened floodgates to potential research areas which are destined to broaden and deepen the critical views on the communicative and semantic manifestations WhatsApp in general and profile pictures and statuses in particular.

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Appendices

Appendix A

FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS QUESTIONNAIRE. (Please cancel the inappropriate)

Please answer the following questions in the spaces provided, circle or tick the most appropriate options.

1. Age:.....

2. Are you: (please tick as necessary) Male Female

3. What is your academic/professional background?

Undergraduate student

Post-graduate student

Professional (White-collar)

Professional (Artisan/Semi-Skilled)

Other: (please describe) _____

4. For how many years have you been using WhatsApp?

<1 Year 1-2 Years

2-5 Years 5-10 Years

>10 Years

5. How often do you change your WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses (approximately)?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Appendix B

Observation Guide

In a bid to complement the other research instruments namely in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the participatory observations are meant to ascertain the following dynamics about WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses:

- The nature/kind of profile pictures and statuses frequently displayed in terms of themes; (personal, political, religious, social, motivational etc) as well as the mode used: (picture, text, video, audio, emoji/emoticon etc)
- The face value semantic signification of profile pictures and statuses
- The frequency with which profile pictures and statuses change
- The extent to which non-personal/personal pictures/videos are used
- The general trend with regard to language used on WhatsApp profiles
- The dialogic nature of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses

Appendix C

In-depth Interview Guide for WhatsApp Users

Introduction

Hello, my name is Enock Nyambo, a Masters in Applied English Linguistics student at Midlands State University. I am doing a study for my research project titled: **What's up with WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses? A Multimodal Approach**. I intend to explore the semantic and communicative manifestations of WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses.

Questions

1. What is your understanding of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses?
2. What do you think about the importance of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses?
3. How do profile pictures and statuses affect other WhatsApp users in your contact list?
4. What kind of profile pictures and statuses do you think are frequently displayed?
5. How do you feel about some of the WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses displayed by some users in your contacts list?
6. What are the meanings frequently attached to WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses
7. Almost all WhatsApp users display profile pictures and statuses of some sort. Some users feel that if you display too much of personal and intimate information, you can be at a disadvantage. Others think that it is best to display whatever you feel or think of displaying. What do you think about this? What kind of profile pictures and statuses do you display? Do you think other user's views on your profile certainly matter?
8. What are some of the advantages you think can be derived from displaying WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses? If any, can you exemplify with real life experiences?
9. What can be done to enhance the advantages?
10. What are some of the challenges of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses? If any, can you illustrate with real-life observations?
11. What do you think can be done to reduce the cited disadvantages?

Appendix D
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOL (FGD)

Topic: What’s up with WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses? A Multimodal Approach.

FDG information

Group No	
Venue	
Date, time	

Group:

- Undergraduate Students
- Post-graduate Students
- Lecturers, Administration and Ancillary Staff

FDG Questions

1. What is your understanding of the terms WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses?
2. What do you think is the importance of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses?
3. What kind of profile pictures and statuses do you frequently view in your contacts list?
4. What is your opinion of WhatsApp users who do display whichever forms of WhatsApp profile pictures or statuses?
5. How do you feel about some of the profile pictures and statuses that are displayed by users in your contact list?
6. What is your opinion of the latest WhatsApp 24 hour status feature? How does it compare with the older version?
7. What is the meaning of some of the profile pictures and statuses that you have displayed and observed?
8. Why do some people have reservations on displaying certain kinds of profile pictures and statuses?
9. What are some of the advantages you think can be derived from displaying WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses? If any, can you exemplify with real life experiences?
10. What can be done to enhance the advantages?
11. What are some of the challenges of WhatsApp profile pictures and statuses? If any, can you can you illustrate with real-life observations?
12. What do you think can be done to reduce the cited disadvantages?

-----Thank You-----

Appendix E

Consent Form for Participants in Enock Nyambo's Research titled: What's up with WhatsApp Profile Pictures and Statuses? A Multimodal Approach.

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet dated _____.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Select only one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. • I do not want my name used in this project. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant:

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Researcher:

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date