SEXUALITY GOING VIRAL: USING WHATSAPP AS A SITE FOR SEXUAL

EXPLORATION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN GHANA

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Sexuality Going Viral: Using WhatsApp as a Site for Sexual Exploration Among College Students in Ghana.

Among college students in Ghana, the new media app WhatsApp has been widely adopted as a medium for both communication and sexual exploration. Drawing on a classical media effects theory Uses and Gratifications, this mixed method research is designed to investigate sexual practices staged on WhatsApp among college students in Ghana. This study surveyed 314 students, along with in-depth interviews with eight respondents from the African University College of Communications in Accra, Ghana, to investigate the practice of viewing and circulating sexually explicit materials on WhatsApp. Key findings from this study with the exception of impact of sexual content on both male and female college students, point to no statistically significant differences in sexual gratifications on WhatsApp. This thesis delineates the various forms of motivations regarding the use of WhatsApp as a sexual gratification platform.

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This thesis is dedicated to my son Nana Yaw Akyede Prempeh Adu-Kumi. It took me four years to finally see your face for the first time, but it was worth the time.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Circulating sexually explicit materials on social media platforms has in recent times become a spectacle, especially, among college students in Ghana. Impelled by mobile apps such as WhatsApp, Viber, Badoo and Tango, college students have resorted to the recording, sending and receiving of explicit materials such as nude pictures, sex clips, and flirtatious messages. The magnitude of sexual content distributed across social media platforms in Ghana has generated much attention in the recent years. A lot of the issues coming out of the discussions surrounding this practice are centered on the vaunting of sexual activities across social media. Consequently, the practice has generated a lot of media, group, public and private dialogue. At the heart of these discussions is the increasing popularity of the new media app "WhatsApp". The app serves as a carrier of bulk of the sexual content.

> *"WhatsApp is an instant messaging platform that enhances chats through a series of threaded messages on a wall, using spatial position and color differentiations among senders and receivers"* (O'Hara et al., 2014).

Modern technologies such as digital cameras, smartphones, and other mobile devices with combined video, photography, and audio capabilities have engineered the creation of private sexual content (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). Preliminary enquiries point to college patrons as creators and distributors of sexual content on WhatsApp in Ghana. Though Ghanaian college students serve as the primary focus of this issue, the practice is now widespread in other parts of Africa. This thesis, *"Sexuality Going Viral: Using WhatsApp as a tool for sexual exploration*

among college students in Ghana", is an attempt to investigate this novel practice. There is

conjecture among a section of the Ghanaian public that this practice is a result of the easy access

to new media tools. The overarching assumption however for this study is, new media

technologies such as smartphones, digital cameras, and tablets together with applications such as

WhatsApp, Viber, Tango, among a host of other social networking platforms have rendered it

effortless to engage in diverse forms of activities including but not limited to sexual expressions

(Lenhart & Madden, 2005). This research is particularly interested in understanding the

increasing popularity and adoption of "WhatsApp" as a site for these sexual expressions among

college students in Ghana.

This study is grounded theoretically on the Blumler and Katz (1974) uses and

gratifications theory. This theory suggests that media users are active and autonomous

individuals with specific needs, and thus adopt different media platforms, contents, and

applications to gratify these needs. The reason for adopting this theory is two-fold First, to help

address the two research questions posed in this study; Secondly to, aid the analysis and the

discussion of the research findings. The study also provides a context through a discussion of

some historical re-conception of human sexual practices across time and space. This is to draw a

connection between human sexual behavior as a discourse and a social construct.

The objectives of this research include exploration of WhatsApp as the preferred medium

for carrying out sexual expressions. In other words, what makes this application unique and how

does it compare with other mediated communication platforms? Secondly, I aim to ascertain the

significance of social media as the domain for social and private learning about sex related

activities among college students in Ghana. Moving forward, the study adopts a mixed method

design that combines both survey and in-depth interview methods for a multi-step analysis. The rationale is to explore this important topic from both a theoretical and humanistic purview. In other words, gauging college students' use of WhatsApp generally must correspond with the personal experiences of users in this regard.

Background

Personal Note: Sexual activities and WhatsApp?

In 2008, I worked at a communications consulting firm in Accra, Ghana, as a junior consultant. One fine afternoon, a colleague of mine called my attention to a video clip making rounds on social media. The video was a sex clip involving two college students circulating on WhatsApp. I was utterly dismayed at the sight of the video for one particular reason; the female partner in the clip was a former schoolmate. The events surrounding this tape were unfortunate as I thought it through. Even worse would be the ramifications of the clip for my former schoolmate's character and image in the long term. The clip contained the naked and intimate act of her private sexual activity with a male partner whose face never appeared in the tape. The tape revealed the intimate expressions and emotions of the partners as well as the power play that transpired between the two. Most vivid was the role of the male partner in convincing the female character to have the entire activity recorded without showing his face. The clip went viral within a matter of days and was received with scorn for the display of indecency. Following the chaos that greeted the circulation of the clip, news broke about an attempt by the female character to commit suicide. The palpable conclusion would be that she felt ashamed for the leakage of her sex life along with the dent to her family reputation. In the end, support from

family and close friends sustained her, but not without a big lesson about her action and the actions of the male involved and inerasable impact on her perceived character.

Observing the five-minute clip brought up a lot of questions as well as perspectives on the decision to record a private sexual act. What role did technology play in affording the partners the opportunity to record their intimate affair? What propelled it to viral in a matter of days? Following this incident, several other sex clips began to sprout from other colleges involving students recording themselves in explicit activities. These scenarios posed a lot of concern for a society like Ghana as people began to discuss on radio and other public places. The concerns were over the indecency that has fraught a traditional and religious country like Ghana. The debate and discussion is what fueled the desire to undertake an investigation into this phenomenon. The rationale was to unravel the possible links between the use of WhatsApp and the sexual activities of college students in Ghana was developed. Yet again, it is intriguing to review the literature on new media technologies and social media to become familiarized with the qualities and features of new media technologies such as the potency to spread information beyond defined proximities. Another lesson to be gleaned from social media and technologies relates to the damage they could produce. These and many more of such qualities stirred up my curiosity to undertake this study. A review of the sex clip revealed the extent to which young partners and college students are willing to explore their sexual pleasures with digital technologies. Finally, questioning the state of the African value systems held in check by tradition and religiosity as it is increasingly threatened by sexual indecency is worthwhile. This latter notion is premised on the long-standing debate over the role of technology in society. For example, technological determinism observes that technology is a force on its own and is able to

determine and create social and cultural changes (Bimber, 1994; Hughes, 1994.) What this means essentially is, that technology in whichever form it comes is inherently endowed with unique sets of discourses that are not created by social events, but by the technology itself (Smith & Marx, 1994). Opponents of technological determinism on the other hand, have argued that social phenomenon determine the course of human action including the use of technology (Pinch & Bijker, 1987). Over the years, acquaintances comprised of former schoolmates, colleagues and associates have shared, through social networking sites such as WhatsApp, huge volumes of sexual content. My interest is therefore, to find out why WhatsApp has over the recent years become the site for the exchange of sexual content and hence exploration among college students in Ghana.

Statement of the Problem

The growing levels of sexual indecency among college students in Ghana have been impelled by the access to social networking platforms. Social networking sites have been abused as they now serve as channels for the circulation of sexual content (Cookingham, & Ryan, 2015). There have been a series of conversations across different spheres of the Ghanaian social set up, including schools, churches, homes, public and private spaces regarding the corruption of morals due to the high mass of sexual materials that keep sprouting. The creation of such content is now possible and easy to access by the help of new media technologies such as smartphones, digital cameras, laptops and tablets. Some of the text has over time managed to spill over to social media networks and other online sites. New media applications such as WhatsApp, Tango, Viber, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, are now among the most adopted tools for communication as well as sexual expressions. Worth noting is the fact that these technologies do not operate in isolation, rather they produce effects that threaten social values, especially among

traditional societies (McLuhan & Powers, 1989). The creation of such intimate content has

become avenue for scandalizing creators of sexual materials. There are varying degrees of

explicit materials generated through these applications. Some of these materials include

recordings of sex clips, sending and receiving of nude pictures and flirtatious messages. The

recording of sexual clips is often termed as "sextapes or sexleaks" while the staging of

sexualized conversations over these channels are christened as "sex chat". Incidentally,

WhatsApp has become the predominant medium for the distribution and the crafting of these

sexual activities (Lenhart, 2009).

Scope of the Study

New media is an uncertain and a complex term. The nature of the concept makes a

standardized definition difficult to uphold. However, it has broadly been defined as the interplay

between the Internet, modern communication devices, and democratization among the general

population (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016). This definition of new media expresses a form of

collage among different media forms coming together to create a certain media culture. Jenkins

(2006) views this kind of collage as convergence, a system by which content flows across

multiple platforms, the establishment of corporations among media industries and the migratory

behavior of media audiences (p.2). These technologies and applications are now a common

spectacle in Ghana, predominantly among college students. People across the developing world

now have access to these technologies for different purposes. A case in point is the East African

nation of Kenya, where there has been a sustained use of mobile money transfer services

otherwise known as "MPESA". This system allows citizens to send, receive money and transact

business across regional boundaries through their mobile phones (Economist, 2013; Owiro,

2011). In addition, others across the continent are also using these new devices as distance

learning and health delivery platforms (Anderson, 2010; Laurillard, 2007). These are but a few

of the ways in which modern technology has become an integral part of African social life. In

defining the boundaries of this research, the study specifically explores the use of "WhatsApp"

by college students in Ghana as a site for sexual exploration. Some scholars have argued that

sex, though a discreet practice hardly discussed openly among different cultures and nations such

as Ghana are not openly vaunted on social media. The objective is therefore to empirically

examine the role social networking applications are playing in sexual practices among college

students.

Significance of the Study

Suggesting that college students regularly engage in illicit sex would not be an aberration.

However, the environment afforded by modern technologies for the thriving of such sexual

experiments is what renders this study important. The evolution of this novel phenomenon opens

an avenue for a conceptual and a theoretical investigation. It is thus useful to undertake an

investigation into the use of the WhatsApp platform both for communication and crafting of

sexual activities. Another significant aspect of this study investigates the effects on both male

and female patrons as they get immersed into the practice of receiving and sending of explicit

content on WhatsApp. It is therefore important to explore the use of this particular application

and the effects its produces on college students in Ghana.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, the study examined how WhatsApp is

utilized as a communication tool and a sexual exploration site among college students in Ghana.

Secondly, the study investigated the motivations for the mass adoption of the WhatsApp as the

preferred medium for social networking. Finally, the study examined patrons' personal

experiences with the app, and the impact it had on sexual behaviors. In other words, did the use of the WhatsApp for sexual explorations provide any form of benefits or psychological harm?

Research Assumptions

Preliminary investigation revealed that college students in Ghana are heavy adopters of the WhatsApp platform. During the course of the app's adoption and usage, college students have appropriated it to different ends including recording, photographing, circulating and receiving of explicit content. There is also the belief that persons who came into contact with sex clips and nude content distribute it among their social groupings as a way of proving their currency with the times in the eyes of their friends and associates. Finally, it was assumed that female partners tend to be scandalized both for sharing their personal explicit materials or circulating independent sexual content.

Thesis Organization

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. Chapter One consists of the general features of the study including the background, statement of the problem, objectives, significance, scope, and research assumptions. Chapter Two is the literature review section, which is comprised of developments in new media technologies, the WhatsApp application as a modern communication tool, and Internet and mobile phone technology in Ghana. The third chapter is the theory section, which discusses the uses and gratifications theory and how it fits into this study. The purpose of this section is to provide a theoretical grounding for the thesis. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the methodology adopted for this entire research. This consists of the mixed method approach, and the data collection methods of survey and in-depth interview, as well as sampling techniques. Chapter Five deals with the results and analysis of how college students in Ghana use

WhatsApp as a sexual exploration tool. Finally, Chapter Six is the conclusion of the study and

consists of the discussion of key findings, limitations and recommendations for further research.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

I examine in this chapter the literature on new media technologies over the recent years. I also discuss the "WhatsApp" technology as a modern communication tool and, finally the Internet and mobile technology in Ghana. Engaging with the different scholarly works was pertinent to this particular study for a number of reasons. First, understanding the changing nature of the communication field and the rapidity of innovations among communication tools is critical. Secondly, the effect of the new inventions on user's lifestyle and choices are as useful as the tools themselves (McLuhan, 1994)**.** These factors, the researcher believes, are important in setting this study on the right track to gauge Ghanaian college students interaction with WhatsApp for sexual exploration. The discussion takes the form of definitions and descriptions and critique of concepts and important debates.

Gender and Sexual Disparity in Ghana

The 1992 constitution of Ghana has provisions for gender equalization between men and women; it was part of a broader step towards curbing discriminations, violence and biases against women. These changes though significant have not been adequate in addressing the inhumane treatment of women especially regarding rights to their bodies and sexual practices (Sossou, 2007). The rights of women as per the memorandum of the Beijing Platform for Action consist of individual right to control their own bodies, choice of sexuality and reproductive health (1995, p. 96; Sossou, 2007). Historically, power and biased gender relations along with cultural and traditional mores concerning sexual practices have been huge factors in the way

women live their lives in Ghana. For instance, Women were in the past relegated to the home while their male counterparts were given access to school and hence better jobs. Patriarchy, poverty, illiteracy and absence of employment opportunities are some of the factors that increase women's sexual vulnerability in Ghana (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2000).The patriarchal system in Ghana works through channels of ritual initiations, marriage, religious and political socializations (Manu 1984; Oppong 1973; Nukunya 1969).

These forms of gender disparities are still alive toward and play significant roles in the way college students perceive female characters in sexual content circulated on WhatsApp. Though, the app provides an equalizing platform for college students to express and explore their sexual lives, culture has a way scandalizing women who appear in sex content as well as those who express their views about sex.

New Media Technologies and Applications

Early researchers in the media and communication field paid a lot of attention to mass media effects, particularly how the media influences the audience's social behaviors. Some of the studies focused on the impact of mass media on violence, alcoholism, sex and race among other social issues (Dominick, 1984; McGee & Frueh, 1980). Today, there is no doubt that new media technologies have infiltrated society in leaps and bounds and is thus an important part of human social life and development (Rogers, 1986). A great deal of work has gone into the use of digital technologies and applications for human and social change (Gladwell, 2010; Ruggiero, 2000). An important characteristic of new media technology is its relative ease of use for people of all ages, economic groupings, and educational backgrounds. It is therefore, not an aberration to opine that new media technologies have gradually become user friendly. Bolter and Grusin

(2000) argued that due to its simplified and friendly nature, new media technologies are often taken for granted for its ramifications on individuals and society at large.

The Internet is one such invention that has gained popularity across space and time. Its usefulness is based on the utility of its infrastructure to combine and empower different technologies and processes all at once. The Internet serves as the major infrastructure upon which digital media content is produced, distributed and consumed by society. Recent mass proliferations of digital media infrastructure, applications and content make the definition of what constitutes new media in this day and age a hard one (Bolter and Grusin, 2000; Lister et al 2009). For example, the production and distribution of text, photos, audio, and video all at once across distances with record speed and instantaneity, but the absence of room for professional censorship leaves room contemplation (Lenhart & Madden, 2005).

One of the many rhetorical questions often asked about new media consists of the 'newness' of the said media. Some scholars believe there is nothing new about new media technologies. For instance, the argument is made that moving a radio programing from a frequency to an online spectrum does not make it new. The spectrum only expands the reach and the ways in which it is can be accessed (Lister et al 2009). There are also arguments about the changes in lifestyle and connections that have been instigated by new media technologies. To answer the question of what constitutes the newness of new media, it is imperative in this regard to recognize that the technologies are distinct relative to mass media. One of such direct distinction between new media and the mass media is how users and audiences approach the technology. For example, in mass media content flows from one to many with no feedback, or in some cases delayed feedback (Bennett & Manheim, 2006). In new media, content is fast as it can

be one-to-many and one-to-one as well (Robinson, 1976). The Internet enables one-to-one

instant chat, group chat as is done on Facebook, WhatsApp, and twitter. Another important

example is that now persons across different geographical spaces, races, ethnicities, ages, sex,

and diverse economic backgrounds are forming relationships with each other across different

levels that were previously not possible.

In furtherance to this argument, another important component that has been suggested in

relation to new media is the ability of modern technologies to shield the identity of the source

from the public while rendering the audience visible (Gladwell, 2010). Producers of content on

the Internet are afforded the sovereignty of staying anonymous however, the audiences are

denied this privilege since their participation on any platform supported by the Internet requires

some of identification (Lenhart, Purcell & Smith (2011). These inconsistencies in the use of the

Internet have instigated some criticisms against new media applications especially the Internet. It

has been argued that the Internet serves as an avenue for bullying and promotion of other

mischievous behaviors (Gladwell, 2010). Advertisers now capitalize on the access granted to the

audience to target consumers based on the history of their Internet choices and behaviors

(McChesney, 2008).

Re-conceptualizing New Media
The evolution of a technology usually comes with its own set of discourses especially if it

is heavily adopted. It is through discourses that ideas and frameworks on the technology and its

impact is developed. Thus theorizing new media could be viewed as contextualizing the

discourse on modern technology (Meyrowitz, 1994). Celebrants of the internet and new media

technologies and applications often conclude implicitly and explicitly, that technology serves as

the driving force for most social changes (McChesney, 2008). For example, in 2011, the massive protest that swept across the Arab world became christened as a technological revolution. It is believed that the government crackdown on the mass media triggered a switch over to other social media platforms such as twitter and Facebook to rally people for civil disobedience. Such conceptualizations of modern technology often fall into the bracket of 'technological determinism' (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006). The criticism of this kind of approach to technology is that it conceives humans as lacking the agency to perform certain tasks and actions independent of technology (McLuhan, 1994). Technology thus becomes the driving force behind social organization and the construction of relationships.

A contrary opinion however, has it that since technology does not just appear, but instead created by humans to satisfy a need. There is therefore the need to observe the social forces that underscore the development of technologies (Pinch & Bijker, 1987). Some of these forces include economic, cultural, political, religious and social determinants that influence technology. Advocates of the sociological forces and human agency have argued that technology is only an extension of human agency and therefore cannot determine the cultural and social output of societies and people (Raymond William, 1983, 1974). In disbanding the technological determinism theory, Fischer (1992) also intimates that human beings are creative and capable of reinventing themselves. They are therefore not at the mercy of technology unlike previous thoughts on media effects sought to project through the hypodermic needle theory (Bennet & Manheim, 2006). Over the years, it has become evident that new media technologies and applications keep stretching its limit, but scholarship shows that such stretches are infinite, showing how human agency continues to evolve (Douglas & Yoram, 1987). A sociological

approach to understanding new media technologies posits that media technologies are integral

part of human social set up and will play a vital role in the evolution future technologies

(Raymond William, 1983). Lessig (1999, 2006) also indicates that regulations, ethical codes and

conducts are part of the social forces that shape the use of the infrastructure of the Internet and

human communication.

Debating the Moral & Technological Panics

The different technological inventions such as the Internet and mobile applications

present enormous opportunities to society, on the other hand. Alternatively, technology can also

spark a lot of sociological problems as discussed previously. Conceptually, technology has been

identified as instigating some sociological panics. Typical types of such sociological panics are

moral and technological. For example, Stanley Cohen (1972) intimated that "societies appear to

be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic" (p. 225). He then opines that it is

through these panics that society frames what constitutes a threat. Following such threats are

development of regulations to control the potential threats. Technological panics have been

conceived by Alice Marwick (2008,p) as "the attempt to contextualize moral panics as a

response to fear of modernity as represented by new technologies". The scholar's argument is

that the technological panic is characterized by a focus on new media forms, pathologizing

young people's use of new technologies, and the attempt to regulate the behavior of young users.

The panics that have become a concern for new media technology and application users relates

to increased sexual content making rounds on WhatsApp and other social networking sites in

Ghana. It only becomes prudent to invoke Slade (2000, p) who indicated "wherever one person

invents a technology, another person will have a sexual use for it".

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The WhatsApp Technology

Millennials along with the generations before have in the recent years been immersed into a new form of online culture, due to the explosion of social media platforms and applications. Literature shows that millennials now form the biggest portion of "digital natives" (Gardner & Davis, 2013). This is due to their natural transposition into this arena by virtue of times and the innovations in the technology they are caught up in. The generations before millennials are perceived as migrants in transition into the technological arena (Gardner & Davis, 2013). Both millennials and the generation before are now at the receiving ends of social media and new media applications saturation. There are a multitude of platforms that provide avenues for socializing, networking, interacting and gratifying diverse needs. Gardner and Davis (2013) observe that digital technologies are now reconfiguring human identities, personal intimacies and individual imaginations. These new forms of interactions, along with the formation of intimate relations, are now staged online with the aid of specialized applications with features that enhances creativity.

An "app" or "application" is "a software program designed to run on a mobile device which allows the user to carry out one or more operations" (Gardner & Davis, 2013, p.6). Smartphones now have a tremendous amount of room for new mobile applications to thrive. There are now thousands of applications for different purposes including exercises, communication, food, transportation and weather among countless others. The mobile app WhatsApp represent one of the many communication applications that has since its invention in 2009 managed to rack up over a billion subscribers as at the last count (WhatsApp.com, 2016). Industry experts say the app is the second most popular instant messaging application for social networking after Facebook. The app is part of a pool of instant messaging applications such as

Skype, Line, WeChat, Imo, Viber, iMessage, among others often referred to as "Over The Top" applications (OTT). OTT applications are independent of mobile networks and offer affordable communication services (O'Hara et al, 2014). A recent article published on myjoyonline.com an online news service in Ghana indicated that mobile telecommunication networks in Ghana are pushing for the National Communications Authority (NCA) in Ghana to ban such OTT services. The report stated that, mobile network companies are losing money as more and Ghanaians make calls over the Internet than over the networks.

In 2014, Facebook acquired the WhatsApp franchise from inventors Jan Koum and Brian Acton former employees of Yahoo at a cost of 19 billion dollars (Economist, 2015). The app is extremely popular across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America where the majority of the population have less to spend on mobile network services. The app presents instant messaging chats as a series of threaded messages on a wall, using spatial position and color to differentiate sender's and receiver's messages (O'Hara et al, 2014). Chats can be carried out between two individuals or in groups. Also, text messages can be transmitted in the form of URLs, images, video or audio clips (Metz, 2016). All messages are timestamped and include one or two ticks next to the time to indicate the massage has been sent and delivered respectively (O'Hara et al, 2014, WhatsApp.com, 2013). Status of user's currency online is determinable to show when recipient was "last seen online" (Metz, 2016). There are no upper bound limits on the number of messages that can be sent through WhatsApp.

The popularity of the app among users has been attributed to the rich feature set, which allows a combination of photos, video and messages. As at 2013, there were on average, more than 31 billion messages sent through WhatsApp per day, 325 million of which were photos

(Karapanos, Teixeira & Gouveia, 2016; Olivarez-Giles, 2013). Furthermore, WhatsApp and other such applications have been noted to provide users the ability to engage in more intimate communication, personalized conversations, intimacy and a sense of connection due to the private nature of the communication channels (Karapanos, Teixeira & Gouveia, 2016). Finally, WhatsApp's near universal adoption among users have been attributed to social influences, and the ability of WhatsApp to support social, informal and conversational communications, which latently leads to high frequency of use (Karapanos, Teixeira & Gouveia, 2016; Church and de Oliveira, 2013; Quan-Haase and Young, 2010).

Mobile Phone Technology in Ghana

The mobile phone is one of the most popular technological inventions of the recent years. Its ability to enable instant communication makes it one of the fastest commodities present in almost every household across the globe. In 2010, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) released a report in which they indicated that, as of 2010, there were about 5 billion people around the world who had access to mobile phones (ITU, 2010). This number has certainly increased over the years and it represents more than half of the world's population. The World Bank also indicated in its 2014 report that "as of 2000, there were fewer than 20 million fixed-line phones across Africa, a number that had grown steadily since the time of colonialism, and a waiting list of a further 3.5 million" (World Bank, 2014). These figures represent a penetration rate of just over 2 percent. Landlines were not common and could only be found in the offices of government departments, agencies, multinational corporations and the households of the rich. The means of communication, both at the individual and the level of society, have in recent decades been transformed due to the significant role that the invention of the mobile phone has presented.

The mobile phone and the Internet have now become mutually intertwined and perhaps considered as one of the most useful inventions of this generation. For example, mobile phones have now become smarter as different components are combined in a single phone. These types of mobile phones are now serving as tools for fighting crimes such as domestic violence (Donner, 2005). Development organizations now provide victims phones to use in times of emergencies. It also facilitates activism and public journalism (Cecchini & Scott, 2003). Reuters and Yahoo and small independent news companies such as Jasmine News in Sri Lanka are using mobile phones to produce new forms of citizen journalism and news production (Cecchini, & Scott, 2003; Saunders et al., 1994). For most communication scholars, the mobile phone has become a catalyst to human psychological, social and political development as well as a transmitter of globalization (World Bank, 2014).

The advent of the Internet, a technology developed in 1960s to enhance computer interaction and information sharing, later became an infrastructure used by the US military as a tool among others for monitoring nuclear surveillance against the US government (Waldrop, 2001). Later, the Internet found its way into the public domain as tool for conducting academic research by universities in the US and also for sharing of information. It has for some time now become a useful infrastructure upon which mobile media technologies such as cell phones are thriving. The development of the cell phone technology has also inspired the development of other applications that enables audio and video recording, chatting, photo taking among other things (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). Over the years, Internet accessibility has grown from 10 million in 1990 to 2.25 billion users in 2011 (ITU, 2012). In Africa, Internet penetration according to the ITU is currently pegged at 21 percent whereas actual Internet usage is estimated

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to be around 8.6 percent. Another important innovation upon which the mobile technology thrives is fiber optic technology. This involves the transmission of information from one place to another by sending pulses of light through an optical fiber cable. First developed in the 1970s, the fiber-optic communication system is believed to have revolutionized the telecommunications industry and played a major role in the construction of what is now the information age.

The United Nations reported that mobile phones have spread faster than any other technology within the last century. As of 2010 there were as many as 272 million people using mobile phones in Africa. However, this number was tripled just in two years to 650 million subscribers in 2012 as indicated earlier. Africa also has a 50 percent growth rate in mobile phone adoption between 2001 and 2006 (ITU, 2008). These reports suggest that mobile phones have the potential to improve the livelihood of the poorest people in developing countries. Others have also argued that by providing access to information in places where landlines or the Internet are not available, especially in the developing countries, people will become empowered to participate in the affairs of their society (Hermanns, 2008). For example, people now call in from remote distances to contribute to political talk shows on radio and television. (Kalyango & Adu-Kumi). According literature, mobile phones are creating a wealth of micro-enterprises by providing jobs such as the sale of airtime on the streets and the refurbishing of mobile handsets (Sey, 2006). In most African countries, travel distance to communicate messages has been cut because of the advent of the mobile phone. Some scholars have also argued that, even though mobile technology is transformative, it would be wrong to generalize its potency as the one antidote to the eradication of poverty in the developing world (Sey, 2006). This assertion points

to the absence of tangible means to measure the direct relationship between mobile phone use and poverty reduction.

Another important point of consideration is that in most developing parts of the world, mobile phone sharing is not considered a taboo since only a few have the financial means to maintain one. For example, the World Bank indicated that it is common in Senegal, Kenya, and urban India and throughout the developing world to see families and groups of friends often sharing one mobile phone. The assumption is that it is more convenient and economical to contribute to buy one phone which will serve the group.

At a more macro level, mobile technology is making a meaningful contribution to the development of African economies through telecommunication taxation. For example, since 2000, over $70 billion has been realized from taxes collected from mobile service operators in Africa (World Bank, 2008). In 2007, the mobile industry employed more than 3.5 million people directly or indirectly in sub-Saharan Africa. The average mobile tax contribution to government total national tax revenue is 7%. The five countries with the highest contributions are Chad 11%, Republic of Congo %, Gabon 9%, Tanzania 8% and Cameroon 8%. The mobile industry is a substantial generator of GDP, contributing around 4% on average in 2006. The tax contributions of the mobile industry within the same 2006 saw a GDP growth of 5.3 percent in Ghana, 4.3 percent in South Africa and 4 per cent in Nigeria, just to mention a few (World Bank, 2008).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed above paints a broader image of recent developments in communication technology, the opportunities it presents to society through education, business, formation of intimate relationships and more. In the same vain, these innovations just like any

social phenomenon has its side effects. The negative outcomes in using new media technologies and applications include different forms of panics and consequently, regulation of human lives. Finally, the WhatsApp platform is properly described along with how mobile phones have over the short period of time made inroads in Ghana and Africa in that regard. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpins this research. The Uses and Gratifications theory by Blumler and Katz (1974) is adopted and thus applied to recent media technologies as used by college students in Ghana.

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on a classical mass media effects theory: Uses and Gratifications. A section is also dedicated to historical conceptions of human sexual practices. These theoretical conceptions are important to this research in a number of ways. First, they help to conceptually ground the study by practically applying college students adoption of media applications as tools for sexual gratification. Secondly, the historical conceptualizations of human sexual practices are critical in making references to modern mechanisms of social control. This is also important because many modern social control mechanisms have over the years become normalized in Africa as a result of colonialism and globalization. The intent then is to prepare the ground to draw the relevant connections to incidents that scandalizes persons who openly flaunt their sexual activities on WhatsApp.

Uses and gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is a mass media effects theory that has been used thoroughly by media and communication scholars. It has been used to examine audiences use of media for a variety of gratifications (McQuail, 2010; West & Turner, 2007; Ruggiero, 2000; McQuail, 1994; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974;).The UGT has extensively been used in the context of traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television (Luo, Chea, & Chen, 2011; McQuail, 2010; Pai & Arnott, 2013; Tankard Jr. and James, 2000; West & Turner, 2007). The theory has over the recent years been applied to studies on social media and social networking apps, which serves gratification needs (Cheung & Lee, 2009; Cheung et al.,

2011; Dholakia et al., 2004; Ku, Chu, & Tseng, 2013; Luo et al., 2011). Some media and

communication theories before portrayed the audience as helpless groups of people totally

dependent on the media to satisfy their informational needs (Zillman & Bryant, 1994). In one of

the earliest media effects studies, the hypodermic needle theory, the argument was made that the

audiences are passive recipients of media contents (Wimmer & Dominick 1994). In other words,

the audience lacked the agency to appropriate the mass media to a personalized need. UGT on

the other hand examines the agency of the audience as active members with different

sociological and psychological needs of which use of media apps and social networking sites

now form a great part (Limayem and Cheung, 2011; Katz et al., 1999; McQuail, 1994;). A case

in point would be households of say five people with each using WhatsApp at different times for

different purposes. Other applications demonstrated in the research literature includes music,

news, sports, and political debate (Krause et al., 2014; Lee and Ma, 2012; Baek et al., 2011; Park

et al., 2009 ;). Essentially, knowledge of UGT can be vital in predicting WhatsApp usage, as

well as its recurrence (Kaye, 2010).

The core assumptions of UGT as indicated by media and communication researchers are

informed by the motivations and needs of media users (Wimmer & Dominick 1994). To put it

another way, UGT is helpful for addressing questions such as for what purposes do college

students use WhatsApp? How do they use WhatsApp? Where do college students seek out

special gratifications from the app? Further questions such as when is the practice most recurrent

and, which category of users use what type of media applications are relevant to UGT. Several

studies have sought to provide answers to these questions. For instance, people use the media

because they believe the media can be a great source for personal learning on matters concerning

religion, politics and business, sex education, and relationships (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Another example of a motivation for using different kinds of media, both traditional and new is that it provides an abode of consolation for people who have need for both physical and mental support (Ruggiero, 2000; Katz et al., 1974). Research points to such broader categories of user motivations and gratifications such as relaxation, entertainment, information seeking, social interaction, escapism, mobility and so forth (Katz et al., 1974; McQuail, 2010; Tankard Jr. and James, 2000).

Even though UGT has been widely used in research, it has been criticized for being inadequate in scope. For example, it has been labelled as a theory which relies heavily on self-reporting and therefore cannot be adequately substantiated (Ruggiero, 2000). Against this limitation, some scholars have suggested that developing a repertoire of media interests becomes viable in organizing needs and reducing excessive distraction (Heeter & Greenburg, 1985). Audience's media repertoire affords them the capacity to support their interests and gratifications. This simple act of shuffling through different media content by the audience is referred to as "cross-channel clusters" (Reagan, 1996, p. 118). New media technologies and applications supported by the Internet are shifting the agency of audiences on how they use apps and platforms (Weaver, 1993). The audiences in the new media era do not just adopt technologies and applications in full; instead, the audience create their own content such as videos, music and other creative content for themselves. This idea is what underscores college students experiences with sexual materials on WhatsApp for gratifications. As college students receive and share sexual materials, their agency as active users of media is enhanced.

Contextualizing Human Sexual Practices

Research suggests that scholars and popular writers alike have for years conceived sex as a secret act. Sex must therefore be observed, exercised and practiced discreetly. The French social theorist, Michel Foucault in his ontological appraisal of "History of Sexuality", made some profound arguments as to why there is now a great deal of discourse on sex. Sex has thus become an organizing framework for enacting power relations (Horrocks, 1997; Foucault, 1985). Foucault observes:

> *"Modern society has put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning sex"* (Foucault, 1998).

The scholar argues that the discourse of sexuality has been formalized by the many years of open conversations in public spaces such as schools, churches, theaters and parks concerning sex (Foucault, 1978). Discourse is the material and verbal traces left by history in the institution of sex and sexuality (Barthes, 1993). Discourses ultimately are "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power-relations reified as knowledge along with the relations between them" (Foucault, 1985; Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987).

Several scholars including Foucault attempted to look at how Western societies have modernized over time and space through different mechanisms of control and power, including sex. In Foucault's assessment of sex, the development of the discourses on sex in western civilizations has occurred in incremental fashion through the reifications of sex as a secret practice (Foucault, 1998). In line with this argument, it becomes evident that western socio-cultural, political, economic and religious institutions have instituted practices such as confessions in the church and medical consultations to systematize control. An example is the

religious practice of confession believed to have been secularized in the 18th and 19th centuries (Foucault, 1978). People were encouraged to confess to their deepest desires and sexual practices and fetishisms. These confessions have over the years become data for the social sciences, which use the knowledge to construct mechanisms of social control (Foucault, 1998; Foucault, 1978.) Consequently, modern confessions now serve as forms of impulsion to constitute power and control over members of society.

Other scholars have contributed to this scholarship by observing that, for many years and especially the era preceding the 17th century, sex and sexuality was never an autonomous entity with its own set of discourses. Rather, sexual practices and behaviors were part of other domains of human social, moral and philosophical life including, procreation, family, and capital (Horrocks, 1997, Brasch, 1973)). Sex now represents an autonomous entity and a framework for asserting identities. According to Halperin (1993) *"sex is now the hermeneutics of the self in the west"*. Ultimately, the proliferation in discourses on sex has rather inspired modern society to actively participate in the unraveling and the demystification of sexuality (Foucault, 1978).

Offering another significant addition to this literature is Sigmund Freud, the father of the psychoanalytic paradigm. The paradigm has been classified as one of the most important frameworks or theories for the study of human sexual behaviors throughout the 20th century (Horrock, 1997). Psychoanalysis thus became a method through which the mind was investigated (Masson, 1985). According to this theory, "large part of the mind dwells in the unconscious" (Freud, 1979, p.). The conscious part is made up of experiences that are fleeting expressions of a deep mental substratum, which consists of thoughts, emotions and appetites. Unconscious processes are openly unnoticeable to determine the distinguishing characteristics of psychic life,

or the content of consciousness, humans are left with the option of interpretation and hypothesizing" (Milton, Polmear & Fabricius, 2011, Freud, 1993). Freud believed that the unconscious consists largely of infantile desires that are all removed from any reality. According to the scholar, "the unconscious is a repository of forbidden wishes" (Horrocks, 1997, Freud, 1979). In the view of psychoanalysts, there are secrets buried within the unconscious mind that causes the individual stress and hysteria at certain times (Horrocks, 1997, Freud, 1979). In Freud's analysis of sex and the psyche of human beings, the suggestion is made that since sex is suppressed in the sub-conscience, the object of sex heats up and becomes a ticking time bomb in the subconscious waiting at any time to explode. This Freud referred to as "the return of the repressed" *(*Masson, 1985, Freud, 1979*).* A critique of Freud's 'return of the repressed' concept has however, viewed it as an unnatural phenomenon by some scholars (Foucault, 1978). An argument put forward by Foucault suggests that human beings are constantly subjected to a power struggle that requires us to speak about sex Foucault, 1978). Practically, the amount of apps and sexual content available and the easy access afforded by the Internet has a way of pushing college students to seek out sexual gratifications. Foucault uses the concept "bio-power", to describe the different power relations that exist between people, schools, churches, places of work, prisons, and institutions, which incites people to speak routinely about sex (Foucault, 1978, 1985, 1985, 1998).

Another psychoanalytic theorist Jacque Lacan shares that "sex is less a search for pleasure or contact, rather it is a search for meaning and the self by those who lack these objects" (Lacan, 1973). The Lacanian conception of sex posits that human society has a hyper desire for remote things that are untenable. In fact, Lacan refers to this behavior as the 'desire for the

desire' (Lacan, 1973). The Lacanian argument is that desire flows from loss, and therefore, it is out of loss that human beings crave more of an object (Horrocks, 1997). In other words to achieve social equilibrium, control and repression of such desires, sex must be contained through regulations of behavior. Relating this to modern society, humans continue to develop insatiable desire for things they do not want and cannot achieve. The neoliberal and capitalist market, seizes on such human behavior to produce more for human consumption. For the French psychoanalytic theorist, desire is global (Lacan, 1973). Lacan's argument is that all desires are based on fundamental lack, one that cannot be satisfied, the object of such lack is but all hallucinatory (Lacan, 1973, p.). He asserts that "it is the discontent that makes for a good sex life, thus sex is always aiming to overcome a gap or a discontinuity within oneself" (Lacan, 1973). This assertion paints a picture in which people have become perpetually indebted to sex since they lack any definite satisfaction and hence are always looking for avenues to repeat their perversions.

Finally, Karl Marx observes sexual practices as individualistic and subjective (Horrocks, 1997). The individual nature of it signals a deviation from the collective social relations that form the base of Marxian thoughts. Marx indicates that "it is through alienation that the individual begins to be regarded as separate from other people, and the social bonds between people are fetishized and projected in the form of money, God, property and even sex" (Marx, 1975, p.).

These sociological thoughts on sex, though were formed from a Western social context, have global implications today. Recent advancements in telecommunication, Internet, transportation and media communications have extended the boundaries of human

culture. Globalization has effected changes that have opened up areas such as Ghana and Africa

for that matter to novel practices. Adoptions of applications and technologies such as WhatsApp

by college students in Ghana are thus providing avenues for exploration and effects that have

sociological implications. According to literature, these recent developments and practices are

not arbitrary; rather they are part of larger social, economic and political power play established

through institutions of society. It is in the light of the above theoretical delineations that this

research poses the questions below.

Research Questions

    R1: How does WhatsApp usage promote sexual expressions among male and female
        Ghanaian college students?

    R2: Do men and women differ in the sending and receiving of explicit materials through
        WhatsApp among college students in Ghana?

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study is an explorative project on college students' use of WhatsApp as a platform for sexual expressions in Ghana. This section, thus discusses the philosophical foundations of the mixed method approach and how it is applied in this research. The design is intended to aid the evaluation, analysis and interpretation of data obtained from respondents as part of this study. In here, the researcher discusses both survey and in-depth interviews as distinct, but mutually relevant designs.

The Mixed Method Approach

Combining quantitative and qualitative designs in a research is not a new practice, it however, comes with its intrinsic challenges. Researchers have used this approach across different fields and disciplines dating back to the early 1970s and 80s through to today (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). Some scholars have indicated that both quantitative and qualitative approaches are asymmetrical, unique in their own ways, and paradigmatically, ontologically, and epistemologically distinct (Guba, 1990). From this view, combining the two approaches in a study becomes antithetical. The implication in this case is that while quantitative designs present truth as empirical constructs, qualitative designs are only interpretive and yet subjective (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Kuzel & Like, 1991). Another distinction between quantitative and qualitative is that, the quantitative method thrives on objectivity and independence of both researcher and the researched (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). In other words, the researcher and the researched do not interact. The qualitative design, on other hand, thrives on meaning and

depth which then requires subjectivity in its analysis (Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Such

distinctive and differential qualities of two designs are what underscore the debate among social

science researchers operating in these two unique paradigms.

Contrary views have argued that mixed designs should be viewed as mere tools in the

conduct of research, whose integration in research enhances the answering of questions that are

substantial and important (Carey, 1993). Often times, researchers operating with mixed methods

argue that the approach is independent of the paradigm that defines both the quantitative and the

qualitative designs (Caracelli & Greene, 1993). In addition, some proponents have suggested

that using this approach opens up an avenue for understanding the world in a broader sense

(Haase & Myers, 1988). Reichardt and Rallis (1994) also observe that this method presents an

opportunity to witness the shared commitment towards understanding and improving human

conditions, which is the common goal for knowledge disseminating. Finally, others suggest both

research approaches, quantitative and qualitative, should be regarded as not definite but rather as

part of a continuum in research with specific techniques, which serves different research

objectives (Casebeer & Verhoef, 1988).

Besides the support for collaboration, other scholars have opined that just because

quantitative and qualitative methods are often combined in a study does not mean it is

appropriate (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). For instance, the continuous combination of the two

approaches has thus been crafted as a mere technicality as the lines between them have over the

years become blurred (Smith and Heshius, 1986). Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil (2002) in the appraisal

of this subject shared that since the research objectives of the two approaches tend to be

different, explanation of results from such design cannot be considered as similar and yet valid.

In spite of the complexities associated with the use of this kind approach, this study was carried out based on the belief that the method is relevant and appropriate for this kind of research. For example, the quantitative instrument aided in the measurement of general familiarity and usage of WhatsApp among respondents. The qualitative instrument adopted for the study provided depth through conversations about personal experiences, thoughts and reactions. The multi-method designed was helpful in objectively and subjectively gauging the use of WhatsApp as a sexual exploration tool among college students.

Survey

Surveys are one of the oldest and still the most widely used research methods in social science research. Surveys have been applied to different studies in the field of communication and media for more than half a century (Moy & Murphy, 2016; Biemer & Lyberge, 2003). This method consists of ways, which emphasize quantitative analysis (Moy & Murphy, 2016; Kramer, 2016). Scholars across fields have applied survey to diverse theoretical conceptualizations including public opinions, uses and gratifications, agenda setting and cultivation (McComb & Shaw, 1972; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). The utility of survey is its ability to stand-alone as well as combines with other methods such as interviews, content analysis, focus groups, experiments (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Researchers, Biermer and Lyberg (2003) identified five major total survey errors (TSE) that can potentially disrupt researcher's data in the course of using survey method. For example; *specification error*; can happen when the wrong survey question is used to measure the phenomenon of study. *Frame error happens* if and when a biased individual draws the survey sample. Thirdly, *nonresponse error* is also likely to occur if individuals do not respond to the

survey in full. In other words, a survey that does not receive full response from participants has

the tendency to affect the overall outcome of the survey by tilting results to one side of the curve.

The fourth likely error is the *measurement error.* This type of error occurs when respondents do

not interpret, administer or react to questions in the survey as intended by the design. This type

of error happens when the questions in the survey are either ambiguous or the respondent did not

pay particular attention to elicit the right response. Finally, *processing errors* occur when there

are problems with the editing, entry, or coding of data. This study was steadfast in observing

these potential pitfalls, and the possible ways to avoid some of them in the study. For example,

concepts such as explicit contents were explained to mean any sexual materials such as sex clips,

nude pictures and text messages portrayed as flirtation. Again, processing of data and coding

were carried out and reviewed several times to ensure they were consistent across

board. Contrary to this practice, the study could not escape the nonresponse error as some

respondents refused to participate while others did not provide response to some items on the

survey. Unanswered items were thus coded as missing.

Participant Sampling

The study was intended to gauge college students' use of the new media app "WhatsApp"

as a site for sexual exploration in Ghana. Using college students in this study became necessary

because preliminary investigations suggested they were prominent users of WhatsApp. Secondly,

college students tendency to seek intimate relationships, record videos, circulate explicit contents

were higher as predicted by the number of already existing sexual materials circulating on the

app and other social media. The researcher obtained approval from the University of Oregon IRB

and the African University College of Communication (AUCC) to conduct the study. The AUCC

is a private communication university in Accra, Ghana. The university has a population of about

2,000 students studying in different fields of media and communication studies. Respondents were all drawn from of undergraduate majors such as strategic communication, visual communication, development communication and journalism. The respondents were also made up of male and female participants representing different age groups.

Instrument Application

The 20-item survey questionnaires were administered in a paper and pencil form. A lecturer of the university distributed the surveys to respondents in their respective classes. All responses were anonymous. The rationale behind the anonymous responses was to prevent any direct connection to individual respondents. The format of the survey was simplified to avoid confusion and to also trigger interest among respondents. The listed items on the survey included demographic information such as year of birth, gender, and educational qualifications. Also a series of semantic-differential scales such as; how often, not often, not at all, not sure, and neutral were employed to draw out responses. The information sought from respondents was regarding familiarity with WhatsApp, frequency of use, frequency of receiving and circulation of sexual content and, the impact of explicit contents on sexual relationships. (See Appendix A). The survey targeted all 2,000-student members of the university as part of the data gathering process. In the end only those who were willing available for the study were surveyed under no compulsion. Out of the entire population a total of 325 students responded to the survey, out of which 11 were rejected for violating the anonymity code.

In-depth interview

This method provides a flexible platform upon which researchers can tap into the knowledge and opinions of respondents (Kalyango & Adu-Kumi, 2013; Townsend, 2010). In-depth interviews serve as a holistic way of understanding the respondent's point of view or

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situation by serving as an exploratory method for assessing behaviors, attitudes, and practices for further development (Berry, 1999). Webber and Byrd (2010, p.) contend that this approach of collecting qualitative data is flexible and "allows interviewees responses to guide the interaction" and shape the discourse to produce better results. The research approach utilized herein follows the usual qualitative in-depth interview data collection method, which often starts with ice-breaking questions followed by pre-formulated research questions. According to Townsend (2010), the conduct of an in-depth interview is useful when an interpretivist approach is adopted to critically examined data while result is presented with deep context. This approach permits the incongruities of the respondents to surface as the story is narrated (Kalyango & Adu-Kumi, 2013).

Instrument Application

In-depth interviews were sought because they had the potential to decode and decipher meanings from the personal experiences and narratives of college patrons regarding their usage of WhatsApp and its impact on their sexual lives. The semi-structured in-depth interview consisted of 10 item questions put to respondents regarding their experiences with WhatsApp and the kinds of activities they undertake on the app. (See Appendix B) These questions were developed based on the research questions to draw out detailed narratives from the respondents (Webber and Byrd, 2010). The selection of participants into this study was by invitation of maximum number of students possible. However, only eight persons responded to this invitation and thus participated in the study. Respondents were made up of five females and three males. Respondents were all communication majors who considered themselves as active users of the WhatsApp. The researcher followed up with respondents after initial contacts were made to schedule a convenient time for both interviewer and interviewees. This was necessary because of

a significant time difference between U.S. based researcher and the Ghanaian respondents. Interviews were conducted over WhatsApp voice note. Prior to interviews, agreements were reached to have respondents detach themselves from all possible distractions and interruptions. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes each. To ensure complete anonymity and confidentiality, participants were only labeled under pseudonyms. Interviews were later transcribed by researcher himself to ensure consistency in the data process. The transcription lasted up to an hour for each interview.

My Role as Researcher

My involvement in the research process was always important as the outcome of the study. In view of that, I was careful not to the possibility of influencing respondents and vice versa. I therefore allowed myself to be guided by all the training I received towards scientific investigation, which included seeking permission from both the authorities of the AUCC and the student body who formed the subject of this research.

Secondly, as a user of WhatsApp myself, I knew at first hand some of the unique features of the application which has impelled its massive adoption among Ghanaians and college students particularly. I was, however, careful to not generalize and assume the motivations behind the apps usage. Again, as an alumni of AUCC, I made conscious effort to not let my contact with respondents spark any form of conversations and connections beyond the confines of this research as it could jeopardize the credibility of the study. I also deemed my role in the in-depth interview session as critical to the success of this study. In the light of this awareness, I was careful not to ask any leading questions. In addition, I avoided guessing the outcomes of

respondent's answers. Rather, I chose to let the semi-structured questions guide me in drawing

out information, details and cues from respondent's personal narratives.

Thirdly, I factored the time difference between my location in the U.S and that of the

respondents who were based in Accra, Ghana and was sure to accommodate their schedule into

mine. In some cases, some respondents were only available to talk after their days off from

school while others were ready to talk at their lunchtime, which was sometime early morning in

the U.S. Others could only speak when their phones have been fully charged since Ghana is

currently on a timetable for electric power shedding. I was conscious of the times of day to talk

and the possibilities of rescheduling interviews due to electric power cuts to ensure conversations

with were recorded for the purpose of this study. Finally, transcribing the interviews, designing

useful and intelligent codes out of the scripts was a tiresome experience. Some of the

transcriptions lasted over an hour while others were short. The next chapter presents results for

both SPSS analysis and the thematic coding processes.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis began with investigation and organization of the paper and

pencil survey questionnaire. In trying to maintain consistency across board, each survey was

assigned a unique number. Further interrogation of the data was carried out to ensure

respondents followed the right steps in answering the survey. A total of 325 surveys were

counted out of, which 11 were rejected for violating the anonymity code. Following these

process 314 surveys were thus coded and imported into SPSS for data analysis. Among the

sample, the age range was between 18 and 56 years old. Respondents between 18 and 24 years

were considered as young college students while 25 and above were categorized as old and matured college students.

The first analysis performed on SPSS was the descriptive to provide a general picture of the numbers regarding: gender differences, age range, duration of WhatsApp usage per a week, and frequency of sending and receiving explicit contents. The descriptive showed that 44.1 percent of male respondents as against 55.9 percent females were sampled for this study. (See Table 1. Below).

Table. 1

Table 1				
Frequencies				
Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative%
Male	98	31.2	44.1	44.1
Female	124	39.5	55.9	100.0
Total	222	70.7	100.0	
Missing	92	29.3		
Total	314	100.0		

Qualitative Data Analysis

Data analysis for this part of the study started right after all the interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions were two-fold; audio voices and text. Audio voices were transcribed verbatim. Responses from respondents sent in the form of text messages were also transcribed word for word. The transcripts were analyzed with Glaser and Strauss (1967) three-step coding design. The design involved classifying several words, phrases, sentences, and clauses into "categories" (Strauss & Cobin, 1998). The categories represent respondent's experiences, thoughts, desires and discomforts regarding the use of WhatsApp as a tool for sexual

expressions. The categories are also described succinctly to guide the researcher about what context respondents used the term. The second step in this approach was arrived at by drawing out meta-categories or codes from the previous categories. These codes served as refined representations of participant's motivations, activities and experiences that were identified. The final stage of the process involved fine-tuning all the meta-categories or codes into definite themes, which served as the motivations of college students adoption of WhatsApp for personalized gratifications.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This study, to reiterate, was an investigation into how college students use WhatsApp as a tool for sexual exploration. This chapter presents the results of this research consistent with the methodological approach, theoretical framework and the research questions. The analysis outlines the patterns developed out of the statistical instruments for the quantitative analysis as well as the thematic codes developed from the qualitative instrument. The chapter thus charts a course for a concrete application of results as well as suggestions for further studies.

Quantitative Results

In an account of college students familiarity with WhatsApp, 85.6 per cent of the respondents reported they were familiar and active users of the app. Another 13.5 per cent said they were fairly familiar, that is to say, they have heard about the app and use it sparsely. Only 1.0 per cent of respondents reported they were not familiar with the app. A possible explanation for unfamiliarity with the app could be that members of this group do not own a feature phone that can accommodate new media apps such as WhatsApp. The researcher also computed for age of WhatsApp users in college and their rationale for using the app. About 65.7 per cent of users 25 years and above designated as older group per this study reported they use the app for social networking. This compares with 68.4 per cent who reported using it for the same purpose. Again, 11.6 per cent of older users said they use WhatsApp for business purposes as against .001 percent of young college users of WhatsApp.

Following the initial test for WhatsApp familiarity, age and rationale for using WhatsApp, a series of SPSS analyses were conducted to compare key variables. The first in this stage of analysis was an examination of the relationship between gender and sexual gratifications. A Pearson chi-square test of independence was calculated between gender and acknowledged use of WhatsApp for sexual gratification. No significant relationship was found. ($X^2(1)$= .282, p >.05). Approximately 82.2 per cent of women use WhatsApp as a sexual gratification tool, relatively in the same proportion as their male counterparts, who reported 85. 7 per cent, (See Table 2 below).

Table 2
Perceived Sexual Gratifications among Male and Female

SexGrat	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
YES	72	77	149
% Within Gender	85.70%	82.80%	84.20%
% Total	40.70%	43.50%	84.20%
NO	12	16	28
% Within Gender	14.30%	17.20%	15.80%
% Total	6.80%	9.00%	15.80%
Count	84	93	177
% Within Gender	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
% Total	47.50%	52.50%	100.00%

The second analysis compared respondent's age group and sexual gratification from using

WhatsApp. In other words, does being young (18-24) or older (25 and above) have any

relationship with using WhatsApp for sexual gratification? In a Pearson chi-square test of

independence, the results showed that there was no significant difference between age groups

$(X^2 (1) = 1.869, p > .05)$. Age and sexual gratification are independent of each other. In college

older students sought gratifications in greater proportion than young students, but the

differences were not statistically significant, (See table 3 below).

Sexual Gratifications among young and older college students

Table 3.				
SexGrat		Age		Total
		1 (Young 18-24)	2 (Older 25 and above)	
Yes	Count	11	179	190
	%Within Ag2	68.80%	82.50%	81.50%
	% of Total	4.70%	76.80%	81.50%
No	Count%	5	38	43
	Within Age 2	31.30%	17.50%	18.50%
	% of Total	2.10%	16.30%	18.50%
Total	Count%	16	217	233
	Within Age 2	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	% of Total	6.90%	93.10%	100.00%

Women reported receiving sexual contents on WhatsApp in almost identical proportion

84.7 per cent as men 83. 4 per cent, (See 4. below).The researcher computed impact (negative,

neutral and positive) on both male and female WhatsApp users in relation to sexual content

received through the app. A simple Pearson chi-square of independence was thus calculated.

The results indicate a statistical significance between both male and female WhatsApp users. For

males it was reported as such (X^2 (2) = 15.348, p < .001), while female WhatsApp users shows

thus (X^2 (2) = 8.470, p = .014). The result indicates that female college students reported they

were impacted more negatively with the sexual content they receive on WhatsApp just as much

as their male college counterparts. In other words, both sexes considered the impact of receiving

such sexual content on their personal lives to be a negative.

Table 4.		Received Sexual Content and Impact on Male/Female				
		Valid		Missing		Total
Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	
Impact on males	262	83.4%	52	16.6%	314	100.0%
Impact on females	266	84.7%	48	15.3%	314	100.0%

Table 5.	**Impact of Sexual Content on Male College Students**			
Received Sex Content	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Yes	41	88	77	206
No	4	15	37	56
Total	45	103	114	262

Table 6.	**Impact of Sexual Contents on Female College Students**			
Received Sex Content	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Yes	33	96	80	209
No	5	18	34	57
Total	38	114	114	266

Table 7	College Students Reaction to Sexual Contents Received on WhatsApp			
Reaction to sexual content		Male	Female	Total
Negative	Count	26	31	57
	%within Gender	29.5%	29.0%	29.2%
	% of Total	13.3%	15.9%	29.2%
Neutral	Count	50	55	105
	%within Gender	56.8%	51.4%	53.8%
	% of Total	25.6%	28.2%	53.8%
Positive	Count	12	21	33
	%within Gender	13.6%	19.6%	16.9%
	% of Total	6.2%	10.8%	16.9%
Total	Count	88	107	195
	%within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	45.1%	54.9%	100.0%

The researcher analyzed the relationship between college students reaction to sexual content personally received on WhatsApp alongside college students' gender. A Pearson chi-square of independence was thus calculated and the results were not significant. The results showed (X^2 (2)= 1.292, p > .05). The implication was that, between both sexes in Ghanaian colleges reaction to sexual contents tends to be neutral. As the numbers indicate, 56.8 percent of males as well as

51.4 per cent reported their neutral reaction to the sexual materials they receive over the app (See

Table 7).

Table 8		College Students Rationale Behind WhatsApp Usage		
Rationale for using WhatsApp		Male	Female	Total
Entertainment	Count	9	12	21
	%within Gender	14.1%	12.6%	13.2%
	% of Total	5.7%	7.5%	13.2%
Social Networking	Count	45	62	107
	%within Gender	70.3%	65.3%	67.3%
	% of Total	28.3%	39.0%	67.3%
Business	Count	5	7	12
	%within Gender	7.8%	7.4%	7.5%
	% of Total	3.1%	4.4%	7.5%
Other	Count	5	14	19
	%within Gender	7.8%	14.7%	11.9%
	% of Total	3.1%	8.8%	11.9%
Total	Count	64	95	159
	%within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	40.3%	59.7%	100.0%

Also important was the relationship between college students gender and how that informs their rationale for using WhatsApp. In terms of percentages, 70.3 per cent of men reported using WhatsApp for social networking purposes, whereas 65.3 percent of women noted using it for similar reason. The researcher again computed a Pearson Chi-square of independence. The differences were not statistically significant. $(X^2 (3) = 1.748, p > .05)$.

The analysis also included an independent t-test comparing the means for WhatsApp users personal reaction to sexual content received among male and female college students. The difference was not statistically significant (t (193) = 1.046, p =. 297). The reaction to received sexual content among females posted a mean of (m= 2.32), which was slightly lower than males (m=2.43). The result shows that female college users of WhatsApp in Ghana are by a small margin more likely to react negatively to sexual contents they receive as well as receive negative reaction from people they share sexual contents in comparison to their male counterparts. However, the reactions overall, are similar.

Qualitative Results

This section describes the results of the codes and themes drawn from the interview with 8 college students from AUCC as part of this research. The method, to restate, was based on the Strauss and Corbin (1998) three step coding approach. This method is useful for drawing out a list of notes and items from the research data. The notes are further grouped into categories, codes and then themes representing the broad associations between observable concepts. The views and perspectives of respondents are presented in the form of direct quotations from the interviews to, support the analysis of the themes drawn from the data. The direct quotations from

respondents are used to describe the experiences of respondents to as it pertains to the research objective. The section starts with a general description of respondent's demographic information. This is then followed by analysis of the major themes drawn from the data to explain the research findings.

Respondents

Eight college students of the African University College of Communications (AUCC) who regarded themselves as active users of WhatsApp were interviewed over a period of two weeks. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, each respondent was assigned a pseudonym. The respondents included five females and three males. All respondents were full-time students of AUCC pursuing bachelors in communication studies. Three of the respondents were majoring in strategic communication, two in visual communication, and two others in development communication with one other majoring in journalism. Adwoa, a 24-year-old level 300 student, has as at the time of our interview been using WhatsApp for three years. Kwabena, the only final year student, had been an active user of WhatsApp for four years. Afia a 27-year-old first year student, had only a year experience with the app. The remaining five respondents had all been using the application for a period ranging between three to five years. Akua though has been a user for five years, she had been on and off the app because she lost her phone, but soon came back on when she got a new phone. Similarly, all participants informed the researcher that they have been consistent with their use of WhatsApp and accessed it through their smartphones. Adwoa was the only exception because she owned both a smartphone and a tablet and access the app on both.

The consistency and the overlaps in the narratives of all respondents support the initial decision to sample only college students for this study. Primarily, all respondents at a point in the interview indicated that WhatsApp helps them to stay connected with their colleagues outside of school. They reported exchanging important details about lessons beyond the classroom. Even though this phenomenon was not the intended objective of this study, it adds a lot of valuable information to some of the vital motivations behind college students adoption of the WhatsApp. This could be a potential area for further research. Additionally, the gender differentiations among the respondents provided the added impetus to connect their unique experiences regarding gratifications and impacts from using WhatsApp. Finally, generalizing to all college students based on this small sample would be far-fetched, however, the results are useful in capturing the levels of motivations, differences in experiences as well as the impact of sexual activities among college students. There were overall a total of eight major codes that were drawn from the categories of words and phrases, from the narratives of respondents. Based on the codes, a further 8 themes representing the key benefits, motivations and impacts that college students broadly ascribe to from WhatsApp usage regarding sexual experiences were developed. Below are the discussions on the codes and themes, which were drawn from the conversations (Table 10).

Codes for College students Sexual Exploration on WhatsApp

Classifications	Category	Depictions	Themes
Item	reception	Receiving contents from others	
Item	Circulation	Distributing contents with others	
Code	**Content creation on WhatsApp**	Avenues for making and distributing explicit materials	Avenues for viewing explicit materials
Item	horrible	Sex clips and nude pictures are unpleasant	

Item	Privacy breach	Posting nude content against the private wishes of others	
Item	Scandal	Public leakage of individual private content	
Item	Condemnation	Blaming actors sex clips for public exposure	
Item	Neutral	Adamant about the impact of sexual content	
Code	**Circulating nude content on WhatsApp leads to victimization**	Persons featured in explicit materials are subjected to public ridicule	Denunciations for leaked sexual content
Item	Convenience	It is suitable for personalized usage	
Item	Privacy	App can be used for one-on-one communication	
Item	Utility	Can be used for variety of purposes	
Item	Cheap	Relatively cheaper than regular networks	
Item	Accessible	Easy to download and operate	
Code	**WhatsApp is Cost Effective to use**	WhatsApp is accessible to all social classes	Middle ground for social consumption
Item	information	App can be used for sharing information	
Item	Communication	Chatting, discussions, delivering and receiving message	
Item	News	For reporting first hand incidents	
Item	Business	For marketing and selling products to customers	
Code	**WhatsApp enhances Communication**	Different modes of communication is supported on WhatsApp	Need based communication tool
Item	Flirt	To chat and seduce lovers	
Item	Sexual arousal	Creating scenarios that are sexually charged	
Item	Naughtiness	Teasing sexually with lovers	
Code	**WhatsApp facilitates virtual romance**	WhatsApp supports the romantic relationships	Pictures, videos and flirts

Item	Intimacy	Lovers stay closer by messaging and sharing pictures, videos	
Item	Relationship	Establishing deeper tides among loved ones	
Item	Emotions	Sharing deep feelings with one another	
Code	**Building Emotional connection among users**	Sustaining friendships and relationships through messaging, images and videos	Building and keeping relationships running
Item	Friends	Making contact and striking acquaintances with those who matters	
Item	Family	Staying connected with blood relationships who are distance apart	
Item	Group platforms	Sharing content among known groups	
Code	**The app enhances social engagements**	Patrons are keep in touch with friends, colleagues, families and acquaintances through WhatsApp	Social Networking
Item	Sex Education	Discussion topics about human sex	
Item	Sex Clips	Watching Short clips with sexual contents	
Item	Nude pictures	Images that has full or partial exposure of the body	
Code	**WhatsApp affords Sexual Gratification**	College students learn more about sex through the sexual content they encounter	Sexual enlightenment

Avenues for viewing Explicit Materials

One of the major issues discussed during the interview section with respondents is

WhatsApp serving as an avenue for viewing explicit contents. Some respondents indicated,

though they do not go out of their way to seek sexual materials such as sex clips and nude

pictures from porn sites, they encounter these contents mostly through group platforms. The

table above provides a holistic assessment of the codes developed in this study to describe college students sexual exploration practices and experiences on WhatsApp.

All respondents acknowledged encountering sexually explicit materials on WhatsApp. Though encounters tend to be uniform across group platforms, reactions to sexual materials were viewed differently. The codes developed from the conversations provided hints on respondents' engagement with explicit materials on WhatsApp as well as motivations for viewing and circulating the content. Respondents used the word "reception" to describe the practice of being at the receiving end of sex clips, and nude pictures. Respondents stated they receive explicit materials from friends and group participants on the app. Group platforms tend to be liberal and hand participants the freedom to post contents ranging from entertainment, sports, explicit images to daily Bible devotions. During the interview Adwoa was asked if she has received explicit contents on WhatsApp and this is what she said:

> "I use WhatsApp to send and receive messages with friends and family since it is cheaper. I also use it to send text, documents, videos, pictures, audio and news. I have received a lot of sex tapes through WhatsApp on countless occasions. I became bored with it after a while and in my view it was unpleasant and horrible so I deleted them. There were other occasions too that I shared some of the sex tapes and nude pictures with some friends".

Another respondent Kwaku had this to say when asked the same question:

> "I have received a lot of sex tapes and I have lost count. I think without WhatsApp, I wouldn't have gotten in on those tapes. If I am not mistaken, it seems to me I get such tapes from my friends every week. The only way we can easily access and share among my friends is through WhatsApp".

During the course of the interview, the researcher asked respondents if they had in the course of using WhatsApp shared any form of sexual material with others. Respondents used

words like "circulation" to describe contents that migrate from them to other people through WhatsApp. Respondents reported that they had on some accounts circulated a lot of information and other content including sexually explicit materials. When asked about the circulation of sexual contents; Kwaku said:

> "Honestly, I have shared a lot of these sex clips. Because sometimes my friends ask me about it. There are other times that they may not be aware and yet I still send it to them because they are my friends so I send it anyway".

Yaa, a respondent also told this story:

> "I shared one of the sex clips I saw on my group chat with others because, the lady in the clip was my senior in high school so, I shared with my former school mates. My motivation for sharing was because, the girl was a senior who was arrogant and disrespectful back when we were in high school so, I felt a little bit bad but also excited that she was caught up in this mess".

Denunciations for leaked sex content

Across the board, respondents had negative feelings towards sexual contents circulating on WhatsApp even though they confessed they had at certain times shared such contents. They viewed such materials as "horrible" and at times a "breach of privacy". Belonging to group chats on WhatsApp exposes participants to a myriad of explicit contents, which violated respondent's privacy. Users, however, reserved the right to control what content is downloaded automatically over WhatsApp. Some respondents to describe the unpleasant nature of the sexual contents they encountered especially from group platforms used the word "horrible". This is how Abena described her experiences with WhatsApp.

> "Yes I have seen a sex clip before. I received it through the group platform on WhatsApp but what I do is I refuse to download them when I realize it has sexual content, because I don't like them. They are simply horrible".

Need Based Communication Tools

        An important detail, which stood out from the conversations with respondents, is the use

of WhatsApp as a communication tool. Almost all the respondents reported they use WhatsApp

to send and receive information from friends and family. Using WhatsApp as a communication

tool involved sending news about events and information about products that some college

students sell to their colleagues. The word "business" also featured in some of the narratives and

it was used to describe marketing of products to friends as a way of making a living. This is what

Yaw said:

> "I have been using WhatsApp for 3 years now and I like it very much. I like it because it
> makes sending of messages fast and convenient. I use it to do business by sending
> pictures of the product I have for my customers. I make a lot of sales through WhatsApp.
> It is just like an online marketing".

Middle ground for social consumption

        WhatsApp, as has been indicated throughout the previous chapters, serves a lot of
purposes. One reason for the massive adoption of the app, according to respondents, is because it
has a leveling effect. What this means is that even for a lot of college students who do not have
the necessary financial reserve to maintain connection with telecommunication networks, they
are able to stay connected with friends for a long time with just a bundle. All respondents shared
that, they use WhatsApp regularly because it is "convenient" and more importantly "cheap".
Below are some of the stories told to researcher:

> Kwaku:
> "The app helps me to keep my friends and family close since I have a lot of contacts in
> Ghana and abroad. I am able to chat with them anytime and, I get instant feedback. It is
> cheap compared to calls on the traditional networks such as MTN, Tigo, Vodafone and
> the rest, which are by the way really high".

Kwabena:

> "You would need a lot of Internet bundle to use other social apps but with WhatsApp it
> lasts you a long time".

Pictures, Videos and Flirts

The main objective behind this research, as stipulated from the very onset, was to examine sexual expressions of college students on WhatsApp. The specific avenues identified through this study are the circulation of pictures, videos and flirtatious conversations. All Respondents reported they send flirtatious conversations with sexual partners multiple times on WhatsApp. Others said that they have at certain point in their use of WhatsApp shared photos, videos and flirtatious conversations. One thing, which stood out, is the circulation of sex clips of people external to respondents. Some of the sex clips were of superstars and others were people who got recorded secretly by their partners. Below are some of the accounts;

Kwaku:

"I don't remember sending a nude picture or video of myself to my girlfriend, but what I do often is to chat with girls on WhatsApp in a flirtatious manner and, I have done that multiple times. I do get turned on by the conversation I hold with my girlfriend over WhatsApp, it is usually romantic but it has never led me on to play with myself. Although there have been times our conversation have sparked the desire to kiss and caress".

Kwabena:

"I have not personally shared any nude picture in my entire life, but I have on one occasion received a nude picture from an anonymous person. I think she was trying to seduce me but I blocked her from my WhatsApp account".

Adwoa**:**

"I do send pictures and videos of myself. I constantly communicate with my boyfriend through this platform. I have shared a lot of nude pictures with my boyfriend on several occasions through WhatsApp. The reason for sharing nude pictures with my boyfriend was because, at a point in time, I had travelled for a while and we missed each and he requested to see my body so I obliged and shared some pictures of myself with him. Actually, he also sent me some video clip of his private parts through the WhatsApp platform".

Yaa:

"I have on countless occasions sent pictures to my friends and family. I have both male and female friends and I do send to all of them. I must add that I have never posted a nude picture to any of my friends through this app. No, never. I always send decent ones. I have also recorded a video of myself dancing in the past and I shared it with a friend because I was trying to teach her a new dance in town. I send pictures to my friends not

to flirt but just for them to see me and all that I am doing. I share it with them just for the fun of it".

Building and Keeping Relationships Running

Among college students, the WhatsApp application is an effective tool for establishing

and maintaining relationships. Through constant communication with boyfriends and girlfriends,

the app provides cheap and convenient avenues to sustain such friendships. Respondents talked

about expressing their "emotions" and staying "intimate" with their partners. These words were

used to describe the exchange of messages, and other contents to provide and receive emotional

support from the people that matter. It is now possible to receive such emotional and intimate

support, but it was previously not possible and even when it became possible, it was expensive.

This is what Kwabena Shared as part of his experience:

> "I have been using WhatsApp for like 4 years now. Before WhatsApp life was a bit tedious for me in terms of communication. I remember back then you have to get on the bus to go visit family and friends, but now it's better. It is effective actually. Another aspect of it is that, the app provides a quick feedback".

Akua:

> "I feel my friends are now closer to me than anything else".

Kwaku:

> "The app helps me to keep my friends and family close since I have a lot contacts in Ghana and abroad. I am able to chat with them anytime and I get instant feedback and it's cheap compared to calls on the traditional networks which are by the way really high".

Social Networking

The primary objective of most social networking site is to establish both casual and

professional contacts. This was true as respondents at each point in the interviews shared that

WhatsApp among other things enhances their social networking capabilities. Words such as colleagues, friends, acquaintances and family were used to paint a picture of who respondents stay connected with for pleasure, business and educational purposes. Some respondents compared WhatsApp with other social networking sites such as Facebook and had this to say:

Kwabena:

> "What makes WhatsApp different from other social applications such as Facebook and Instagram is that it blends all other features. For instance you can take videos and pictures and make calls, which is great. Another thing is that WhatsApp is much affordable compared to other apps".

Adwoa**:**

> "WhatsApp is different from say Facebook because, I use Facebook to connect with other people publicly. WhatsApp is an instant messaging platform which helps me to exchange multimedia content that I deem private".

Sexual Enlightenment

Receiving and circulating sexual contents on WhatsApp though is not carried out by all respondents in the same margin, for some it is a tool that provides sexual education. The majority of the respondents indicated that receiving sexual materials from group chats on WhatsApp sparks conversation and debates on the recklessness of offenders in using the technology and social media. It thus provides an avenue for learning. Below is what some respondents shared.

Akua:

> "I use the app for chatting, sending and receiving of information. I benefit a lot from it academically because I receive information concerning my course from friends through WhatsApp. Regarding the sexual contents, sometimes the debates over who made a mistake become a life lesson".

Kwaku:

"My reaction sometime depends. There are times that I watch those clips and I talk with my friends, ask questions as to why people could go to that extent in this age of privacy breach. There are also others that I just delete after seeing them".

Summary

College students using WhatsApp as a tool for sexual exploration does not happen in a vacuum. It comes with decisions and choices, some positive and others negative. The narratives developed out of the interview provided depth into personal encounters and motivations for seeking sexual gratifications. WhatsApp as a social networking platform provides avenues for establishing deep emotional connections as well as intimacies with friends and families at distances apart at a cheaper cost. Discussions, debates and conversations with friends on sexual contents on WhatsApp provide an avenue for learning about sex, relationships, trust, and modern technology itself. Finally, college students though bring themselves to places where they receive and view sexual contents; they hold reservations about flaunting sex publicly. This belief leads to denunciations of people who abuse the app.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the results outlined in the previous chapter in accordance with the theoretical framework and the method. This section thus responds to the questions set out in this study by drawing on both the statistical instruments and the thematic codes adopted to measure participant's responses. In addition, directions for practical application of results, as well as further investigation of this topic are addressed. The chapter, however, begins with the major limitations of this research.

Limitations

This research from the very beginning proved to be a complex one, primarily because it involved distant human subjects, and a sensitive topic involving sexuality. Going through Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval took a considerable amount of time. This affected researcher's ability to collect, analyze, discuss and report study results in a timely manner. Secondly, since the study location was Ghana and researcher was based in the U.S., interaction with respondents to assert researcher confidence in the security of respondent's information was diminished. Also, money to transport researcher to research location for direct contact with respondents was a challenge and thus delayed the collection of data as researcher had to rely on a research assistance for survey administration. In-depth interviews were conducted over the phone through WhatsApp voice and messaging. This reduced the impact of observation, which could have provided a lot of useful context.

Furthermore, the study's initial plan was to sample the entire 2,000-student population of AUCC. However, the study drew 325 respondents, out of which 11 were rejected for violating the anonymity code. This situation left a significant hole in the study's ability to make confident generalizations. Similarly, respondents for the interview were recruited through verbal announcements and notices requesting students to make contact with researcher. This approach of participant recruitment did not yield maximum results as only 15 participants made contact with researcher. In the end, only eight agreed to go forward with the interview. Yet again, the small number of respondents for the interview section failed to provide the maximum depth sought to understand college students use of WhatsApp.

In exploring college students' use of WhatsApp as a sexual expressive tool in Ghana, both survey and in-depth interviews provided an opportunity to observe patterns as well as close connections with respondents. The section that follows is an application of the results presented in the previous chapter to the two research questions posed in this study.

R1: How does WhatsApp usage promote sexual expressions among male and female Ghanaian college students?

College students in Ghana are for the most part active adopters and users of WhatsApp. Based on both survey and interviews, about 84% of respondents reported they use WhatsApp almost every day for a myriad of purposes. Prominently among college students rationale for using the app is, sending and receiving explicit content as a self-gratifying medium. Seeking out explicit content from porn sites appears not to be of interest to a lot of college students. However, similar content circulating on WhatsApp is able to draw the interest of college students. Students view, share with friends and colleagues, and hold conversations about sexual content. Sending nude pictures, sex clips and staging of flirtatious conversations on WhatsApp

becomes an avenue for addressing emotional gaps, binding relationship ties and learning about sex.

Among college students who use WhatsApp in Ghana, sending and receiving sexual content is carried out in nearly equal amounts. Male patrons use WhatsApp to stage private flirtations with girlfriends and potential girlfriends. In the course of such flirtatious conversations, male patrons place demands on their female partners to share with them pictures and some other times nude pictures for their pleasurable viewing. In some other instances, male patrons bring up conversations about sex with their partners to trigger deep and intimate discussions that draw on both partners' emotions. Female college WhatsApp users on their part use the app in a similar fashion. They tend to collaborate in sex talks and conversations, sending nude pictures of themselves and demanding the same from their male counterparts. College students explore their sexual needs on WhatsApp through their collaborations on group platforms. Group platforms serve as the neutral ground for those who would ideally not seek out sexual content from porn sites to privately view sexual materials presented as group content. Another aspect of this practice is that, on group platforms, female patrons, according to this study, tend to circulate sex clips, and nude pictures of people external to themselves, as well as participate in debates and discussions about sexual content. However, female college patrons tend to confidently share their nude pictures and sometimes clips with their sexual partners privately through WhatsApp to please and maintain their relationships.

Similarly, college students in using WhatsApp for sexual explorations share sexual content with people they trust and believe are receptive to them. Both male and female students reported, though they share sexual content among groups it does not attract them sexual partners.

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However similar content sent to specific individuals with whom they already have some form of intimate connection sparks further explicit conversations.

R2: Do women and men differ in sending and receiving of explicit materials through WhatsApp among college students in Ghana?

Reaction to sexual content sent and received through WhatsApp among college students is varied. However, according to the findings of this study, the majority of college students reported a neutral reaction to sexual content. For many, the sexual content they encounter on WhatsApp draws neither negative nor positive responses. In the same vein, the friends and colleagues they share sexual content with also tend to be receptive, and therefore, react neutrally to what they receive from study respondents. The difference, however, lies with the impact that sexual content has on the psychological frame of recipients in college. Based on the findings of this study, encounters with sexualized content on WhatsApp does impact the personal lives of both male and female college students in similar degrees. Both male and female respondents reported that over time the explicit materials they receive and view has the tendency to affect them by drawing them to watch at certain times. Male and female college WhatsApp users posted statistical significance in the way the explicit content they view on WhatsApp impact their personal lives. These results indicate that among college WhatsApp users, impact appears to be uniform. What this means is that sexual content circulated on WhatsApp has a way of affecting the thoughts and ideas of college students about sexual practices. Generally though, college students tend to treat sexual content lightly, they view them as a normal media content that checks into their system. Essentially, for college students, using WhatsApp to view sex clips, circulation of nude pictures, and crafting of flirtatious conversations is a normal way of gratifying a human need.

The findings of this study lend itself to what previous researchers have found as a consistent pattern in the use of social media and new media applications for gratifying personal needs. These findings corroborate the original work of Blumler and Katz's (1974) Uses and Gratifications theory on the use of media for specialized needs. The study shows how college students in Ghana have adopted WhatsApp as a sexual expressive tool among other things. By and large, WhatsApp provides an avenue for college students to socialize and network across personal and group platforms, though experiences vary based on individual needs, there are aggregate gratifications that cuts across gender and age differentiations among college students.

Again, this research support the various literatures reviewed earlier on the massive penetration of the mobile phone technology in Ghana. A greater percentage of the study respondents reported using WhatsApp on their mobile phones, which is by the way popular and affordable compared to computers. This scenario is an indication of the ground leveling capacity of the mobile phone to provide an avenue of equalization for college students to socialize and gratify their sexual needs through contact with explicit content on WhatsApp.

Opportunities for Future Research

Investigating the practice of using social media applications particularly WhatsApp as a tool for sexual exploration among college students in Ghana is assuredly a novel practice. However, engaging in sexual activities and flirting among college students in Ghana transcends generations. What informs this practice is varied and intriguing as college students continue to seek out community on social media platforms. The exposure to sexual contents either peer-to-peer or among groups, the demand for love affirmation, and intimacy drives college students to record and share pieces of themselves sexually on WhatsApp. The insight gained from this study

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is critical, and yet not entirely exhaustive. In the future, I plan to look into the practice of receiving and sharing sexual contents through WhatsApp broadly among a larger population of Ghanaians both young and old. I believe this will paint a clearer picture of the level of sexual explorations and gratifications sought through private social media platforms. Similarly, it will give an insight into the types of content that Ghanaians receive and share among friends, colleagues and associates through apps.

As noted in this study's findings, WhatsApp helps in carrying out a lot of services including learning and marketing of products. One respondent noted that, WhatsApp serves as an online market place in his opinion. He shared that by capturing the images of products and goods and sharing them on group platforms earns him a living. Even though this phenomenon diverges from the central assumptions of this study, studying other motivations behind students mass adoption of this new media app would be worth trying.

Again, as more and more people adopt WhatsApp as a medium of communication outside of the traditional telecommunication networks, it would be worthwhile to carry out a study into how the use of new media apps such as WhatsApp is transforming communication and the business of telecommunication in Ghana. Finally, as a tool for connecting with friends, colleagues and family, I for see WhatsApp becoming a tool for campaign elections in the come months. Ghana will be heading to the polls come November 2016 to elect members of parliament and president. In the past, politicians and political parties used text messages through the telecommunication networks to reach countless number of voters. As noted in this study, most college students indicated that WhatsApp serves as the ground leveler for all mobile phone users, because it

cheap, and convenient to use. Undertaking an investigation into how WhatsApp is used as an election campaign tool will provide a unique African perspective.

Summary

In spite of all the challenges this research was confronted with, it also provided the researcher with an exciting experience. There are valuable lessons that can be gleaned from the survey responses as well as the interviews. New media technologies and applications have over the recent years diffused enormously throughout the developing world and its presence is challenging normative ways of life in Africa and Ghana for that matter. WhatsApp now has over a 1 billion subscribers across the world. The app has found a strong presence in Ghana and particularly among college students. The app is opening up a lot of avenues for users to explore businesses, education, relationships, communication as well as sexual expressions.

This study has found a place in the building blocks of knowledge by drawing out useful associations and narratives about college students use of WhatsApp as a tool for learning about sexual scandals, flaunting of personal sexual experiences through the circulation of pictures, and sexualized clips as well as flirtatious conversations. The app is also aiding the formation of intimate relationships. Results from the interviews with respondents point towards practical, but taken for granted motivations about college students use of WhatsApp. Some of these motivations are at certain times impelled by pressure from groups and friends. An important outcome of this study is the place of both male and female college active users of WhatsApp for sexual exercises. Survey results point to no significant differences in user influences regarding sending and receiving sexual contents. However, impacts between both male and female college

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students turned out to be statistically significant. In translation, college students tend to view sexual contents circulated on WhatsApp to have a negative impact on their personal lives.

Finally, college users of WhatsApp often receive, view and circulate sexual materials on WhatsApp among friends as a way of proving their currency with the times. Students ability to share current sexual contents making rounds with friends position them as sources of news and information on gossips and scandals. In variably, college students tend to be more interested in viewing and sharing sexual contents of people external to themselves than their own sexual lives.

Further Studies

In the future, a more feminist approach would be applied to this study to observe the significant impact that sexual exploration on WhatsApp has over female users who tend to be the victims of such scandals. In a patriarchal society like Ghana, a lot of women tend to be blamed for displaying their sexual acts either by their own creation or by the creation of a male partner. It is in line with this negative stereotype that observing perceptions, influences and impacts from the lenses of gender differentiations in this regard would be useful.

Private Survey on the use of the WhatsApp Application

Sex: Male/Female

Please state your year of birth (…………………………….)

1. Level of education

    a.   ----- GED/SHS

    b.   -----Associate Degree

    c.   -----Bachelor's Degree

    d.   -----Master's Degree

2. Are you familiar with the app WhatsApp and how it works?

    a.   --------Familiar

    b.   --------Fairly familiar

    c.   ---------Not familiar

3. How do you access WhatsApp?

    a.   ----------Smart phone

    b.   ----------Ipad/Tablet

    c.   ----------Desktop computer

4. How often do you use WhatsApp?

    a.   ---- Very often

    b.   ----fairly often
    c.   ---- Occasionally

       d.   ----Not at all

5. How many times in a week do you use the app?

       a.   -----Everyday

       b.   ----A few times a week

       c.   ----Occasionally

       d.   ----Not at all

6. Which of the statement below describes your use of WhatsApp?

       a.   ------ For Flirting

       b.   ----- For entertainment

       c.   ----- For social networking

       d.   ----- For business

       e.   ----- For sharing photos/videos

       f.   ----- Other (Explain)
         ………………………………………………………………………………………………
         ……

7. Which of the statements below about WhatsApp makes it your preferred app?

       a.   -------Privacy

       b.   -------Affordable

       c.   -------Utility

       d.   -------Other

8. Does the WhatsApp platform encourage sexual exploration (The freedom to view and share nude pictures, engage in sexual conversations, view sex videos for one's sexual gratifications?

       a.   ---------Yes

b.   --------No

c.   ------- Not sure

9. Have you ever received **sexual/explicit content (Nude pictures,
    sextape,   conversations related to sex)** through WhatsApp?

    a.   -------Yes

    b.   -------No

    c.   -------Don't remember

10. If you answered yes on #9 above, how often do you receive **sexual/explicit content
    (Nude pictures, sextape, conversations related to sex)** through WhatsApp?

    a.   ------Often

    b.   ------Fairly often

    c.   ------Occasionally

    d.   ------Never

11. Have you ever circulated any sexualized/explicit content ((**Nude pictures, sextape, sex
    related conversation**) through WhatsApp?

    a.   ------Yes
    b.   -------No

    c.   -------Don't Remember

12. If you answered yes on # 11 above, how often to you circulate sexual/explicit content on
    WhatsApp?

    a.   -------Often

    b.   ------fairly often

    c.   ------Occasionally
    d.   -----Never

13. Which of these sexual activities do you engage in through WhatsApp?

a.   -----Sexual conversations

b.   -----Circulation of nude pictures

c.   ----- Circulation of sex clips

d.   ------ All of the above

14. Does the content you encounter on WhatsApp influence your sex life?

a.   -------Very Much

b.   -------Fairly

c.   -------Not at all

15. Does the content you share and the conversations you craft on WhatsApp influence your possibility of attracting sexual partners?

a.   ------ Think so

b.   ------Do not think so

c.   -----Not sure

16. How would you describe the reaction of the people you share the explicit content with?
a.   ------Positive

b.   -----Negative

c.   -----Neutral

d.   ----Not Sure

17. What is often your reaction to the explicit content you receive from friends, acquaintances and colleagues through WhatsApp?

a.   -------Positive

b.   ------Negative

c.   ------Neutral

18. How would you describe the impact of the explicit text circulated on WhatsApp on male patrons?

     a. --------Positive

     b. --------Negative

     c. --------Neutral

19. How would you describe the impact of the explicit text circulated on WhatsApp on female patrons?

     a. --------Positive

     b. --------Negative

     c. --------Neutral

20. How different is this app from other social networking applications in relation to flirting, sexting, circulation and receiving of sexual content? Kindly explain

………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………

Thank you!

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How long have you been using WhatsApp and what impact do you think it has on your ability to communication and network?

2. Describe to me how the app operate as a conversational tool for you and your friends?

3. How does owning a device with smart features such as camera, videoing, texting and audio recording influence the way you craft your sexual activities **(Taking of pictures of your private self, recording sex clips, flirtatious conversations**)?

4. Have you ever engaged in any sexual activity such as flirting, photographing, recording of your private sexual act through WhatsApp? Describe that activity to me?

5. How does your participation in a sexual conversation on WhatsApp influence your thoughts about sex?

6. Have you ever recorded anything explicit content **(Nude pictures, sextape)** for private viewing? Was it video recording, photographic recording or audio recording and describe your first experience of it.

7. Explain how recording your sex life **(Nude pictures, sextape, conversations related to sex)** on WhatsApp enhances your freedom in exploring your sexual world?

8. Have you ever shared any explicit content **(Nude pictures, sextape,   conversations related to sex)** with anyone (Boyfriend, girlfriend, friends, colleagues etc.) through WhatsApp and what was their reaction?

9. Has any of your friends ever shared their private sexual recordings with you? If yes, how did you react to the text from the person who shared it with you?

10. What is your reaction to those who opine that WhatsApp is a site for sexual activities?

APPENDIX C

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Gender	Age	Academic Level	Program of Study	Years of Usage
Adwoa	Female	24	Level 300	Strategic Communication	3 years
Kwabena	Male	27	Level 400	Journalism	4 years
Kwaku	Male	24	Level 300	Visual Communication	4 years
Abena	Female	21	Level 200	Development Communication	3 years
Akua	Female	28	Level 300	Strategic Communication	5 years
Yaa	Female	22	Level 200	Development Communication	3 years
Yaw	Male	26	Level 200	Visual Communication	3 years
Afia	Female	27	Level 100	Visual Communication	1 year

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