

# **The Influence of Facebook usage on Marital Relationships in Zimbabwe: An exploratory study of Gwabalanda community**

**Memory Kodzai**

**(Student No. 13399315)**

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I, **Memory Kodzai** declare that “**The Influence of Facebook usage on Marital Relationships in Zimbabwe: An exploratory study of Gwabalanda community**” is my original work and that any hitherto secondary material used (either from a printed source or from the internet) has been appropriately acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria.

Signature.....

Date.....

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this study to my family and friends who supported me throughout this process. A special gratitude to my sister, Irene Chiveto for encouraging me to finish this dissertation and for being my pillar of strength and cheer leader.

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceptions of married individuals in Zimbabwe regarding how social networking, Facebook in particular, influences marital relationships. The specific objective was the exploration of the major reasons for Facebook usage among married individuals with the intended aim of establishing its positive and negative influences on marital relationships. Data collection was by use of in-depth interviews and a semi-structured interview guide. Purposive sampling and snow balling were used in selecting participants. The sample size, due to budgetary constraints, consisted of only 16 married individuals from the Gwabalanda community who had been married for at least two years, had been users of Facebook for more than a year, and who log in to their Facebook account more than thrice a week. The sample was categorised into two age groups: those aged 35 years and above and those aged 34 years and below to explore the views of the older and younger cohorts.

The study found out that Facebook has increasingly become a means of communication in Zimbabwe; both for the young and the elderly. Married individuals have made use of the site for various reasons among which the following are included: it is efficient, cheaper, convenient and reliable even for business and job purposes. However, major findings of the study suggested that many married people were of the view that Facebook has more negative influence on marital relationships. Facebook is resented for having made it easier for married people to connect with different people and for some to re-connect with ex-lovers thereby resulting in issues of infidelity amongst partners. As partners spend more time online, feelings of jealousy are invoked leading to creation of tensions. It was also revealed that the use of Facebook has resulted in conflicts due to lack of trust due to partner surveillance amongst married partners. The study also showed that Facebook has some positive influence in that it has allowed people far from each other to remain connected and to maintain relationships online. It has also given a platform for marriage discussion forums where married individuals discuss marital problems and advice one another.

The study concludes with a number of recommendations for further study including further study on the dimensions for the increased use of Facebook in Zimbabwe and an exploration of the socio-economic and demographic profile of users. It argued that the answers to these and under similar questions can help contribute to the overall study of family sociology in terms of factors that contribute, or have the potential to lead, to marital instability.

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# CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

Many developments such as the shift from computer-centred applications to network-diffused applications through the use of the internet have taken place in information and technology since the 1940s (Bhanot and Fallows 2003). According to Turkle (2011) technology has reshaped our everyday lives by making them very fast and convenient and by detaching us from the physical world as we interact more online and spend less time interacting with other humans. Stald (2007) expounds that technological advancements have also resulted in the increase of mobile phones and the increased use of the internet for communication which, in turn, has increased the efficiency and the speed of communication. According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), there will be more than seven billion mobile phone subscriptions worldwide at the end of 2015, up from 738 million in the year 2000. By the same token, global internet penetration is expected to have grown seven fold from 6.5% in 2000 to 43% at the end of 2015 (ITU, 2015).

These technological advancements have led to a rapid growth of social networking sites worldwide. Social networking sites are defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007:211) as “web-based services allowing individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. The most popular sites are Facebook (a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them); twitter ( an online social networking service that enables registered users to post and read “tweets” which are short messages on a variety of things that interest them); MySpace (a social networking service with a strong music emphasis); Friendster (A global social network that emphasizes friendship and the discovery of new people); and LinkedIn (a business-oriented social networking service that assist registered users to build and engage with their professional networks).

Current statistics show that Facebook remains by far the most popular social media site. According to Duggan et al (2015), 71% of all adult internet users in the United States were on Facebook as of September 2014, up from 67% in 2012. Twitter users, on the other hand,

increased from 16% in 2012 to 23% in 2014, while the corresponding figures for LinkedIn were 20% and 28%. Global statistics show that Europe has the largest number of Facebook users totalling 243 million users in 2012. In the same year Asia had 236 million users, North America had 184 million, Africa 48 million, the Middle East 23 million and the Caribbean's having the least number with a total of 7 million users (Internet World Stats 2012).

One of the most recognised advantages of Facebook is that it helps people communicate easily and in contact with old friends or colleagues. According to Harvey (1989), as a result of innovations in communication, there has been time-space compression as there is destruction of spatial barriers and distances. Gosling (2009), for example, notes that Facebook allows individuals to maintain social bonds with others that are geographically spaced and therefore making the communication process easier. It also allows one to share with others what they desire to share and ask for public opinion (Chirinda, 2012). For Lockyer and Patterson (2008) Facebook allows users to share personal information through their profiles, visit each other's profiles to see information about them, upload, tag and share multimedia content and initiate or join groups based on common interests or pursuits.

Despite its positive aspects, the increasing use of Facebook has been associated with marriage instability and dissolution due to issues such as jealousy that accompany its use. According to Bindly (2012), some information such as tagged photos with ex-lovers and friendship requests from ex-lovers can provoke jealousy tendencies in the other spouse. Bumgarner (2007) asserts that divorce cases in North Carolina have been accrued to sites such as Facebook as there are complaints about inappropriate conversations, flirtations, extra marital affairs, over-sharing or under-sharing (whereby one has shared more or less information as expected by their partner) of information within the site.

For Boyd (2004) sites such as Facebook are an avenue by which threats develop and if failed to be communicated can exacerbate existing problems. Couples use social networking sites as a tool to gather information about possible threats to their relationships (Marshall et al., 2012). The observer may respond to relationship threats by posting on their partner's Facebook, creating status threats are anything that has a negative effect on the relationship. Negative partner behaviour, conflicts, and disagreements may negatively impact a relationship (Feeney & Lemay, 2012).

In agreement with other scholars, William (2012) reveals that Facebook is a source of tension for partners and exacerbates pre-existing problems in relationships. An article by Valdes (2009) also focuses on how Facebook usage ruins marriages with time spent on line invoking feelings of jealousy amongst couples. Hill (2009) also asserts that the more the time one spends on Facebook the more likely they will monitor their partner's activities online. A research at the Dutch University by Muise et al (2009) shows how Facebook causes jealousy and negatively impacts on romantic and sexual relationships.

Since much information on the effects of social networking is based on studies done in the West, the purpose of this study is to explore, in a non-Western context, perceptions of married individuals on how social networking, particularly Facebook, influences marital relationships. The study uses an urban area, Gwalabanda in Zimbabwe as a case study.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

While the use of Facebook has been identified as a contributory factor to marital instability in many Western countries (Bumgarner 2007; Bindly, 2012), no studies have been done to explore the influence of this social network on the current levels of marital instability and dissolution in African countries such as Zimbabwe. This is however deemed important given that Facebook usage is also on the increase in Africa. In Zimbabwe, Techzim (a news and media website in Zimbabwe), estimated that there were about 1.2 million Facebook users in the country in 2012 (Kabneza 2012). While in the past only those with computers could access the internet and social networking sites, the proliferation of smart phones has made it easier for an increased number of people to log on to their Facebook pages regularly and easily (Kabneza, 2012).

## **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The broad objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of married Zimbabweans regarding the influence of Facebook usage on their marital relationships in Gwalabanda community. The specific objectives are to explore:

- i. the main reasons for using Facebook among married individuals in Gwalabanda community;

- ii. the perceived positive influences of Facebook on marital relationships in Gwabalanda community; and
- iii. the perceived negative influences of Facebook on marital relationships in Gwabalanda community.

## **1.4. Rationale of the study**

The social networking phenomenon is not only relatively new in the grand scheme of sociological studies but, as earlier stated, its study is largely Western-based (Brandtzaeg and Heim, 2008). Thus, by focusing on a developing country, Zimbabwe and in a setting such as the Gwabalanda community in particular, this study contributes a non-Western aspect and cross-cultural perspective to the subject. The study uses a qualitative approach which allows for an in-depth analysis of how social networking affects marital relationships; an element which is very important in the broad field of the family sociology.

## **1.5. Structure of the dissertation**

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter makes introductory remarks on the social network Facebook and the results emanating from its usage in general. The negative and positive impacts of the use of this social network are also highlighted. The chapter also spells out the objectives of the study, the research problem and the justification of the research. A discussion of how Gwabalanda was chosen as a case study site is made. Chapter two: Literature review

This second chapter provides a literature review; with a focus on the usage of social networks as well as the impact social networks have posed on different aspects in society. The chapter discusses Facebook in particular; its keys features, main uses and how it has impacted on marriage and marital relationships.

### **Chapter three: Methodology**

This chapter is a discussion of the research design that was used in the study in order to access the impact of Facebook usage in the Gwabalanda community. The chapter discusses the study site, the study population, the sampling technique and the methods used to collect data. Data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are also discussed in detail.

### **Chapter four: Findings**

**Chapter four** is a presentation of the research findings gathered by the study in the Gwabalanda community.

### **Chapter five: Conclusion and recommendations**

Chapter five summarizes the key findings of the study by way of revisiting the research objectives as outlined in chapter one and presents recommendations for further research.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an introduction and background to the study and also revealed the objectives of the study, the problem statement, the rationale of the study, the limitations of the study as well as the research outline. The next chapters follow the sequence shown in 1.9 on the structure of the dissertation.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews available literature on social networks in general and Facebook in particular. Emphasis is placed on how these social networks affect marital relationships and marriage institutions. The chapter also presents a detailed discussion of Facebook in terms of its origins, its features, as well as the uses to which Facebook is being put by contemporary societies. The conceptual framework that guided the study is also discussed.

### 2.2. Social networks

Social networks are defined as “web based services allowing individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, allows them to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd, 2004:150). Social networking sites are the latest online tools which have attracted many users with 1.79 billion users worldwide and 29% global social network penetration (Statista 2015). Different social networks and technological applications serving a wide range of interests but mostly support and provide opportunities for the maintenance of pre-existing social relations and communication amongst people (Hampton and Wellman, 2000). As Barlett-Brag (2006) points out, most of these applications augment group interactions and shared spaces for collaboration, social connections, and aggregate information exchanges in a web based environment. Many others help strangers to connect to the profiles of others with shared interests, needs, political views etc (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Besides Facebook, the most accessed social networks in the contemporary world include MySpace, Friendster Twitter and LinkedIn.

Social networking sites allow people to create social bonds and extend their existing social ties and other networks in real life as well as via the digital realm (Boyd, 2004). For example, for young adults, social networking sites are used to promote social interaction and reinforce important offline relationships, demonstrating that for this young age group technology is a tool for supporting interpersonal connections (Subrahmayan, 2006).

In addition, Fukuyama’s (1999) concept of the ‘Information Age Society’ shows the transition from the Industrial Society to an Information Age Society where there have been

technological changes. This is consistent with Castells' (2000) postulation that we live in a 'Network Society' in which networks have become the basic units of modern society. Central to these networks are information processing, communication and control of the human society (Castells 2000).

Fukuyama (1999) extends this idea by asserting that in the Information Age technological changes have seen the increased use of the internet which has made communication more effective and efficient. This in turn has resulted in a great disruption in the social order and in social relationships, and has led to the rise of individualism and the diminishing of the community. As a result of this information revolution, society's social capital and civility has been affected; a concept known as value shifts. The indicators of this value shift include a diminished importance of the family, kinship, social cohesion and decreasing levels of trust which has an effect on the ability of individuals to relate to one another with integrity and accountability (Bruhn 2005). On the overall, Fukuyama (1999) asserts that the nature of society, particularly the relationships between people, are significantly altered by the new information technology and, to some degree people's lives are becoming modified to serve the technology.

The study uses Fukuyama's concept of the 'Information Age' and Castells (2000) notion of the 'Network Society' to show that the advancements in technology that have taken place in Zimbabwe have seen the increased use of the internet which, in turn, has resulted in the growth and use of social networking sites such as Facebook. This conceptual framework is further used to identify the reasons of the wide usage of Facebook and how it influences marital relationships, both positively and negatively.

## **2.3 Facebook**

### **2.3.1 Origins**

Created in 2004 by a Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook was originally intended to cater only for a niche community of Harvard graduates. However by September 2006, it was opened up to other colleges and schools and a year later it was opened up to the general public where it continues to grow among young people, professionals and everyone across the globe (Cassidy 2006; Martinez, 2009). Since its expansion to the general public,

Facebook use has increased yearly by an average of 13%. It is estimated that there are currently over 1.39 billion monthly active users worldwide (Statista, 2015). Statista (2015) further reports that about 890 million users log onto the site daily. Facebook is used more prominently by middle-aged people, with the 18-25 age groups accounting for 29% of global users, followed by the 26 – 34 age group at 23% (Phillips, 2015; The 60 Second marketer, 2015).

### **2.3.2 Key features**

The site offers many of the same elements offered by other social networking sites. Overall, Facebook can be seen as a collection of profiles indexing each user's chosen events in their life recorded on their profile through photos or text (Gershon, 2011). On joining Facebook a user needs to create a profile and then chooses to friend other people, allowing these "Facebook friends" access to their profile. Users can regularly post anything they are thinking or feeling and the update feature, and their friends are then able to like, share, and comment on their thoughts (Feeney and Lemay, 2012). These elements include blogs, photo sharing, game applications, online forums and groups (Greg Bowe, 2010). In addition, Facebook provides a personalised profile of the user while allowing for communication, personal information-sharing, creation of friends lists and photo albums as well as forming or joining to social interest groups based on common interests or pursuits (Boyd, 2004; Lockyer and Patterson, 2008). Through the relationship status feature, users can choose to indicate their status from following a choice of options: "single", "it's complicated", "in a relationship", "engaged", "married", "in an open relationship", "widowed", "separated", "divorced", "in a civil union" and "in a domestic partnership".

### **2.3.3. Main uses**

Facebook is used for different purposes by users with different interests and of different ages. According to Ellison (2006), the most common internal motivation for Facebook usage is the desire to keep in touch with friends and family. However, the site is also used for passing time or leisure, learning about others, maintaining social communication, following updates about friends and events (Stutzman, 2006). It can also support educational activities by making interaction, collaboration, active participation, information and resource sharing and critical thinking possible (Mason, 2006; Bumgarner, 2007). In addition to connecting people with shared interests such as music, cinema or politics, Facebook is used for work-related purposes including forming new business relationships and maintaining existing ones (Boyd

and Ellison, 2007). For Williams (2012) Facebook groups have been created for communicating and sharing experiences on break ups, divorces and to gain and give each other support and advice.

## **2.4. Marriage and the marital relationship**

The marriage institution is of importance to the Zimbabwean society as through marriage a family ensures its survival and continuation into the next generation (Weinrich, 1991). According to Ayisi (1997) marriage in the African sense confers status and dignity as it confers certain rights on the wife and corresponding duties on the husband and vice versa. It has also been shown that marital stability has positive influence on society such as in children's education and poverty reduction (Wilkins, 2012). According to Wilkins (2012) children are able to continue with education within a family where both parents are available while those within the single parent family are likely to leave school.

## **2.5 Potential impacts of Facebook usage on the marital relationships**

While Facebook is applauded for its creation of social bonds and extension of individuals' social connections, negative issues in marital relationships have also arisen as a result of this social networking site (Boyd, 2004). For Turkle (2011). Although social networking sites have brought people together and strengthened their relationships, they have also increased the possibility for people to be detached from their real world and more attached to the online world. Brandtzaeg (2010) notes that issues such as privacy, content sharing and sociability have also arisen in these social networking sites much to the detriment of their marital relationships. It is noted that with more information being openly shared, individuals become more exposed and vulnerable. Boyd (2004) and Bumgarner (2007) concur with this by asserting that social networking sites have made personal information to be easily available. This can result in identity theft. Hempel (2009) also asserts that the availability of personal information can result in people being stalked thereby putting them in danger.

Originally a social space for younger people, Facebook is gradually changing with people older than 40 years gradually joining it (Brandtzaeg and Heim, 2008). This calls for research on the experiences of various generations on Facebook.

In addition, while Facebook usage has been noted for strengthening relationships with friends and families, a number of marital and family relationships have been negatively affected by Facebook as more time is spent on these sites by partners and spouses. For Boyd (2004), regular use of sites such as Facebook is one avenue through which various threats develop and, if not communicated effectively, can exacerbate existing problems in relationships, or start new conflicts. Bumgarner (2007) concurs with this by asserting that Facebook as a social networking site provides ample opportunities for trouble in most marriages and unions. In the same vein, Lupkin (2012) is of the opinion that Facebook has been one of the causes of divorce in many instances.

As Merkle and Richardson (2000) assert, interactions on Facebook often lead to flirtations, virtual sex, and other incidences that not only raise questions of boundaries of intimacy, but can also become a source of tension in existing face-to-face romantic relationships. Bumgarner (2007), for example, reports that a number of divorce cases in North California have been attributed to social networking sites and Facebook in particular with complaints about inappropriate conversations, flirtations, extra marital affairs, tagged photos with exes and under sharing and over sharing about the networking with others. Hempel (2009) concurs with this by noting that couples often come into conflict over various things that range from one party reconnecting with an ex, to one not mentioning their relationship status on the site at all.

Muise et al (2009) adds to the foregoing by stating that spending a lot of time on Facebook increases exposure to information about one's partner that may arouse jealousy and negatively impact on romantic and sexual relationships. An article by Valdes (2009) also discusses how Facebook can ruin marriages as time spent on the site invokes feelings of jealousy amongst couples. Greg Bowe (2010) asserts that Facebook gifts, blogging, uploading photographs are some Facebook activities which negatively impact on relationships. According to Marshall et al (2012), photographs of ex-lovers are likely to cause the most problems and evoke feelings of jealousy above anything else on Facebook amongst people in relationships. The result is often surveillance, where partners continually monitor each other's activities on Facebook (Helsper and Whitty, 2010; Marshall et al, 2012).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter gave an overall overview of social networking sites and Facebook in particular. It outlined the main reasons of Facebook usage and explored the positive and negative influences of Facebook on marital relationships. The chapter ends with explanations of Fukuyama's concept of the Information Revolution as well as Castells' concept of the 'Network Society' as the theoretical frameworks adopted by the study. The next chapter is a discussion of the research design that was adopted in the study.

## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods used to explore the perceptions of married individuals on how social networking influences marital relationships. The chapter sets out with discussions on the research design. This is followed by a discussion of the study site, the study population, the sampling technique and the methods used to collect data. The chapter also discusses data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

### 3.2 Research design

Parahoo (1997:142) describes a research design as “a plan that describes how, when and where data are to be collected and analysed”. The design for this study was a qualitative research approach which allows researchers to gain the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). According to Kozinets (2002), qualitative methods are particularly useful for revealing the rich symbolic world that underlies needs, desires, meanings and choice. On the overall, qualitative research is typically more participatory than quantitative research, and it aims at gathering data on numerous aspects of a situation. It also constructs a complete picture of social dynamics of a particular setting (Horbeg, 1992). Additionally, qualitative research methods are flexible, “thereby providing room for the researcher to pursue new paths of discovery as they unfold” (Popper 1995:35). To this end, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study given that the research question was exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is conducted for a problem that has not been clearly defined and when the main aim is to gain familiarity or acquire new insight with a phenomenon (Shields and Rangarjan, 2013).

The study was conducted in Gwabalanda Township, a high-density suburb located 15km North West of the city of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. According to Zimstat (2012), Bulawayo has a population of 653 337 people of whom 46.4% are males and 53.6% are females. Built in the late 1970s, Gwabalanda was designed for the black middle class who comprised mainly of citizens in the nursing and teaching professions (Ranger 2010). The overwhelming majority of the current population are Blacks who belong to the Ndebele ethnic and language group (Ranger 2010), although Shona and English also form part of the languages spoken in

Gwabalanda. The decision to use Gwabalanda as a case study was based on the accessibility of the area by the researcher. Also, since Gwabalanda is a middle-class suburb, social media usage is likely affordable and a key expenditure. In this case, comparisons could be established on the impacts experienced in the West and in a non-West suburb in a developing country.

### **3.3 Study population**

A study population refers to the entire group of objects (including people) in which the researcher is interested. For this research, the study population for the interviews was drawn from married individuals from the Gwabalanda community who had been in a heterosexual marriage for at least two years. This choice was based on the idea that a marriage that would have lasted for at least two years can be considered as established and would therefore guarantee reliable research results. The study also considered respondents who had been users of Facebook for more than a year, and who log in to their Facebook account more than thrice a week. This allowed the researcher to work with respondents who participate long enough on Facebook and who are therefore most likely exposed and also familiar to its impacts. To give a comparison between different age cohorts, the sample was categorised into two age groups: those aged 35 years and above and those 34 years and below so as explore the views of older and younger age cohorts. The assumption that motivated the age criteria was that the older participants had been married for longer and had therefore gathered more experience on how to manage marital relationships more than the younger participants. Although it is acknowledged that views from both married partners could provide more information, data was collected only from individuals and not couples. The main purpose of this approach was to ensure that independent views were obtained without one partner influencing the views of the other. The study did not include individuals in homosexual relationships because homosexuality is illegal in Zimbabwe and therefore it would have been difficult to find homosexuals as participants of the research.

### **3.4 Sample selection**

The study population was selected through purposive sampling which is defined by Patton (2002) as selecting a sample on the basis of knowledge of the population and relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units such as people, cases/organisations, events, pieces of data that are to be studied. The researcher first

approached a married individual whom she knows from the community and whom she is friends with on Facebook. The researcher then asked this married individual to identify and refer other married individuals within the Gwabalanda community who met the criteria described in Section 3.4 above. This approach is known as snowball sampling and is defined by Schaefer (2004) as the use of personal contacts from individuals who have agreed to take part in the study and referring potential participants to build up a sample of the group to be studied.

The researcher then telephonically contacted the referred married individuals and explained the aims and purpose of the study in detail before requesting them to participate. All the 16 individuals identified and approached (nine females and seven males) agreed to take part and appointments were set with them to conduct the interviews at a prearranged and mutually agreed time. All interviews were conducted at the participants' homes.

### **3.5 Data collection**

As stated earlier, data was collected using in-depth interviews and semi-structured interview guides (Appendix A). According to Harvey (2012) in an in-depth interview the researcher explores, in detail, the respondent's attitudes, life history, experiences, perceptions, etc. The semi-structured interview guide was designed to solicit information on the married people's reasons for using Facebook as well as the perceptions on the negative and positive aspects of Facebook usage on marital relationships.

Data collection took place during the month of January 2014. The interviews lasted between 40-45 minutes on average and were conducted in English. However, respondents were allowed also to answer in their native languages (Ndebele or Shona) if they felt more comfortable with their vernacular. The researcher is fluent in both languages. With the consent of the respondents, all interviews were audio-recorded. Field notes were also taken during the interviews.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Le Compte and Scheusul (1999) define data analysis as a process in which the researcher reduces large amounts of collected data to make sense of them. To achieve this, the researcher, at the end of the data collection phase, played back the recordings of the in-depth interviews and transcribed the data. Transcription refers to the transformation of sound or

image from recordings to text (Duranti, 2007). Where necessary (where interviews were conducted in the vernacular) the transcripts were translated into English. Through the overall data analysis process the researcher was able to recognise re-occurring words, and ideas that ran throughout the data. This assisted the identification of the main themes that were brought forward by the participants. The overall findings of the study are a synthesis of the data from the in-depth interviews and the analysis of the mass media materials. There were no clear cut or formal focus group discussions conducted because of time and budgetary constraints. However, the data obtained was reported to some of the individual participants.

### **3.7 Limitations of the study**

Due to time and budgetary constraints the study population of this research was small. Thus, the data is not generalizable to the whole population of Zimbabwe.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

According to Strydom (1998) ethics refer to, “a set of moral principles which are suggested by an individual or group, or are ideally accepted codes of conducts”. The study was granted ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. Overall, the following ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process.

#### **3.8.1 Informed consent**

The principle of informed consent entails communicating the aims of the research and the research process to the participants before the interview (Strydom 1998). Thus, as shown in Appendix B the participants were informed about the nature of the study and were given the choice of either participating or not participating. They were also told they could withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished and that there would be no comebacks if they did so. The researcher made use of the language that the sampled participants understood in explaining the purpose of the research and obtaining informed consent.

#### **3.8.2 Right to privacy**

Privacy denotes the state of not being seen or observed by others (Strydom, 1998). Participants’ right to privacy was respected by the researcher as the voice recordings and the notes taken during the research were protected from being viewed by the public but remained

secluded by storing them in coded form in a laptop accessible only to the researcher through a password.

### **3.8.3 Confidentiality**

Strydom (1998) asserts that in ensuring confidentiality, the information given by participants will be kept confidential. In this research, confidentiality was achieved through making research records and notes taken during the interviews that indicated participants' identities inaccessible to others except the researcher. This was further ensured by coding information and storing the data electronically in the laptop where they are only accessible through the researchers' personal key password which is not known to anybody else. Additionally, pseudonyms were used in the write up of the research findings.

### **3.9. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a discussion of the research design. This was followed by a description of the study setting which was the Gwabalanda community. The sample was categorised by two sample groups those aged 35 years and above and those aged 34 years and below who were selected through purposive and snow ball sampling. Data analysis and limitations of the study were further discussed. The chapter ended with a discussion of the ethical considerations which included informed consent, right to privacy and confidentiality. The following chapter presents the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the key findings of this study. A general layout of the opinions from the two sample groups (younger and older married individuals) is outlined to show their perceptions on the influences of social networking and Facebook usage in particular on marital relationships.

### 4.2 Main reasons for using Facebook

There was a general appreciation among respondents that there have been developments in information and technology. Most respondents acknowledged the fact that the contemporary era has seen changes taking place with the increase of social networks such as Facebook which they made use of in their everyday life. For example:

"There have been changes from the past to this present time and as such I have also adapted to the changes by making use of Facebook a social networking site which I have been able to access"(Dube,41).

It was evident that people have been able to adapt to the technological changes and, as mentioned by Mr. Dube in the above excerpt, most participants reported that they have been communicating through Facebook. This reveals therefore that Zimbabwe has also been able to be part of the new 'Network Society' in which people have become more networked and are able to communicate through social networks (Castells, 2000). In terms of Fukuyama's Information Age (1999), it can be considered that Zimbabwe is basically a society that has seen advances in information and communication systems and which makes use of social networking sites via the internet.

Further, linking these findings to Harvey's (1989) time-compression concept, it can be argued that advancements in communication systems and the use of cell phones have enabled people to stay in touch with others who are geographically dispersed. Overall, this upholds Turkle's (2011) claim that technology has reshaped our everyday lives and that we have made our technologies and in turn, they have in some way shaped us and our relationships.

In a similar vein, Brandtzaeg (2009) postulated that the increased use of the internet has infused all aspects of people's lives and has shaped relationships. Fukuyama's concept of the "Information Age" relates to the advancements that have taken place in this community under study which have seen the increased use of the internet. Despite the fact that the use of the internet has enabled individuals to stay connected to each other, it seems their relationships have become more dependent on the internet for them to continue to be in existence.

The majority of respondents reported that they got to know about Facebook through family and friends who motivated them to open Facebook accounts. Of the respondents, a total of 12 from both age groups mentioned that communication with friends and relatives was a motivation for them to open their Facebook accounts. When asked about the reasons why they were still using Facebook, the 16 respondents stated that the site was an efficient, cheap, and convenient mode of communication that was also great as a business platform.

#### **4.2.1 Efficient and cheaper mode of communication**

Facebook was almost invariably hailed by both age groups for having facilitated a level of contact with people that the participants would have otherwise failed to keep in regular contact with, but whom they enjoy hearing or seeing what they are up to. Sithole, a 50 year old man said, "I have children in America, so through Facebook, it is much easier to communicate for longer hours". Another man, Dube aged 41 years said:

"there have been changes [in ICT] from the past to this present time and as such I have also adapted to the changes by making use of Facebook a social networking site which I have been able to access for communicating with my wife who frequently travels to Mozambique"(Dube,41).

More than half of the sampled respondents used the site to find and re-connect with their ex-classmates, schoolmates, former teachers, college friends, and colleagues. This is in line with Ellison (2006) who pointed out that the most common motivation for Facebook usage is the desire to keep in touch with friends and family. All in all, when one explores these views using Harvey's (1989) time-space compression notion in which geographically dispersed places have become closer to each other, it can be considered that through the use of the internet there has been easier access to Facebook making the communication pace much easier and quicker in the Gwabalanda community. The process of communication has been

made easier because by simply clicking buttons people are able to relate to their friends and relatives who are from different parts of the world. Hence, Facebook as a communication tool has united friends and families who are dispersed and has brought them much closer to one another even in Non-Western settings such as Gwabalanda in Zimbabwe.

It also emerged from the findings that most people have relatives and friends who are out of the country and the use of the site makes it much easier and cheaper to communicate with them than using emails or telephones. Respondents alluded to that emails take longer for one to respond and that the telephone is much costly especially when communicating with people outside the country. One respondent in light of this commented:

"Facebook is cheaper than calling...all I need is to recharge my phone with just one US dollar, convert it to data bundles to access the internet on my phone...it can last up to one week rather than recharging with five US dollars to be able to talk to friends outside the country "( Grace, 28).

Overall, there was a general agreement by participants that Facebook was the best option and a cheaper medium of communication as it did not require much airtime to use. In tandem with Turkle (2011), most of the advances in communication were conceived to have increased efficiency and made people efficient in their private life, where more and more people have remained connected through the social networks. Hence, communication has been made easier and effective with little costs.

#### **4.2.2 Convenience**

Participants from both age groups also reported that communicating through Facebook was one of the most convenient ways to communicate with others. From the sample, nine participants with six from the younger married individuals group stated that Facebook usage is more convenient to them as they can quickly receive messages from their Facebook friends and respond to them and also upload pictures, tag friends and change statuses at any given time. Sindy, a 30 year old participant from the younger married individuals group stated:

"...when on my Facebook page...all I need is to tap the buttons of my phone...the message is gone...the profile picture is changed...so convenient indeed".

Participants also appreciated the fact that when one sends a message or a comment, the intended recipient will see it when they log into Facebook and they can respond to the message at their convenience instead of having to stop everything and send a message back right away. If they are both online at the same time, a chat gives them the ability to communicate in real time. Greg Bowe (2010) alludes to this when he states that Facebook offers many of the same elements offered by other social networking sites such as blogs, photo sharing, game applications, online forums and groups. These participants further stated that Facebook usage makes it convenient for them to post and invite people to upcoming events. In addition, Facebook provides users with several methods to choose from when contacting their friends and relatives as it offers direct messages, wall posts, chatting and comments. This, according to the participants, allows users to choose the best method for the type of message they want to convey. Hence, Facebook is seen as more convenient since it makes easier for people to put across any message they want to communicate to their friends.

The convenience of Facebook was seen to have been enhanced, to a large extent, by the use of smart phones and the easy access to the internet as 32 year old Ndlovu said, "...with this my iphone, I can log onto my Facebook account at any time and at any place...it is very convenient...enabling me to remain online most times...". This was also noted by Kabneza (2012) who posited that the proliferation of smart phones has made it easier for people to access the internet through their phones.

Furthermore, participants also revealed that on their smart phones they are also able to use the Facebook messenger which reports a message instantly. They further explained that this feature, for them, was a more convenient way of chatting to their friends as they could instantly read a message coming from anyone of the Facebook friends who has sent the message. This is consistent with by Turkle's (2011) assertion that texting has become a better way of communicating for people rather than making calls and it has made people to stay in touch with one another.

#### **4.2.3 Business and job purposes**

Eleven participants from both sample groups also alluded to the importance of using Facebook for business purposes. They mentioned that those with company Facebook pages could advertise on Facebook pages and this allows a wider audience to access their products through knowing about the business online. They also mentioned that it is a cheaper and

easier advertising method. All in all, Facebook usage has also proved to be invaluable in augmenting the income for those couples who are in business as they could market their products, get connected to a myriad of customers globally.

#### **4.2.4 Making impressions**

There were also insinuations among some respondents that for some people Facebook usage has not been really about social interaction but for giving impression and keeping up appearances. This was particularly evident with the younger female respondents in the sample. Young female participants who had these sentiments emphasized how some people paid much attention to looking good on their Facebook pages, posting their best photos, tagging pictures at good places and good houses so as to be seen at their very best. Indeed, according to Mehdiadeh (2010: 358) "it is believed that impression management is the most reason for having a Facebook page."Turkle (2011) also concurs with this by noting that it is certainly true that virtual impression management is taking place and it is very effective. Participants from the younger married individual group in particular asserted that it was important to keep appearances as they felt it important to maintain a particular status on Facebook and this was the reason why they constantly changed their profile pictures unlike the older married individuals. In view of this, it can be argued therefore that the influence of Facebook usage in the Gwabalanda community is more age-group inclined especially when female participants are considered. The following statement by 28 year old lady, Grace, illustrates:

"...I have to be at my very best...a good photo of me at cool places with a good dress and a nice hairstyle...people should see me at my best...that is why I should post the good ones.."

Similarly:

"men at times forget to tell us we are beautiful...as a woman I need to be told that...by posting beautiful pictures on Facebook, all these comments I can get them...it just makes me smile..." (Grace, 28)

Older married female participants, on the other hand, generally felt that keeping appearances was unnecessary while the other sample group felt it was necessary.

"being frank to oneself is the starting point of showing who one is...of which most people fake it...showing fake lifestyles different from their real lifestyles"  
(Zirimo, 49).

In the view of most of these respondents, Facebook has been used by some married individuals to keep up a certain 'appearance' and act in a certain 'manner' in front of their online world. The question of double standards arises as to whether individuals portray who they really are on their Facebook pages or create a certain online identity that is pleasing to their online friends.

### **4.3 Perceptions on the influences of Facebook on marital relationships**

Respondents held a strong view that the use of Facebook in Zimbabwe has brought changes in the way that married partners relate to each other as they also use Facebook to communicate with one another online. One of the participants, for example, said "...all I can say is that Facebook as a social networking site has changed the way that married partners develop their relationships..."(Carol,29). The following section discusses the perceived positive and negative influences of Facebook on marital relationships.

#### **4.3.1 Perceived Positive Influence of Facebook on relationships**

##### ***Compression of time and space***

The study found out that some married couples live in different cities and there are distances of a day's travel between some of the cities. Facebook usage works positively for these partners in facilitating conversations between married couples in real time. Kabneza (2012) consents with this by asserting that many Zimbabweans live outside the country, hence, it is inevitable that the social network has been used to transcend national boundaries. One respondent, for example, noted how Facebook has helped him and his wife to stay in contact despite the fact that they live in different countries. He was of the view that Facebook, when used accordingly brings about togetherness and makes him feel like he is closer to his wife even though distance will be separating them as they communicate using it every day and even send each other pictures and videos that will always keep him thinking of his wife. This also emerged in the comments made on how married individuals could easily celebrate their birthdays and marriage anniversaries online as this was posted on their Facebook pages for

their friends to see. Thus, for them it has acted as a platform on which married couples could express their love for one another and their appreciation of each other through their Facebook pages. Though the extent to which these married partners can express their love face to face is different from the expressions online, participants hailed Facebook usage for closing several gaps that had been created by distance relationships.

In addition, the 16 participants from both sample groups alluded to the fact that using Facebook for social networking has allowed them to maintain relationships, demonstrating that Facebook is a communication tool through which married individuals have been able to maintain their relationships with family, friends and colleagues. One participant, in showing how his relationships have been maintained through Facebook commented, "I have been able to stay connected to my friends online and to my wife who usually travels outside the country...so through Facebook we stay in touch..." (Moyo,38). Regardless of this, the extent to which Facebook has allowed for the maintenance of marital relationships is debatable as it cannot fulfill the intimate, affectionate and sexual needs of partners (Hampton and Wellman 2000).

### ***Marriage Discussion Forum***

It also emerged that there are some Facebook-based marriage discussions forums or groups in Zimbabwe where people expressed themselves. In groups such as 'KuzeyaNyayanaMadzibaba' and 'Mamoyo' users are able to post and make comments on marriages thereby creating online identities where they are freely able to express themselves. Participants explained how through these marriage forums they were able to discuss with one another their marital experiences. Many respondents felt that through these marriage groups they are able to give each other marital advice and share their marriage experiences.

While one participant from the older married individual sample (35 and above) mentioned how through these forums one could be poorly advised since these are people who do not know each other, the overall feeling was that this platform allowed them to hear the views of other married people and get advice from different perspectives. However, the older married individuals' views showed more concern in how there is less privacy within marriages as a result of exposing marital affairs online.

### ***Keeping in touch with a partner***

Other participants felt they have often stayed out of harm as they can easily update each other on whatever will be happening at different places. For some participants, Facebook usage has helped them to experience true love and have gone on to experience life differently by getting bonded with each other updating each other of global and local events, working on puzzles, being with each other and fulfilling even the filial bonds. One male participant from the over 35 sample group asserted that he has the leverage through Facebook to chat with his wife who often finds time to communicate while at work especially when he is at night duty in America. The wife works as a teacher in the diaspora and the family has been able to overcome the pressures brought by distances.

#### **4.3.2 Perceived negative influence of Facebook on marital relationships**

##### ***Detachment from offline relationships***

While many respondents hailed Facebook for having brought them and their loved ones close, the feeling among some is that they had, as a result of the site, become detached from their partners in their face to face interactions. This is in line with Turkle's (2011) assertion that, "networked we have become...yet so lessened are our expectations of each other that we utterly feel alone and detached from one another". More than half of the participants were also of the opinion that as people make use of Facebook each day, they rely on the online world to make conversations. This has become a place where even marital issues are discussed. They also revealed that for them, marital values that used to exist have been eroded and the togetherness that families used to have has deteriorated as married individuals rely more on their Facebook pages for conversations rather than their marital partners. To this effect one participant commented:

"...family life is no longer important...more conversations are made online in Facebook pages...online relationships have become important whilst existing marital relationships have been sidelined..."(MaNyoni, 48).

It can therefore be noted how time spent on Facebook has resulted in a detachment of partners with their real world. Castells (2000) further validates these claims by stating that as new social interaction is created it exerts determinant on how social life is organized and experienced. As more time is spent maintaining and building online relationships, marital relationships within the offline world become altered as lesser time is given to them. The use of Facebook cannot certainly be the only determinant factor for conflicts within relationships.

However, when married partners remain more attached to their pages the possibility of forming strong and vibrant relationships is questionable.

### ***Infidelity***

Views given by the participants revealed that Facebook usage has opened up the possibility of infidelity among married couples. Indeed, one male participant explained how he had met a woman on Facebook and though he is married, he has been dating her for a few months. He further mentioned that they constantly communicate on Facebook since they live far from each other. He went on to reveal how through the site he has been able to maintain their relationship as they send each other messages and photographs on their Facebook pages.

It can thus be argued that since Facebook usage has managed to connect people from different places and has reunited them, it has also increased the possibility of reuniting with ex-lovers as well as finding love. This has apparently created problems between some married couples as some really enjoy chatting with their ex-lovers thus leading to issues of infidelity. Indeed, as Merkle and Richardson (2000) assert, interactions on Facebook often lead to flirtations, virtual sex, and other incidences that not only raise questions of boundaries of intimacy, but can also become a source of tension in existing face-to-face romantic relationships. One of the participants noted that, being cheated on can be really hurtful and devastating and when someone finds out that they have been cheated on, even on Facebook, it usually results in lack of trust because of the betrayal. Most respondents especially from the younger sample group reiterated that the fact that Facebook is surrounded by secrecy has played a huge part in enabling married couples to cyber cheat without even getting caught. An individual can have a sexual conversation with their ex-lover or any new lover for that matter without being caught by simply chatting within the inbox only and never on their timeline.

### ***Time spent on Facebook***

Participants went further to explain that when an individual finds their cyber lover and/or ex-lover interesting and intriguing to chat with on Facebook they could spend more time chatting with their Facebook lover rather than spending more time with their marital partner. Facebook dating can be obsessive as well as addictive and this then leads to suspicion and invasion of privacy by the suspicious partner. Participants also argued that when an individual is having an affair on Facebook it also affects their physical relationship with their

partner at home. In as much as most people would like to argue that there is nothing like cyber cheating, it actually exists and it is breaking marriages. This was also noted by Boyd (2004) who asserts that regular use of sites such as Facebook is one avenue through which various threats develop and, if not communicated effectively, can exacerbate existing problems in relationships, or start new conflicts. In light of this, one participant from the young age group remarked:

“My husband hooked up with his ex-lover on Facebook, I noticed that he had become friends with her on my timeline because I was also his Facebook friend therefore every friend that he added came as a notification on my timeline. I never suspected anything then, until he started spending more of his time on his Facebook page and he would usually smile a lot when he was on Facebook. I ended up being suspicious and I invaded his privacy and found out that he was actually planning to spend the coming weekend with his ex-lover. I was so devastated to find out that my husband was really cheating on me. From that day on I spent most of my time stalking him and I never trusted him again and this really caused a huge strain in our marriage.

### *Jealousy*

Other participants were of the view that most relationships have their own fair share of problems and Facebook has just added to them. Most married partners are friends on Facebook and this has also caused problems in their marriages. Twelve participants mostly from the younger married individuals group noted that when their husbands are reluctant to update their Facebook status to married, problems leading to relationship dissatisfaction arise. It was revealed that most women update their Facebook status unlike men and this has caused problems as it somehow gives men the platform to cheat as they can easily portray themselves as single. Most female participants were of the view that when a female friend sends their husbands a very beautiful picture they become jealous and end up feeling insecure since they will not be really knowing how their partner really feels about that picture.

Most male participants were also of the view that when their wives' male friend comments too much each time their wife uploads a new picture; it makes them jealous and suspicious of their partner. Most of the female participants argued that they want their husbands to acknowledge their marriage on Facebook. Failure to do that would really cause problems such as relationship dissatisfaction and jealousy in that marriage. Hempel (2009) concurs

with this by noting that couples often come into conflict over various things that range from one party reconnecting with an ex, to one not mentioning their relationship status on the site at all. Thus, when married couples fail to relate with each other with honesty it creates problems within the marriage.

Most male participants in the young age group were of the view that it was better off if they were not friends with their wives on Facebook whilst most males in the older age group wanted their wives to know what was happening in their internet lives. Hence, it was revealed that most young men are not faithful to their wives on Facebook, and even if they are, they do not want their wives to know what will be going on in their Facebook accounts as this would be likely to cause harm to their marriages.

As mentioned earlier, some participants also pointed out that when a partner is private about their Facebook, it arouses suspicion which also leads to jealousy and sometimes paranoia, just thinking that they maybe cheating even when they are not. Most participants pointed out that because of jealousy their partners end up stalking them on Facebook looking for the slightest thing that they can hold over their partner. In line with this, one of the participants noted that, after her ex-lover had commented on a picture she had uploaded, that she was still just as pretty and made it known to her just how much he missed her, it caused an uproar between her and her husband. Ever since that incident, the husband started stalking her on Facebook and they would fight about everything. This almost led to their separation until she had to make a choice between her marriage and Facebook. In line with these assertions in the Gwabalanda community, Bumgarner (2007) states that Facebook as a social networking site provides ample opportunities for trouble in most marriages and unions. In the same vein, Lupkin (2012) is of the opinion that Facebook usage has been one of the causes of divorce in many instances. Hence, communicating through Facebook seems to have resulted in conflicts and divorce cases for some in marital relationships which causes a disruption in the social order of society.

Participants further explained how some married people can be offended just by the fact that their partner has added a new friend whom they do not personally know. This has been known to cause problems in marriages. It was revealed that when one has a jealous partner, chances that they will always be found guilty of something are very high. Thus, most of the

respondents were of the view that married couples should refrain from using Facebook to avoid causing conflicts in marriage.

Another relevant aspect which was raised by both sample groups was that the amount of time a partner spends online invokes feelings of jealousy. To this effect, a woman from the younger married group questioned, "*...I wondered what someone will be talking about when they go for hours on their Facebook pages...it was one day when I had to find out there was an ex-girlfriend involved...*" (Cynthia, 28).

Participants in both sample groups made reference to partners being hooked online with their online friends rather than giving attention to their immediate partners. A participant from the young adult group explained how her friend complained of her husband spending time on his Facebook and did not give much attention to the family and this created tension in their relationship as confronting him created more conflict between them.

#### ***Relationship status update***

The relationship status update feature of Facebook was also mentioned as having the potential to arouse jealousy in relationships. Most of the younger married individual participants felt that it was important for a partner to disclose their relationship status. They asserted that through the status they can show their online friends that they are married. Participants felt it was important for a partner to show the relationship status for their online friends to see. They further explained that showing that one is married on their relationship status gave them some security especially for the women. Participants also mentioned that if their partner had to remove their relationship status and changed it to being single or not reflecting any status then it created suspicion of why they were hiding the relationship status.

#### ***Conflict and lack of trust due to partner surveillance***

Most respondents especially from the younger married sample group admitted to the fact that they monitor their partner's activities on Facebook, arguing that it is imperative to keep tabs of what a partner is up to when online:

"...it is important for me to keep tabs on my partner, I should know who they talk to, the messages they share and in fact their activities on Facebook in general." (Tinashe, 28)

"...I check my partners activities...I also monitor him so that I can always keep myself informed of their thoughts, what they are up to and who they talk to..." (Ruvimbo, 33)

However, these respondents stated that the more they monitored their partners' Facebook pages, the more it resulted in conflicts when they found out what their partners were up to; from chatting with exes to flirting with other women or men on Facebook. For them, this created tensions when they confronted their partners. They further mentioned that at times they had insecurities, so keeping tabs on their partners could help them ease themselves.

Indeed, participants from the younger married individuals' sample revealed that their partners still have friends on Facebook who are their ex-lovers and they seemed uncomfortable with that. It is noteworthy that while the older married individuals had a higher trust for their partners, possibly because by virtue of having lived longer in their relationships have managed to become established and secure. In contrast, the younger married individuals, understandably still undergoing marital life transformations, felt more insecure of their partners befriending their ex-lovers as they were afraid they could still revive their love. A woman from the older married group made this comment:

"I trust my husband, so whether he still communicates with his exes, am not bothered because I know he will not cheat on me..." (Ruvimbo, 37).

There was a general agreement amongst respondents from both age groups that partners who trusted each other should be able to share Facebook passwords and that when a partner refuses to give their password it creates suspense which made it hard for them to be trusted as they might be hiding something. Although this is so, most respondents in both groups also alluded to the fact that though they feel it was important to share passwords, they did not have their partners' passwords.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter gave an overview of Facebook usage in Zimbabwe and the reasons why it has been used. It further revealed the general perceptions of married individuals on the influence of Facebook on marital relationships. The perceived positive and negative influences of Facebook on marital relationships as highlighted by the participants were also reported. The

next chapter concludes the study by revisiting the research objectives and by making some evaluation statements on whether the problems experienced by some of the participants are due to Facebook *per se* or are a result of other factors among which lack of self-control, addiction and time mismanagement are included.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

The principal aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of married individuals in Zimbabwe regarding how social networking influences marital relationships. The specific objectives were to explore the:

1. main reasons for using Facebook among married individuals in Gwabalanda;
2. perceived positive influences of Facebook on marital relationships in Gwabalanda;
3. perceived negative influences of Facebook on marital relationships in Gwabalanda.

### 5.2 Summary of Findings

The findings of the study showed that the main reasons for Facebook usage in Zimbabwe are communication with family, friends and colleagues. This was the major reason why they were motivated to open Facebook accounts. Facebook is also an efficient and cheaper mode of communication considering that many Zimbabweans are in the diaspora due to economic reasons. It was also revealed that Facebook usage is more convenient for communication. Facebook has been used for business and job purposes as well by more than half of the sampled participants.

### 5.3 Limitations

Although the study was able to provide useful insights on the perceptions of married individuals in Zimbabwe regarding how social networking influences marital relationships, there are a number of limitations that are noteworthy when interpreting the findings. Firstly, due to time and budgetary constraints, the study was based on a small localised sample. This means that the results cannot be generalised to the whole population of Zimbabwe. Secondly, the researcher only interviewed married individuals and not married couples to ensure that independent views were obtained without one partner influencing the views of the other partner and as such could not capture both views of the couples thereby limiting results of the study by excluding the views of both partners.

## 5.4 Recommendations for Further Study

Marital stability has been shown to have an array of positive aspects for society and overall development. According to Wilkins (2012), for example, education whereby children are able to continue with education within a family where both parents are available while those within the single parent family are likely to drop out of school. There is poverty reduction as a result of marriages as both parents are able to support their family and give care and attention to their children as compared to children outside marriages who do not receive more attention and care.

In many African societies such as Zimbabwe, marriage has also been associated with an increase in women's status, dignity and access to land rights. According to Ayisi (1997) marriage in the African sense confers status and dignity and a wife acquires certain rights and corresponding duties on the husband and vice versa. Hence, it is through marriage that women are able to maintain their rights within the society.

Against this background, and given the widespread and increasing use of Facebook in Zimbabwe, there is need for further research on the impact of this social network on marital relationships and family life in general. The following are some of the research questions that require further interrogation:

- The extent to which Facebook is used in Zimbabwe and the socio-economic profile of users. The current study could not explore this due to lack of available data. There is therefore need for a large scale study that will reveal the dimensions of Facebook use in Zimbabwe.
- The reasons why people use Facebook using basic background characteristics such as marital status, gender, rural/urban residence and education status as mediating variables.
- The influence of Facebook on homosexual marriages. It can be argued that failure to engage with the sexuality of the couples in homosexual relationships may be an illustrate heteronormative bias. However the study was limited in the regard because homosexuality is illegal in Zimbabwe. There is therefore need to further research in other non-Western countries on the impacts of Facebook on the health and longevity of marital relationships.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has concluded the entire study by way of revisiting the research objectives as outlined in chapter one as well as by summarizing the literature reviewed in chapter two, the methodology in chapter three and the research findings obtained in chapter four. The chapter has also pointed out the limitations or setbacks that were encountered during the study and how these were overcome. Recommendations for areas needing further study have also been presented, thus leading to the conclusion.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

Sex – male/female

Age

Number of years married.

### Communication

When did you become familiar with the social network site Facebook?

What motivated you to open a Facebook account?

Who do you communicate with when you log in to your Facebook account?

Do you think Facebook has allowed you to create new friendships?

### Activities

How often do you use Facebook?

What activities do you do when on Facebook?

Do you monitor your partners' activities on Facebook?

What do you use to log in to your Facebook account e.g. cell-phone, computer?

### Privacy

Do you have access to your partners' password of their Facebook account?

What do you think about the changes in technology with regards to privacy when using the internet?

Are you aware of the privacy settings offered by Facebook?

### Jealousy

Who uses Facebook the most?

Do you think the time spent on Facebook has an effect on your relationship?

### Trust

Does your partner befriend ex's on Facebook?

Does your partner mention the relationship on Facebook?

### Information Disclosure

Do you disclose personal information on Facebook?

Do you think it is appropriate to disclose your private information about your relationship on Facebook?

### Identity Representation

Do you think the way your partner expresses themselves on Facebook expresses their identity?

How often do you or your partner change your profile pictures?

Do you think it is important to keep up appearances on Facebook pages?

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### **Consent form: The influence of Facebook usage on Marital Relationships in Zimbabwe: An exploratory study of Gwabalanda Community.**

My name is Memory Kodzai, a student conducting research for the fulfilment of a Master's Degree in Sociology at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is entitled: **The influence of Facebook usage on Marital Relationships in Zimbabwe: An exploratory study of Gwabalanda Community.**

The research aims to explore the perceptions of married individuals in Zimbabwe regarding how social networking influences marital relationships. The specific objectives are the main reasons for using Facebook among married individuals, the perceived positive influences of Facebook on marital relationships and the perceived negative influences of Facebook on marital relationships. Therefore I would like to invite you to participate in this study to obtain the objectives of my research.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed and taking part in the focus group discussion. During the interviews conversations will be recorded through the use of a tape recorder but, if one feels uncomfortable and is unwilling to be tape recorded then notes will be taken as a way of recording the information. Participation is also voluntary and nobody will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to be interviewed or not be interviewed. You also have a choice not to participate or to pull out anytime as long as you feel it is necessary for you to do so. You may also reserve your comments when it suits you. While questions are being asked about your personal life with your partner, no identifying information, such as your name or I.D number, is asked for, and as such you will remain anonymous.

If you choose to participate in this study please indicate this by signing this consent form in the space provided below. Both the consent form and the interview sheet will be kept separately and confidential so that there will be no way of identifying who said what in order to ensure anonymity as well as confidentiality. In regards to this, your participation in the study would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for taking your time reading this letter and your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Memory Kodzai

Email: [memkodzai@gmail.com](mailto:memkodzai@gmail.com)

Tel: +263 774181597 or +27722599882

### **Formal Acknowledgement of Consent**

I,.....on this day of.....2014, agreed to be interviewed for the above presented study. I also understand that I will be asked questions about.....

Signature.....

Date.....