

Existential Space, Gender Politics And Pragmatic Discourse Of Power Dynamics In Digital Semiotics And Digital Education: Whither Adeyemi Federal University Of Education

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Abstract

Background: Images as digital signs, combined with dialogue to depict real-world entities in pursuing meaning signification process have been objects of internet discourse studies in most parts of the globe. Extant studies have examined semiotics in traditional media outlets such as cartoons and political posters with stint considerations for such digital communicative platforms as WhatsApp. This study, therefore, investigated selected WhatsApp images and dialogue with a view to examining the unique inbuilt semiotic mechanism for digitalized discourse of power dynamics, existential threat and gender violation.

Materials and Methods: John Dewey's Pragmatism, with an addition of Foucault's theory of knowledge-power entanglement in investigating violence and Oduola's Critical Violence Discourse Analysis (CVDA) is the framework in investigating gender violation and gender politics in digital signifiers of digital images and chats. Critical violence discourse analysis was used in the study.

Results: Image and dialogue perform a transient but revelatory instant of human interaction, rendering the complexities of social communication visible and how people negotiate relationships and boundaries. It was conveyed through Semiotic nominals which consisted of fragments of convention used to render visible the intentions of the participants. WhatsApp images are thus presented as expressions of digitality in online interaction, transforming how humans communicate, share life, and present themselves according to human needs, values, and practices. Contextual ellipsis, showing cohesion of semiotic grammar analytically binding the image and the dialogue, and the negotiation of power and control inherent in the exchange, to digital humanities that enable further understanding of the ways in which digital technologies shape and are shaped by human communication, culture, and identity.

Conclusion: WhatsApp image and dialogue as digital semiosis or signs have signified of power dynamics, gender violation and boundary setting that offer unique platform for further research into communication media, digital technology and digital education in a globalized world. Adeyemi Federal University of Education, thus, stands to reinforce its role as a pioneering hub for innovative and inclusive digital education in Nigeria by advancing research in digital semiotics, computational linguistics, and educational technology.

Keywords: Digital signs, WhatsApp images and dialogue, Power dynamics and digital technology, Gender violation and boundary setting, Digital education in a globalized world

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I. Introduction

WhatsApp-walls and space, as one unique digital instrument of globalization are characteristically awashed by various kinds of digital communication tools. As a social media platform, amongst many such as Facebook, Instagram, Tik tok, Twitter, and so on, WhatsApp appears the most ruthless platform by which the communication world has been revolutionised. It, for instance, features several dozens of emojis that are with implications for creative meaning significations ranging from symbolic meaning, indexical relationship, metaphorical extension, cultural associations, contextual dependence to polysemy. One other feature that makes WhatsApp platform distinguished is the unique inbuilt semiotic mechanism, that is, 'iconic representation such as images, emojis, and other pictorial resources. These digital signs sometimes, combine with dialogue to depict real-world objects or entities, conveying meaning through visual resemblance. It is, therefore, necessary to contemplate a study, projecting the internet discourse through meaning signification process. In other words, our selected digital signs coalesce to create digital actions and interactions that produce 'another' layer of analysis to digital semiotics (Oduola and Agboola, 2022). Through a steady metamorphosis and various manifestations since 2009 when it was founded by the duo of Brian Acton and Jan Koum, WhatsApp, today, is a leading social media

messaging platform known for its simplicity, security, and wide reach (<https://blog.whatsapp.com/>). There exist resources that provide a well-rounded understanding of WhatsApp's history and its influence on communication technology and digital education.

Explorative gulf

In the quest for further insights on the subject of meaning signification processes in critical terms, scholars have explored wide range of visual communication with noticeable lacuna in the aspect of ideological perspectives that touch on existential threat and gender issues in digital semiotics. Such scholarly gulf stems probably from shift in normative enquiries to more descriptive studies in linguistics (Presenting image as semiotic sign, Sonesson (1989:38ff), cited in Danielsson (2010:2) sees image as a visual representation of the form of something or someone with several pictorial constructions such as photographs, chirographics and typographics. In their semiotic lenses, Bal and Bryson (1991), submit that anything can be a sign as long as someone or, more importantly, a group of people who are part of the same culture of society, interprets it as 'signifying' something – that is as referring to or standing for something other than itself". With the example of rubbing one's thumb and forefinger together to signify money, Onugu (2022) explain how a variety of gestures are used in everyday life to convey messages around us. Jolayemi and Mahmud (2017) considered the effectiveness of semiotics communication by the means of 'Road signs' using Gestalt theory of visual perception. Oduola's (2021) scholarship rather leaves an implication "that, it is '**salient**' that *colours hold power in the branding of the university, giving* visual identity that comprises a number of visual cues" with a gap of no entry that could discursively account for the functionality for meaning signification in digital space, leaving an important gap to be filled. Such academic gap requires a new vista that scrutinises the motifs of existentialist philosophy, providing the space for pursuing the ideas of male dominance and power dynamics in digital semiotics as made available in a selected WhatsApp image. Such gap-filling could have productively functional implication for twenty-first century digital education and computational linguistics. The salient point is that such studies as this can advance recommendations that align closely with Adeyemi Federal University of Education's mission to promote knowledge in education, language studies, digital humanities, and the social sciences.

Aim and objectives

The explorative aim of presenting WhatsApp image as digital evidence of semiotic material correlative offers the space to examine relevant discourse-narratives constituted by digital actions and interactions to demonstrate how performativity shapes online (WhatsApp-Messaging) behavior, relationships, and identity construction. The specific objectives are to:

- (i) Identify and categorise set of signifiers and codes that shape how we communicate and interpret meaning in the selected WhatsApp message
- (ii) Examine and analyse the contextual inserts of shared code-bearing image as signified in the selected WhatsApp message
- (iii) Discuss and interrogate perceptions on how digital interactions shape social dynamics and online experiences in the selected WhatsApp message
- (iv) Discuss the relevance of how digital interactions shape social dynamics and online experiences to project discourse in computational linguistic pedagogy, and broader academic development within Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, particularly in relation to digital humanities, language education, and the social sciences.

The thought to be pursued in this research premises is to see whether or not the digital signs constituted in WhatsApp images and the accompanying verbal elements as shared are necessarily connected to power dynamics in some ways. The crux of such pursuit is that the context of instant messaging, intimacy, and informality signified in a WhatsApp image and other modes are examinable as they exemplify digital signs, reflecting and reinforcing existing power dynamics such as harassment and boundary setting. With such WhatsApp background in mind, the conversation and picture are understandable on negotiating meaning, power relations, and relationship within a virtual setting that is relevant to communication technology and digital education.

II. Materials And Methods

As previously cited, and as seen in such publications as by Nathan Wosnack's The WhatsApp Story: How a Simple App Became a Global Giant which presents an intimate glimpse into how WhatsApp came to be and grew, this media has been of specialized type of priceless tool to companies everywhere, including the business tactics behind its own success (<https://www.amazon.com/>; <https://blog.whatsapp.com/>). Our interest in this study, however, is how whatsapp, as digital technologies reflex, has had an amazing job of revolutionizing communication with extensive influence on the world (Alex Hern, 2020). This implies that McLuhan would have to become the reference point. The reason for this simply boils down to the fact that his project for globalization

continues to be the entry point for digitalization. In an anthology of essays, McLuhan and Powers (1989) examine the notion of the "global village" and how electronic media erase distances and make for a global community as one.

Effectively, McLuhan's concepts of media theory provide a background paradigm for the understanding of how digital semiotics engages with examining the way semiotic processes are altered in the domain of digitally networked global communication. They illuminate the complex interplay between technological mediation, cultural expression, and meaning-making process in today's digital age.

In their study on #Endsars protest facebook images, Oduola and Odebunmi (2020) find that visual images are unique and effective semiotic resources with various advantages over the use of words. This was a finding based on the understanding that messages and meaning conveyed in the images are products of the creativity of the artists (the Nigerian youth) and digital platform through which stories, experience and effective statements are conveyed, necessitating more research in digital semiotics

In the book, *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*, in which it explores the materiality of digital technology and how it matters to semiotics, Marianne van den Boomen et al (2009) outline how digital semiotics can be utilized to understand everyday life encounters with digital media and technology. Brodie (2001) proposes a framework for understanding digital semiotics as a new paradigm that integrates traditional semiotic theories with digital technologies. He discusses how digital media shape the production and interpretation of signs and meanings. These, and other works collectively explore how digital technologies influence the ways in which signs, symbols, and meanings are created, communicated, and interpreted. They provide insights into the evolving nature of semiotics in the digital age and its implications for various disciplines, including media studies, communication theory, and digital humanities. The relevance of the foregoing review is the link they have with globalization concept.

McLuhan's notion of the "global village" describes how electronic media (like television and now digital networks) collapse spatial and temporal distances, creating a sense of interconnectedness across the globe. Digital semiotics examines how this interconnectedness influences the circulation and transformation of signs and symbols in a globalized digital environment. It considers how digital technologies enable cross-cultural communication and the evolution of meaning across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Similarly, with his famous aphorism- "Medium is the Message", McLuhan suggests that the characteristics of a medium itself influence how messages are perceived and understood. In digital semiotics, this idea is expanded to analyse how digital media platforms' specific affordances and constraints shape the creation and interpretation of signs and symbols. For example, social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, have distinct communication conventions (like hashtags, emojis) that affect how meanings are conveyed and interpreted globally. Other key intersection points advanced under the globalisation are 'Media as Extensions of Man', 'Speed and Intensity of Communication', and 'Cultural and Linguistic Hybridity'.

Existential philosophy, identity and complexity of power dynamics

Existential philosophy, with its focus on individual freedom, choice, and the search for meaning, can provide a profound framework for understanding gender violence and the dynamics of power that sustain it. By exploring the interplay between existential themes and issues of gender violence, we can gain insights into how power structures and personal agency intersect in these contexts, following the line of Jean-Paul Sartre (1943, 1946). Exploring the Foucauldian intersection of feminist and existentialist theories, Lois McNay (1992) finds that integrating existential philosophy with the discourse of gender violence and power dynamics can channel an accurate perception of the complexities of the challenges faced by victims and the potential pathways for resistance and transformation. This has inspired other like-minded orientations within the feminist school, Hekman Susan (1996), for instance, who writes on identity and subjectivity in feminist terms and engages with existential questions of freedom and authenticity.

Theoretical positions, Methodology and frame of analysis

Apart from the imagistic mode, finding a solid theoretical basis for something like "Existential Space, Gender Politics, and the Discourse of Power Dynamics in Digital Semiotics" has to frame the idea of doing things with words and has to be, therefore, framed in pragmatic terms.

Pragmatism (John Dewey)

In that regard, an adequate pragmatic theory would be John Dewey's Pragmatism, which emphasises the practical application of ideas and how they are articulated from human experience, which aligns with questioning existential space and power dynamics in digital spaces. Our interest in this study is that using Dewey's Pragmatism offers the possibility of examining how the nexus of existential problems, gender politics, and power relations manifests itself in digital communication and semiotics, and how these dimensions offer assistance to practical

knowledge of digital discourse. This inevitably leads us to seek some assistance from complementary discourse theory.

Theory of power/knowledge (Michel Foucault)

Foucault's work can be particularly relevant in violence research in terms of discourse because it explores the relationship between power and knowledge and how they manifest themselves in other modes of violence, including symbolic and discursive violence. Using Foucault's theory provides an insight into how direct and symbolic violence can be embedded and reproduced through discursive practices, most notably in the context of digital communication and semiotics, when describing the idea of 'Bio-power and Governmentality' with emphasis on the regulation and control of individuals' behaviour and identities.

Critical Violence Discourse Analysis (Lekan Oduola)

Perhaps to address the venerable but necessarily relevant theories, novelty in "Critical Violence Discourse Analysis" (CVDA) can account in adequate proportion for contemporary discourse as singular as violence, boundary-marking, and web-based communication. Despite its vulnerability, CVDA is a theory and methodology instrument available to examine how discourse (language and communication) constructs, represents, and legitimates notions of violence. It draws on violence studies, critical theory, and other cognate theories, as well as critical discourse analysis (CDA). The imperative to explore further perceptive commentaries on how violence is conceptualised and described across discourses motivates leveraging CVDA's potential assets in its critical perspective, interdisciplinary nature, and context sensitivity.

The data to be analysed includes a picture and accompanying dialogue downloaded from the UI Alumni Association WhatsApp website. The picture on WhatsApp is rendered attractive by its prominently foregrounded caption and is therefore purposively selected to be analysed. This offers the opportunity to take both the visual and the verbal texts to pieces, testing the validity or otherwise of the caption in the meaning signification process. Consequently, the WhatsApp message under analysis is to be taken for digital semiosis in the pursuit of existential philosophy, identity, and complexity of power dynamics. Digital discourse analysis, a key method in digital humanities, is preferable as the analytical framework in examining the exchange's language, tone, and power dynamics.

Data presentation



Outline of the key concepts, contents, and intents.

Analytical framework:

We shall allude to the framework Kress and van Leeuwen developed for analysing multimodal texts. It includes three main elements:

Mode: The semiotic resource used (verbal language, image, gesture).

Field: subject of unrequited feeling or relationship in travelogue (the subject matter or topic being represented).

Tenor: power dynamics, dominance, and identity constructions and gender politics. The social relations between the participants in the communication event.

Contextualization: sexualized linguistic violence, existential threat in public space

From the foregoing layer of analysis, it is noteworthy that our data allows us to establish a compositional metafunction that coincides with Halliday's textual metafunction. The overall interest would not, however, go in that direction.

Tripartite communicative modes

For the sake of analysis, it is pertinent to identify the different modes of communication in the data. Such modes are constituted in:

- (i) visual elements,
- (ii) textual elements, and the connecting one –
- (iii) sensory elements

These work together to create meaning based on the context

III. Discussion

Man: "Nice perfume... I want to give it to my wife, which one is it..."

Lady: "Don't give her... Some idiots will find an excuse to talk to her".

Line A

Images constitute the episode, that is, pictorial resources taken along with dialogue

The image is about a man and a lady sitting side by side on board a plane. The man tries to open the conversation, which goes thus:

That's a clever and humorous exchange!

The picture and dialogue represent a common social encounter, with the male interlocutor as initiator.

Line B

A conversation with a stranger-cotraveller, a female interlocutor, by complimenting her perfume.

Convention and intention

In line with Deweyan pragmatics, the lady's response was a witty and sarcastic retort that the speaker's intentions might be ulterior and that he might be trying to flirt with her. In discursive terms, power dynamics at play here are engaging, with the implicatures of:

Exertion of a sense of friendliness

- (i) Pretension of innocence
- (ii) Poignant response, quick gaining of the upper hand
- (iii) subtle assertion of boundaries and independence
- (iv) turning a sweet compliment into a lighthearted jab at the unsaid said, that is, potential motives.
- (v) Semiotic indexicality of her disinterestedness in engaging in small talk
- (vi) Strategic discouragement of his advances.

The photo and dialogue, in precise terms, record a transient but telling moment of human exchange, boiling down the dynamics of social communication and people's negotiation of relationships and boundaries.

Semiotic nominals

- (i) women's agency of assertiveness
- (ii) boundary-setting
- (iii) response with a witty remark
- (iv) maintaining control
- (v) smart avoidance
- (vi) potential flirtation
- (vii) fun poking
- (viii) superficiality of approach

Problems of gender relationships in communicative semiosis

- i. Social norms of communication styles: The first compliment and the move by the man to initiate conversation demonstrate the traditional gender scripts, which assume that men are usually expected to be initiators. In contrast, women are expected to be receivers.
- ii. Self-assertion as an instrument of subversion: This becomes a subversion by the woman's response, proclaiming her autonomy and unwillingness to submit to gender roles.
- iii. Boundary-mapping sarcastic intonational device: Humour in the interaction is also a coping strategy, and this illustrates the critical function of wit and humour in navigating power relations and complex social circumstances.

The dialogue and the movie offer a dense critique of human relationships, communication patterns, and gender relations.

Contextual ellipsis in semiotic grammar cohesion

One other aspect of analysis is the semiotic grammar of ellipsis usage, which invites the digital natives to scrutinise their own approach to social interactions and relationships. This is the position of Lasebikan and Oduola (2021) that punctuations are not for decoration in any linguistic event and all spheres of language. Is the question, therefore, whether ellipses, as seen in the discourse, particularly in the woman's response, carry any semiotic meaning?

"Don't give her... Some idiots will find an excuse to talk to her", by the grammar of ellipsis as seen above,

- (i) indexes a pause or hesitation in speech, suggesting the woman chooses her words carefully or pauses for emphasis.
- (ii) creates a sense of 'trailing off', implying that the woman intentionally leaves her sentence incomplete, adding a touch of sarcasm or irony as the ellipsis comes immediately after "Don't give her".
- (iii) Generates implied meaning that invites the reader to fill in the gap, implying that the woman's complete thought might be something like "Don't allow her to become objectified for some wayfaring idiot", which her interlocutor symbolises.
- (iv) Generates tone and attitude that contribute to the woman's witty and sarcastic tone, hinting at her annoyance or frustration with the man's approach.

The ellipses in this dialogue enhance the woman's character, convey her tone and attitude, and add depth to the conversation, making it more engaging and open to many grammatical and semantic interpretations. In this analysis, ellipses, again, are further established as digital signs that represent pauses or hesitation in digital communication, similar to how they function in written text. Using perfume as a conversation starter can be seen as a digital sign for flirting or small talk.

WhatsApp pictures and the traces of digitality in internet communication

As mentioned earlier in our literature review, the fact that the picture has been shared on WhatsApp adds a layer of digital semiotics to our analysis! WhatsApp, as a digital media platform, has signifiers and codes that affect human communication and the making and reading of meaning. The picture, which has been shared on WhatsApp, is situated within one of the instant messaging tools, with the three defining features of globalisation, digitalisation, and 'onlinisation'.

- (i) Immediacy: The conversation occurs in real-time, creating a sense of urgency and excitement.
- (ii) Informality: WhatsApp is a less formal medium than other mediums, which fits the casual and playful tone of the conversation.
- (iii) Intimacy: WhatsApp is usually employed for one-to-one and personal conversations, which adds to the intimacy and familiarity between the two.

With the above tripartite implications within the WhatsApp context, we can better understand how the image and chat negotiate meaning, power relations, and relationships in a virtual context. Therefore, the WhatsApp platform is a significant part of the digital semiotics at play!

Digital semiotics, power relations and implications for digital humanities

One hard fact from looking at the image and the dialogue is that negotiation of power and control of the exchange in the dialogue is also a central problem in digital humanities, particularly how it intersects with digital social interaction. Connecting our analysis to digital humanities facilitates a richer understanding of how digital technologies are configured by human communication, culture, and identity. For example, social media platforms, such as in our case, where the data were obtained from WhatsApp, have altered the way we communicate, share experiences, and represent ourselves online, just as the human needs, values, and behaviours drive digital tools and platforms to develop and mature, Instagram and TikTok being the case in point. However, this highly dynamic mutual relationship between human elements and digital technologies shall remain susceptible to further research.

Untangling various layers of meanings and contexts

Utilising Dewey's theory of Pragmatism, our analysis tries to emphasise the pragmatic impact of ideas and their grounding in human experience. This is in harmony with the exploration of existence space and the issues of power dynamics in online spaces imagined in Foucauldian visions of the relationship between power, knowledge, and social control. Such analysis presents a possibility of unpacking several levels of meaning and contexts.

Dialogue of existential threat

In this exchange, the "existential space" pertains to the feeling of being approached and perhaps objectified by the woman.

Her response suggests that she is attuned to how her existence is mediated via social encounter and how her space can be violated. By warning off the gift of perfume, she tries to master her existential space and ward off unwanted attention. This act of agency in a social world usually exposes her to exterior intrusions and pressures. The dialogue, therefore, contains how the lady negotiates her relations and identities within society's symbolic and spatial structures. Existential space in the Foucauldian context is symbolic, instrumental, and physical. This is an act of power over how she is perceived and treated. Dialoguing Gender Politics

The woman's response is deeply rooted in gender politics.

Her insistence that the perfume could attract unwanted attention from "idiots" is evidence of a gendered conception of women's existence. Women are often faced with unwanted advances and objectification, and their response shows that they anticipate such a reaction by virtue of general gender expectations. The comment presumes a larger social issue where women must learn and guard against unwanted attention, an implication of the power differentials and projections about women in society.

Discourse of Power Dynamics objectified.

The dialogue reflects power dynamics in several ways. The man's inquiry about the perfume represents a neutral, seemingly innocuous interaction. Still, the woman's response reveals an underlying power dynamic where she feels the need to protect her personal boundaries from potential infringement. Her warning indicates that she perceives a power imbalance in social interactions, where women's responses and actions are often scrutinised or exploited by others. The discourse here underscores how women's choices and autonomy can be overshadowed by societal expectations and behaviours of others, revealing the subtle ways power is exercised in everyday interactions, indexing how it is negotiated, asserted, and challenged in communication.

Digital Semiotic discourse exemplified

The fact that the dialogue is the verbal mode of a WhatsApp image establishes its being analyzable through the lens of digital semiotics by considering how the data or similar interactions might play out in digital spaces. In online environments, women often face unsolicited attention and harassment, mirroring the concerns expressed in the dialogue. The woman's response reflects an awareness of how digital interactions can be fraught with power dynamics and objectification, similar to physical spaces. The discourse around digital semiotics often includes how individuals navigate and manage their presence and interactions online, which parallels the woman's concern about managing attention in her physical space.

IV. Results

The study explores WhatsApp as a virtual space wherein communication, identity, and power relationships are shaped by multimodal interaction. With its distinctive semiotic processes of emojis, images, and text, WhatsApp is a space wherein meaning is communicated through digital signs. These signs convey real-world objects or concepts by visual resemblance but also reflect cultural, contextual, and polysemic disparities in communication. The study investigates how digital practices, including images and accompanying texts, fit into a broader discussion of semiotics in the digital age.

Despite growing studies on visual communication, there is a considerable gap regarding the ideological implications of digital semiotics, specifically the questions of gender and existential threats in digital spaces. This study seeks to fill this gap by analysing the power dynamics in a WhatsApp conversation, specifically how gendered roles and boundaries are negotiated through online communication. The analysis is based on an analytic framework derived from Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal analysis, considering modes of communication (text, images, gesture), and how these come together within specific social contexts.

The selected WhatsApp image and exchange between the man and the woman reveal the dynamics of gendered interaction and power negotiations. The man initiates a comment regarding the woman's perfume, which she playfully rebuffs, signifying her sensitivity to unsolicited attention. The banter illustrates how individuals, particularly women, assert boundaries and power negotiations in everyday digital interactions. With sarcasm and

humour, the woman indirectly rejects the man's advances while maintaining control over the interaction, foregrounding the power relations in a seemingly trivial exchange.

The study also analyses the deployment of ellipsis in the exchange, which is employed as a semiotic resource to introduce pauses, hesitation, and implied meanings. The ellipsis in the woman's response gives an ironic and sarcastic tone, which brings out her strategic setting of boundaries while still appreciating the man's compliment. This use of ellipsis illustrates the digital semiotic discourse, whereby punctuation marks, just like in written texts, add tone and convey underlying meanings in digital communication.

WhatsApp as a medium intensifies these dynamics by providing a space for immediate, informal, and intimate communication. These aspects create a sense of proximity and urgency, thus shaping how power and identity are negotiated online. Through the WhatsApp environment, the conversation demonstrates how digital semiotics reflect and entrench gender dynamics, with women needing to constantly negotiate objectification and unsolicited attention in both online and offline environments.

The study illustrates how social norms and power relations shape communication practices by examining these interactions within the models of Foucauldian theory and Critical Violence Discourse Analysis. The woman's response illustrates her acknowledgement of her positioning within these power relations and her struggles to regain control over her personal space, both relationally and symbolically. The exchange also illustrates how gendered power relations are enacted through language, illustrating the insidious violence underlying everyday interaction.

Given the significant position of WhatsApp in building digital communication, further research is necessary on digital semiotic theories. Digital media like WhatsApp offer unique opportunities for exploring the intersections of power, communication, and identity in a globalised world. Further studies should expand on how digital media influences communication media and the development of digital humanities that offers constructive feedback on the bidirectional relationship between technology and human communication.

V. Conclusion

The study highlights the complexities of meaning-making, power dynamics, and gender politics in digital communication, explicitly focusing on WhatsApp as a platform for negotiating interpersonal relations. By analysing a selected image and text through digital semiotics, we examined how multimodal signs - visual, textual, and sensory elements - function within the specific cultural, social, and technological context of WhatsApp messaging. WhatsApp, as a unique instrument of digital communication, provides a valuable space for the signification of meaning, emphasising immediacy, informality, and intimacy, all of which shape how individuals engage with and interpret digital content.

The examination illustrates that the exchange between the man and the woman in the WhatsApp message is not just an informal conversation but a place where power dynamics, boundaries, and gendered expectations are ongoingly negotiated. The poem's woman subject's witty and sarcastic response to the man's compliment indexes her agency in controlling personal space, staking her claims, and disrupting normative gender roles typically available in ordinary social interaction. Her use of humour and ellipsis in the interaction further compacts the semiotic meaning, with levels of implicated meaning and attitude, which function towards her asserting control of existential space.

In the Foucauldian sense, the exchange illustrates how power is negotiated and fought over in social interactions, both online and offline. The woman's response also illustrates her cognisance of the broader societal structures guiding her interactions with others, i.e., the power dynamics that seek to objectify women or undermine their agency. This negotiation of power, as enacted in the virtual space of WhatsApp, illustrates how such dynamics are replicated and challenged online.

With the application of critical theories like Dewey's pragmatism and Foucauldian theory, this study sheds light on how individuals employ language, images, and digital signs in negotiating social identities, maintaining boundaries, and challenging dominant power relations. The woman's response might be seen as an act of resistance in a digital sphere that reflects and refracts social norms. As such, it is an interesting case study on digital semiotics and what it portends for power, control, and social relations. However, this study also opens up several avenues for further investigation. While we have provided a valuable contribution to understanding digital semiotics and gender dynamics, future research could delve deeper into the role of digital hermeneutics, exploring how the interpretation of digital signs and symbols contributes to broader social, cultural, and psychological contexts. Moreover, applying semiotic theories such as "Digital Hermeneutics" can offer deeper insights into how online interactions, particularly through WhatsApp and similar platforms, influence personal relationships, identity construction, and societal change. Further exploration of the utilitarian implications of such digital interactions is essential for enhancing our understanding of how digital media, communication technologies, and globalisation continue to shape human behaviour and social structures.

In sum, the study affirms the significance of WhatsApp as a key space for exploring power dynamics, harassment, boundary-setting, and identity construction within digital semiotics. It also highlights the broader

potential of digital communication platforms in shaping and reflecting societal issues such as gender politics and existential threats. This research, conducted under the academic auspices of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, reinforces the institution's commitment to advancing scholarly discourse on contemporary communication, social justice, and digital humanities. The findings offer a meaningful contribution to the university's growing profile in interdisciplinary research and affirm its relevance in shaping critical thought in the digital age.

VI. Recommendations For Further Studies

Considering the findings from this study, the following recommendations are proposed to guide future research, with particular relevance to digital education, computational linguistics, and socio-linguistic studies within institutions such as Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. These directions can significantly contribute to curriculum development, digital literacy programs, and interdisciplinary research innovation at the university and beyond:

1. Exploring the Relationship Between Digital Semiotics and Gendered Power Dynamics

Further research should examine how digital semiotic cues such as emojis, memes, and linguistic choices mirror and reinforce gender roles in digital communication. This line of inquiry is essential for understanding power relations in online educational settings and can inform gender-sensitive pedagogical strategies within the university's digital classrooms. Such studies can contribute to equity and inclusion in digital education environments.

2. Investigating Digital Semiotic Hermeneutics for Computational Interpretation

The emerging field of Digital Hermeneutics offers a promising area for interdisciplinary exploration, particularly at the intersection of computational linguistics, digital humanities, and communication studies. Scholars at Adeyemi University could develop interpretive frameworks that support digital text analysis, emoji usage, and image interpretation—potentially integrating natural language processing (NLP) into linguistics and education research.

3. Contextualization in Digital Communication: Towards Intercultural Competence

Given Nigeria's multicultural and multilingual landscape, studying contextual cues in digital communication (e.g., humour, tone, sarcasm) can enhance intercultural understanding. This research could inform teacher training programs and multilingual digital education policies at the university, equipping students and educators with strategies to interpret digital texts accurately across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

4. Ethnographic Investigations on Digital Power and Boundary Negotiation

Future ethnographic research could focus on how individuals—especially students—negotiate digital boundaries, harassment, and autonomy on platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram. These insights are highly relevant to university-wide policies on digital conduct, student safety, and ethical communication, and could inform the design of digital codes of practice or training modules.

5. Semiotic Analysis of Digital Violence in Educational Settings

With growing concerns about cyberbullying and digital harassment, further studies could analyse how visual and linguistic semiotic elements are used in perpetuating or resisting digital violence. Adeyemi University can benefit from such research by integrating findings into digital citizenship education, fostering safer and more respectful online learning environments.

6. Cross-Platform Comparative Analysis of Semiotic Practices

Expanding research beyond WhatsApp to other platforms like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook will help uncover how communication strategies and power structures differ by platform. This comparative work can aid curriculum design in media literacy, ICT in education, and digital rhetoric programs at the university.

7. Digital Identity Formation and Representation Among Students

Investigating how students and faculty construct and negotiate their digital identities can inform psychological, sociolinguistic, and educational frameworks. This is especially pertinent to digital classrooms and online collaborative projects, where self-representation plays a vital role in participation, group dynamics, and peer learning.

8. Longitudinal Studies on the Impact of Digital Interaction on Academic and Social Life

Long-term studies on how digital communication shapes relationships, classroom interactions, and institutional culture could offer deep insights into evolving student behaviour. These findings would help Adeyemi University adapt its digital pedagogy to align with emerging communication patterns and relationship-building norms.

9. Enhancing Digital Literacy Through Semiotic Competency

Investigating how varying levels of digital and semiotic literacy affect users' comprehension of digital content (e.g., emojis, GIFs, acronyms) is critical. The university can use this data to improve digital literacy

curricula, equipping students with skills to interpret and engage in meaningful digital discourse within academic contexts and the broader society.

10. Interpreting Digital Spaces Through Existential and Philosophical Lenses

Incorporating existential philosophy into digital semiotics offers a novel way to understand how individuals experience authenticity, freedom, and identity online. Such research can influence how universities like Adeyemi conceptualise digital well-being, mental health, and emotional expression in virtual learning environments.

Institutional Relevance

These recommended research areas align closely with Adeyemi Federal University of Education's mission to advance knowledge in education, language studies, digital humanities, and the social sciences. By fostering scholarship in digital semiotics, computational linguistics, and educational technology, the institution can strengthen its position as a leader in innovative, inclusive, and interdisciplinary digital education in Nigeria and the Global South.

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