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**THE ROLE OF WHATSAPP IN SUSTAINING EMOTIONAL
INTIMACY IN LONG DISTANCE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Communications Honours degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institute for degree purposes.

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the researcher set out to explore the role of WhatsApp in sustaining emotional intimacy in long-distance romantic relationships. The aim was to find out how this can be achieved through the utilisation of the various features of WhatsApp.

Using a qualitative design, a study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with males and females between the ages of 25-35 who are based in Johannesburg, Midrand, and are currently involved in long-distance romantic relationships. This was to gain understanding about their experiences with utilising WhatsApp as a platform of communication in their relationships, and to get subjective accounts of how this assists with sustaining emotional intimacy.

The most findings indicated that couples were able to sustain emotional intimacy through the use of WhatsApp. The least findings were related to bad relationship quality, with most participants stating a general satisfaction. The overall findings indicated that the respondents found WhatsApp to be an effective channel of communication in their long-distance relationships.

Keywords: WhatsApp, Long-distance relationships, Emotional intimacy, Voice messaging, Video calling, Text messaging.

1. INTRODUCTION

While long-distance relationships are not a new concept, the ways of sustaining them have evolved over the years. This is due to constant technological advancements that have come with different forms of social media that enables human beings to keep in touch. For this study, the researcher focused on the WhatsApp application and its various features that can be utilised by people in long-distance romantic relationships. The aim was to explore how these couples can sustain emotional intimacy through the use of the various features of WhatsApp.

1.1 Background and Contextualisation

According to Tam (2018) Being in a long-distance relationship is like taking part in an endurance race that stretches and tests partners human capabilities. The distance and time apart constantly put one's love to the test, challenging partners trust and commitment to each other. Communication plays a big role in human relationships as the length, depth, consistency and honesty of the communication can determine the success or demise of relationships, more especially romantic relationships.

Previously, human beings were limited in their means of interaction with people that they were geographically separated from. Traditional forms of communication included home telephone calling, which could only happen if both parties were at home, letter writing and sending, which people had to wait over a week to receive, postcards which could take months, faxing and telegrams (Edwards, 2015).

However, the development of media technologies and advancement of social media has changed the nature of long-distance relationships by offering vast and cheaper ways of staying connected. According to House, McGinty and Heim (2016:6) in 2014, 71% of social networking users reported accessing Facebook, 30% reported accessing Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, and approximately 71% reported using Instagram and Twitter (House *et al*, 2016:6). For this study, WhatsApp was chosen as the social media communication platform to explore.

While studies have identified some of the negative in which social media impacts human beings, such as threatening self-esteem and encouraging narcissism, other studies have highlighted the various ways in which social media can benefit human

relationships, such as facilitating greater self-disclosure, cultivating social support and decreasing loneliness (Pittman, 2018). The many features that WhatsApp offers (such as voice and video calls, texting, sharing photos, voice notes), allows partners to communicate, and affords them the feeling of being 'present' in each other's everyday lives (Muntean, 2019:3). Therefore, by understanding how the utilisation of the various features of WhatsApp can assist with sustaining emotional intimacy, this study looked to explore how these factors ultimately aid the success of long-distance romantic relationships.

2. RATIONALE

The field of communication seeks to explore communication in its broadest sense. According to Shahkat and Kootbodien (2017), examining the way people communicate has always been important, whether it is verbal or non-verbal, conveying a message to another individual is necessary for human understanding and interaction. Communication is constantly changing, and the most recent evolution is new media, which is described as 'all things related to the internet and interplay between technology' (Shakat & Kootbodien, 2017). Essay Write (2016) states that the integration of technology in the communication process of interpersonal communication remains significant and plays a great role in society. Therefore, this study is relevant to the field of communication as it explored how an instant messaging application contributes to sustaining intimacy in long-distance relationships.

Furthermore, this study does not only add on to the existing body of knowledge of the role of social media in long-distance romantic relationships (such as: Muntean, N. 2019. *Intimacy and long distance in the age of technology* and Hampton, A.J., Rawlings, J., Treger, S, and Sprecher, S. 2017. *Channels of Computer-Mediated Communication and Satisfaction in Long-Distance Relationships*), but it investigated WhatsApp in particular and explored in-depth information from the standpoints of participants in long-distance relationships who actively utilise the application. This should be relevant to the South African society as it was found that 49% of the population use WhatsApp (Clement, 2019), although not entirely for romantic purposes, the people are familiar with the application.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Long-distance romantic relationships generally require more effort as the distance between partners can be debilitating to the relationship (Dorvil, 2019). However, several technological features exist that enables couples to keep in touch at all times, such as text messaging and video calling (Hampton, Fawlings, Treger & Sprecher, 2017). Furthermore, Hampton *et al* (2017) found that despite the lack of frequent face-to-face contact, partners in long-distance relationships have been found to have similar levels of satisfaction to those in geographically close relationships due to computer mediated communication. This study aimed to understand how the use of these technological features, particularly those of WhatsApp, assists in sustaining emotional intimacy between couples in long-distance relationships.

4. RESEARCH GOAL AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4.1 Research goal

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the role of WhatsApp in sustaining emotional intimacy in long-distance romantic relationships. The aim was to find out how this is achieved through the utilisation of the various features of WhatsApp.

4.2 Research Questions

- In which ways does the utilisation of the various features of WhatsApp assist in sustaining emotional intimacy amongst heterosexual couples between the ages of 25-35 who are in long-distance relationships?
- Does the utilisation of WhatsApp texting, video call, voice call, voice note messaging, and status update features assist in sustaining emotional intimacy in long-distance relationships?

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To gain understanding of how the use of WhatsApp assists in sustaining emotional intimacy in long-distance romantic relationships.
- To evaluate texting, voice calling, video calling, voice note messaging, picture sharing, and status update as WhatsApp features that long-distance couples utilise.
- To explore the advantages and disadvantages of the utilisation of WhatsApp in long-distance romantic relationships.
- To investigate whether the success of the communication in long-distance romantic relationships can be linked to utilising WhatsApp

6. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION – SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

6.1 History of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theoretical framework and perspective in sociology that addresses how society is created and maintained through repeated interactions among individuals (Carter & Fuller, 2015:1). Symbolic interactionism was developed to understand the operation of society from bottom-up, shifting the focus to micro-level processes that emerge during face-to-face encounters in order to explain the operation of society (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

6.2 Defining Symbolic Interactionism

Du Plooy-Cilliers and Louw (2014:28) define symbolic Interactionism as 'A theory that argues that human interaction has little meaning, but that humans have the ability to read meaning into one another's actions because they share meaning systems such as language. These shared meaning systems allow us to interpret signs or actions and give meaning to them'. For example, if a person starts crying, one has to have learnt what crying means in order to respond. People cry for several reasons such as pain, joy, or relief. Therefore, one's response will depend on the reason why the person is crying. To establish this, language is used, and meaning is created (Du Plooy-Cilliers and Louw, 2014:28).

6.3 Basic tenets of Symbolic Interactionism

Carter and Fuller (2015:1-2) state that 'Symbolic interactionists are often less concerned with objective structure than with subjective meaning'. Symbolic interactions basic tenets state that: 1) Individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them; 2) Interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects, as well as situations, must be defined based on individual meaning; 3) Meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society; and 4) Meanings are continually created and recreated through interpreting processes during interactions with others (Carter & Fuller, 2015:1-2).

6.4 Generalised other, Roles and expectations as elements of Symbolic Interactionism

As a means of understanding the roles and expectations in symbolic interactionism, Redmond (2015) proposes the 'generalised other' standpoint, which refers to the way in which people carry within them a view of other people in general which includes how people view them. The generalised other is part of the self. Thus, Berlo (1960 cited in Redmond, 2015) saw generalised other as a foundation for creating expectations about how people behave and the roles they play. These expectations and roles are then used to guide our behaviours.

Roles represent an intersection between self, society, and social interactions. People's ability to create and play roles allows them to successfully adapt and interact with the role someone else is playing. Furthermore, people's behaviours, reactions, expectations, and interpretations are affected by their generalised other. Mead (1962 cited in Redmond, 2015) observed that the generalised other is one way in which society extends control over people and impacts their thinking.

6.5 Relevance of Symbolic Interactionism to this study

Symbolic interactionism theory is suitable for this study as the researcher was seeking to explore how couples in long distance-relationships establish emotional intimacy by communicating through WhatsApp. The dimensions of making this

establishment will be different as the communication does not take place on a physical level, therefore meaning will be extracted from tone. For example, if one sends their partner a warm heartfelt text such as 'I love and miss you honey', they will attach meaning to the response they get, therefore, if they don't receive a response of the same enduring nature, but rather just an 'okay', their knowledge of what that kind of response could mean will affect how they interpret it. The researcher was thus interested in exploring the complexities of establishing and interpreting meaning through communication on WhatsApp. The next section of this assignment will discuss the selected suitable literature reviews of the study.

7. LITERATURE REVIEW

7.1 WhatsApp as the chosen communication platform

The advancement of technological communication platforms affords users instant communication with each other. In a study by Muntean (2019:29), on 'Intimacy and Distance in the age of Technology', for Stockholm University, it was found that when looking into the overall number of technologically mediated interactions, WhatsApp and texting are at the top of the list. However, WhatsApp continues to be the first choice for nine out of the ten couples who participated in the study (Muntean, 2019:29-30).

For this study, the researcher chose WhatsApp as a choice of social media because as mentioned previously, it is said that 49% of the South African population utilise the application (Clement, 2019) (although not for the same reasons, these findings suggest that the population is familiar with the application). Due to this, the researcher was interested in discovering how the application and its various functions can assist people in sustaining their personal relationships. The following is an explanation of WhatsApp and its various features.

WhatsApp is a free service that lets users' message one another easily between mobile and desktop devices. The application was launched in 2009 and has become, according to Dove (2020), the world's most popular text and voice messaging application. The application has various functions that enable users to: initiate

conversations with individuals or groups of people, send voice note messages of any length, make voice calls and video calls to both local and international contacts, send photos, videos, audio clips, contacts and documents, share locations, send broadcast messages to over 20 contacts, broadcast status updates to contacts, view contacts status updates, use the camera to shoot videos and photos with the app, as well as block and unblock users (Dove, 2020).

7.2 Interpersonal Communication on WhatsApp

The researcher was looking to explore the effects that WhatsApp as a tool for communication has on interpersonal relations, particularly long-distance romantic relationships. In a study by Chan, Yong and Harmizi (2020) for SEGi University on 'Usage of WhatsApp and Interpersonal Communication Skills among private University Students' it states that WhatsApp has allowed people a platform of communication where they can conveniently chat online, which may help to enhance their interpersonal communication skills. This is because the application makes it easier and quicker to communicate with each other, which thus improves interpersonal communication (Chan *et al*, 2020:21).

However, in contrast to this, Chan *et al* (2020:21) also state that their findings show that when people depend on social networks, they will communicate less face-to-face, and this will affect human relationships. This is supported by findings in a study by Murray and Campbell (2015) for The Journal on Couple and Relationship Therapy on 'The Pleasures and Perils of Technology in Intimate Relationships' which states that technology-mediated forms of communications may likely lead to miscommunication as non-face-to-face communication provides limited information about social cues that help people understand the context of communication (Murray & Campbell, 2015). Social cues are an important factor in achieving successful interpersonal communication, therefore it can be understood why interpersonal communication can be weakened through platforms such as WhatsApp.

When reviewing the above-discussed arguments, the researcher acknowledges that messages can be lost in translation and thus interpersonal communication can be affected when mediated through technological platforms. However, the researcher sees how platforms such as WhatsApp can in fact strengthen interpersonal

communication because it can be said that people utilise these constantly, more particularly couples in long-distance relationships who then rely on platforms such as these to keep in touch.

7.3 WhatsApp as a communication tool in romantic long-distance relationships

In the research study by Gutzman (2018:8-9) for St Catherine University on 'The Utilisation of social Media in Strengthening Communication in Long Distance Relationships', it states that mobile phones are essential to everyday life. Smartphone users spend 85% of their time on smartphones. Mobile social media also encompasses the services of texting, voice calling, and video calling so that people can maintain closeness, despite geographical distances (Gutzman, 2018:8-9). Furthermore, text messaging between romantic partners can be effective due to the immediate response and closeness it creates (Exploring your mind, 2018).

Contrary to this, Gutzman (2018:9) also found that with trust and communication being the foundation of a relationship, integrating the use of technology can impact the dynamics of the groundwork associated with couples. To understand this better, some of the ways in which messaging services affect relationships have to be explored. An article by Exploring your mind (2019) on 'The WhatsApp couple: messaging in relationships' lists some of the negative aspects of WhatsApp on couples as:

1) Constant contact: at the beginning of a relationship, partners are constantly texting each other, however, it is likely that at some point it will be difficult to maintain this flow of communication, which might affect the close connection between partners. 2) Patience is tested: if one partner leaves the partners text message unanswered after reading it, it can arouse frustration and suspicion, and 3) Who are they online with: seeing your partner online with someone that isn't you can create a conflicting and an unpleasant situation (Exploring your mind, 2019).

The above arguments look at the positive and negative aspects of social media communication in romantic relationships. However, several studies suggest that in the context of long-distance relationships, the utilisation of WhatsApp serves as more of an advantage than a disadvantage. According to Sum (2018), applications like WhatsApp allow partners in long-distance relationships to see what the other is up to

and experience their life, even though they may not be there in person. It gives them an idea of how they are keeping up and it gives them something to talk about when they do see each other. The core aspect of this study was for the researcher to explore whether this sustains or harms emotional intimacy between couples in long-distance relationships. The question was: Can this be achieved through communication through the various discussed WhatsApp functions? The following is a discussion of this.

7.4 Intimacy

In attempt to understand the core assumption of the research question, that is: Emotional intimacy through the use of WhatsApp, the researcher had to consider the broad nature of the term Intimacy. To do this, the researcher focused on previous literature and how the scholars defined and differentiated between the different types of intimacies, and ultimately, those that focused on substantially defining the term 'emotional intimacy'.

In a study by Sevic, Ivankovic and Stulhofer (2015) for the Springer Science+ Media journal, on 'Emotional Intimacy: Assessing the roles of minority stress', it states that intimacy is often described as a relational process that encompasses affective aspects of personal bonds and includes feelings of understanding, personal validation, positive affect, closeness, commitment, mutual self-disclosure, caring, support, and trust. Intimacy shared with one's partner is considered to be a fundamental component of romantic relationships (Sevic *et al*, 2015).

Similarly, Muntean (2019) states that the kinds of interactions that were found to be associated with intimacy between partners include: revealing something personal or private, experiencing positive feelings about each other due to the interactions with each other and perceiving the interactions to have reflected the partners understanding of each other (Muntean, 2019). It is also stated that when trying to identify a complete definition, the word intimacy overlaps with concepts such as love, closeness, self-disclosure, support, and bonding. The scholars here conclude that intimacy is a natural concept and it is thus hard to attach to a singular definition (Muntean, 2019).

7.5 Emotional Intimacy

As established from the discussed definitions of intimacy, there are variations in defining intimacy, but some of the common defining factors include closeness, personal bonds, mutual self-disclosure, support, and trust. These concepts are the key defining factors of 'Emotional Intimacy'. According to Hastings (2020), it can be said that emotional intimacy is most generally related to emotional intelligence, communication, and feeling connected to a partner. Emotional intimacy's definition encompasses the degree of comfort, passion, positive communication, commitment, romance, a feeling of closeness to a partner, and sharing memories and common interests (Hastings, 2020).

To support this definition, Good Men Project (2016) states that 'Psychology Today describes emotional intimacy as closeness that requires a high level of transparency and openness. This involves a degree of vulnerability that can prove to be uncomfortable for others. However, once this is achieved, it can enhance emotional well-being' (The Good Men Project, 2016).

7.6 Achieving Emotional Intimacy in romantic long-distance relationships through technologically mediated platforms

Now that emotional intimacy has been defined, the researcher was interested to find out how this can be achieved in long-distance romantic relationships. In a study by Jurkane-Hobein (2015:235) for the Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences Journal, on 'Intimacy and Imagination in Long-Distance Relationships', it was found that a number of other studies show that long-distance relationship partners perceive their online communication as more qualitative. Because of the lack of non-verbal cues online, the long-distance partners fill the time with textual or verbal conversations when they communicate with each other (Jurkane-Hobein, 2015:235). They talk about their everyday lives, explore each other's lifeworld's, and develop emotional intimacy. To some extent, it is the absence of presence that allows for more emotional intimacy than would be possible if they spent more time together in the same place (Jurkane-Hobein, 2015:235).

As a way of creating emotional intimacy, Jurkane-Hobein (2015:235) also found that 'previously, letter writing could be seen as an example of creating intimacy as it was a way in which partners in long-distance relationships could disclose their feelings and dreams of a shared future. However, with times, letter writings have been replaced by text messaging as they are quicker and more convenient, but still affords partners to write about and share their emotions and personal matters' (Jurkane-Hobein, 2015:235). As WhatsApp offers affordable, instant, and real-time communication, texting through this platform can allow partners to maintain emotional intimacy.

Video calling is one of the features that WhatsApp offers and it can be utilised by long-distance couples. In a study by Kusisto (2015) for The University of Kentucky, on 'The Impact of Video Chatting on idealization and Dillusionment for Long Distance Dating Couples' it was found that participants acknowledged that video calls allowed them to feel closer to their partners than any other form of technology did. Participants also stated that 'sensitive discussions were easier had over video call because they could actually see each other and talk, instead of taking turns typing long paragraphs of thoughts' (Kusisto, 2015:23).

Furthermore, evidence shows that besides texting and video chatting, other forms of technological communication services are utilised by couples in long-distance relationships. In a study conducted by Hampton, Rawlings, Treger and Sprecher (2017:172) for various Universities, on 'Channels of Computer-Mediated Communication and satisfaction in Long-Distance Relationships' it is stated that couples who are geographically separated can satisfy their need for closeness via various mediums, including pictures or mementos associated with a partner. The transmission of photos may help to increase the visual presence between them (Hampton *et al*, 2017:172). Similarly, WhatsApp allows partners to share and receive pictures, making it possible then to gratify this need for closeness.

7.7 The disadvantages of WhatsApp in romantic long-distance relationships

Contrary to the previously discussed findings, a study by House, McGinty and Heim (2016:7) for Concordia University on 'Can You Handle the Distance? A look into Social Media & the Affects on Long-Distance Relationships' revealed that in some situations, individuals felt a lack of genuineness when their partner contacted them too many

times over text or voice calls. This was strenuous to the relationship because it showed either a lack of trust or some form of dependency that may not always be healthy for relationships (House *et al*, 2016:7). Furthermore, long-distance relationships experience strain because when being constantly connected with a partner, conversations tend to become mundane. These involve having the same talks regarding daily experiences and activities. Frustration over having the same conversation over and over again threatens the couple's stability and communication (House *et al*, 2016:8).

Similarly, Kusisto (2015:10) found that long-distance dating introduces a multitude of unknowns that are minimal or non-existent in geographically proximate relationships simply because a partner's daily life is largely invisible. Video chatting only shares a small segment of daily life, which the partner can edit to share only what they wish to share. Muntean (2019:41) states that 'The main frustration when it comes to online interactions and communication is the fact that things, meanings and emotions get lost in translation (unable to understand due to having been poorly translated). One of the participants confessed that texting is not the best way to communicate something profound because you miss a lot of parts of the conversation. Above all, when it comes to long-distance relationships and technology, the lack of touch tops the issues as one participant states, 'you can't even get a hug from the one you love after a really hard day' (Muntean, 2019:41). This shows how the fulfilment of emotional intimacy can be challenged.

When reviewing the various arguments, the researcher acknowledges the positive aspects as well as the possible shortcomings of emotional intimacy created through communications via technological platforms. However, based on the above arguments, one can agree that the utilisation of WhatsApp can assist in sustaining emotional intimacy in long-distance couples. This is because the platform gives partners various options that imitate physical proximity, such as video calling and voice note messaging. Indeed, this does not make up for the physical absence, but partners have a variety of ways of maintaining closeness.

As seen in the above various arguments, the impact and use of social media in relationships and for interpersonal communication have been widely examined by scholars. These different academic works will thus assist in strengthening this study

as they provided the researcher with reliable information that has been tested. However, based on the research done for the literature review section, the researcher noticed that there is insufficient work on the use of WhatsApp in particular as the primary tool for communication between partners in long-distance relationships. Therefore, this study attempts to contribute knowledge on WhatsApp and its various features as the main communication tool used by long-distance couples for intimacy sustaining.

8. CONCEPTUALISATION

8.1 WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a social media application that involves sending direct messages and sharing media that includes voice messages, photos, and videos. The application uses both data and WIFI. WhatsApp can be downloaded onto any internet-accessible mobile phone/device and it is considered to be generally safe and secure for users (Ali & Kootbodien, 2017:12-13). WhatsApp can be utilised by couples in long-distance relationships as a means of instant, affordable, and convenient tool for communicating.

8.2 Voice Messaging

WhatsApp voice messaging allows users to communicate instantly with contacts. It can be used to deliver important and time-sensitive information (WhatsApp FAQ, 2020). Voice notes can vivify communication, reclaiming an intimacy that is usually lost online (Luckhurst, 2018)

8.3 Video calling

Video calling allows users to video call their contacts using WhatsApp (WhatsApp FAQ, 2020). Couples that are geographically separated can utilise this feature to constantly see each other.

8.4 Text Messaging

Text messaging on WhatsApp allows users to send and receive messages from contacts (WhatsApp FAQ, 2020). This feature can be utilised by couples in long-distance relationships.

8.5 Long Distance Relationships

Long-distance relationships are those where partners expect to continue a close relationship but communication opportunities are restricted because of the geographical distance (PennState, 2020).

8.6 Emotional Intimacy

Emotional intimacy is when people in a romantic relationship achieve a degree of comfort, passion, positive communication, commitment, romance, a feeling of closeness to a partner, sharing memories and common interests, and often focuses on the communicating of feelings (Hastings, 2020). It is usually built over time, and couples often judge the quality of their relationship based on the depth of intimacy and the degree to which they feel close to their partners (GoodTherapy, 2020).

9. RESEARCH PARADIGM

For this study, the researcher chose the Interpretivist Paradigm. According to du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014:27), The main idea on which interpretivism rests is that people are primarily different from objects and can therefore not be studied in the same way that objects are studied. The reason for this is that unlike objects, human beings are constantly changing, and the environment they find themselves in during those changes influences them (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:27).

In contrast to Interpretivism is the Positivism paradigm, which seeks to discover and explain causal relationships, in attempt to predict and control nature and the behaviour of humans and animals alike (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:28). Positivism was not suitable as this is a qualitative study, which means it pursues the in-depth human

experience, which thus makes the interpretivist paradigm ideal as it proposes that in the Social Sciences, researchers should study and describe meaningful social action. The researcher explores the ontological position of interpretivism.

Ontology is the study of existence, reality, or being. The main questions that it seeks to discover are: what is reality? and how do we know what is real?. The ontological position of interpretivism states that 'reality is subjective and fluid, humans create reality through interactions' (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:23-34). The grounds of the ontological position of interpretivism relate to this study as this is a qualitative and exploratory study.

Through this study, the researcher hoped to understand how each participant constructs reality through their interactions with their partners on WhatsApp. The responses from the participants differed as each of them gave subjective accounts of their experiences. This is the main proposition of the Interpretivist paradigm, that 'human beings should be studied in their everyday natural environments and understood according to their subjective experiences' (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:27).

10. RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

The researcher used the qualitative research approach, which is about uncovering the deeper meaning and significance of human experiences (Chetty, 2016). The researcher aimed to get in-depth accounts of how the various features of the application assist long-distance couples with intimacy creation.

The researcher worked deductively. The purpose of a deductive approach is to gather themes, then to develop these themes around the research questions (Gabriel, 2020). The researcher used the exploratory research design. According to du Plooy-Cilliers *et al* (2014:75), the basic tenets of this research design is to obtain new insight, to identify key concepts, to prioritise social needs, to confirm assumptions, and to become familiar with unknown situations.

Social media can be an example of a topic that gives a rise to many exploratory research studies because it is a relatively new phenomenon, and has many dimensions that can still be explored. Similarly, WhatsApp can be regarded as a social

media phenomenon that can be further explored. It is just over a decade old, however, the application seems to be growing in popularity (WhatsApp.com, 2020).

The researcher conducted field research. According to du Plooy-Cilliers *et al* (2014:175), When conducting field research, it is assumed that the behaviours of the individuals that are being observed have a purpose and are an expansion of deeper feelings and believes. This is qualitative in nature. The researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This was a cross-sectional time frame study with no repeat (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014).

11. POPULATION

11.1 Units of analysis

The units of analysis are the entity that is being analysed in the study (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014). It is the 'what' and 'who', as well as the responses of the utilised instrument (du Plooy Cilliers *et al*, 2014). For this study, it was the interview responses of the males and females between 25 and 35 years of age, based in Midrand, who are involved in long-distance romantic relationships and utilise WhatsApp to sustain emotional intimacy with their partners.

11.2 Population Parameters

- Males and Females based in Midrand, South Africa.
- Between 25 and 35 years of age.
- Must be involved in a long-distance romantic relationship.
- Must use WhatsApp as a communication medium with their partner for the purpose of maintaining emotional intimacy.

11.3 Target and Accessible population

The target population is the group of people the researcher hopes to understand, the whole group (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014). There are currently no available numerical statistics for couples who are involved in long-distance romantic relationships in South Africa therefore, the researcher cannot provide a number for the target population. However, the interviews were conducted with a sample size of three accessible participants who met the parameters for this study.

12. SAMPLING

12.1 Non-Probability Sampling

The researcher used non-probability sampling. This type of sampling was ideal as not only was it difficult to determine the entire population of couples in long-distance relationships, it would have also been difficult to get access to them. Non-probability sampling allowed the researcher to select a sample from an accessible population. The sample still met the population parameters for this study however, the sample was selected using the researcher's judgment and the participants were therefore not randomly selected from a list (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:137).

12.2 Convenience Sampling

The researcher firstly used convenience sampling to conduct a pilot study as a means to determine if the questions in the interview schedule were clear and easy to comprehend. In convenience sampling, the sample consists purely of elements that the researcher knows or can easily get access to. The people that are likely to be convenient are the people that the researcher already knows and who meet the population parameters (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:142).

12.3 Snowball Sampling

The researcher then used snowball sampling to select the respondents for this study. Snowball sampling makes use of referrals to increase the sample size. One selected participant that meets the population parameters of the study provides suggestions of others who also fit the population parameters for the study. This method is often used when members of the population are difficult to locate because they are not listed in databases or records (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:143-144). Indeed, As discussed under target and accessible population, the number of people involved in long-distance romantic relationships in South Africa was difficult to access as it is not listed on the database. Therefore, in order to get a sample, the researcher asked the accessible participants for referrals that met the exact same parameters of the study.

13. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The researcher conducted three in-depth interviews with three participants. Interviews are a form of conversation, with the primary aim of obtaining information based on open-ended questions (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:188). In-depth interviews were chosen because when conducted correctly, they will assist in interpreting and understanding the meanings of the participants' responses. Interviews also allowed the researcher to ask participants to clarify the points they are making and to provide detailed explanations. The interviews were semi-structured, which is a form of interview that is open-ended and does not strictly follow a formalised list of questions (Doyle, 2019). The information obtained allowed the researcher to compare notes on the views and opinions of the participants in an organised manner (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:188).

The researcher needed to collect information on how the various features of WhatsApp utilised by couples in long-distance relationships helps sustain emotional intimacy. To do this, the researcher focused on themes gathered from the conducted literature reviews. These themes included:

- Emotional intimacy (closeness, mutual disclosure, and trust),
- WhatsApp (various features, frequency) and,
- Relationship quality (good or bad).

The interview questions were based on these themes. The following Table outlines the themes, research questions/objectives, and the interview questions for this study:

Table 13.1: An outline of the research questions, research objectives, themes, and interview questions for this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	MAIN THEMES	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
-In which ways does the utilisation of the various features of WhatsApp assist in creating emotional intimacy amongst heterosexual couples between the ages of 25-35 who are in long distance relationships? -Does the utilisation of WhatsApp texting, video call, voice call, voice note messaging, and status update features assist in creating emotional intimacy in long distance relationships?	-To gain understanding of how the use of WhatsApp assists in creating emotional intimacy in long distance romantic relationships. → -To evaluate texting, voice calling, video calling, voice note messaging, picture sharing, and status update as WhatsApp features that long-distance couples utilise. →	Emotional Intimacy -Closeness → -Mutual disclosure → -Trust → WhatsApp -Various feature → -Frequency →	1.How long have you been in a long-distance relationship for? 2.How would you define emotional intimacy? 3.How often do you communicate with your partner on WhatsApp? 4.Would you say that you and your partner have established emotional intimacy in your relationship through the use of the various WhatsApp features despite the geographical distance? (follow up question to be asked) 5.How often do you and your partner use the video call and voice call features on WhatsApp? 6.How often do you and your partner share picture's and videos on WhatsApp? 7.Where lengthy explanations are involved, do you prefer to send your partner a voice note or to text paragraphs of thoughts on WhatsApp? (follow up question to be asked) 8.Do you and your partner use the WhatsApp status update feature to express certain aspects of your relationships with your contacts?
	-To explore the advantages and disadvantages of the utilisation of WhatsApp in long distance romantic relationships. → -To investigate whether the success of the communication in long-distance romantic relationships can be linked to utilising WhatsApp.	Relationship Quality -Good → -Bad →	9.Does using any of these WhatsApp features make you feel closer to your partner? (follow up question to be asked) 10.Are you comfortable with disclosing sensitive feelings, information, or details about yourself to your partner over WhatsApp? 11.Do you trust your partner with the information you share with them over WhatsApp? 12.Which would you say are some of the positive and negative aspects of utilising WhatsApp in your long-distance relationship? 13.Do you think that communicating on WhatsApp has in any way improved the quality of your long-distance relationship?

Table 13.1 presents the research questions, research objectives, main themes and interview questions. The table is structured in a way that shows how the research questions are linked to the research objectives. With the use of arrows, it is indicated from which research objective each main theme and its sub-themes were extracted. It also shows how ultimately each interview question was derived from particular themes/subthemes. The purpose of the table is to illustrate how the research question, research question, main themes and interview questions are all linked together.

To begin with the process, the researcher asked for permission from selected participants to participate in the study. Upon their agreeing, the researcher then sent the participant's consent forms that: 1. Explained the nature of the research and outlined clearly what is required of the participants, 2. Consent for interviews, and 3. Consent for the audio/video recording. These consent forms are attached at the end of the document, see Appendix F. The participants were required to sign these forms. This communication was done through email, and upon receiving the signed forms, the researcher then sent follow up emails to the participants to arrange the dates that the interviews would be conducted.

The researcher conducted all three interviews between the 9th and the 13th of July 2020 at varying times due to the participant's individual schedules. Due to the Covid19 restrictions, the researcher did not make any physical contact with the participants but rather conducted the interviews through Zoom. The researcher had ensured that participants have the Zoom application for the purpose of this study. Zoom is a web-based conferencing tool that allows users to meet online, with or without video. Zoom users can choose to record sessions, collaborate on projects, and share one another's screens (Keanu, 2020). To ensure privacy for each interview session, the researcher used the privacy features that Zoom offers, particularly locking meetings (when a meeting is locked, no other participant can join), enabling waiting room (participants are placed in a virtual waiting room until admitted by the host) and prevented sharing screen (turning this option off prevents participants other than the host from sharing the screen) (Cornwell University, 2020).

On the agreed-upon dates and times by the researcher and the participants, the researcher began preparing for the interview fifteen minutes earlier. This was to

ensure that all the interview questions were correct and that the internet connection was strong. For each interview, Once the participant was online, the researcher began by greeting, then introduced herself to the participant, explained the research topic, the reason for conducting the research, and how it will benefit society. The participant's rights were explained to them, and the researcher reminded them that they were allowed to discontinue the interview if at any time they felt uncomfortable. Thereafter, the researcher proceeded to ask the 13 interview questions with the necessary follow up questions.

The researcher recorded each interview session using the screen recording option that Zoom provides, for transcription later on. Not being able to conduct interviews face to face was a limitation for this study as this was a qualitative study and thus observation was essential. However, although the interviews were conducted over Zoom, the researcher was still able to observe the participant's expressions. Therefore, during the interview process, the researcher made extensive handwritten notes on the participant's non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and eye contact. This information was important for the study as part of getting in-depth insight into the human experience of the research phenomena is taking note of how the participants react to the questions. The researcher, therefore, used the full range of responses received from participants, both recorded and handwritten, this could help strengthen the validity of the study.

At the end of each interview, the researcher thanked the participants for their time and participation, then proceeded to save the recordings and end the session. Each interview lasted for an average of between ten to twelve minutes. The respondents showed a complete understanding of the questions and thus answered as straight forward as possible. The researcher later transcribed the recorded interviews, saved them as Microsoft Word files, then uploaded the transcriptions into a transcribing software called QDA Miner Lite, which is used to analyse qualitative and mixed methods data (Provalis Research, 2020). The following is a discussion of the data analysis method.

14. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

The researcher was conducting a qualitative study, therefore qualitative data analysis procedures were used. Through qualitative data analysis and interpretation, data is transformed into findings (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al* 2014:229). The researcher used textual analyses. According to du Plooy-Cilliers *et al* (2014:230), when qualitative data is analysed, whether collected through interviews, observations, or field notes, it is referred to as analysing text. Once the data had been collected, recorded, and saved on Zoom, the researcher typed out the respondent's answers and saved them as Microsoft Word documents. These documents were then uploaded onto QDA Miner Lite. The researcher used the following eight steps required in the process of qualitative analysis:

1. Preparing the data: This first step entails organising and converting or transcribing the new raw data that has been collected into written text before analysing it. This includes data collected from interviews and recordings (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:236).

The researcher transcribed the recordings from the three interviews. Each question and each response were transcribed. The interviews were transcribed separately, with a unique file name for each one. The file names are in a form of codes, namely LDRR1, LDRR2 and LDRR3 (Long-Distance Relationship Respondent 1-3), this is because the participants were promised anonymity. Every element of the recordings was transcribed, including every sound the respondents make (laughs, sighs). This should help increase the trustworthiness of the study.

As a tool to help analyse the data, the researcher used memoing. Through writing memos, the researcher made reflective notes on some of the information picked up during the transcription of the interview recordings. Any questions or comments that may arise about any of the answers will go into the researcher's memoirs to help make sense of them. The memo notes will also be considered as data to be analysed; this will help increase the trustworthiness of the study.

2. Defining the coding unit to be analysed: This step refers to the basic coding unit or unit of text that the researcher intends to use. This step is crucial as here, the researcher has to indicate whether they are going to use individual words, phrases, symbols, paragraphs, or sentences as coding units (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:236). The researcher proceeded to define the themes that were derived from the literature review developed under data collection. These include:
 - Emotional intimacy (closeness, mutual disclosure, trust)
 - WhatsApp (various features, frequency)
 - Relationship quality (good/bad)
3. Developing categories and coding schemes: This step involves grouping related coding units together to form categories of codes. An important aspect of the coding is that the researcher should define every code, theme, and category clearly and systematically to allow the researcher to apply it to the text as consistently as possible (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:238)
4. Testing the coding schemes in a simple text: This step involves testing the clarity and consistency of the category definitions on a sample of the data (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:240). Before transcribing the actual responses, the researcher did a test run on QDA Miner Lite. This was to ensure that there was a clear understanding of how to use the software in order to prevent possible mistakes on the transcribing of the actual interview recordings.
5. Coding the text: This refers to the careful scrutiny of the data and taking note of all the irrelevant and meaningful sections and items (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:240). The researcher used line by line coding, which is a form of microanalysis and means that the researcher literally reads through parts of the text line by line while marking certain words and phrases that are relevant.
6. Assessing the coding consistency: Once the coding has been completed, it is vital that the researcher re-checks the consistency with which the coding was conducted (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:242). After coding the text using QDA Miner Lite, the researcher opened the saved files and went through the text

again to ensure that all the themes have been highlighted. This was to make certain that there were no mistakes and the results will be accurate.

7. Drawing conclusions (interpreting the data): This step involves the interpretation of the themes or categories identified. At this point in the process, the researcher has to rely on his/her ability to augment the analysis (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:242). After the researcher had analysed the transcriptions and identified the subthemes, the analysis function of QDA miner Lite was activated to determine which main or subthemes were mentioned the most to least overall by all three respondents (LDRR1 – LDRR3). By doing this, conclusions are drawn as to which themes and subthemes are most to least important.
8. Reporting on the findings: This step requires that the researcher reports on the processes applied in the coding, analysis, and interpretation as truthfully and completely as possible (du Ploy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:243). The researcher presents the findings in tables for each respondent (see Presentation of findings section).

15. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Because this is a qualitative study, it was important that the researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the study, to do so, the credibility, transferability, and the dependability of the study have to be proved.

Credibility refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interpreted the data that was provided by the participants (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:258). The researcher used QDA Miner Lite, which is a software that is made for analysing qualitative data. The program assisted by giving a list from most popular to least popular themes, thus ensuring that the researcher was able to make accurate interpretations of the results.

Furthermore, the researcher has included the interview schedule, which is the instrument used to obtain the data, and which is detailed and linked to the research

questions. Although the snowballing sampling method was used, the researcher personally knows one of the participants and trusted them to give referrals of other people who met the required parameters. This was successful as the overall participants met the parameters for this study

Transferability is the ability of the findings to be applied to similar situations and delivering similar results (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:258-259). The researcher ensured transferability by seeing that the research question, research objectives, main and sub-themes, as well as the interview questions are consistent with the research topic as seen in Table 13.1. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the chosen previous literature links directly to the research topic as well.

Dependability refers to the quality of the process of integration that takes place between the data collection method, data analysis, and the theory generated from the data (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:259). The researcher ensured that there is a constant link between the data collection and data analysis methods. This was done by ensuring that the discussed main and sub-themes were identified by QDA Miner Lite when the software was activated. The following section is a presentation of the findings in table format, from table 16.1 to 16.4.

16. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Table 16.1: Sub-themes mentioned most to least by LDRR 1

Main themes	Sub-themes	Sub-themes mentioned most to least by LDRR 1
Emotional Intimacy	Mutual self-disclosure	6
Emotional Intimacy	closeness	4
Emotional Intimacy	trust	4
WhatsApp	various features	6
WhatsApp	frequency	5
Relationship quality	good	6
Relationship quality	bad	2

Table 16.1 shows the number of times that each sub-theme was mentioned by respondent 1, LDRR1. These are presented from:

- The most mentioned sub-themes: Emotional Intimacy: mutual disclosure, closeness, and trust.
- Second most mentioned sub-themes: WhatsApp-various features and frequency.
- Least mentioned sub-themes: Relationship quality – good and bad.

Table 16.2: Sub-themes mentioned most to least by LDRR 2

Main themes	Sub-themes	Sub-themes mentioned most to least by LDRR 2
Emotional Intimacy	closeness	12
Emotional Intimacy	mutual disclosure	9
Emotional Intimacy	trust	3
WhatsApp	various features	16
WhatsApp	frequency	8
Relationship quality	good	10
Relationship quality	bad	1

Table 16.2 shows the number of times that each sub-theme was mentioned by respondent 2, LDRR 2. These are presented from:

- The most mentioned sub-themes: Emotional Intimacy: closeness, mutual disclosure, and trust.
- Second most mentioned sub-themes: WhatsApp-various features and frequency
- Least mentioned sub-themes: Relationship quality – good and bad.

Table 16.3: Sub-themes mentioned most to least by LDRR 3

Main themes	Sub-themes	Sub-themes mentioned most to least by LDRR 3
Emotional Intimacy	closeness	3
Emotional Intimacy	mutual disclosure	2
Emotional Intimacy	trust	2
WhatsApp	various features	7
WhatsApp	frequency	6
Relationship quality	good	3
Relationship quality	bad	1

Table 16.3 shows the number of times that each sub-theme was mentioned by respondent 3, LDRR 3. These are presented from:

- The most mentioned sub-themes: Emotional Intimacy: closeness, mutual disclosure, and trust
- Second most mentioned sub-themes: WhatsApp-various features and frequency
- Least mentioned sub-themes: Relationship quality – good and bad.

Table 16.4: Overall sub-themes mentioned most to least by LDRR 1- LDRR 3

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Sub-themes mentioned most to least by LDRR 1- LDRR 3
Emotional Intimacy	closeness	19
Emotional Intimacy	mutual disclosure	17
Emotional Intimacy	trust	9
WhatsApp	various features	29
WhatsApp	frequency	19
Relationship quality	good	19
Relationship quality	bad	4

Table 16.4 shows the overall combined number of times each sub-theme was mentioned by all three participants, LDRR1, LDRR2 and LDRR 3. These are presented from:

- The most mentioned sub-themes: Emotional Intimacy: closeness, mutual disclosure, and trust
- Second most mentioned sub-themes: WhatsApp-various features and frequency
- Least mentioned sub-themes: Relationship quality – good and bad.

All these main themes and sub-themes were gathered from the research questions and research objectives for this study, as seen in Table 13.1 under the Data Collection section. The following is an interpretation of these results.

17.INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The study explored how the utilisation of WhatsApp and its various features assists with sustaining emotional intimacy in long-distance romantic relationships. Each participant had a unique perspective of their experience with WhatsApp in their relationships, however, there were some consistencies and similarities between the responses of the three participants. As seen in Table 13.1 in the data collection methods section, this study showed the following main themes together with their sub-themes; Emotional Intimacy (closeness, mutual disclosure, trust), WhatsApp (various features, frequency) and Relationship Quality (good, bad). The following is a discussion of these main themes from the most to the least mentioned, with their respected sub-themes in the same order.

17.1 WhatsApp

Under [WhatsApp](#) as a main theme, the subtheme mentioned the most by participants was [various features](#) followed by [frequency](#). As seen from tables 16.1 to 16.3 under the presentation of findings section, all three participants mentioned video calling, voice calling, and voice audio recordings as the most important features which they utilise on [WhatsApp](#) to sustain emotional intimacy in their long-distance relationship. Some of the features mentioned in the interview questions included video calling, voice calling, and voice audio recordings. The respondents made mention of these features, as seen in the following quotes by respondents 1 and 3:

LD RR 1: *yeah Its actually everything uhm at times you can get a bit tied up so you can't necessarily text, uhm and that's why [inaudible] the voice note feature, uhm and it is, we make it, in my relationship its mandatory that you know, we have uhm, you know video calls just to see each other's face you know just to kind of replace the geographical you know, the physical aspect of the relationship as much as possible*

LDRR 3: *Because with, you know with.... you can actually express yourself more with the voice recording unlike texting eish [expression], you get frustrated while you texting or you can't actually say much when texting rather than voice recording or audio calling*

The sub-theme 'frequency' was mentioned the least compared to the various features, however, it is as equally important to note as the high number of the use of the various features relates to the frequency in which WhatsApp (as the main theme) is utilised generally by the participants. The following are quotes from respondents 1 and 3:

LDRR 3: *uhm, everyday really*

LDRR 1: *uhm, we communicate every day, every day yeah*

The two respondents state that they use WhatsApp to communicate with their partners every day, and as seen under the various features sub-theme, respondents also state that they utilise more than just one feature of the application for communication in their long-distance relationship. These suggest that WhatsApp can be said to be an effective channel of communication amongst geographically separated romantic partners. These results are consistent with findings by Gutzman (2018:9) Which states that smartphone users spend 85% of their time on their smartphones in apps. Mobile application use on-the-go has become essential to everyday life. Individuals can keep in touch with close ties and communicate on a constant basis. Mobile social media also encompass the service of texting, voice calling, and video calling so that people can maintain closeness despite far geographical distance. The following is the interpretation of results for Emotional Intimacy, which was mentioned the most after WhatsApp.

17.2 Emotional Intimacy

Under **emotional intimacy** as a main theme, the overall sub-theme mentioned the most by participants was **closeness**, followed by **mutual disclosure** and then **trust** (as seen in table 16.4 under the presentation of results sections). When asked to define **emotional intimacy**, participants made reference to closeness as a primary defining factor of the term, this can be seen in the following quotes by respondents 1 and 2:

LDRR 1: *uhm, I feel like emotional intimacy is heart to heart, uhm, those are the conversations that just bring, you know, uhm, the heart together, you know it's just, you get an understanding of each other, you get an understanding of how each other, you know how each party feels, you know, and what makes each party tick, you know you get to understand if they are sad, if they are happy, I think that's emotional you know, intimacy or what it entails*

LDRR 2: *Ooh that is a very difficult question [laughs].... uhm, emotional intimacy I think is being in tune with your partners emotions and feelings and you know, being able to relate to them and I suppose being.... I always confuse the two but I suppose being empathetic or is it sympathetic towards whatever it is they are going through, well, that's how I define it, just being in tune with yeah, essentially your partners emotions*

The sub-theme **mutual disclosure** came through second-most in the responses for defining **emotional intimacy**. Based on the previous quotes by respondents 1 and 2, it can be said that **closeness** is built from the partner's ability to **mutually disclose** to each other. Furthermore, when asked if they are comfortable with disclosing sensitive information to their partners over WhatsApp, respondents 1 and 2 responded with the following quotes:

LDRR 1: *Uhm I feel that in a relationship trust is needed, uhm, and I trust my girlfriend, so, and we have built that emotional intimacy you know, which we are speaking about right now, I feel that this emotional intimacy is also built in terms of me being able to trust someone with my emotions, otherwise there is no intimacy in that, so uhm, yeah no definitely I don't mind sharing sensitive information with my girlfriend on WhatsApp because I know that because of the emotional intimacy that we have been able to build with each other on WhatsApp and off WhatsApp you know, just makes it easier for us to trust each other.*

LDRR 2: *uhm yea definitely, I've always been comfortable with doing it in person, as I said before you know video calls are quite intimate so it hasn't really been a big shift and I suppose she makes it very easy because she's able to I guess tell when I'm uhm you know, not a hundred percent, so she'll dig it out of me, same thing with her you know I can tell within thirty seconds of you know, a conversation started that she's kind of uhm, maybe not in a good mood or you know things aren't okay, so I think, I think what has helped is that we already had that kind of relationship before you know, going long distance, so its never felt like a challenge to be honest.*

When evaluating these responses, the researcher noted that when participants responded to questions relating to **emotional intimacy**, there was an overlap of all the themes in one response. Similarly, when **emotional intimacy** was defined under the literature review section, a study by Muntean (2019) states that when trying to identify a complete definition, the word intimacy overlaps with concepts such as **closeness** and **self-disclosure**, therefore, the scholars here concluded that intimacy is a natural concept and it is hard to attach a singular concept. However, the previously two discussed subthemes of **emotional intimacy** received the most reference compared to the sub-theme '**trust**', as seen in table 16.4 in the results section. When asked whether they trusted their partners with the information they shared on WhatsApp, respondents 1 and 3 responded with the following quotes:

LDRR 1: *Yes, I do yeah*

LDRR 3: *[Nods] yeah*

It can, therefore, be assumed that **trust** is indeed an important aspect in defining **emotional intimacy**, however, based on the participant's responses, the other subthemes seemed to be better defining factors. Similarly, as seen in the literature review section, Good Men Project (2016) states that 'Psychology Today describes **emotional intimacy** as **closeness** that requires a high level of transparency and openness. This involves a degree of vulnerability that can prove to be uncomfortable to others. Perhaps trust came in third as the other aspects are required to be achieved first before trust can truly be formed between partners. The following is an interpretation of Relationship quality, which is the third main theme for this study.

17.3 Relationship Quality

‘Good’ and ‘bad’ were chosen as sub-themes for this main theme and the idea of a generally good relationship quality was mentioned the most by the respondents. When asked whether communicating on WhatsApp had in any way improved the quality of their long-distance relationships, respondents 1 and 2 responded with the following quotes:

LDRR 1: *Yes, no definitely, uhm I feel that without WhatsApp I don't think that I would be in a long-distance relationship*

LDRR 2: *Uhm, I think it has, no definitely it has, I think it has allowed us to like I guess build uhm, on the foundation that we've set here at home in Joburg as I said, we've always had an open relationship, we were able to share whatever it is that we going through and we would communicate freely, uhm, so it just helped to I suppose further enhance what we had built already, uhm, you know I sense that if it wasn't for some of the functionality of the app, like the video call function especially, uhm I'm a huge fan of that so I'll always make reference to it, if it wasn't for that I sense you know there would have been a regression of sorts.....*

With regards to measuring relationship quality based on communication via WhatsApp, the findings of this study are consistent with findings by Sum (2018), which found that ‘Applications like WhatsApp allow partners in long-distance relationships to see what the other is up to and experience their life, even though they may not be there in person. It gives them an idea of how they are keeping up and it gives them something to talk about when they do see each other’. This is an important observation to consider as both respondents in the previous quotes stated that they believe their long-distance relationships would have either taken strain or would not have existed if it wasn't of the convenience of WhatsApp. The following is an application of findings to the chosen theory for this study

17.4 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism was chosen as a suitable theory for this study as the core aspect of the theory is meaning within human interactionism. As discussed, the purpose of the study was to gain understanding of the role of WhatsApp's various features in sustaining emotional intimacy in long-distance relationships. In this context

of communication, the meaning is derived from tone as the physical presence is absent. Similarly, one of the respondents stated that:

...she's able to I guess tell when I'm uhm you know, not a hundred percent, so she'll dig it out of me, same thing with her you know I can tell within thirty seconds of you know, a conversation started that she's kind of uhm, maybe not in a good mood or you know things aren't okay....

This response is consistent with symbolic interactionist's first and fourth tenets, that is: Individuals act based on the meaning's objects have for them: and Meanings are continually created and recreated through interpreting processes during interactions with others. It can, therefore, be deduced that the respondent is able to predict their partner's mood based on what the meaning of the tone they received means to them. The following is an application of the findings to the research objectives and research questions.

18. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED

For this study, four research objectives were set. The following is a discussion of to what extend each objective was addressed:

- **Objective 1-** To gain understanding of how the use of WhatsApp assists in sustaining emotional intimacy in long-distance romantic relationships

When asked whether the respondents think that they and their partner have established emotional intimacy in their long-distance relationship through the use of WhatsApp and its various features, all three respondents said yes. As such, the sub-themes of emotional intimacy were the most mentioned themes, it can thus be said that this objective has been addressed.

- **Objective 2-** To evaluate texting, voice calling, video calling, voice note messaging, picture sharing, and status update as WhatsApp features that long-distance couples utilise.

When asked about the features they preferred to use on WhatsApp to communicate with their partners, two out of three respondents said they prefer the voice recording feature, two out of three said they used the video calling feature every day, two out of

three said they share pictures and videos every day, and all three said that they didn't use the voice call feature as often as they did the other features. When evaluating the frequency in which the respondents said they use the various features of WhatsApp, the second objective of this study has indeed been addressed and related to the sub-themes.

- **Objective 3-** To explore the advantages and disadvantages of the utilisation of WhatsApp in long-distance romantic relationships.

When asked about what they think are the positive and negative aspects of having WhatsApp as a communication platform in their long-distance relationship, all three respondents stated that there were more positives than there were negatives, with two out of three stating that the only negative aspect was the security risks that come with mobile applications. As such, objective 3 has been addressed.

- **Objective 4-** To investigate whether the success of long-distance romantic relationships can be linked to utilising WhatsApp.

When assessing relationship quality (as a main theme) between partners in long-distance relationships, all three respondents stated that communicating on WhatsApp has contributed to the good quality of their relationship. Two out of the three respondents stated that without the convenience of WhatsApp, they are certain that their long-distance relationships would have taken strain. It can, therefore, be said that objective 4 has been addressed.

- **Application to the Research Questions**

With the discussion above showing how each research objective set for this study has been addressed, it can be deduced that the research questions: **In which ways does the utilisation of the various features of WhatsApp assist in sustaining emotional intimacy amongst heterosexual couples between the ages of 25-35 who are in long-distance relationships?** and **Does the utilisation of WhatsApp texting, video call, voice call, voice note messaging, and status update features**

assist in creating emotional intimacy in long-distance relationships? have been answered

19. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND HEURISTIC VALUE

19.1 Ethical issue

s related to the participants and the researcher

- Informed consent

In a research study, participants should be allowed to give their consent. They should be made to understand clearly what is required from them during their participation, whether and how their identities will be protected, and how the results will be used. (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:364).

A participation consent form which states clearly what the study is about, what would be asked from the participants, as well as an overview of the participant's rights concerning participating in the research, was sent to each participant to agree and consent. The researcher also sent participants consent forms for interviews and audio and video recordings. After each participant had signed and sent back the forms, the researcher proceeded with the interviews (see Appendix F).

- Collecting data from participants

The participant's physical and psychological comfort needs to be prioritised when collecting data (du Plooy Cilliers *et al*, 2014:264). Therefore, the researcher informed the participants that their identities would be protected at all costs and that the interviews would be password protected, as such, the researcher has adhered to this throughout the interpretations of findings section, and all other sections of this study. furthermore, the researcher ensured that there were no third parties involved in the interview process and that the interview questions were phrased in a simple to understand way, to avoid any confusion.

- Dealing with sensitive information

During some research studies, sensitive information can be revealed about participants. As an ethical researcher, one has to protect this information as a matter of principle, and should not allow their personal feelings to interfere (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:265). As mentioned previously, the researcher has ensured the anonymity of each participant and has remained completely unbiased when reporting the findings. The QDA Miner Lite software assisted with this.

- Avoiding harm

The researcher ensured not to place any participant in a position that causes any harm, for example; not forcing them to keep speaking when discomfort was detected.

- Ethical clearance

The researcher waited to receive ethical clearance from the IIE before conducting the interviews. The researcher's supervisor sent the ethical clearance letter on 3 July 2020, then the researcher began conducting the interviews from 9 July 2020 up until 13 July 2020. Furthermore, the researcher completed and signed an ethical checklist and has thus adhered to the checklist (see Appendix C).

- Falsifying information

This is when researchers deliberately fabricate or change data (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:269-270). The researcher ensures that all the data that is presented in the findings section is accurate and unchanged. To further ensure trustworthiness, the researcher used the QDA Miner Lite software.

- Distorting results

When one distorts results, they deliberately over emphasising certain aspects over others of equal significance, and quote numbers out of context, which might distort interpretation (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:270). The use of the QDA Miner Lite software ensures that no findings were distorted in this study.

- Bias

Bias in research is the desire or expectation of achieving a particular result. This may influence the research results in a sense of how and where the researcher collects the data and interprets it (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*, 2014:271). In order to produce accurate

research, the researcher ensured that she was aware of her personal bias, then removed it completely.

19.2 Limitations

- Covid19

Due to the current global pandemic, COVID19, South Africa was put on a nationwide lockdown from the 26th of March 2020. This resulted in the Varsity College Waterfall campus closing down for students, and lectures were put on hold. This has had a great effect on the study as it meant that the researcher could not physically meet with her supervisor for detailed lectures and discussions on important aspects of the research proposal/study. However, online sessions were arranged and communication was still enabled.

In light of the regulations in place by the government and by the IIE, the researcher could not physically meet with the participants to conduct interviews and had to use an online platform (Zoom) to conduct the interviews. Conducting an in-depth interview online had the following shortcomings: Connection problems which sometimes caused a delay in the interview process, data costs for the participants which lead to one expressing that they had to make it 'quick', a loss or distortion of audio which required the researcher to repeat questions and also resulted in 'inaudible' notes in the transcriptions and lastly, in some instances, some respondents seemed to be getting distracted and not focusing their attention on the camera.

Furthermore, the nature of qualitative data collection requires that the researcher takes note of external physiological reactions of the participants, such as body language. This was difficult to pick up over technological mediated communication platforms and thus interfered with the 'in-depth' aspect of the interviews. However, the researcher relied on non-verbal cues such as facial expressions as the participant's faces were visible.

- Small sample size

Due to the size of the sample and the population parameters, the findings of the study cannot be generalised to a larger population. This should be considered for future

research as perhaps if the same or similar study is conducted with a larger number of respondents, there could be more variations in the responses

- Number of participants

The researcher was permitted to conduct interviews with only three participants with a limited number of questions in the interview schedule in order to prevent interviewee fatigue. Therefore, this study lacks in range and variety. The lack of variety can also be seen in the responses as each of the respondents interviewed have successfully managed to maintain a long-distance relationship, and may have therefore been partial to stating that WhatsApp was the reason for the success. This may have led to bias in the findings surrounding the positive aspects of WhatsApp in long-distance relationships. Had the partners not been able to establish closeness as a primary defining factor of emotional intimacy in their relationships through WhatsApp, perhaps it might have shifted the findings, themes and interpretations of this study.

19.3 Heuristic value

Where interpersonal relationships are involved, particularly long-distance romantic relationships, this study highlights how technology can be beneficial to people to help them sustain emotional intimacy. Despite the previously discussed disadvantages of social media in romantic relationships, platforms such as WhatsApp appear to aid romantic relationships as they, according to the findings of this study and the discussed literature, somewhat reduce loneliness, increase closeness, and help to maintain constant communication in instances where physical presence is absent. Knowing the benefits of social media platforms can be helpful when seeking out the advantages of social media.

Furthermore, this study and additional research on similar research topics will be beneficial in addressing the options of communication that couples in long-distance relationships have, and the ways in which they can establish emotional intimacy despite the geographic separation. Further knowledge on this topic could also be beneficial to future scholars or practitioners who engage with long-distance couples

and want to offer insight on how they can achieve emotional intimacy in their relationships.

This study could also be helpful to couples who are currently involved in long-distance relationships or those who are considering getting involved in one, by helping them determine whether they would possibly find social media, particularly WhatsApp as an effective communication channel in their relationship. It will also give them insight into other people's experiences with WhatsApp in their long-distance relationships. Although the findings of this study cannot be generalised, they do offer knowledge on understanding how the utilisation of WhatsApp contributes to sustaining emotional intimacy between geographically separated couples.

19. CONCLUSION

Romantic relationships generally require work and efficient communication, more so long distance relationships because couples here rely on constant communication to fill the geographical gap. Having one platform that offers a variety of ways to keep in touch makes it easier for couples to be in constant communication. As such, Whatsapp proved to be highly favoured by all the participants of the study, with two even stating that they don't believe that their long distance relationship would have subsisted without the application.

One of the most noticable findings of this study was the frequency in which the participants use the application to communicate with their partners. All three participants stated that whatsapp was the primary source of communication in their relationships and is thus utilised everyday. Participants stated that indeed communicating with their partners everyday helped them feel closer to them as they get to constantly share and communicate about their daily activities.

This finding relates to findings by Sum (2018) which states that 'applications like WhatsApp allow partners in long-distance relationships to see what the other is up to and experience their life, even though they may not be there in person'. Therefore, it can be said that the frequency in which participants utilise the various features of WhatsApp contributes to the level of emotional intimacy achieved by them in their long-distance relationships.

Furthermore, where sustaining emotional intimacy is involved, participants stated that the video call and voice audio recording features allowed them to achieve this, as they are able to express themselves efficiently. According to the findings of this study, participants favoured the video calling option as it allowed them to observe their partners facial expressions where serious conversations were involved, and they also favoured the voice audio recording option because it allowed them to easily express themselves where lengthy explanations or conversations are involved.

By exploring the findings of this study, it is important to observe that the themes of this study are intertwined. The frequency in which the couples utilise the various features of WhatsApp to mutually self-disclose allows them to build trust and to become closer, maintaining and strengthening the emotional intimacy between them, thus leading to satisfaction with regards to their relationship quality. This observation answers the study's research questions and the research objectives.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with the findings in the various evaluated previous literature on technologically mediated communication and satisfaction in long distance relationships and more importantly, they also expand on how geographically separated couples establish emotional intimacy through the use of the various features of whatsapp. The findings also proved to be consistent with the theory chosen for this study (Symbolic Interactionism), linking the responses to the basic tenets of the theory.

Furthermore, this study shows a variety of strengths due to its qualitative nature and the chosen qualitative analysis procedures. This is because qualitative research gives a study an expansive and personalized understanding of each participants views and experiences. This not only provides sufficient insight to the research, but it allows further opportunities for future exploration into studies that are similar to this one in nature.

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APPENDIX A: Final Research Report Summary Document

Research Purpose/objectives	Primary Research Question	Research rationale	Seminal Authors/Sources	Literature Review-Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method	Ethics	Anticipated Findings	Reference
-To gain understanding of how the use of WhatsApp assists in creating emotional intimacy in long distance relationships -To evaluate the pros and cons of WhatsApp in long distance relationships -To explore how South African couples use the various features of WhatsApp to create emotional intimacy	In which way does the utilisation of WhatsApp help create emotional intimacy in long distance relationships? To evaluate texting, voice calling, video calling, voice note messaging, picture sharing, and status update as WhatsApp features that long distance couples utilize	-To add onto an existing body of knowledge on the role of WhatsApp in creating emotional intimacy in long distance relationships	Du Plooy –Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014).	Theme 1: channels of computer mediated communication and satisfaction in long distance relationships Theme 2: Imagining the absent partner-intimacy and imagination in long distance relationships Theme 3: The impact of video chatting on idealization and disillusionment. Theme 4: Intimacy and long distance in the age of technology. Theme 5: Emotional intimacy: assessing the roles of minority stress.	Paradigm Interpretivist Epistemology: -To educate Ontology: -Reality is a combination of both social construction and laws. Axiology: -Research should contribute to building knowledge	Qualitative research method Population Population Parameters: -Males and females based in Midrand South Africa -between ages 25-35 -involved in long distance romantic relationship -utilise WhatsApp	- in-depth interviews -semi-structured -The zoom interviews were recorded and later transcribed.	The researcher ensured that: -She received informed consent from the participants -She was not biased -No form of harm was caused to participants -No information was falsified	-Whether WhatsApp messenger assists in sustaining long distance relationships -The pros and cons of utilising WhatsApp in long distance relationships	Du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C and Bezuidenhout, RM. 2014. <i>Research Matters</i>. Cape Town. Juta.
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/Hypotheses/Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling	Data Analysis Method	Limitations	Anticipated Contribution	
A lack of frequent or sufficient communication between partners in long distance relationships can make the relationship even harder to maintain.	In which ways does the utilisation of the various features of WhatsApp assist in creating emotional intimacy between heterosexual couples between 25-35 years of age, involved in long distance relationships	WhatsApp Video calling Voice messaging Text messaging Emotional Intimacy Long Distance Relationship	Symbolic Interactionism			Non-probability sampling Convenience sampling Snowball sampling	-QDA Miner Lite Qualitative data analysis methods	-COVID19 -Number of target population cannot be accessed -Findings are limited to the specific age range. -Finding are limited to a small sample size.	-To add on the body of knowledge regarding social media and its role in sustaining relationships through strengthening communication.	

APPENDIX B: Interview Schedule

1. How long have you been in a long-distance relationship for?
2. How would you define emotional intimacy?
3. How often do you communicate with your partner on WhatsApp?
4. Would you say that you and your partner have established emotional intimacy in your relationship through the use of the various WhatsApp features despite the geographical distance? (follow up question to be asked)
5. How often do you and your partner use the video call and voice call features on WhatsApp?
6. How often do you and your partner share picture's and videos on WhatsApp?
7. Where lengthy explanations are involved, do you prefer to send your partner a voice note or to text paragraphs of thoughts on WhatsApp? (follow up question to be asked)
8. Do you and your partner use the WhatsApp status update feature to express certain aspects of your relationships with your contacts?
9. Does using any of these WhatsApp features make you feel closer to your partner? (follow up question to be asked)
10. Are you comfortable with disclosing sensitive feelings, information, or details about yourself to your partner over WhatsApp? (follow up question to be asked)
11. Do you trust your partner with the information you share with them over WhatsApp?
12. Which would you say are some of the positive and negative aspects of using WhatsApp in your long-distance relationship?
13. Do you think that communicating on WhatsApp has in any way improved the quality of your long-distance relationship? (follow up question to be asked)

APPENDIX C: Honours Ethical Clearance letter



Date: 3 July 2020

Student name: Gomolemo Tshoagong
Student number: 16011444
Campus: Varsity College, Waterfall



Re: Approval of RESM8419p (BA Honours) Proposal and Ethics Clearance



Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.



Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and we hereby provide you with ethical clearance to proceed with your data collection.

There may be some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. If this is the case, feedback will be provided to you in writing. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure that all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued in such instances.

We wish you all the best with your research!

Yours sincerely,



Dr. EA van der Walt
Supervisor
Campus Postgraduate Coordinator



Xandie Thompson
Programme Manager
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APPENDIX D: Ethics checklist



HONOURS RESM ETHICS CHECKLIST

Dear student

Please complete this checklist and include this in your proposals as an appendix:

Student name: Gomolemo Tshoagong

Title of the research: The role of WhatsApp in sustaining emotional intimacy in long distance romantic relationships

	Yes	No	Comment:supervisor/ navigator/lecturer
Are you using human subjects in your research?	√		
I intend to use human subjects - I understand that I will not conduct research with human subjects under the age of 18 and other vulnerable groups. - I understand I can only proceed once I receive an ethical clearance letter.			
Interviews/ Focus groups An example of the <i>written consent form</i> I intend to use is attached.	√		
I will record the interview/focus groups and the sample of the letter where I ask for permission to do so is attached.	√		
I plan to use an interview schedule: The example of my research instrument is attached.	√		
I plan to use a questionnaire: The example of my research instrument is attached.		√	
I plan to use a gate-keepers letter: The example of my letter is attached.		√	
I plan to do research on an IIE site/with IIE students/staff/artefacts and I filled in the application for permission to do so. The application is attached. I understand I can only proceed once I receive IIE Approval for this.		√	

Signed: student.....

APPENDIX E: Participant Consent Form



CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE TO BE EXPLAINED TO PARTICIPANTS

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Gomolemo Tshoagong and I am a student at Varsity College Waterfall. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Lizelle van de Walt about the role of WhatsApp and its various features in sustaining emotional intimacy in long distance relationships. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of technologically mediated communication in interpersonal relationships. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you fit the parameters for this study. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to conduct a 13-question in-depth interview with you. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experience with WhatsApp in your long-distance relationship. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;

- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Varsity College Waterfall, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Bachelor of Arts: Honours. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Gomolemo Tshoagong

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

evanderwalt@varsitycollege.co.za

APPENDIX F: Signed consent forms for interviews and video and audio recordings from all three participants



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

PARTICIPANTS	
I, [REDACTED], agree to allow Gomolemo Tshoagong to audio record my interviews as part of the research about the role of WhatsApp in sustain emotional intimacy in long distance romantic relationships. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
	13/07/20
Signature	Date



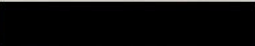
CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

PARTICIPANTS	
I, [REDACTED], agree to participate in the research conducted by Gomolemo Tshoagong about the role of WhatsApp in sustain emotional intimacy in long distance romantic relationships. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
	13/07/20
Signature	Date

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

PARTICIPANTS	
I, [REDACTED], agree to allow Gomolemo Tshoagong to audio record my interviews as part of the research about the role of WhatsApp in sustain emotional intimacy in long distance romantic relationships. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
[REDACTED]	13/01/2020
Signature	Date

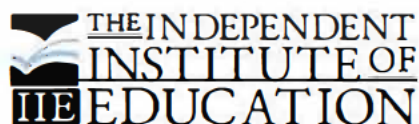
CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

PARTICIPANTS	
I, , agree to participate in the research conducted by Gomolemo Tshoagong about the role of WhatsApp in sustain emotional intimacy in long distance romantic relationships. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
	13/07/2020
Signature	Date

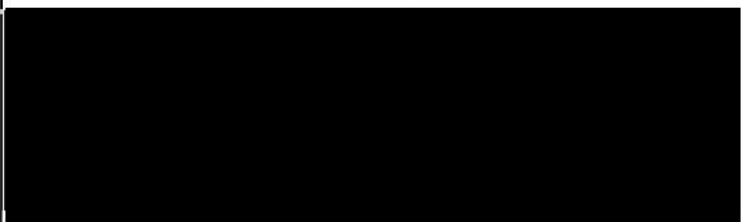
CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

PARTICIPANTS	
I, Mufaro Moyo, agree to participate in the research conducted by Gomolemo Tshoagong about the role of WhatsApp in sustain emotional intimacy in long distance romantic relationships. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:	
• I agree to be interviewed for this research.	
• My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.	
• My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.	
• I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.	
• I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
09/07/2020	
Signature	Date

APPENDIX F: Consent Form for Audio Recording



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

PARTICIPANTS	
I, Mufaro Moyo, agree to allow Gomolemo Tshoagong to audio record my interviews as part of the research about the role of WhatsApp in sustain emotional intimacy in long distance romantic relationships. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
	09/07/2020