

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**FEMINIST AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION ON BLOGS: A  
STUDY OF SELECTED TOP BLOGS IN AFRICA**



**ANITA BRENDA ALOFAH**

**2015**



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The logo of the University of Education, Winneba, is a circular emblem. It features a central sun-like symbol with rays, surrounded by a gear-like border. The text 'UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA' is written around the perimeter of the circle.

**A THESIS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA  
STUDIES, FACULTY OF LANGUAGES EDUCATION, SUBMITTED TO THE  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA,  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR AWARD OF THE  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES  
(COMMUNICATION SKILLS) DEGREE.**

**JULY, 2015**

## **DECLARATION**

### **STUDENT'S DECLARATION**

I, Anita Brenda Alofah declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

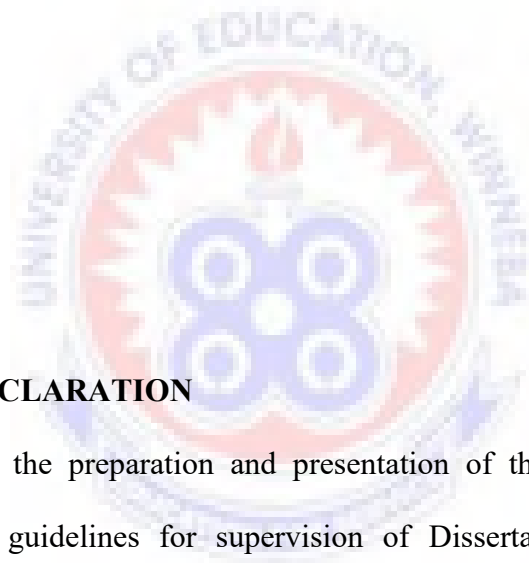
### **SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

NAME OF SUPERVISOR:

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DATE:



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My greatest gratitude goes to my supervisor Dr. Andy Ofori – Birikorang for his support, guidance and direction. He has gone above and beyond for a successful completion of this work and the entire programme as a whole. Doc, God richly bless you.

My immense gratitude also goes to Mr. Kwesi Aggrey, Mr. Joseph Emmanuel Allotey-Pappoe, Prof. Timothy Acquah-Hayford, Prof. Emmanuel Adedun, Dr. Charles Owu-Ewie, Ms Christiana Hammond, Miss Abena Abokomah Asemanyi and Mr. Okai Anti for their guidance and academic support throughout my stay in the Department of Communication and Media Studies.

I would also like to thank Auntie Mary and Auntie Gifty for providing us with all the support needed for the smooth running of our academic affairs in the department. I want to again appreciate Tasneem Mia of Webfluentia and African Blogger Awards for providing me with all the information needed for the successful completion of this work. All the participants of this study who are recognized as top bloggers in Africa are also not forgotten. I appreciate your comporment.

I also thank all my friends (both out-going first and second years) for making my academic life an impacting one.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank my brothers; Patrick, Louis, Ben, Richard, and Desmond as well as my sister Naomi for their love, prayers and support in all my endeavors. God bless you.

And to God Almighty who has for now, brought me this far.

## **DEDICATION**

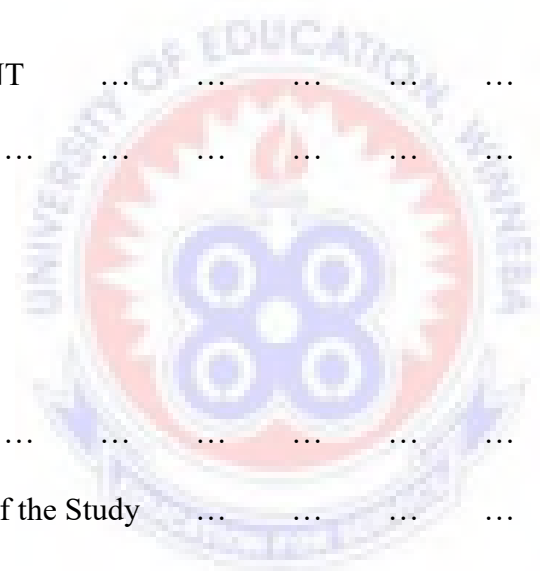
To my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Eric Samuel Alofah who have shown me wonderful love and support through all my life's endeavors and have urged me on towards a brighter future.

May God richly bless you.



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## ABSTRACT

The study examines the blog posts and blogger profiles of selected top African bloggers. The study is premised on the grounds that; first, the blogosphere is one of the most suitable online spaces for the construction and exploration of identity; second, that women can use the blogosphere to explore their creativity and true identity through their writing; and third, that the identity of the woman has been veiled from time immemorial since women as writers as well as their works have always been evaluated under the influence of male patriarchal and literary tradition and, therefore, could never have an original, innovative and independent art. Through qualitative content analysis of ten top African female blogs and further anchored on the feminist gynocriticism theory and the identity theory, the study argues that while its findings support earlier research that women writers construct their identity as inspirational bloggers and relationship builders, the findings disagree with popular assertion by some researchers that women shy away from issues related to governance, technology, education and business. The findings also support earlier but limited number of research that women use blogs to challenge gender stereotypes. The study concludes that when it comes to women's identities, stereotypical roles bestowed on them by society are being confronted, challenged and wriggled off.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 2.0. Introduction

“The emergence and growth of blogs in the late 1990s coincided with the advent of web publishing tools that facilitated the posting of content by non-technical users.” (McCullagh, 2008, p.85) The word ‘blog’ originated from ‘web log’. ‘Web-logging’ has been known by the name ‘blogging’ since 1997 and by the mid-2000s, blogs were reaching the mainstream (Carlson, 2007 p. 2). Today, millions of people have either group or personal blogs.

According to Nardi, Schiano and Gumbrecht (2004, p. 9), “blogging is sometimes viewed as a new, grassroots form of journalism and a way to shape democracy outside the mass media and conventional party politics.” Blogging has emerged as a popular way for individuals to share their reflections with others. While many well-known blogs provide political commentary, most people use their blogs for personal expression to record and reflect on their daily experiences (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Bloggers are often referred to as ‘Citizen Journalists’ according to Levinson (2013, p.81) to underline the fact that a blogger need not be a professional journalist to write and publish about the news. However, the personal control that the writer has over his or her blog means that the blog can be about any subject, not just news (Levinson, 2013).

On the issue of reading and writing, Levinson (1997) observes that the emergence of the printing press opened many doors and made Bibles, reports and scientific treatises readily available to millions of readers. However, this resulted in the inequality of consumers and producers and took away every chance of a one-to-one ratio in which every reader could



also become a writer. And now, blogging has changed and reversed all of that. “Although there are still more readers than writers of blogs, any reader can become a writer, either by commenting on someone else’s blog or, with just a little more effort, by starting a blog of one’s own. More than 165 million blogs were being written in 2011” (Levinson, 2013, p. 82).

Blogging has its roots in the digital age in computer conferencing and message board that go back at least fifteen years and this became the first big player in the new new media revolution. It takes the dissemination of news and opinions one big step beyond old media by allowing ‘reporters’- that is, people, everyone- to file their stories instantly not with their newspapers but on their blogs and, therein, with the world at large (Levinson, 2013, p. 85).

The good news is, because blogs are under the personal editorship of the writer, they can be about anything the writer pleases- unlike newspapers and magazines where professional editors usually decide the subject of the stories. This freedom of expression and production allows bloggers the opportunity to construct their identities online.

The issue of identity has long been recognized by social scientists and Goffman (1959), Cooley (1902), and Mead (1934) have described the self as a product of social interactions. Again, there is a general consensus among researchers that the internet can offer its users tremendous opportunities to experiment with their identities (e.g. Katz and Rice, 2002; Rheingold, 1993; Smith and Kollock, 1999; Turkle, 1995; Wallace, 1999). This reveals the fact of identity as being a subject that has been massively debated upon.

According to Goffman’s dramaturgic analysis of social life, the self is a ‘collaborative manufacture’ between a performer and his or her audience (Goffman, 1959). In this sense, the performer is the blogger and the audiences are the readers or followers; and since the space of social media can represent the online form of social life, we can say that the kind of

identity constructed is as a result of the collaborative effort of the blogger and her audience. Pedersen & Macafee (2007) have suggested that males and females are likely to demonstrate online identity differences; based on their biological and psychological differences. This suggestion has led to several studies about the differences that exist in male and female blogging, leading to the widely known assertion that men are most likely to blog about external matters while women resort to personal issues in their blogging practices.

Against this background, the present study seeks to investigate the phenomenon of blogging and identity construction among female bloggers, within the African continent.

### **1.1.0. Background of the Study**

Within the last few years, social media, riding on the wave of massive internet growth, have become the new frontiers of engagement in all aspects of personal, corporate and civic affairs within the African Continent (Dibussi, 2011). An example of this massive internet growth and/or global development is what is happening in Ghana at the moment. “The statistics speak for themselves: about 1.4 million active web users, 70% mobile penetration, 1.2 million Facebook users and over 300 bloggers. The rule of the game in the internet age is simple - adapt or die.” (Adzaho, 2012, p. 1). While this is true, the African blogosphere suffers the lack of intentional academic and industrial research into the phenomenon of blogging. As a result, a larger percentage of the related works are those conducted in the Western World.

Various studies have investigated the socio-demographics of bloggers, as well as their motivations and habits (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Newson & Oberlander, 2006). According to these studies, the majority of blogs are the

personal journal type which deal with the bloggers' personal experiences and reflections. Within this group, female and teenage bloggers are in the majority.

However, Pedersen and Macafee (2007) posit that the most influential bloggers are males; and go ahead to suggest, through the outcome of their analysis, that as long as quality is measured in terms of popularity, women bloggers will never achieve equal recognition. This, according to Pedersen and Macafee, has led to discussions among bloggers and researchers about the relative position of male and female bloggers; and suggesting that the blogosphere is essentially sexist. In confirmation of this suggestion, Gurak's earlier work in 1999 claims that the electronic medium encouraged the intensification of gender rather than neutralizing it. Gurak (1999, p. 74) posits that "participants in online communities are likely to bring with them pre-existing patterns of hierarchy and male domination conditioned into them in early life."

Blogging is not the first form of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) to be accused of sexism. While research into CMC dates back to the 1970s, it was not until the 1990s that researchers turned their attention to the issue of gender (Kibucha, 2013).

Herring (1996), for example, investigated electronic discussion spaces and found that men and women "constituted different discourse communities in cyberspace" (p. 101) and that such communities were different but not equal. According to Herring, women and men have different online styles; the male-gendered style being more adversarial, while the female-gendered style was characterized by supportiveness and attenuation. She points out that most often than not, users are able to infer the gender of posters through the features of these styles and therefore react to posters on the basis of their presumed gender.

Since it is now possible to make money from blogging by selling advertising space on one's blog, the perception that women's blogs are less popular than men's, puts women bloggers at an economic, as well as a social, disadvantage. Considerations such as these have led to the establishment of the BlogHer Movement in the United States "with the mission to create opportunities for women bloggers to gain exposure, pursue education, and create community" (Pedersen & Macafee, 2007, p. 3). In Africa, there are general blog spots such as BloggingAfrica, BloggingGhana, BloggingSouthAfrica, BAKE, Kenya, etc. though these spaces are accessible to both male and female bloggers.

As blogging gains popularity, women's presence in the blogosphere increases and as suggested by Somolu (2007, p. 484), when women blog, "irrespective of the topic, they are sharing their life experiences and perspectives; documenting and passing on knowledge; reaching out to other women and men, and giving women a voice." Schmidt (2007, p. 1) refers to the blog as "a tool for information, identity and relationship management" and if that is so, it is important that we not just know of the presence of women in the blogosphere, but their contributions to life and to society through these blogs.

In the past, women bloggers have been described as people who base their arguments on personal issues such as family life and relationships while men bloggers blog about external topics such as governance, politics, sports, finance, etc (Herring et al., 2004; Pollard, 2003; Perseus, 2003; Pedersen & Macafee, 2007). Despite these gendered framings, Antunovic and Hardin (2013, p. 1) have stated that "women's engagement on the blogosphere is significant for feminist scholars, as women often use the blogosphere as a tool for organizing and community building." These two opposing perspectives of 'organizing and community building' as opposed to 'family life and relationships' may be evidenced to the fact that

studies in the past have not closely considered the themes of women's blogs but have only concentrated on the style of writing. If this is so, the same claim of Gurak (1999), that individuals in online communities are likely to bring with them pre-existing patterns of hierarchy and male domination, can also be said of the eye with which studies in the past have interrogated women's blogs.

### **1.1.1. The Blogosphere as a Space for Women**

At the 2005 BlogHer Conference in San Jose, California, Alice Bradley, a mommy blogger made a declaration that caused a ripple effect throughout the blogosphere. According to Bradley, "Mommy blogging is a radical act" Bradley (2005) as cited in Lopez(2009, p. 3). This statement can be situated directly in the fact that female blogging is a radical act, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The segregation of women's voices on the blogosphere has been acknowledged by researchers (Antunovic& Hardin, 2013;Herring et al., 2004; Lopez, 2009; Rainie, 2005). One reason for this may be the gender divide with regard to blog subjects. It has been widely speculated that women are more likely to talk about personal experiences while men talk about more external matters (Herring et al., 2004; McCullagh, 2008; Royal, 2008).

Another way to look at the criticism that female bloggers have received is through the "concept of the public/private dichotomy" (Lopez, 2009, p. 3). According to Lopez, being woman is seen as part of the private or domestic sphere that women are supposed to occupy and not challenge. Motiejunaite (2005, p. 15) has said that "the public sphere which consists of the working world, politics, economics, the law and mainstream discourse is a place that men inhabit and women desire to belong to."

When women bloggers wanted a piece of the blogosphere, it seems that what they wanted was to participate in the public sphere as equals with their male blogging counterparts. As successful, strong men do not air their dirty laundry in public, so to speak, female bloggers did not fit into this equation and were thus criticized for their transgression (Lopez, 2009, p. 5).

This has made it difficult for women to establish a credible reputation in the blogosphere. In short, women are playing in the wrong field.

Siegel (1999) looks at the issue of women and blogging by going back to the history of women's diaries and journals. According to Siegel, the modern phenomenon of blogging can be seen as an extension of women's earlier forms of "narrativizing personal experience" (p. 6). This is possible since blogs can be seen as a modification of the diary or journal into an internet form.

Even so, women's place on the blogosphere continues to be challenged by the larger blogging community. Still, the connection between blogs and other forms of women's writing poses the necessity to examine the contributions of women to the blogosphere. It is also important to assess the ways that women express themselves and make their voices heard. If the internet provides both a forum for the broadcasting of women's voices and the community to support that voice, then much more attention should be paid to the work that is happening on these websites (Lopez, 2009).

### **1.2.0. Statement of the Problem**

The vast majority of academic investigation that has so far been carried out on the blogging phenomenon has focused on the United States (e.g. Katz and Rice, 2002; Rheingold, 1993; Smith and Kollock, 1999; Turkle, 1995; Wallace, 1999) and United Kingdom (Auty, 2005; Pedersen & Macafee, 2006, 2007; Thelwall, 2006). This imbalance is now being redressed in

relation to non-English Language blogging; for example, Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl, and Sapp's (2006) examination of the state of the Polish blogosphere. As yet, however, few studies have specifically investigated the African blogosphere (Tande, 2011). In certain respects, African bloggers of both sexes are in a similar position to American and British women bloggers—"less noticed and less commented upon" (Pedersen & Macafee, 2007, p. 2). Most researchers (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Davis, 2014; Suler, 2002; Tetzlaff, 2000) are of the view that online spaces expand opportunities for identity expression due to their varied purposes, design features, and audience make-up. Several studies have been conducted about gender and identity on blogs.

Pedersen and Macafee (2007) investigated the British blogosphere to ascertain whether blogging in the United Kingdom reproduces the gender differences in blogging behavior and the gender inequalities in recognition that have been observed in studies based largely on United States bloggers. With a mixed-method approach and using no theory, Pedersen and Macafee found that for both sexes, blogging is mainly a leisure activity, and men and women find the same range of satisfactions in blogging. However, more women, unlike men use blogging as an outlet for creative work, whether as a hobby or as a livelihood.

Studies conducted in Scotland on the linguistic analysis of gender and personality differences in the language of blogs (Nowson & Oberlander, 2000; Nowson, 2005) reveal that women have a more immediate style of writing; they use more pronouns and words reflecting social processes, emotions and physical states. Men by contrast talk more about external matters. They use more articles and less concrete language.

Again, Herring, Kouper and Scheidt (2004) investigated the discursive construction of weblogs, using no theory. The study concluded, in conformity with Lopez (2009) that

women use a more personal style of writing; the first person narrative form. They also suggested that women are more likely to talk about their personal experiences while men take on political issues. It is evident that none of these studies looked closely at the themes of women's writings but rather their style of writing.

From a more feminist perspective, Antunovic and Hardin (2013, p. 19) investigated the formation of self and the conceptualization of sports in the 'Sports Blog' directory of BlogHer. Using content analysis and no theory, the study revealed that women bloggers tend to use blogging to document personal experiences of participation in sports and to provide resources for others about physical activity, health, and fitness. They concluded that "Women's active and participatory relationship with sports defies both stereotypical representations of women in mainstream sports media and hegemonic masculine discourses replicated in the blogosphere."

Even so, McCullagh (2008) is of the opinion that the topics women address are culturally undervalued; thus, women bloggers struggle to gain credibility. This leads us to the question of the exact topics women address; hence, the themes of the women's blogs as well as the implications of these themes for their identities.

Concerning the African blogosphere, this study has yet to find academic research on the phenomenon of blogging in Africa. Undoubtedly, several bloggers have addressed the prospects of Africa in the blogosphere; (Dibussi, 2011; Sakari, 2014; Ejugbo, 2013, Ajao, 2009; Zuka, 2013). However, the African blogosphere is seriously lacking in academic research and most importantly the facts that answer questions such as; 'Who is the African blogger?', 'What are they blogging about?', 'What specific identities are they constructing for themselves?' 'Do these identities reflect the African continent, the African people and



the African mind and intelligence, or are there negotiations to these characteristics that are considered African?', 'What is the way forward?', etc. These and many other questions have been left unanswered and meanwhile if researched into, would provide scholarship for further research and evidence or statistics for Africa and the African's representation on the world's blogosphere and for that matter the global new new media frontiers.

Looking at the above scholarly works, not much has been done on the blogosphere in Africa. Also, most of these works have been generally concerned about such identities that have to do with, writing styles, popularity and recognition in the ranking system of the blogosphere. While this observation has no intention of annulling previous research, it is quite obvious that most of these works were based on no theories. This study however, uses the identity theory and the feministgynocriticism theory to investigate the phenomenon of female bloggers' identity construction on the African blogosphere. It seeks to investigate the themes of African female bloggers' posts as well as their style of writing and the implications of these themes and style for their identity.

### **1.3.0. Research Objectives**

Identity is often characterized in terms of "one's interpersonal characteristics, such as self-definition or personality traits, the roles and relationships one takes on in various interactions, and one's personal values or moral beliefs" (Calvert, 2002, p. 5). Identity also involves a sense of continuity of self images over time (Grotevant, 1998). Also, as Ajao (2009, p. 1) has stated, "Africa is a large and very diverse continent and there are several news websites and blogs focused on Africa and our personal experiences, that are authored by Africans on the continent..." and in an era where women are doing their best to be seen

and heard both in presence and substance, it is high time we understood the phenomenon of the African blogosphere and the constructed identities of Africa's female bloggers who represent the continent in the eyes of the global virtual community. The objective of the study is to:

- a) Investigate the major thematic issues in African female bloggers' posts.
- b) Investigate the major stylistic issues in African female bloggers' writing.
- c) Ascertain the implications of the thematic and stylistic issues for African female bloggers' identities.

#### **1.4.0. Research Questions**

Questions from which the research was guided are:

- a) What are the major thematic issues in African female bloggers' posts?
- b) What are the major stylistic issues in African female bloggers' writing?
- c) What are the implications of thematic and stylistic issues for African female bloggers' identities?

#### **1.5.0. Significance of the Study**

Statistics given earlier in this work points to the fact of the massive penetration of the blogosphere into the African Continent. As has been stated by Miller (2009) the African blogs "bring together the richness and diversity that is Africa, with voices covering specific countries, experiences across the borders, news, technology, art, and culture," (p. 2). This work will bring into the limelight the African blogosphere, since it has received little

attention. It will also help reveal the contribution of the African blogosphere to national and international development and growth.

The study will again be one of the pacesetters in the field of research concentrated on the African blogosphere. Until now, very little work has been done in this area and the findings of this research will help give shape to an area of virtual Africa that seems less organized and less documented.

Furthermore, as has been pointed out by Somolu(2007), community building has been of particular significance to marginalized groups, including women. Mitra (2001: 31) has said that “on the internet, the marginalized can call out the dominant and put the dominant in the difficult position of either having to acknowledge the marginalized, or further distance the disposed by ignoring the call.” Even so, women’s voices often remain isolated (Rainie, 2005). The findings of this study will help discourage the male domination at the expense of the woman. It will also help give a voice to the woman and encourage the acceptance and appreciation of the feminine side when it comes to their contribution in presence and in substance to life and nation building. Thus, the study will assist women’s efforts towards social change and provide visibility to their endeavors.

Again, the study will help provide a better understanding of the differences that exist in the identity construction of male bloggers and female bloggers by throwing more light on the themes embedded in the writings of female bloggers, given that it has received little concentration in the past. It will also help bloggers and users of the internet to acknowledge and appreciate the characteristics that define them with regards to identity construction and popular culture.

Finally, the study will contribute to the ongoing debate on identity construction (. Katz & Rice, 2002; Rheingold, 1993; Smith & Kollock, 1999; Turkle, 1995; Wallace, 1999) and weblogs (Nowson & Oberlander, 2000; Davis, 2009; 2011; Huffaker & Calvert, 2006) as well as on feminist studies (Rainie, 2005; Mitra, 2001; Somolu, 2007; Antunovic & Hardin, 2013).

#### **1.6.0. Scope of the Study**

The study will focus on investigating the phenomenon of identity construction of African female bloggers within the African Continent. The study will be limited to only diary blogs or what we call personal blogs. Diary or personal blogs in this study refer to individually owned online sites where the authors document their day-to-day experiences, thoughts and feelings on any subject of their choice, “with a strong sense of the author’s personality, passions, and point of view” (Nardi et al, 2004, p. 42).

In this study, selected top African Diary Blogs that are authored by African female bloggers will be used. Top African Diary Blogs in this study will refer to the selected female top blogs which made the Personal Category Entries of the 2015 African Blogger Awards. Ten blogs will be used in this study and this is due to the availability and responsiveness of the authors of the blogs.

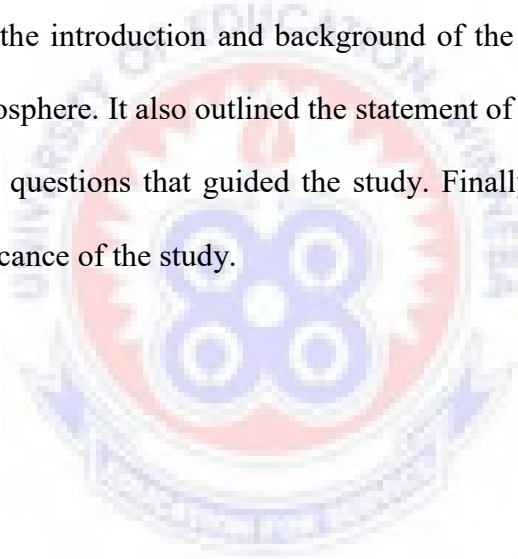
The study will concentrate on posts that were published between August, 2014 to April, 2015. The reason for this selection is because Webfluentia (the host of African Blogger Awards) begins its year from August when entries to the Blogger Awards are opened. In April, Webfluentia closes entries and begins the process of screening, filtering and scoring which goes on for about one and half months. Awards are announced in the month of May

(Wefluential, 2014). Ten blog posts will be investigated in each blog, using the most recent post to the nearest less most recent ones.

The study will be concentrated on the African Continent and on African female bloggers. African female bloggers in this study shall refer to female bloggers who are 18 years and above, who are of African descent and are living in Africa.

### **1.7.0. Summary**

Chapter One looked at the introduction and background of the phenomenon of blogging as well as the global blogosphere. It also outlined the statement of the problem, the objective of the study and research questions that guided the study. Finally, this chapter discussed the scope as well as significance of the study.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on gender and feminist issues, as well as, identity construction on the internet. It looks especially at other studies on the blogosphere and the wider social media space, interrogating the theories and findings of these studies to situate the relevance of the present study. It also throws light on the African blogosphere and its progress so far. The chapter also interrogates the theories on the wheels of which the entire work will be ridden. The related studies here offer understanding from all over the world, including Africa, about gender issues, feminist issues and identity construction on social media spaces and especially, on blogs.

#### **2.1 A Brief History of Blogging and the Blogosphere**

The origins of blogging go further back than the Internet to the days of personal diaries, chronicles and other written forms of personal musings. Today, a blog is considered to be a Web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual or company, (Beal, 2007). While the term "blog" was not coined until the late 1990s, the history of blogging starts with several digital precursors to it. Before "blogging" became popular, digital communities took many forms, including Usenet, commercial online services such as GENie, BiX and the early CompuServe, e-mail lists and Bulletin Board Systems (BBS). In the 1990s, Internet forum software, such as WebEx, created running conversations with

"threads". Threads are topical connections between messages on a metaphorical "corkboard". Some have likened blogging to the Mass-Observation project of the mid-20th century, (David, 2005).

Usenet was the primary serial medium included in the original definition of the Internet. It featured the moderated newsgroups which allowed all posting in a newsgroup to be under the control of an individual or small group. Most such newsgroups were simply moderated discussion forums, (Reyhan, 2005). In 1994, the world witnessed the birth of what many agree to be the very first blog. It was called Links.net - a place where creator Justin Hall could share his musings and favorite links with the world. It was just a simple page with manually updated HTML (and it still is); but it changed the course of how we shared ideas and content on the web, (Wilson, 2006).

The modern blog evolved from the online diary, where people would keep a running account of their personal lives. Most such writers called themselves diarists, journalists, or journalers. A few called themselves "escribitionists", (Wilson, 2006). Justin Hall, who began eleven years of personal blogging in 1994 while a student at Swarthmore College, is generally recognized as one of the earliest bloggers. Another early blog was Wearable Wireless Webcam, an online shared diary of a person's personal life combining text, video, and pictures transmitted live from a wearable computer and EyeTap device to a website, (Merholz, 1999).

Early weblogs were simply manually updated components of common websites, (Sullivan, 2002). However, the evolution of tools to facilitate the production and maintenance of web articles posted in reverse chronological order made the publishing process feasible to a

much larger, less technical, population. Ultimately, this resulted in the distinct class of online publishing that produces blogs we recognize today. For instance, the use of browser-based software is now a typical aspect of blogging. Blogs can be hosted by dedicated blog hosting services, or they can be run using web software publishing platforms such as WordPress, Movable Type, Blogger, LiveJournal, or on regular web hosting services.

The term "weblog" was coined by John Bargerin 1997. The short form, "blog," was coined by Peter Merholz, who jokingly broke the word 'weblog' into the phrase 'we blog' in the sidebar of his blog Peterme.com in 1999. Shortly thereafter, Evan Williams used "blog" as both a noun and verb ("to blog," meaning "to edit one's weblog or to post to one's weblog") and devised the term "blogger" in connection with Pyra Labs' Blogger product, leading to the popularization of the terms, (Beal, 2007).

After a slow start, blogging rapidly gained popularity. Blog usage spread from 1999, being further popularized by the near-simultaneous arrival of the first hosted blog tools: Open Diary, SlashDot, LiveJournal, DiaryLand and Blogger. Blogging combined the personal web page with tools to make linking to other pages easier — specifically permalinks, blogrolls and TrackBacks. This, together with weblog search engines enabled bloggers to track the threads that connected them to others with similar interests. By 2001, blogging was enough of a phenomenon that how-to manuals began to appear, primarily focusing on technique. The importance of the blogging community (and its relationship to the larger society) increased rapidly. Established schools of journalism began researching blogging and noting the differences between journalism and blogging, (Stableford, 2011).



One important event in the rise of blogging was when bloggers focused on the comments United States Senate Majority Leader, Trent Lott said regarding U.S. Senator Strom Thurmond in 2002. Lott, while praising Thurmond, stated that the U.S. would have been better off if Thurmond had been elected President in 1948. During that race, Thurmond was a strong supporter of racial segregation. Though Lott's comments were made at a public event attended by the media, no major media organizations reported on his controversial comments until after blogs broke the story. Blogging helped to create a political crisis that forced Lott to step down as majority leader. The impact of this story gave greater credibility to blogs as a medium of news dissemination. Though often seen as partisan gossips, bloggers sometimes lead the way in bringing key information to public light, with mainstream media having to follow their lead, (Wilson, 2006).

Since 2002, blogs have gained increasing notice and coverage for their role in breaking, shaping, and spinning news stories; and according to Beal (2007), the Iraq war saw bloggers taking measure and passionate points of view that went beyond the traditional left-right divide of the political spectrum. In 2004, the role of blogs became increasingly mainstream, as political consultants, news services and candidates all over the world began using them as tools for outreach and opinion forming.

Today, some estimate that more than 400 million people actively read blogs; and that number will only continue to grow, (Zuckerman, 2007). The line between what does and does not constitute a blog is more blurred than ever. Journal-style blog platforms targeted toward teens are as popular as ever, as are mid-level free platforms like Typepad, WordPress and Blogger that allow people to share their passions with a wider audience.

Again, most respected news outlets rely, at least in part, on blogging in order to bring their subscribers the best and most urgent news. But the importance of great content isn't just for the unbiased any more. Today, the world's biggest brands use blogs to tell their story, promote their products, and connect with their audiences in ways that were once considered impossible.

By the middle of 2006, there were 50 million blogs according to Technorati's State of the Blogosphere report. To say that blogs experienced exponential growth is a bit of an understatement, (Chapman, 2011). According to Beal (2007), blogs often reflect the personality of the author or the company employees they represent. To this end the most accurate and fitting evolution of today's blog comes from online diaries where the diarist would keep an online journal of themselves. "Blogs have become an integral part of online culture", (Chapman, 2011, p. 13).

## **2.2 The African Blogosphere**

Bloggers such as Miller (2009), Ajao (2009), Bastion (2011), Fahamu (2014) and Zuckerman (2007) agree that Africa is a very large and diverse continent with many different people, nationalities and unique cultures that inform the kind of enormous diversity found in this part of the world. Ajao (2009, p.3) has said that "there are several news websites and blogs focused on Africa and the African experiences, that are authored by Africans on the continent" and according to Miller (2009, p. 2), "these blogs bring together the richness and diversity that is Africa with voices covering specific countries, experiences across the borders, news, technology, art, and culture."

Africa's blogger community is still in its infancy, but it has already demonstrated its importance in mobilizing opinion in several African countries, especially in Kenya and Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, etc, and promises to be a significant player in the fight for democracy and freedom of expression across the continent, (Zuckerman, 2007). The contribution of political weblogs in shaping public opinion and mobilizing society is much discussed around the globe – at least, in so far as it concerns Europe and the Middle East. “But what about Africa?”(Miller, 2009).

In truth, despite the impact of a growing number of politically orientated blogs from across Africa, the continent is all but non-existent on the Web 2.0 map. What potential does this type of Internet communication have in supporting and advancing democracy, particularly in countries with fragile democratic or other participatory structures? An Internet connection is the precondition for any web-based activity, but the prohibitive cost means that only 11 per cent of African households are connected to the Internet, far below the global average of 23 percent. However, with the improvements in infrastructure, reforms in government regulation and the development of creative business models, recent years have seen a significant increase in Internet access in most parts of Africa. In particular, the rapid spread of mobile telephone networks and community-based Internet access has greatly improved the situation, (Miller, 2009).

At the same time, the dissemination of so-called Web 2.0 applications – for personal, commercial and political use – has been increasing. These include social networking services such as Facebook, SMS-based services such as Twitter and, above all, weblogs. The blog aggregator, Afrigator offers an insight into the African blogging community: in

July 2009, it counted over 10,500 African blogs, 62 percent (approx 6,400) of which were in South Africa, by far the leading blogging nation, followed by 1,094 in Nigeria, 555 in Kenya and 325 in Egypt. Seven percent – approx 780 – of the blogs listed cannot be categorized by country: they concern themselves mainly with Africa-wide issues and are categorized as cross-regional.

The African blogosphere is as colorful and diverse as anywhere else; love and sex, technology and business, music and animals as well as development and politics are in abundance. Bloggers also deal with subjects that may be censored by the state or that remain social taboos; corruption and homosexuality are two such issues, (Huffaker, 2005). According to Afrigator, religion, education, governance, social networks and soccer are the most widely covered topics, (Afrigator, 2013). In other blogs, such as the Cape Town Daily Photo, the main subject is the normal goings-on of everyday life, (David, 2005). While South Africa provides the greatest number of blogs, the newest and most striking example of their use as a means of political citizen journalism can be found in those African states with fragile government and media structures.

In general, weblogs can be divided into three distinct types: personal online journals, corporate blogs and citizen journalism blogs. In the latter, the consumer becomes the producer of content and a correspondent in his or her own right independent of traditional media structures. This form of non-professional journalism, and the network of like-minded writers it brings together, is a vital tool of political involvement and participatory, democratic activism, (Ajao, 2009).

However, according to Huffaker and Calvert (2006), “personal online journals are the highest form of means of online identity construction”. These journals are basically an open-book diary people’s day to day life and experiences, both covert and otherwise.

Reyhan (2005) sites Africa's vast diversity of languages and cultures, together with the sheer size of the continent, as some of the difficulties of communication and networking across borders. Nevertheless, Internet activists from different regions, such as SokariEkine from Nigeria or OryOkolloh from Kenya, see themselves as part of a dynamic and growing African online community. Ekine emphasizes the existence of "a growing number of Internet-connected people who are familiar with blogs and social media. Compared to the overall population, this number may still be small, but the growth rate is remarkable", (Ekine, 2014, p. 10). In Okolloh's view, the ready collaboration and cooperation of bloggers was crucial for the establishment of Africa’s lively blogging community; especially in countries like Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria. “Particularly in the beginning, when our numbers were still small, we made sure that we commented on each other's blogs so that we could get to know one another", (Okolloh, 2013, p. 4).

Bloggers see these new technologies as a chance to create greater openness and use them as tools for individual and social development as well as political mobilization. (Ansa,2013). Due to the simplicity of Web 2.0 applications, "users" can become "producers" much more easily: they become the creators as well as the consumers of content.

Also, according to Okolloh (2013),

In countries lacking a pluralistic media or political environment, or for marginalized sectors of the population who are usually under-represented or absent in national and international media, the creation of these new and instant channels of communication is particularly important, (p. 13).

An example of this is the Nata Village Blog (Nata means ‘a village of hope’) in which the inhabitants of a small village in Botswana report on the tangible impact of the HIV/Aids pandemic, compiling information on various treatments and self-help opportunities, and facilitating exchanges between those affected. Also, the blog Voices of Africa allows a platform where bloggers present and discuss their visions of political, economic and social development. Their global reach enables these new forms of media and journalism to correct common stereotypes of the African continent and replace them with more authentic views from within.

In recent times, traditional media outlets are being driven by the blogs to use their own communication tools more effectively. The Nigerian daily The Vanguard actively creates a dialogue with its readers by inviting them to comment on online articles, delivering video and audio content, and allowing content to link into social networks, (Huffaker, 2005).

The international media has also begun to react to the growing blogosphere in Africa. In 2007, when Reuters news service started to work with "Global Voices", an international blog aggregator of bloggers and citizen journalists outside Europe and the US, it included links to African weblogs on its new Africa website, (Zuckerman, 2014).

One of the milestones of the African blogosphere are the introduction of blogger awards in countries like Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Botswana and many others, including

African Blogger Awards (ABA) which bring all African countries under one umbrella. These competitions receive entries from all corners of the continent including Nigeria, Kenya, Benin, Mali, Morocco, Togo, Cameroon, Malawi and Eritrea, to name a few, with the diversity of nationalities being a clear indication that social media influencers across Africa have welcomed the opportunity to be measured quantitatively against their peers, (ABA, 2014). The 2014 African Blogger Awards marked the first time that winners had been announced based on scientific metrics, rather than through peer nominations. It can be said, therefore that the African Blogosphere is witnessing a steady growth and development.

### **2.3 The Character of Blogs**

Blogs are web pages on which content appears in reverse chronological order; the most updated content, then, is at the top of the page, (Blood, 2000; Dart, 2009; Herring et al., 2004). According to the Nielsen/McKinsey Company, the number of blogs reached over 181 million worldwide in 2011, (Nielsen Wire, 2012). Blogs do not require sophisticated technical knowledge to access or create, (Blood, 2000). Blogs “challenge once-sacred distinctions between interpersonal, group, and mass communication” because they can serve as journal or diary-type outlets and be shared with a large community of web users, (Sundar, 2008, p. 58).

Blogs allow users to explore the “self” in a social sphere in a way that is not permitted by face-to-face interaction, (Lievrouw et al., 2001). Since user-generated content is widely accessible, the blogosphere may be seen as a democratizing force, (Blood, 2000; Dart, 2009). Although it is important to acknowledge that Internet access is not universal, and the Internet community often replicates existing social power relations, (Youngs, 2007), blogs

do offer a public outlet for perspectives historically ignored by mainstream media (Mitra, 2001; Nardi et al., 2004; Somolu, 2007).

A number of research about why people blog have emerged in the past decade. Based on these findings, reasons for blogging can be grouped into two categories: Intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations include the desire to express one's feelings and writing to cope with problems, (Liu et al., 2007; Nardi et al., 2004; Stavrositu&Sundar, 2008). Another motivation includes the desire to document one's life and construct a self-identity, (McCullagh, 2008; Nardi et al., 2004). In a study of political bloggers, (Ekdale et al. (2010, p. 224) found that the three most common reasons why bloggers started a blog were "to let off steam," to "keep track of their thoughts," and "to formulate new ideas." Blogs, therefore, may function as a sort of "directory" of thoughts, where bloggers document their emotions through writing.

While the online diary form tends to be the most common type of blog, it is certainly not the only one. Bloggers are often driven to produce content with meaningful implications for readers. They intend to connect to others with similar interests and build a virtual community (Liu et al., 2007; Newbury, 2008).

However, on the interesting side, the online diary form has been given almost no attention in the African blogosphere and it is high time we shifted our attention to the very form of writing that has evolved into blogging as we know today, and even within the African continent.



## 2.4 Identity, Blogging and Identity Construction

Blogging is a relatively new form of Internet communication, and scholarly research is not yet extensive. However, some interesting studies have been published, (Nardi et al., 2004). Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004) reported a quantitative analysis of 203 randomly selected blogs, focusing on blog author characteristics, reasons for blogging, frequency of posts, usage of blog features, and frequency of commenting. Cohen (2004) and McDonald and Towle (2004) conducted empirical studies of photoblogs. Krishnamurthy (2002) analyzed blog posts regarding September 11. Halavais (2002) discussed methodological issues in text analyses of 125 randomly selected blogs. According to Nardi et al (2004), "Blogging" is a web-based form of communication that is rapidly becoming mainstream and blogs have been featured extensively in the popular media and have entered political campaigns, news organizations, businesses, and classrooms.

Valkenburg, Schouten and Peter (2005, p. 32) have stated that, "internet communication has several characteristics which may stimulate individuals to undertake identity experiments." First, it is characterized by reduced auditory and visual cues, which may encourage users to emphasize, change or conceal certain features of their physical self. Second, internet communication is anonymous, especially during the early stages of internet-based relationships. This anonymity may trigger people to feel less inhibited to disclose certain aspects of their self because the potential repercussions for real life are reduced, (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Spears et al., 2000).

While technology has made it possible to fashion diverse and fluid identities, Davis (2011) has suggested in same manner that the motivation to do so is propelled by the feeling of

anonymity that is fostered by some forms of computer-mediated communication. Also, internet communication often happens in social communities that are isolated from those in real life. Such remote communities, which often involve limited commitment, may encourage identity experiments, management or verification, (Turkle, 1995).

Many identity researchers like Brinthaupt and Lipka (2002), Harter (1999) and Hogg et al. (1995) regard the self and identity as two different, yet related constructs. They assume that while individuals have only one self, they have many different identities. These identities vary across relational contexts, such as the family, peer group and school.

Valkenburg et al. (2005) in their investigation of how often adolescents engage in internet-based identity experiments and with what motives they engage in such experiments, found that early adolescents experimented with their identities significantly more often than older adolescents. Falling on the Uses and Gratification paradigm and the self presentational strategies, Valkenburg and his colleagues found that 50 percent of their population sample engaged in internet-based identity experiments and management. The most important motive for such experiments was self exploration (to investigate how others react), followed by social compensation (to overcome shyness) and social facilitation (to facilitate relationship formation).

These findings are consistent with Davis (2010) who takes a somewhat different approach by considering the ways in which normative developmental processes shape individuals' blogging practices during the course of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Davis' study also focused on only adolescent girls and used the developmental theory. According to Davis, for more than a decade, young people have used the Internet for self-expression and exploration; as her study found that adolescents use their blogs to record and reflect on their

daily experiences, personal relationships, and feelings. Davis however found, quite inconsistent with Valkenburg (2005), that rather than form new relationships, young people use these new media technologies to maintain existing friendships formed in their physical social environment.

Negotiating the usual course, the present study is not focused on adolescence which Erikson (1968) has described as a period of identity formation during which individuals revisit their childhood identifications as they become aware of the roles valued by society and in the process, confront for the first time such questions as “Who am I? How do I fit into the world around me?” Evidently, the adolescent stage is characterized by a search for an identity and a kind of confusion that needs to be settled. Meanwhile, until an identity is known and constructed, one cannot verify or validate that identity.

This study therefore concentrates on young and mature adults in this study. While adolescents depend, to a large degree, on their peer group for self-validation (Davis, 2010), feelings of anxiety and self-doubt tend to recede as individuals reach adulthood, a period that spans between the ages from 18 to 25, (Arnett, 2000, 2004). Thus, while identity formation may begin in adolescence, Arnett (2004) has argued that it is the period of emerging adulthood when individuals engage earnestly in the process of self-definition and expression.

With fast-paced technological advances and rising globalization, the social organization of societies has become increasingly complex over the course of the 20th century and into the 21st century. People today assume an increasing number and wide variety of social roles across diverse contexts, a state of affairs that many scholars contend affects the way individuals construct and experience their identities. Specifically, scholars observe that

identity has become increasingly multi-faceted and fluid as individuals move from one social context to the other, adopting different roles in each context, (Davis, 2011).

Scholars such as Plant (1997), Stone (1991), Turkle (1995) and Waskul & Douglass (1997) have also recognized the potential for self-multiplicity afforded by the internet. This early body of internet researches describes the multiple and varied identities that people can assume in virtual spaces like chat rooms and multi-user dungeons (MUDs), identities that may have little connection to individuals' offline lives.

While the present study investigates African female bloggers' identities, it does not concern itself with the multiple identities of the research participants across different social media contexts or the connection between their online and offline identities. This study seeks to investigate the implications of thematic and stylistic issues for African female bloggers' identities.

Pedersen and Macafee (2007) reveal that while research into Computer Mediated Communication dates back to the 1970s, it was not until the 1990s that researchers turned their attention to the issue of gender and feminism. Despite earlier suggestions that online communities were gender-blind, researchers such as Herring (1993, 1996), Kramarae and Taylor (1993), Hall (1996) and Gurak (1999) claimed that rather than neutralizing gender, the electronic medium in fact encouraged its intensification, and that participants in online communities were likely to bring with them pre-existing patterns of hierarchy and male domination conditioned into them early in life.

Herring (1993, 1996), for example, investigated electronic discussion lists and suggested that men and women constituted different discourse communities in cyberspace and that such communities were different but not equal; proposing that women and men have

different online styles. Other research findings support the fact of significant differences in the identity construction between male and female bloggers. Previous studies of CMC (Herring 2000) have found that women generated shorter posts than men in discussion lists and news groups. However, these studies have tended to focus on work-based groups, and findings also suggest that women are less confident posting, often feeling intimidated by their male colleagues. Nowson and Oberlander (2000) have however explained that “diary blogs, by contrast, are personal and individually written, closer to situations in which women are reported to participate to a greater extent,” and therefore reveal findings that are quite the opposite of Herring’s. Again, the findings revealed that women have a more immediate style of writing, they use more pronouns and words reflecting social processes, emotions and physical states; men by contrast talk more about external matters, they use more articles and more frequent, less concrete language.

Nowson and Oberlander’s findings indicate that not only are personal weblogs dominated by females, but that they also spend more effort blogging than men. This is reflected not only in longer posts, but in more frequent postings where women wrote on average 30 personal posts in a month while men wrote only 19; posing a significant difference. Adding to the possible differences, Fallows (2005) has suggested that men are “more avid consumers than women of online information,” while women are more enthusiastic online communicators.

While Nowson and Oberlander (2000) and Herring (2000) used no theory in their work, Herring (1993, 1996) were based on discourse analysis.

The present study however makes use of the identity theory and feminist gynocriticism theory. Again, the research is conducted basing its site in the African Continent, unlike previous studies.

More interestingly, the issue of gender, feminism and identity on blogs has been investigated (Garfunkel, 2005; Pollard, 2003; Ratliff, 2004a, 2004b, 2006; Pedersen and Macafee, 2007). However, these researchers based their works largely on the gender inequalities in popularity and recognition that have been observed on the blogosphere. For instance, Garfunkel (2005) and Pollard (2003) agree in their findings, remarking that men tend to receive more links to their blogs from other bloggers than do women. Having more links places a blog higher in the popularity ranks; this effect is amplified by blog-monitoring sites such as Technorati, Afrigator, etc, which use page-ranking algorithms that give greater weight to links from blogs that are themselves highly ranked. Ratliff (2006) produced evidence that men's postings also receive more comments than women's. It has also been claimed, in the North American context, that a greater amount of attention is accorded in the mass media to male bloggers (Herring, Kouper, et al., 2004).

Again, Antunovic and Hardin (2013) in their investigation of identity and the conceptualization of sports by women bloggers, report that women bloggers tend to use blogging to document personal experiences of participation in sports and to provide resources for others about physical activity, health, and fitness. They opine that women's active and participatory relationship with sports defies both stereotypical representations of women in mainstream sports media and hegemonic masculine discourses replicated in the blogosphere.

Moreover, Lopez (2009) provides an alternative to the masculine construction of the blogosphere by analyzing ‘mommy bloggers’ through the lenses of feminism and autobiography. Lopez argues for the potential in the radical act of mommy blogging (where bloggers document motherhood/parenting experiences) to build communities and challenge dominant representations of motherhood in society.

Also, Akujobi (2011), using the feminist gynocriticism theory, to explore Motherhood as a discourse in African women creative efforts; appraises Motherhood as a concept and as an institution within the African literature and culture.

Finally, while Pedersen and Macafee presented a snapshot of the motivations and habits of British bloggers, it was recommended by their study, as is evidenced by the reviewed literature, “that further research be conducted in order to obtain a better understanding of possible gender, feminism and identity issues of blogging activities across a wide range of social, national, and cultural environments” (2007, p. 189).

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

This section presents the theories that buttress concepts on which the analysis and the core findings of the study will largely be based. Thus, the theories and their concepts will help make judgments and predictions about the phenomena surrounding the implications of thematic and stylistic issues on African female bloggers’ identities. The theory will serve as a guide for the study. Eisenhart (1991, p. 205) as cited in Donkor (2014) defines theoretical framework as “a structure that guides research by relying on formal theory...constructed by using an established coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships”. Based

on the questions and objectives that guided the research, this study employed the identity theory and the feminist gynocriticism theory in investigating the kinds of identities implied by the themes and styles embedded in African female blogs.

### **2.6.0. Identity Theory**

Identity theory consists of a set of ideas about the self and the output of self into society, (Stryker & Burke, 2000). In Identity theory, the self is reflexive, in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. This process in identity theory is called Identification, (MacCall & Simmons, 1978). Through the process of identification, an identity is formed. McCall and Simmons (1978) refer to identification as a person's conception and expression of their individuality. Although self-categorization is a phenomenon that generally exists in social identity theory, Stryker (1980) is of the view that it is equally relevant in identity theory, in which categorization depends upon a named and classified world. Serpe (2011) refers to the classified world as social structure. In this sense, the blogosphere can represent the named and classified world.

The blogosphere is a virtual social environment where bloggers exist to express their own conception of their individualities as McCall and Simmons (1978) have put it. According to Heivadi and Khajeheian (2013), the perceptions, attitudes, behaviors and actions people do on the blogosphere construct and shape their identities which in regard increase the importance of the social media. This construct has, therefore, become more critical to be studied and to understand.



People acting in the context of social structure name one another as occupants of positions or roles. Symbols are used to designate these positions, (Stets & Burke, 2000). Also, as individuals designate their own positions, they call forth in themselves expectations about how they are to behave and what acts they are to perform, (Serpe, 2011). Stets and Burke (2000) therefore summarize the import of identity theory as they point out that the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance. This means that when a person perceives or categorizes himself or herself as an occupant of a role, they also have expectations that have to do with doing things that are supposed to confirm, verify or legitimize that role.

It is true that people are almost always aware of expectations associated with positions, and as they present themselves to others, the form and content of the presentation reflect that expectation. However, this can change depending on the kind of social structure within which the presentation occurs. Some structures are open and flexible while others are closed and rigid, (Serpe, 2011). Bloggers have the chance to create their own world (which is the blog site) within the blogosphere on the larger internet space. It is therefore safe to say that the blogosphere is an open and flexible social structure and hence, bloggers would have the freedom to change the form and content of their presentation to their readers. They also have the freedom to maintain a routine form and content, all of which depends on the kinds of identities bloggers desire to construct. Still, all structures impose limits and constraints on what individuals do when engaged in communication, (Serpe, 2011).

### **2.6.1 Identities and the Salience Hierarchy**

According to Stryker (1987) as cited in Serpe (2011, p. 3), “identities are designations that people makes about themselves in relation to their location in social structures and the roles that they play by virtue of this location.”

Stets and Burke (2000) state that identities are organized into a salience hierarchy, and those identities high in the hierarchy are more likely to be evoked than those lower in this hierarchy. Not all situations will invoke multiple identities, but many do. The salience hierarchy determines those identities that are invoked by people as they orchestrate their roles, (Blumer, 2008). This means that in a single platform such as an individually authored personal blog site, the blogger has the freedom to evoke multiple identities based the different roles she performs. Since the main activity bloggers perform on their blogs is to publish posts (whether as articles, images or videos), their roles are played through what they post to their audiences.

Stryker proposes that when a communication situation is isolated from structural constraints, individuals will have more options in their choice of an identity, and hence, they will be more likely to evoke more than one identity. However, the recurring identity or identities rank high in the salience hierarchy, (Jasso, 2002). This is possible within the blogosphere; that since individual bloggers create their own personal site, free from some of the rigid constrains of other social structures; bloggers are likely to evoke more than one identity. This would most likely be evident through the issues or topics they choose to talk about and how they choose to talk about them to their audiences in order to carry their messages across.

This points to the study's interest in investigating the major thematic and stylistic issues of African female bloggers' blogging practices in order to ascertain which identities rank high in their salience hierarchy.

### **2.6.2 The Concept of Commitment**

Stryker (1987) as cited in Blumer (2008) introduced the concept of commitment as a means for conceptualizing the link between social structure and self. Commitment designates the degree to which a person's relationship to others depends on being a certain kind of individual with a particular identity. In other words, being a certain kind of individual with a particular identity determines a person's relationship to others. In effect, the kind of relationship a person desires to have with others serves as a precursor to the kind of identity they construct; so that the others will see the person the way he/she wants them to see him/her. Blumer (2008) states that these others may be the external evaluators of the person's role identity.

Having a relationship with others that is based on one's desired identity will tend to produce behaviors that conform to the expectations and definitions of that identity, (Burke, 1998). When people reveal such commitment to an identity in a situation, their sense of self-esteem becomes dependent on the successful execution of their identity, (Jasso, 2002). As a result, individuals seek to verify their identities through performance.

Serpe (2011) concludes that role identities become part of individuals' plans and goals because legitimating one's identity in the eyes of others is always a driving force of human behavior. Moreover, people evaluate themselves through the role performances intended to confirm a role identity. Furthermore, as McCall and Simmons (1978) as cited in Stets and

Burke (2000) have emphasized, the most important audiences for a role performance are the individuals themselves who assess their performances with respect to their own idealized view of their role identity.

The study therefore seeks to investigate the thematic and stylistic issues of African female bloggers' posts and to ascertain their implication on bloggers' identities.

### **2.7.0. Feminist Gynocriticism Theory**

According to Brewer (2002), feminism seeks to explain how women find their own power in a world filled with social stereotypes and stigmas. Freedman (2001) asserts that feminisms concern themselves with women's inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex. Furthermore, one could argue that all feminists call for changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order, to reduce and eventually overcome this discrimination against women. One way of doing this has massively incorporated the power of the arts and literature.

Particularly so, gynocriticism theory, according to Showalter (1979, p. 25), focuses on the theory and practice of women as writers – “on the woman as the producer of textual meaning.” Gynocriticism was developed from the feminist literary theory by Elaine Showalter who describes the latter as

male-oriented, devoted to exposing what men thought women were and should be; in order to do this type of criticism one may need years of apprenticeship in a male-created critical tradition; it tends to naturalize women's oppression by focusing on it; and it gives victimization an allure.

In other words, the feminist critique of the 1960's and 1970's saw a close interrogation of art and literature, looking at how female characters were portrayed in the male-authored classics of the time; how the portrayals illustrated a patriarchal ideology and how they reinforced traditions of masculine dominance.

Borne out of the feminist literary theory therefore, gynocriticism theory “focuses not on male texts, textuality, creativity and traditions but on women's texts, textuality, creativity and traditions”, (Lye, 2014, p. 5).

In patriarchal society, Nodeh and Pourgiv (2012) say that women first started writing through an internalization of the standards of the dominant culture and an imitation of its established modes of writing and behavior. They try to write as equal to the intellectual achievements of the male culture. Thus, women as writers have always been under the influence of male patriarchal and literary tradition and therefore could never have an original, innovative and independent art. Changing the phase of the art and literature, gynocriticism theory explores the uniqueness of women's writings without using masculine linguistics and male aestheticism as the standard. Explaining this idea, Showalter (1981) asserts that in such a space where women writers writing in patriarchal society “seek the approval of their male masters and inherently sexist publishing circles, no female writer has been free to explore the female consciousness,” (p. 42).

Using Showalter's linguistic and cultural model of gynocriticism to investigate the network of influence in Adrienne Rich's “A Change of World”, Nodeh and Pougiv (2012) put out that feminism has come far and through, at least to some significant extent, as to emancipating women from some of the patriarchal restrictions imposed on them; and which is expected to reflect in the female art and literature.

It seems therefore that women and their writing deserve a chance at being evaluated free from the standard of the masculine literary canon and attentiveness so as to be appreciated in a space of the feminine literary canon and attentiveness.

Again, expounding Rich's "A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far", Nodeh and Pourgivi (2012, p. 2) posit that gynocriticism theory contrives a "cultural locus of female literary identity, idescribing the forces that intersect women writers' experiences in relation to the social context in which they occur." According to Landau (1995), gynocriticism theory interrogates the women's art and literature as a female text source which has the ability to make its own symbols, creating a wild zone of experience; for articulating female issues and positing them within the national and global phenomenon, even as an opposition to the restrictions of male tradition. Langdell (2004) has said that the essence of women and their artistic intelligence has been unaccounted for in art and literature. This is what drives gynocriticism theory.

Commenting on women's history of literary creation, Langdell (2004) mentions that women have traditionally been considered as "sociological chameleons" who have historically been allowed only to adopt lifestyle, class, and culture of their male counterparts. Their literature before the inception of feminism was too much of an imitation of their male authoritarians. Therefore, what they needed most was to express and illustrate what they have really known, felt, and experienced.

Hence, in line with feminism, Gelpi and Gelpi (1993, p. 15) believe that "gynocriticism allows women writers to form a subculture, within the larger framework of a whole society, unified by common values, conventions and experiences, making their way for direct self-expression and creation of their own true identity."

Gynocriticism theory offers four models or approaches for analyzing women's writings. These are biological approach, linguistic approach, psychoanalytic approach and cultural approach.

According to Miller (2003), the biological approach explores how the female body is imprinted on a text. It seeks to identify relevant literary images that speak to the core of the message and reveal the intention of the writer. For instance, the uterus and breasts may be meaningful images in texts written by women. The linguistic approach assumes that women write in a way particular to their gender and therefore focuses on content and/or language and how women make use of it in order to construct their identity. This approach may analyze areas such as themes, style, genre, grammar, imagery and other linguistic elements of the text, (Nodeh&Pourgiv, 2012). The psychoanalytic approach analyzes the female mind and its artistic potential. It seeks to find answers to questions such as "How does the female mind digest her experiences?" and "How does this affect writing?" This according to Miller (2003) offers a better understanding of the text and its author. To this approach, Showalter suggests that the female writing is more fluid than the male writing. Finally, the cultural approach lays emphasis on how the surrounding society influences women's writing. It asks the question, "How has the woman's self-concept been shaped by her society and how is this reflected in the text?"

Explaining the models or approaches of gynocritic theory, Showalter (1986, p. 310) as cited in Ali (2013) writes that "Its subjects are history, style, themes and structure of writing by woman; the psychodynamics of female creativity, the trajectory of the individual, the evolution and laws of a female tradition." Ali (2013) adds that gynocriticism is presented as a way to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop

new models based on the study of female experience and identity rather than to adapt male models and theories.

### **2.7.1 Gynocriticism in African Women's Writing**

In Africa, gynocriticism has been used to explore some themes in women's writing. For instance, Akujobi (2011) appraises Motherhood as a concept and an institution that bestows the highest identity on the African woman in her article "Motherhood in African Literature and Culture". From the perspective of gynocriticism, she interrogates literary discourse where motherhood is a recurrent theme and explores perceptions of women regarding themselves as mothers and the sense they make of their experiences of motherhood. Akujobi asserts that in African society, the core essence and identity of the woman has been seated significantly in her role as a mother; and this has set African women on the race for motherhood, "long before they had a chance to find what they themselves wanted to be defined by as individuals", (p. 4). Akujobi is of the opinion that "Yes, motherhood is vital but it should not be all that the woman is made of. It should be a matter of choice as some women would rather not experience motherhood. If it is a choice, it might save the woman some troubles in society", (p. 5).

Furthermore, following women's experiences, most African scholars and critics have dwelt on the oppression and victimization of the woman in society and have utilized it to empower the African woman to free herself in order to reveal her desired identity.

Hill-Collins (1990) expresses her contempt for women's acceptance of victimization as part of their experience. She challenges the African woman to "tear the veil of invisibility by



breaking the barriers of patriarchy” using the metaphor of the “veil” and the powerful vision of gynocriticism, (p. 11).

Again, Adebayo (1993) in agreement with Hill-Collins (1990) has put out that it is important for the African woman to tear the veil of invisibility which has the ability to mask her identity, muffle her voice and distort her vision.

The issue of motherhood has for a long time been the axis of African Women’s art and literature. While it has not yet reached its highest potential of being re-conceptualized within the female tradition, other areas of the woman’s experiences have not received that much attention. To this course, some scholars and critics are of the opinion that the African woman needs to include in her story her other areas of interests and roles outside of the popular motherhood institution. For instance, Oriaku (2006) explores the relevance of the Black woman’s creativeness in patriarchal Africa (especially in creative writing) from the perspective of gynocriticism. Oriaku asserts that society seems to expect not much from the creative mind of the woman apart from her love for her present and future children. Orieku includes that it is important for the woman to throw away the yoke of discomfort and oppression and preoccupy herself with freedom, comfort, prosperity and dignity. Also, Wilson-Tagoe (2007) is of the opinion that the woman must contest and revise misconceptions and narrow untrue and undeserving representations.

These views point out the fact that it is women themselves who can redefine their own identity, whether in the physical society or the virtual one. One of the ways women can do that is through their writing.

Though this study did not encounter works done on African women writers online, the researcher believes that this work will contribute to setting the pace to adding contributions of online African women writers towards redefining the African woman's identity.

## **2.8 Language, Social Media and Blogging**

The issue of language and social media has been the focus of some scholarly research as Perez-Sabater (2013) has pointed out that in the last few years, information and communication technologies have evolved and rapidly created new forms of literacies. While there has been a fairly extensive research done in these areas, a greater percentage of them are focused on gender differences in language. Thus, researchers juxtapose women's use of language as compared to men's use of language in order to reveal the gendered differences that exist in their usage.

Research conducted by Rosseti (1998) on the use of language by men and women in emails showed that men are interested in presenting their personal points of view in order to present an authoritative contribution to the discussion while women are more interested in the contribution itself. Rossetti opines that women use far more expressions offering support and building their relationship with their readers. Also, women use more expressions of appreciation and thanks while men use less direct expressions.

Again, in her discourse analysis of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) bulletin board, Herring (1993, p. 8) describes the features of women's language as "attenuated assertions, apologies, explicit justification, direct questions, personal orientation and support of others", while men's language feature strong assertions, self promotion, rhetorical question, authoritative orientation, challenges and humor". In agreement with

Rosseti(1998), Herring attributes these differences to women's interest in building relationship while men are more prone to remaining impersonal in communication.

Furthermore, Argamon, Koppel, Fine and Shimoni (2003) distinguish the use of virtual language into involvement and informativeness. According to Biber (1995, p. 4) as cited in Argamon et al (2003), "the involvement dimension consists of linguistic resources that create interaction while the informational dimension consists of resources that communicate propositional content". In their research on language and gender, Argamon et al (2003) compared frequencies of large word classes such as parts of speech. The involvement dimension of parts of speech includes first and second person pronouns, present tense verbs and contractions while the informational dimension includes prepositions, attributives and longer words. It was found that informational word classes are preferentially used by men while involvement and interaction are associated with women.

Newson, Oberlander and Gill (2005) relate differences in online texts to contextuality. According to Newson et al (2005, p. 23), "males are seen as preferring a formal and explicit style in writing while females are seen as preferring a style that is more deictic and contextual.

Rather interestingly, Herring and Paolillo (2006) investigated the association of involvement and informational word classes with male and female authors. However, they took into consideration, the genre of the blogs they investigated. Herring and Paolillo found that the gender differences became an insignificant factor; stating that women are more likely to write 'diary blogs' linking to content of personal nature while men are more likely to write 'filter blogs' linking to external content. Heering and Paolillo (2006) found that the involvement and informational word class were associated with the genres and the genres

were in turn associated with gender. However, within each genre, there were no significant gender differences in the frequency of word classes.

Also, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) who conducted a research on gender similarities and differences in online identity and language use also focused on teenage groups stating that such groups constituted the highest users of blogs as well as other CMC tools. Investigating the use of explicit language among teenage bloggers as well as the posting length, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) found that male language was more aggressive and active than female language. They also found that majority of teenage bloggers preferred to use slang rather than standard language in their posts; attributing this to the fact that the blog is a private place, therefore they are freer to use such language there than in the outside world.

Though seemingly very few, some researchers have focused primarily of the features of women's language on social media.

For instance, Pebrianti (2013) investigated women's language features used by Indonesian female bloggers. Pebrianti found that female bloggers mostly used informal language in their blogs to shorten the gap between the blogger and the readers. Another finding was that intensifiers tend to be the most frequent feature of women's language as used by Indonesian female bloggers. According to Pebrianti (2013), the finding indicates that female bloggers want to emphasize or strengthen their utterance deeply to attract addressee's attention by using intensifier.

Lakoff (1975, p. 287) as cited in Holmes (2001) has said that women "use intensifying devices to persuade their addressee to take them seriously" because they are lacking status in society. Holmes (2001) adds that female bloggers mostly use gendered language features

in their postings because they tend to reflect uncertainty and lack of confidence in communication.

Furthermore, Schler, Koppel, Argamon and Pennebaker (2005) have said that avoiding issues related to politics, technology and money, female bloggers discuss their personal lives and use more personal writing style. Schler et al (2005) have noted that female bloggers use more pronouns, assent/negation words and blog words (such as 'lol', 'haha'). According to Schler et al, their findings confirm and lend support to the hypothesis that female writing tends to emphasize what Biber (1995) calls "involvedness", while male writing tends to emphasize "information".

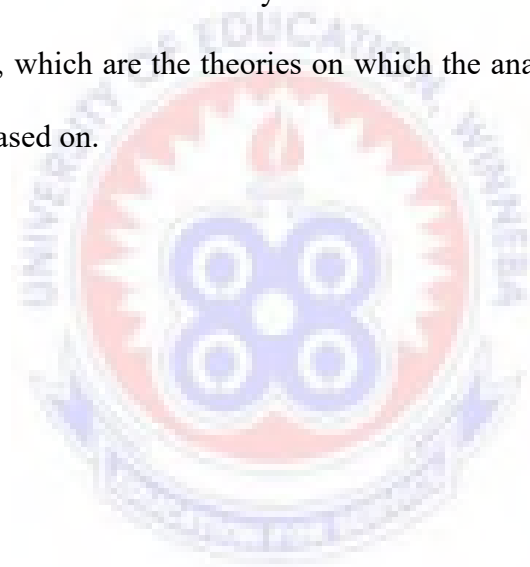
Finally, Lovheim(2011) has noted in their analysis of the linguistic characteristics and content of top-ranked blogs authored by Swedish female bloggers, that bloggers representing their personal life and interest through family, fashion and beauty, primarily express themselves through informal and personal style of writing. They also use but also polite, supportive and emotionally expressive language.

According to Lovheim (2011), this kind of language corresponds with the conventions of a personal blog, but also with the conventions of female style of writing as opposed to masculine language styles identified in Herring &Paolillo (2006).

Lovheim (2011, p. 6) emphasizes that "the ambition of presenting one's self is expressed in topics and language that are closely related to the conventions of one's interests, situation and ways of communicating."

## 2.9 Summary

This chapter reviewed related works based on identity construction, identity management, and works situated on the blogosphere, social media and the broader internet space. The review brought out the fact that very little has been done on feminist and identity construction online within the African continent; and especially, on the blogosphere which has become an increasingly popular space for individuals, groups, disciplines and institutions to communicate with the rest of the world while remaining true to their desired identities. The chapter also looked closely and in detail at Identity Theory and Feminist Gynocriticism Theory, which are the theories on which the analysis and final judgments of the investigation are based on.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures employed to obtain and analyze data for the study of identity construction by African female bloggers. It discusses the principles for the methods as well as the procedures for the analysis of the data.

Again, the chapter discusses the categorization and coding process employed for the establishment of the major themes for analysis. It discusses the data analysis tool used for the research as well as the methods that were used to gather data for the research questions.

The research questions are therefore stated as follows;

- d) What are the major thematic issues in African female bloggers' posts?
- e) What are the major stylistic issues in African female bloggers' writings?
- f) What are the implications of thematic and stylistic issues for African female bloggers' identities?

##### **3.1.0 Research Approach**

The study is a qualitative research, which has been defined by Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge (2009, p. 13) as being “concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. That is to say, it aims to help us to understand the world in which we live and why things are the way they are.” Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the

experiences they have in the world, (Merriam, 2009,). The study believes in the appropriateness of this approach because of its interest in understanding the identity that female bloggers have constructed for themselves, and how they make sense of this construct. According to Denzin (2010), qualitative research approach provides complex textual descriptions of how people experience a phenomenon. Thus qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, how people make sense of their world and experiences they have in the world.

It is concerned with “the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about why people behave the way they do; how opinions and attitudes are formed; and how people are affected by the events that go on around them”, (Hancock et al, 2009, p. 12). Since the social aspect of our lives basically entails our interaction and relationship with and in society, the researcher found this approach as an appropriate choice for the study. Blogging is part of the now popular social media communication and it comprises people using the ‘new new media’ space to share and live their experiences with other people who are consumers, and almost immediately, producers at the same time, (Patton and Cochran, 2002). Expanding this earlier definition, Patton (2005) adds that qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis.

Qualitative research is research using methods ... which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice, (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011). Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. They turn the world into a series of representations, which involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This



means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

This perspective is relevant because this study is interested in studying a phenomenon, which means that it investigates the phenomenon of blogging and identity construction by African female bloggers.

### **3.2.0 Research Design**

#### **3.2.1 Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)**

Qualitative content analysis is defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278).

Qualitative Content Analysis defines itself within this framework as “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification”, Mayring (2000, p. 2). According to (Patton, 2002, p.453), QCA is “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”

These three definitions illustrate the fact that in qualitative content analysis, texts and their specific contexts are mutually dependent on one another. This study is therefore focused on investigating the major themes embedded in African females’ blog posts and how these themes are a road map to their identities.

Qualitative Content Analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text, (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2014). Thus, it allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. The themes extracted from the posts under study will therefore be interrogated to understand how gendered or otherwise they are in relation to the bloggers.

Researchers have outlined the characteristics of a research that deems itself qualitative. Weber (1990) has emphasized that, unlike quantitative content analysis which is deductive and intended to test hypotheses or address questions generated from theories or previous empirical research, qualitative content analysis is mainly inductive, grounding the examination of topics and themes, as well as the inferences drawn from them, in the data. In other words, QCA moves from the specific to the general. This research looks into the phenomenon of identity construction by studying what is done by the participants themselves in order to generate themes that may or may not have a specific relation to existing theories. It analyses the content in text which, in this work, refers to the posts and profiles of the bloggers. These posts include text in writing, images and videos.

Again, samples for qualitative content analysis usually consist of purposively selected texts which can inform the research questions being investigated, (Berg, 2001). The sampling technique for this research is purposive and this is because the researcher sought to find participants who met the criteria set for this study: personal/ diary-style blogs, individual bloggers of African descent and residing in Africa.

Another proof of the qualitative nature of this research is what has been espoused by Berg (1990), that the qualitative approach usually produces descriptions or typologies, along with

expressions from subjects reflecting how they view the social world. By this means, the perspectives of the producers of the text can be better understood by the investigator as well as the readers of the study's results. This study does not only extract themes from the text that are interrogated but it also produces evidence of participants' writings to illustrate how they identify themselves and how they verify these identities.

Qualitative content analysis pays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon rather than the statistical significance of the occurrence of particular texts or concepts.

According to Mayring (2000), qualitative content analysis is very scientific because it follows a laid down procedure which is deductive or inductive. Patton (2002, p. 98) has said that qualitative content analysis involves a process designed to "condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation. This process uses inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison," and Weber (1990) agrees to this assertion, having stated earlier that QCA is mainly inductive.

This study was based on the inductive procedure since it involved working from specific development of theories and categories to a broad theory or conclusion. The procedure for the study follows these steps; selection of text, determining the unit of analysis, coding units, developing content categories and presenting and analyzing the findings.

### **3.3.0 Population**

The target population of this research includes all blogs in Africa and the accessible population includes all entries of the African Blogger Awards 2015.

The blog aggregator, Afrigator, offers an insight into the African blogging community. In July 2009, it counted over 10,500 African blogs, 62 % (approx 6,400) of which were in South Africa, by far the leading blogging nation, followed by 1,094 in Nigeria, 555 in Kenya and 325 in Egypt. Seven percent – approx 780 – of the blogs listed cannot be categorized by country. They concern themselves mainly with Africa-wide issues and are categorized as cross-regional. The researcher did not find a more recent statistics or update on these numbers. The researcher therefore depended on Afrigator's blogs statistics of 2013. The target population included all the different kinds of blogs we have in the African blogosphere. The African Blogger Awards were made up of not less than 40 categories and all these categories are part of the researcher's accessible population.

### **3.3.1 Sampling Technique**

According to Palys (2008), the adoption of the sampling technique of a study is dependent upon the nature of one's research objectives. Per the objectives of the study, the purposive sampling technique, which according to Palys is virtually synonymous with qualitative research, was employed. Oliver (2006; p.116) defines purposive sampling as “a form of sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research.”

The researcher uses personal judgment to select subjects that are considered to be representative of the population.

This technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of subject or a number of them due to the qualities they possess. It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of subjects, (Tongco, 2007). Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience, (Bernard 2002, Lewis & Sheppard 2006). According to Baxter and Jack (2008), convenience is at the core of qualitative research. They assert that availability of participants who will provide data for the study is an important consideration in purposive sampling.

The researcher purposively sampled all blog entries (which automatically comes with the bloggers themselves) under the Personal Category of the African Blogger Awards 2015 as they possess the characteristics set by the research which include being an African individual blogger with specifically a Personal Blog. These blogs were chosen because, as has been indicated by Nardi et al. (2009), personal blogs come with a strong sense of the author's personality, passions, and point of view. Also, Blood (2014), asserts that the freedom of expression and production in blogging which has been recognized by researchers (Nardi et al., 2009; Levinson, 2013; Pedersen & Macafee, 2007) allow personal bloggers the bigger opportunity to construct their identities online.

### **3.3.2 Sample Size**

According to African Blogger Awards (2015), 148 entries were received from all over the African Continent for the Personal Category of the Blogger awards for the year 2015. Out of this number, 50 were selected as top blogs. These 50 blogs were considered to have met the criteria pole for personal blogs. Out of these fifty blogs, the first ten female blogs were purposively selected for this study due to reasons of proximity. The selected entries for the award included 26 female blogs and 24 male blogs. See Appendix 1 for details of the Top 50 Blogs in Africa as released by African Blogger Awards 2015. (See Appendix II details of the selected blogs for the study).

### **3.3.3 A brief Insight into African Blogger Awards (ABA) Awarding Process as Provided By Webfluentia**

The total number of entries for African Blogger Awards 2015 was 3,182. This covers the different categories of blogs we have. From this each entry may have entered themselves into more than one category. For example, Mr. X may have entered his blog once, classified it as being a personal blog, music blog, fashion blog and technology blog.

With regards to how winners were chosen, each individual had to register with Webfluentia as an influencer and link their blog to their profile. Webfluentia is a global platform that allows brands to connect with relevant influencers to facilitate campaigns reaching the right target market. It is also the official host of African Blogger Awards.

The Webfluent system then calculates various things about the blog such as reach, relevance, resonance and influence. Based on what the system calculated, the winners were determined. Those with the highest influence in each category were declared the winners.

### **3.4.0 Unit of Analysis**

Zhang and Wildermuth (2014) define the unit of analysis as the basic unit of text to be classified during content analysis. Kimani (2009) says that it is the smallest element or indicator of the phenomenon of interest in a content analysis. Skoldberg (2009) adds that the unit of analysis in a study is the level of abstraction at which one looks for variability. The unit of analysis might be a single word, a symbol, a theme, a story or an entire article. The unit of analysis for this study included the blogger profile and the blog posts.

According to William (2006), different analyses in the same study may require different units of analysis. The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) (2009) defines a blog post as the published content, in text and images, which appears on the interface of the blog site. This is usually the main message on the blog and the purpose of the blogging practice. The blogger profile or the profile is the outline of personal and/ or professional information about the blogger. It may also include the purpose of the blog, (IAB, 2009).

The blog posts are articles written and published on the blog sites and the profiles are also write-ups written by the bloggers and published on the blog sites. The profiles are published as Pages and according to The Blogger Tutor (2011), blogger pages let you publish/post static/ fixed information on stand-alone pages linked from your blog. For example, you can

use pages to create an 'About Me' page that discusses the evolution of your blog and information about you.

The unit of analysis for the study therefore consisted of the main articles in published posts as well as the write-ups in the blogger profiles.

### **3.5.0 Coding and Categorization**

Codes are the linkages between the data and the categories posited by the researcher. (Lindlof& Taylor, 2002).Charmaz (1983) as cited in Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explains that codes... serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile and organize data. Categorization is therefore “the process of characterizing the meaning of a unit of data with respect to certain generic properties” (Lindlof& Taylor, 2002, p. 214). The focus of this study was to interrogate the phenomenon of identity construction by the female bloggers through their blogging practice. The coding scheme designed for this study was generally based on the major themes embedded in the bloggers' posts and bloggers' profiles. Qualitative content analysis does not restrict the researcher to predetermined categories but opens its range so that other themes may emerge from the study, (Schilling, 2006 cited in Donkor, 2014). The themes in this study were therefore established from the blog posts and profiles. Through a close reading and interrogation of the data (blog posts) by the researcher, the following themes emerged;

- ❖ **Education** was operationally defined to include texts depicting the phenomenon of training, instruction and the acquisition of knowledge at all levels. It also included



texts depicting bloggers' academic achievements and prowess. Thus, bloggers who identified themselves through their academic qualifications and skills.

- ❖ **Celebration** was operationally defined to include texts related to the commemoration, observance or marking of an important day, event or phenomenon.
- ❖ **Technology** was operationally defined to include texts related to the application of the newer and more personalized technological tools and systems (eg. Personal computers, internet software applications, cellular phones, etc.) for practical purposes on social and new new media platforms.
- ❖ **Relationship** was operationally defined to include texts that depicted romantic associations with others as well as association with friends.
- ❖ **Governance** was operationally defined to include texts depicting association with the management, exercise of authority or the control of a country, an organization or any group of people. It also included texts related to the debate between parties and the assumption of power.
- ❖ **Career** was operationally defined to include all texts related to issues of commerce, business, profession and employment.
- ❖ **Family** was operationally defined to include all texts related to the makings of a household as well as association through family ties, common lineage or ancestry.
- ❖ **Health** was operationally defined to include texts depicting a person's good mental and physical condition, fitness and freedom from injury or illness. All texts relating

activities (eg, sports) and habits (eating habits) geared towards fitness were included in this definition.

- ❖ **Art** was operationally defined to include texts related to the various branches of creative activity, human creativity, in connection with social life. These included texts bordering on issues of music, film, books, entertainment and fashion.
- ❖ **Inspiration** was operationally defined to include texts aimed at emphasizing lessons that can be learnt from issues and circumstances common to experiences of life. It also included messages geared towards the mental stimulation of a person's mind towards inventiveness and innovation. These were generally referred to by bloggers as life lessons or motivational messages.
- ❖ **Gender** was operationally defined to include texts depicting or related to the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of equality of the sexes.

The themes that emerged from the blogger profiles were;

- ❖ **Occupation** was operationally defined to include bloggers' reference to their profession, job, skills and other details about the profession, job or skills.
- ❖ **Accomplishment** was operationally defined to include bloggers' reference to their achievements in their education, career and other endeavors.
- ❖ **Interest** was operationally defined to include bloggers' reference to things or issues they are particularly passionate about. The theme also included bloggers' reference to their hobbies.

- ❖ **Purpose** was operationally defined to include bloggers' reference to the objectives of their blog or their blogging practice, the topics or issues the blog seeks to address or what readers can expect as far as the blog site is concerned.

These themes were established from a close examination of the blog posts and bloggers' profiles.

### **3.5.1 Coding Process**

Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004) refer to blogging as an outlet for a person's ideological and philosophical thinking, their thoughts, opinions and ideas on life, which form the total embodiment of their personality. Per this definition, it can be said that the themes that manifest continually in a blogger's work point readers to the identity of that blogger. As a result, the data was subjected to several sessions of close reading to find several ideas, formations or instances in the data that related to each other in such a way as to belong to a category, as pointed out by Lindlof and Taylor (2002).

As the study is based on the inductive procedure of Qualitative Content Analysis, the idea was to "formulate a criterion of definition derived from theoretical background and research questions which determined the aspects of the textual material taken into account" (Mayring, 2000, p. 4). A coding sheet was designed to accomplish this purpose. In order to establish the major themes in the posts, the researcher investigated the points of view and/or the subject matter of every post. In order to establish the subject matter, all related arguments set out to authenticate the main subject were highlighted and jotted down. After this, the highlighted texts were closely interrogated and interpreted to formulate major

themes under which they were considerably fitted. The categories and coding agenda was revised twice more to ensure the reliability of the study.

According to Babbie (2004), a coder is someone trained by the researcher, to locate the variables and interpret the codes. Two coders who are undergraduates of the University of Education, Winneba (Department of Theatre Arts) were taken through the themes in order to serve as a guide during the coding process. Qualitative Content Analysis lays emphasis on the need for coders to be trained in order to maximize validity.

Again, Mayring (2000) states that inter-coder reliability must be tested in order to reduce errors as a result of the varying backgrounds of the coders. This also acts as a check on the subjectivity levels of coders. The coders were asked to code a single blog which means they coded 10 blog posts (all from a single blog). This was used to serve as a test for reliability and it was supervised by the researcher. The coders agreed on 8 posts out of 10 used for the test.

Turner (2006) and Mayring (2000) stipulate that 0.7 coder agreement is acceptable. That is

$$\text{Percentage of Agreement} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}}$$

Therefore,

$$\frac{8 \text{ agreements}}{8 \text{ agreements} + 2 \text{ disagreements}} = 0.8$$

### **3.6.0 Data Collection**

#### **3.6.1 Distanced Virtual Ethnography**

The Internet is an open context for social interactions where practices, meanings and identities are intermingled, Figaredo, Beaulieu, Estalella, Gómez, Schnettler and Read (2007). To answer all the research questions, the study adopted the distanced virtual ethnography. Distanced virtual ethnography is referred to by Evans (2013) as a research which is constituted by the evaluation of sources such as texts, images, or emoticons and the observation (but not participation in) of social interactions in online spaces. According to Evans (2013, p. 3), in as much as “the term ethnography may be loosely applied to any qualitative research project where the purpose is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice; in more exact terms, ethnography may be defined as both a qualitative research process and method , a product and a tool.” The data that was needed for this study was information that was already published and available on the blog sites of the participants. In this way, Slater (2000) explains that data can be located and archived from the internet without it having to be recorded and transcribed as the traditional ethnographer would need to ensure.

In order to locate the themes embedded in the bloggers’ posts, the researcher archived the selected posts from the blog sites. Again, in order to interrogate the kinds of identities the bloggers give themselves through their profiles, the researcher archived the profiles (in words and images) of the bloggers. This can be done without sacrificing the need for the researcher to participate within the environment (Evans, 2013). Unlike what happens in traditional ethnography where the immersion in a specific locality and participant observation are still the cornerstones of ethnographic research, Evans (2013, p. 3) argue that

the notion of the field itself in virtual ethnography is radically altered; “since the field is now text on a screen and the group of people involved in the community can be scattered worldwide in physical geography” –even while sharing the same space as afforded by technology and social media. The difference is that whereas traditionally the researcher has been embedded within the community being researched, it is not a necessity with research using the internet as the location for the community being studied, Morton (2001).

The researcher was therefore able to collect data for the study without necessarily getting involved and participating in the environment. The selected posts were archived for analysis.

### **3.6.2 Online Demographics Survey**

In order to get the blog demographics of the blogs under study, as well as that of the bloggers, an online demographics survey was conducted for the selected participants through Survey Monkey. According to Wyse (2012), demographics are characteristics of a population. Characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, education, profession, occupation, income level, and marital status, are all typical examples of demographics that are used in surveys. To spell out the logic of qualitative survey, Evans (2013) has said that the objective of a qualitative survey is to gain understanding of underlying reasons and motivations guiding the study and to provide insights into the setting of the study. It is also conducted to develop an initial understanding and sound base for further decision making.

Survey Monkey is an online survey development service that provides free customizable surveys, as well as a suite of programs that include data analysis, sample selection, bias elimination, and data representation tools, (King, 2005). The researcher employed Survey

Monkey to design nine open-ended and close-ended questions for all 26 top female bloggers. This study invited all the female bloggers because of the likelihood that some might fail to participate in the survey while others were likely to delay responding to it.

The questions sought to find out the general information of the blogs; such as blog type, blog category, blog age, etc.

The researcher also conducted this survey in order to verify such information as related to nationality and residency, gender, etc of the bloggers since the study was looking only at bloggers who were of African descent and lived in Africa. Once the survey was designed, Survey Monkey provided a uniform resource locator (URL) to enable the researcher to e-mail to participants. Participants were instructed to use the link for access to the survey after which they could participate. After the responders participated in the survey, Survey Monkey notified the researcher and decisions were made upon a close examination of the responses given. See Appendix for a copy of the sample survey.

### **3.6.3 Access into the Field**

As a result of the fact that this is study is an online research, it was necessary that the researcher gain access to bloggers who were going to participate in the study. The researcher therefore followed a series of steps in order to gain access into the field.

First of all, the researcher reached out to African Blogger Awards by emailing them through their official website. Several attempts failed to yield a response from African Blogger Awards.

Just around this same time, Webfluentia, the host of African Blogger Awards (though the ABA has an independent website apart from Webfluentia's official website) notified the

researcher who also happens to be a blogger, to register and make an entry for the 2016 Awards. The researcher took the opportunity to reach out to Webfluentia for the list of the 2014 entries of the African Blogger Awards and to grant permission to use the winners of those entries for the study.

Webfluentia granted access to the field and provided the list of entries for the then just-ended 2015 African Blogger Awards on the grounds that those constituted a more recent update on the phenomenon of the African blogosphere. Webfluentia required the utmost protection of bloggers' privacy. The list was made up of 148 entries of the Personal Blog Category. Webfluentia also provided the list of all 50 top blogs in Africa. Out of this number, 26 were female bloggers.

After this, the researcher accessed all the 26 blog sites in order to retrieve bloggers' email addresses. This was to enable the researcher to give a formal notice of the study and to request the participation of the bloggers in the research. E-mails were sent to all bloggers and bloggers who were interested responded accordingly. Beyond this stage, the researcher communicated with the bloggers directly through e-mails. See Appendix for copies of e-mail exchanges between the researcher and bloggers as well as the Webfluentia representative

### **3.7.0 Data Analysis**

#### **Textual Analysis**

Larsen (2002, p. 122) situates textual analysis within "an indeterminate field of meaning in which intentions and possible effects intersect. The task of the textual analysis, then, is to bring out the whole range of possible meanings, not least the "hidden" message of the text."



In order to do an in-depth analysis of the themes that were developed from the content analysis, the study employed textual analysis as a research tool. This was to help the researcher to interpret the major thematic issues established from the African female bloggers' posts and profiles as related to their constructed identities. Again, textual analysis was employed in order to make sense of how gendered or otherwise these themes are in relation to the bloggers; as well as to interpret constructively the verification of the identities of the bloggers. Cross (2012) says that when we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text.

We interpret texts (writings, films, television programmes, magazines, advertisements, clothes, graffiti, and so on) in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them, (Herman, Swiss & Sloop, 1997).

Silverman (2001) also posits that textual analysis investigates the structures of texts in order to explore a text's foundational elements and the functions they serve in the construction of meaning. As it were, this study sought to investigate the phenomenon of identity construction by African female bloggers and how these identities relate with issues of gender in popular culture. Mckee (2003) adds that in employing textual analysis, the researcher wants to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures (and in this case, popular culture and more specifically, the blog culture) make sense of who they are and how they fit into the world in which they live. Textual analysis is useful for researchers working in Media Studies and in Mass Communication.

Cross (2012) explains that textual analysis is about the content of text, and focuses on the study of thematic and symbolic elements to determine the objective or meaning of the text.

According to Silverman (2005, cited in Donkor, 2014), studies using textual analysis as a method should not conclude with statements of fact, but rather, they should look for pieces of information within the texts that allow the researchers to make generalizations about a group, culture, or society. This study therefore employed textual analysis to investigate the phenomenon of identity construction by African female bloggers.

### **3.8.0 Validity and Reliability of the Study**

According to Brink (1999), validity in research is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings. Creswell (1998) as cited in Daniels (2013) provides a list of eight verification procedures that researchers can use to validate their qualitative study. These procedures are prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review and debriefing; negative case analysis; clarification of research bias; member checking; rich thick description and external audits.

Among these procedures, Noble and Smith (2015) have suggested that at least two procedures can be used by qualitative researchers in a study. This study therefore used two of the verification procedures; namely, triangulation and rich, thick description. Lincoln and Guba (2000) identify four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. This study used two types of triangulation; namely data triangulation and theory triangulation.

According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), data triangulation examines the consistency of different data sources within the same methodology. In this study, data was collected from African Blogger Awards (who are the official organizers of the annual award ceremony for bloggers in Africa), Webfluentia (the official host and blog aggregator for African Blogger

Awards) and from bloggers originating eight different African countries; South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Uganda, Benin and Cameroon.

Noble and Smith (2015) posit that rich, thick, verbatim descriptions of participants' accounts provide support for the findings. Thick description is a term used to characterize the process of paying attention to contextual detail in observing and interpreting social meaning when conducting qualitative research. This study provides detailed description of the phenomenon of blogging by participants. These descriptions are given explicitly in tables, excerpts and major and minor headings that make understanding clear. The description of a phenomenon in sufficient detail enables evaluation to the extent that conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations and people, (Daniels, 2013).

Noble and Smith (2015) refer to reliability as the consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings. In order to ensure reliability of the study, the researcher conducted a preliminary online demographic survey. This ensured that the participants selected for the study met the stipulated criteria which included: that bloggers be of African descent; individual blogger; personal/diary style bloggers; resident in Africa; above 17 years; and would have blogged for more than one year.

Again, data collected from African Blogger Awards and Webfluentia confirmed these stipulations. Even so, the researcher observed participants' blogs for two months to ensure the existence and activeness of the blogs as well as the sex of the authors before going ahead to invite them for the survey. Data gathered was also subject to rigorous interrogation before drawing findings for the study.

### **3.9.0 Data Handling and Analysis**

Webfluent first of all, requested that the privacy of bloggers be held in high esteem. As a result, the data handed to the researcher by the host of the African Blogger Awards released only bloggers' blog titles and uniform resource locators (URL). The researcher was given permission to visit the blog sites and begin communication with the bloggers, pending their (bloggers) acceptance to participate upon request from the researcher. Every information data gathered from bloggers' sites received bloggers' appended permission.

Analysis was done in three phases. The researcher read and reread the posts and profiles of bloggers (including others that were not gathered as data) for a deeper knowledge and understanding of the issues embedded in the posts. After this, issues, scenarios, expressions and symbols pertaining to particular meanings and suggested meanings were underlined and noted down. These underlined subjects were cross-matched to find similarities or differences in their meanings. The posts were reread for the third and fourth times in order for the researcher put these marked subjects into themes.

Finally, the themes that emerged from the interrogation of the texts were drawn for discussion. Tables were also used in the discussion of findings (chapter 4) to explain the thematic and stylistic issues of African female bloggers' posts and their implication for female bloggers' identities.

### **3.10 Summary**

The above chapter discussed the research approach for the study. The chapter followed the following steps; research approach, design, population, coding and categorization, and data analysis. It elaborated on the categorization and coding process employed for the establishment of the major themes for analysis. It also discussed the data analysis tool used for the research as well as the methods that were used to gather data for the research questions. Finally, the chapter presents the basis for the validity and reliability of the study as well as the ethical issues involved in the handling of data and analysis for the study.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

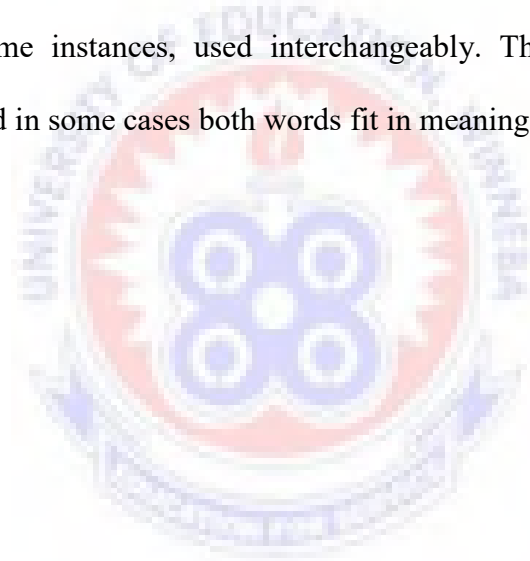
This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the data that was collected. The discussions derived from the findings of the blog posts and blogger profiles. The findings are also presented with frequency distribution tables for a better understanding of the discussions. Below are the questions that guided the study:

1. What are the major thematic issues in African female bloggers' posts?
2. What major stylistic issues exist in the African female bloggers' writings?
3. What are the implications of thematic and stylistic issues for African female bloggers' identities?

To answer the first and second research questions, the selected posts were analyzed vis-à-vis the themes that were established from them. To answer the third research question, the blogger profiles were analyzed to guide the study in identifying the identities bloggers give themselves. The themes from the blog posts included *Inspiration, Celebration, Family, Relationship, Technology, Career, Education, Gender, Art, Governance and Health*. In order to get a better understanding of the blog posts that were analyzed, details of the posts and the themes that were represented in them were tabulated. (Also, see Appendix II for the details of the posts retrieved for the analysis of the study).

#### **4.1 RQ1. What are the major thematic issues in African female bloggers' posts?**

In all, eleven themes emerged from the analysis of all the 100 posts. The themes were *inspiration, celebration, technology, family, relationship, art, gender, education, career, governance* and *health*. Table 3 presents a cumulative frequency distribution of the number of blogs/bloggers that wrote on the various themes. It must be noted that a single post could be centered on several themes and therefore more than one theme was found in almost every post. As a result of this, the frequency distribution of the themes in the blog posts (found in Table 4) totals more than the 100 blog posts studied. Also, the words “blogs” and “bloggers” are in some instances, used interchangeably. This is because the bloggers represent the blogs and in some cases both words fit in meaning and function.



**Table 1. Frequency distribution of the representation of themes on the various blogs.**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Representation by Blogs</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Inspiration	9	13.2%
Celebration	8	11.7%
Career	7	10.3%
Relationship	7	10.3%
Art	7	10.3%
Family	6	8.8%
Technology	6	8.8%
Education	5	7.4%
Gender	5	7.4%
Health	4	5.9%
Governance	4	5.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table displays the number of blogs/bloggers that wrote on the themes identified. For instance, the first column shows that 9 (13.2%) blogs wrote on the theme of *inspiration*.



**Table 2. Frequency distribution of the posts on themes in the 100 blog posts.**

Themes	Representation by Blogs	Percentage (%)
Inspiration	54	15.2%
Celebration	45	12.7%
Career	38	10.7%
Relationship	37	10.4%
Art	36	10.1%
Family	31	8.7%
Gender	30	8.5%
Governance	26	7.3%
Technology	24	6.8%
Education	18	5.1%
Health	16	4.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Inspiration**

The theme of *inspiration* ranked first among the major themes that emerged. Table 1 indicates that 9 bloggers out of the 10 under study wrote focusing on *inspiration* which were generally referred to by bloggers as Life Lessons or Motivational Messages. Table 2 also shows that the theme of *inspiration* was represented in the highest number of posts,

emerging in 54 blog posts and representing 15.2% of theme representation in the blog posts. The theme of *inspiration* therefore ranked highest both as the most popular theme bloggers wrote on and also as the theme appearing in the highest number of blog posts.

### **Celebration**

*Celebration* ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> among the eleven major themes. Table 1 shows that out of 10 blogs, 8 of them representing 11.7% of the blogs under study wrote on this theme. Table 2 also shows that out of the 100 blog posts analyzed, 45 blog posts, representing 12.7% concentrated on the theme of *celebration*. This makes the theme of *celebration* the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular theme among African female bloggers and the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest theme appearing in majority of blog posts.

### **Career, Relationship and Art**

Three major themes ranked third on the table. These are *career*, *relationship* and *art*. Table 1 shows that 7 out of 10 blogs, representing 10.3% of the total blogs under study had posts dedicated to the issue of career. Table 2 also shows that among all the themes appearing in blog posts, the theme of *career* ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> emerging in a total number of 38 blog posts, leading to a 10.7% of frequent representation. This theme comes after the theme of *celebration* and makes it the 3<sup>rd</sup> most popular and most frequent theme in African female blog posts. Also, the themes of *relationship* and *art* ranked third as Table 1 shows that 7 blogs wrote on these two themes. However, unlike the first three themes discussed above, *relationship* and *art* showed different frequency distributions when it came to the number of blog posts that represented them. Table 2 shows that while the theme of *relationship* ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> with 7 (10.3%) in the frequency distribution of the themes as per the blogs, it ranked

4<sup>th</sup> under the number of posts represented with 37 (10.4%) in the frequency distribution. This is similar to the theme of *art*. The theme of *art*, while it ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> with 7 (10.3%) in the frequency distribution of the themes as per the blogs; ranked 5<sup>th</sup> with 36 (10.1%) in the frequency distribution of the themes as by the blog posts. This means that while the themes of *career*, *relationship* and *art* were used in 7 blogs, they did not appear in equal amount of blog posts.

### **Family and Technology**

The themes of *family* and *technology* ranked 6<sup>th</sup> among the themes that emerged. Table 1 shows that 6 (8.8%) blogs out of the 10 under study wrote on these two themes. However, the two themes ranked differently on Table 2 since they did not appear in the same number of posts. Table 2 shows that out of the 100 posts analyzed, 31 (8.7%) of them had the theme of *family* emerging and therefore ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the frequency distribution of the themes represented in the blog posts. Also, the theme of *technology* as shown in Table 2, emerged in 24 (6.8%) blog posts out of the 100 analyzed, ranking 9<sup>th</sup>. This shows a wide margin between the theme of *family* and the theme of *technology* even though they were all represented in 6 out of the 10 blogs.

### **Education and Gender**

The themes of *education* and *gender* also ranked 8<sup>th</sup> coming behind the themes of *family* and *technology*. As shown in Table 1, 5 blogs wrote on the themes of *education* and *gender*, representing 7.4% in the frequency distribution of themes as represented in the blogs under study. Like the *family* and *technology* themes, the themes of *education* and *gender* vary in the number of blog posts that utilized them. Table 2 shows that 18 (5.1%) blog posts were

written on the theme of *education* and therefore ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the frequency distribution of the themes represented in the blog posts while 30 (8.5%) blog posts made use of the theme of *gender* and which therefore ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the frequency distribution of the themes in the blog posts.

### **Health and Governance**

The *health* and *governance* themes ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among the major themes that emerged. Out of the 10 blogs under study, Table 1 shows that 4 (5.9%) blogs wrote on the themes of *health* and *governance*. Meanwhile Table 2 shows that 26 blog posts focused on *governance* and thereby ranking 8<sup>th</sup> with 7.3% of frequency distribution of themes in the blog posts. Also, Table 2 indicates that 16 blog posts wrote on the theme of *health*, representing 4.5% of theme frequency in the blog posts. *Health* ranked 11<sup>th</sup> and was therefore the least represented theme among the major themes that emerged from the analysis.

#### **4.1.3 Discussion**

It has been widely claimed by researchers such as Herring et al (2004), Newson and Oberlander (2005), McCullagh (2008) and Royal (2008) that women are more likely to write about their personal experiences, while men take on political issues. It seems therefore that the actual topics of women's writings have not been given as much attention as the fact that they (women) make their arguments based on their encounters and experiences. 'Personal experiences' does not point out any particular theme or topic; meanwhile, 'political issues' points to the subject of politics. Hence, research has not been clear on the particular topics or themes of women's writings. This is what research question one

addresses. It must be noted that the study represented bloggers with codes and these are as follows; Lucky Pony (LP), Kawi Snippets (KS), Shaping Opinion with a Pen (SP), Musings of a Millennial Mum (MM), My Million Miles (MS), Patricia Kihoro (PK), Kahill Insights (KI), Running the Race (RR), Jade Mitchell, Writing (JM) and All About Africa (AA).

From the findings, the most occurring topic in African female bloggers' posts center around *inspiration*. This was operationally defined to include posts emphasizing lessons that can be learnt from issues and circumstances common to experiences of life. It also included messages geared towards the mental stimulation of readers' minds towards inventiveness and innovation. The study found that female bloggers mostly wrote on issues geared towards inspiring readers to act and think in ways that result in potentially profitable outcomes.

The study coded 54 (15.2%) posts out of the 355 as gearing towards inspiring readers. Rice (2000) asserts that people are able to inspire others when they have themselves been inspired through an important lesson in everyday life, either personally or as spectators. This assertion serves as the basis of bloggers' inspirational posts as stated by KI,

If you can't record or remember your lessons, you learnt nothing from the great experiences life has to offer. Every day, there is something new to learn, to fail at and to aim at. For the last year I have been learning, failing and aiming; below are my lessons learnt.... - KI on 'One Year as an Online Freelancer: Lessons Learnt'

The study found that bloggers posted inspirational messages to share knowledge, as is demonstrated in PK,

I also believe it must be shared as these are all words we need to hear at whatever stage of our lives we are in... - PK on 'Dignity'

Again bloggers wrote on *inspiration* to motivate readers in what MS calls “the endeavor of life”. Seeded in the African culture of soul songs, PK writes in a post,

You may not have grown up in an African tribe that sings your song to you at crucial life transitions, but life is always reminding you when you are in tune with yourself and when you are not. When you feel good, what you are doing matches your song, and when you feel awful, it doesn't. In the end, we shall all recognize our song and sing it well. You may feel a little warbly at the moment, but so have all the great singers. Just keep singing and you'll find your way home. - PK on 'Your Song'

The theme of *inspiration* was also used to educate readers in areas such as business, technology and innovation. For instance in,

Remember to be you always; don't let the business steal that from you. Stay original and contend with what you can offer. Don't reach for what you can't handle; it will destroy your reputation. Clients buy you, your knowledge and what you can do, meaning, what you know. So stick with that and improve it. You might need to diversify but make sure you are capable to prosper in the new lease choice. - KI on 'Your Song'

The study found that the highest percentage of 13.2 representing 9 out of the ten participants, blogged inspiring posts. This means that female bloggers have great interest in inspiring or motivating readers to think or act in ways that are more profitable or beneficial to life. Most of these bloggers tag their inspiring posts as “Life Blogs”. This finding agrees with Antunovic and Hardin (2013) who have said that female sports bloggers use their blog to inspire readers by relating the benefits or the interesting things about sports. Again, the finding supports the feminist gynocriticism theory which posits that women's literature has the ability to create its own themes and symbols to stimulate one's consciousness towards a particular cause, (Landau, 1995).

Another finding of the study was that African female bloggers posted generally convivial and gregarious-centered themes such as *celebration*, *family* and *relationship*. The study coded 113 out of 355 representing the three themes and which totals 31.8% of theme frequency in blog posts. The finding showed that most female bloggers are fond of the commemoration of important events and milestones, whether as a family or as a nation. It also revealed that the essence of family remains an important part for women and this is not lost in their writing. Examples are shown in,

I'm one of those people who feel strongly that a family can never fly if one of its wings is broken. And if a family doesn't fly, that leaves a trail of broken individuals, which eventually sums up to a broken society. - SP on 'Kiddo Needs a Family'

and in,

In the African setting, it's a common habit that when you go for a get together with family and friends, that the mothers gather on one corner, the fathers (aka wazee's) in another and the children, preferably out of sight. And in their separate groups, they enjoy each other's company as they catch up on what's relevant to them. It's been like that for years on, that it became a way of life. - KS on 'Are They Any Different'

This is in synch with Technorati's State of the Blogosphere 2012 which revealed that out of the 133 million online journals, 36% of women were focusing on family updates, (Sifry, 2013). Though there is an agreement between the findings of this study and the above assertion by Technorati, the figures of this study showed a rather lower level of dedication to the subject of family since it revealed that only 31(8.7%) out of the 355 codes represented the theme of *family*.

Even so, the study found that female bloggers posted on issues of *relationship* which is operationally defined to include texts that depicted romantic associations with others as well as associations through friendship ties. The study coded 37 out of the 355 representing 10.4% on the theme of *relationship*, and which is fairly higher than the theme of *family*. An example of a post on *relationship* reads,

How did you first meet? - It's one of those questions you can only escape for so long. Your friends always want to know the story. Even when you feel it sounds boring and you're tempted to spice it up a little more. There are people with really interesting stories though, truth be told. Some met in a bus or a flight or on transit; others were high-school or campus sweethearts or neighbors or church-mates, while others in random places like supermarkets, barbecues or on Facebook (and other social media channels – Instagram, Twitter ... name it). – MM on 'How Weddings Should Be'

It was realized that while there appeared only few posts on *family*, female bloggers posted more on *relationship*, which involved living and associating with people of closely-bonded ties, resembling the nature of family.

Also, the theme of *celebration* was found to represent an even higher percentage of 12.7, with a coded number of 45 out of the 355. The study found that African female bloggers wrote on acknowledging and/or commemorating events and milestones including birthdays, graduations, promotions and relationships. For instance, bloggers published posts saying,

It's time to celebrate! Yes, C.E.L.E.B.R.A.T.E! No, I've not won a race or ran a PB. I survived the Comrades peak training months. We are in the final stretch of peak training and I can honestly say I've never worked this hard on anything in my entire life! A quick glance at my training log and I can't help but smile and be proud of the 1040km I've ran in 4 months. *Getting to this point uninjured and still feeling fairly*



*healthy is a milestone itself!* So...I am doing a happy dance and celebrating! ☺ - MS on 'Celebrating Com-rades Peak Training'

While the above post celebrates a milestone in a particular endeavor, another one (below) celebrates a birthday:

My Nina James is 9 months and 12 days old. Yip she is nearly one year old! Nearly 365 days have passed since this little creature came into our lives. I haven't written one of these posts in a while and seeing as Sunday was Mother's Day (hope you all enjoyed yours), I thought I would type one out.- LP on 'Nina James at 9 Months and 12 Days Old'

Also, the study found that not only do bloggers write to commemorate family and friends' milestones but they are also keen on commemorating national events such as Independence Day, as well as national and international events and milestones. For instance, some bloggers wrote that,

As we mark this important Day, it is necessary to reflect on this year's African Union theme, aptly coined as "Year of Women Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063". The choice of the theme is quite deliberate and revealing. - AA on 'African Union Day 2015'

and again,

Today is International Children Day. Have you put a smile on a child's face today? Take the occasion today of #ChildrensDay to do something for a child. Let's help our children and all other children in different orphanages to make them happy. - JM on 'Putting the Fun Back in Fundraising'

The findings of the study therefore reveal an obvious shift in women's writings from family-centered topics to favoring issues on relationships and events (commemorations). The study

therefore finds that through blogging, African women explore the freedom of expressing their own interests without being judged by the male-dominated society. This finding agrees with Hill-Collins (1990) who challenges the African woman to use the powerful vision of gynocriticism to tear the veil of invisibility by exploring her own passions and interests.

Also, a large number of the posts on relationships were centered on platonic friendships and friendships borne from the working environment rather than the popular romantic relationships. Out of the 37 coded posts on *relationship*, 21 of them were centered on such friendships, representing a higher percentage of 56.8. This is a possible indication of the fact that female bloggers wrote to identify themselves as career women. Some of these posts read,

Friendship is a thing I believe is quite the big deal in our lives, although people like me try to down play it. We've called people our friends, colleagues, best friends, best friends forever and the like. For you to brand someone that, it's because there's something about them that you want to be associated with. - KS on 'Of Friendships'

and another post which states clearly the kind of friendship being talked about (friendship borne from the work environment):

This past Saturday I had the utmost pleasure of attending one of my good friends, Samantha Dawe's wedding. She and I became friends while working together and I'm proud to say that my friendship with her, as well as the other ladies that I worked with there, has stood the test of time. - MM on 'How Weddings Should Be...'

The study found that the themes of *relationship* and *celebration*, though, received higher representations in the posts, are also gregarious or convivial in nature and can be related to the theme of *family*. However, the shift from family-centered topics, which in most cases

align women with identities categorized under dependency and domesticity, as stipulated in Donkor (2014), is an indication of the fact that female bloggers see themselves as independent individuals in equal-power and equally beneficial relationships.

Thus, the finding agrees with feminist gynocriticism which rejects the social stereotypes and stigmas given to women by the patriarchal society by appraising the strengths in the less explored areas of the woman's identity. Showalter (1979) refers to the woman as the producer of relevant textual meaning which according to Akujobi (2011), has implications for her identity.

Furthermore, the study found that African female bloggers wrote on national and international issues surrounding the themes of *education, governance, health and gender*. *Gender* was captured under the umbrella of national and international issues because as has been stated by Alexander and Welzel (2014, p. 30), "factors such as socio-economic development, political development and the cultural processes of human development figure prominently in women's empowerment." The study coded 90 out 355 representing 26.6% on these four themes. Bloggers posted on *governance*,

The 'Dumsor Must Stop' vigil which started at exactly 4pm on Saturday May 16, 2015 at the University of Ghana overhead Bridge in Accra to highlight the energy crisis in Ghana popularly known as 'Dumsor' witnessed massive turnout... The over 1, 000 people present shared their concerns and sentiment on their placards and held other items with messages to the President to put in ways to stop the ongoing power crisis in the country. - AA on 'Massive Turnout at 'DumsorMustStop' Vigil'.

They also posted on current issues related to education; revealing both the positive and negative happenings within the educational sector. Bloggers also wrote to provide advice

and resources geared towards the betterment of education or people's academic lives. In same manner, the theme of education was represented. For instance, a blogger's post on *education* reads,

Every year, there are horror stories about kids being abused or mistreated and the problem is that you never know if the crèche is good or bad until you hear the horror stories. All these stories may be unreal or made up, but these are real encounters. One begins to think whether government is even doing anything to curb these crèche incidents. Do these crèches have to get approval and a license to run before they even open their doors? - MM on 'Kid in the Cupboard: How Safe is Crèche School?'

and on *health*,

Reducing the world's maternal mortality ratio by three quarters between 1990 and 2015 is one of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goal; actually it's number 5. Even when we all know that these goals were supposed to have been achieved a long time ago, progress towards this objective has been slow, or not yet kicked off in some East African countries, deep down in the villages. - KI on 'Rights to Maternal Health'.

When we look at the numbers constituting *gender*, *education*, *governance* and *health*, *gender* takes the lead with a 33.3% of the 90 posts coded in the study for the four themes. The study found that female bloggers wrote on the theme of *gender*. Most of the posts on *gender* bordered on reversed gender roles. This means that in their posts, bloggers wrote to depict a reversal of the stereotypical roles assigned to men and women by society, so that one could see men performing women's roles and vice versa. Some of the posts read,

Mike has a knack for making odd foods, which he says are just an appetizer before the main meal. But of course those are lies. After he served us these local style

burritos, the next natural thing to do was lie down on our back and take that afternoon nap, 'the itis' is real.- KS on '#ThrowBackThursday: Chicken Buritos'

and also,

Just before you wonder what I value in our friend~~r~~*relationship*, let me tell you just one before I drop down a long list. He (husband) was my first cooking and nowbaking buddy. He taught me how to grill (or basically use the oven). We also baked our first cupcakes together. - MS on 'Irreplaceable Values in Friendships'

A look at the above posts shows that female bloggers like to blog about those phenomena that are for the most part frowned upon in society, especially reversed gender roles such as have been expressed in the posts. Lopez (2014) has said that domesticity is seen as part of the private sphere that women are supposed to occupy and not challenge. Michaels and Douglas (2014) add that the presence of women on the blogosphere is indicative of their desire to participate in the public sphere and as equals with their male blogging counterparts. Michaels and Douglas (2009) consider the mere presence of women on the blogosphere a radical and feminist act. In agreement with Michael and Douglas (2009), Lopez (2014) opines that not only are women present in the blogosphere anymore, but that women are blogging about motherhood, domesticity and sex which in the past had no place in the public sphere. The public sphere according to Motiejunaite (2005) is a place that men inhabit and women desire to belong to; a place that consists of the working world, politics, economics, the law and mainstream discourse.

The findings of this study however indicate that not only are women increasingly invading the blogosphere and blogging on themes of a domestic nature but that they are now reversing the roles in domesticity. Mitra (2001, p. 31) is of the view that women's writing

provides the platform for “the marginalized to call out the dominant and put the dominant in the difficult position of having to acknowledge the marginalized.”

Again, the findings of the study are in line with Matra’s view and it can be concluded that whether consciously or unconsciously, African female bloggers are challenging the status quo and blending the two fine lines that exist in gender roles in order to effect “social change and provide visibility to their endeavors” (Somolu, 2007, p. 484), thereby constructing their own desired identity. African female bloggers are therefore expressing a gender-sensitive identity through blogging.

This expression of identity is in line with the aim of gynocriticism theory which proposes a space and framework of analysis for women’s literature in which women do not seek approval of their ‘male masters’ and inherently sexist publishing circles. Blogging allows the woman such a space to explore her own identity.

Another finding of the study is that African female bloggers wrote on *career*, *technology* and *art*. The study coded 98 out of 355, which represented 27.6% of the frequency distribution of the themes in blog posts. The theme of career which was operationally defined to include all texts related to issues of commerce, business, profession and employment, was the most written about and among these three, it represented a percentage of 38.8. This does not agree with Newson and Oberlander (2006) and Herring et al. (2004) who have speculated that women are more likely to blog about personal issues while men take on business, technology and political issues. The study found that bloggers wrote on career issues, sometimes to offer business advice, express opinions on the operations of certain industries and institutions, deliberate on career issues and sometimes related certain

issues to their own careers and businesses. Bloggers also wrote on the use of technology as well as challenges and prospects of social media and technology.

Again, the study found that one of the major interests of female bloggers was *art* which was operationally defined to include texts related to the various branches of creative activity, human creativity, in connection with social life. These included texts bordering on issues of music, film, books, entertainment, design and fashion. Below are some of the posts on business, technology and art,

If you don't work in 'digital' and have to wade through the endlessly repetitive stream of bullshit spouted by agencies trying to sell you an app, it could, I suppose, seem like quite an intimidating river to dip one's toe into. - JM on '5 Simple Online Things I Wish Every Business would Do...But They Don't'

The above excerpt is on technology and as can be seen, the blogger is taking a look at some of the frustrations that come with technology today. Some posts on technology also sought to provide resources for readers in order to educate them and also make technology and social media enjoyable and easy for users. Also, some posts were on art and most of these posts revolved around literature, and this might be so due to bloggers' love for writing, which is evident in the fact that they are bloggers. Some of the posts were also on fashion, design and sculpture. For instance, a post on ChimamandaAdichie's "Purple Hibiscus" reads,

Africa is the country where the woman is often oppressed by the male figure. She cooks, cleans, irons and gets zero credit for it. *Chimamanda* spins this off by immersing her audience into two parallels; one, of a strong willed woman and

another, of a meek woman whose husband's word is the law.- MS on 'Purple Hibiscus- A Timid Girl Grows Brave'

Also, an excerpt of a blogger's post on fashion reads,

If you go down town these days, you will see some of the coolest kids around, sporting some of the most awesome Johannesburg street fashion. These are guys who look like they have effortlessly put together their looks and then wear them like Kings. Yes, there are no girls in this post, but that is because I feel like the boys rule the fashion scene in town. Hands down.-LP on 'Johannesburg Street Fashion'

**Figure 1. Image showing boys in fashionable clothing depicting Street Fashion**



Also, bloggers posted on design; for instance,



I appreciate both light and dark interiors and this morning this beautiful home caught my eye and had me swooning. This is the space of AlketasPaziswho is a true collector of all things design, ranging from the styles of the 1900's – 1950's. Certainly we have not left our indigenous eye behind- KS on 'Dark Interiors'

**Figure 2. Image of designs depicting the 1900's- 1950's interior decoration**



This shows another side of female bloggers; as people who are interested in appreciating art and its impact on society. It also means that female bloggers are critical thinkers since they interest themselves with analyzing works of art such as are presented in the form of books, design, music, fashion and the like. The finding therefore disagrees with the assertion by Royal (2008) which is that, the topics women address are culturally undervalued. This is so

because Akujobi (2011) refers to art as an imitation of society and culture and the assertion of it being undervalued cannot be applicable. Furthermore, the themes that were established from the posts are themes that contribute to issues ranging from self-development, social change, and to national and international issues of concern such as education, governance, health, business and gender.

The findings of this study also support Moi (1989) who has said that “ gynocriticism tries to make the context and implications of women’s work explicit, precisely in order to counter the tacit acceptance of patriarchal power politics which is so often presented as intellectual ‘neutrality’ or objectivity’.



#### **4.2.0 RQ2: What major stylistic issues exist in the African female bloggers' writings?**

A close interrogation of the blog posts revealed the major stylistic issues embedded in the African female bloggers' writings. Style according to Cali and Bowen (2007) refers to the manner in which an author chooses to write to his or her audience. A style reveals both the writer's personality and voice, but it also shows how he or she perceives the audience. Style in writing includes the formal and informal/conversational. Basically, the purpose of the writing determines the kind of style adopted, (Fang, 1991).

Two of the major features of style include diction and tone, (Cali & Bowen, 2007). Brundage (2011) refers to diction as the choice and use of words in speech and writing. Diction can be formal, informal and slang and the choosing of either depends on a number of factors including the writer's purpose, the intended audience, the writer's tone and the connotations of words. Tone is referred to by Summer (2011) as the writer's attitude toward both the subject and the intended audience. Words like sarcastic, ironic, humorous, insulting, flippant, and angry may be used to describe tone. The tone may also be objective or subjective, logical or emotional, intimate or distant, serious or humorous. It can consist mostly of long, intricate sentences, of short, simple ones, or of something in between, (Cali & Bowen, 2007). The study interrogated diction and tone as employed by the bloggers.

#### **4.2.1 Informal or Conversational Style**

The researcher's investigation of blogger's posts revealed that the major adopted style by bloggers in their writings was the conversational style. A conversational writing style is a fluid form of writing in which the author communicates to or with a familiar audience or

friends, (Tannen, 2000). Herring (1993) adds that a conversational writing style seemingly breaks most of the rules instituted in a formal style of writing; which would include tentative statements, full forms of words, normalized phrasing, passive voice, third person pronouns, restricted direct questions, formal negative forms and the absence of clichés, redundancy and colloquialism. In conversational style of writing, these rules are paid little attention.

The study found that bloggers wrote in such a manner as if they were conversing with their readers who were considered friends. This was mostly evident in the way they opened or started a post. An example is shown in the excerpts below:

Remember how much simpler it was to get dressed when you had a school uniform? -  
JM on 'The Great Switcheroo'

and in,

Sweet boo, so you know you looked drop-dead gorgeous last night in that red-velvet, silhouette-like hugging dress you had on, right? Right. So here is a suggestion. How about we talk about me today since I feel just as diva as you felt yesternight? Lol-  
MM on 'A Sweet Surprise from Wicked Donuts'

From the above posts, it can be realized that the bloggers make use of the second person pronoun "You" and mostly relate scenarios connecting the readers to them, as if the blogger is familiar with the reader and his/her life. The use of the pronouns "I", "You" and "We" according to Herring (2004) indicates the author's effort at establishing a closer and intimate relationship with the readers. Unlike the formal style of writing, conversational style affords the writer the freedom to establish a relationship on such levels of intimacy. This finding is

consistent with Biber's involvement dimension which consists of linguistic features geared towards creating interaction. Also, Gelpi and Gelpi (1993) opine that the stylistic approach of gynocriticism makes way for self expression and the creation of one's desired identity.

The posts also show that bloggers use tag questions, especially, direct questions, which indicates a seeming physical, familiar and cordial space where bloggers are in the presence of readers. This can be used to explain why one of the highly frequent themes in the blogs is the theme of *relationship*. It means that female bloggers are fond of connecting more closely with those in their circles, and Brundage (2011) is of the opinion that a successfully established cordial and intimate relationship with one's audience becomes a great tool in effective communication. This finding is consistent with Rosseti (1998) who attributes women's use of direct questions to their interest in building relationship.

#### **4.2.2 Diction**

The study also found that the diction of the blog posts was predominantly informal and slang. Bloggers preferred to use informal and slang diction in their posts and according to Herring (2004), the use of informal or slang diction depicts a level of casualness in the relationship. The study coded 62% of the blog posts as having informal diction, 29% percent as slang and 9% as formal. Evidence of informal diction was found in bloggers' use of first, and second person pronouns as has been mentioned above; as well as their use of simple, non-technical vocabulary, colloquialism, contraction, clichés, and abbreviations. Examples of bloggers using simple vocabulary can be noted in,

If the parent had killed this child, was it because it was an unplanned pregnancy? - MM on 'Society's Stigma Against Unplanned Pregnancies'

and in,

What caught my attention is that when my friend's father introduced his friend, he said that they have been close friends for over 20 years. - KS on "Are They Any Different?"

It is evident from the above excerpts that the individual words in the sentences are simple and easy to understand and most of them are mono and di-syllabic words. The study found that bloggers preferred to use simple vocabulary in their posts.

Also, bloggers used colloquialism which is referred to by Pierce (2003) as a word or phrase that is not formal or literary and is used in ordinary or familiar conversation. Andersson (2000) adds that a colloquial word or phrase is one that is better suited for a familiar, face-to-face conversation than for scholarly documents. Many times, this is a common word or phrase that is being used in a nontraditional, informal way. Examples of the use of colloquial language can be located in the following,

I'm tired of sugar-coating his experience to strangers. He passed away doesn't seem enough to explain the visceral shock. - JM on 'There are no Words-On Sadness and Silence'

Anyways, this is the point am trying to make... I mean, there's got to be an upside to all this planning. - KS on 'Are Shortcuts Worth Taking?'

and,

I've this thing where at least every 2 months I try and do something with an NGO or charity. - MMM on 'Giving Back at I Care.'

The examples above show that female bloggers make use of colloquial language in order to create a sense of informality or cordialness (through diction) in their posts. The use of Western colloquial expressions such as ‘anyways’, ‘got to be’ and ‘have this thing’ is suggestive of the fact that African female bloggers socialize themselves with popular Western culture through the media, literature and art; and which helps them to reach a wider spectrum of audience which is not only African.

Added to the use of colloquialism, the study found that bloggers employed slang in their posts. Although numerous critics have attempted to define the parameters of slang in different ways, certain similarities between these definitions can be noted. Andersson and Trudgill (1992) agree that slang includes the use of words or expressions which are extremely informal and which are often fashionable and therefore rather temporary. This means that slangs keep evolving and the fact that female bloggers keep up with them and utilize them in their writings shows that the bloggers are current and well-informed in popular culture.

As much as bloggers employed slangs in their posts, the study found that their use was done strategically, so that as Andersson and Trudgill (1992, p.9) put it, “it will be enough to capture the readers’ attention and appeal to their sense of humor”. Words such as ‘emo’ (emotional), ‘frenemy’ (a love hate relationship), ‘my bad’ (to have made a mistake), ‘bomb’ (to be unsuccessful), ‘cram’ (to study frantically the night before a test) ‘crush’ (to be extremely infatuated with someone), ‘breeze’ (easy), ‘fun and dandy’ (exciting and fashionable) and ‘tiny winy’ (short or small) were found in the bloggers’ posts. However, most of these slangs were used in posts that were relatively of a personal nature; such as in,

So I prefer to put them in their specific folders so when the time to retrieve the documents comes, it's a breeze. - KS on '#ThrowBack Thursday: Chicken Buritos'.

and,

It's all fun and dandy when your afro is tiny winy...It feels like a new beginning- KS on 'The Elusive Two Cornrows'

Again, bloggers were found to employ swear words and sarcasm as a way of creating humor and sometimes, expressing aversion; for instance in,

Heck, this wasn't the world our parents thought they were bringing us into.- PK on 'Death, Fear and Living.'

The study found that female bloggers used swear words and sarcasm to connect with their readers by appealing to their sense of humor and sometimes empathy. Jay (2013) suggests that "even though research done on swear words perpetuates the marginalization of emotional speech in theories of language, when language is viewed in a more comprehensive fashion that includes offensive speech (that is swearing) as an element in communication comprehension and production process, the result is a more realistic view of human language" (p. 13). This means that African female bloggers' employment of swear words and even other slangs and colloquialism offers a more realistic view and appreciation of what they communicate through their blogs. It also offers a better understanding of the writers' views, emotions and personality. This finding is inconsistent with Herring (1993) who has opined that men, not women depict humor in their writing.

#### **4.2.3 Contractions**

William (2012) refers to contraction as the shortened version of the written and spoken forms of a word, syllable, or word group, created by omission of internal letters or sounds.



Also, an abbreviation is the shortened form of a word or phrase, usually consisting a letter or group of letters taken from the word or phrase, (William, 2012). While contractions are mostly applicable in linguistic analysis, abbreviations exist in general words and phrases. Not all abbreviations and contractions can be used in formal communication, but they can be used in informal communication, (Andersson&Trudgill, 1992). It must be noted that contractions are generally identified with parts of speech, (Argamon et al., 2003). However, the study included bloggers' use of contractions in the stylistic issues since it is related to informality in writing style.

The study found that bloggers used certain contractions and abbreviations generally considered informal by Pearce (2003) in their posts. For instance in,

There's a tribe in Africa where the birth date of a child is counted not from when they were born. - PK on 'Your Song'

Also, on abbreviations, bloggers employed them for certain words that are generally abbreviated in everyday communication; for instance, 'Okay' (ok) and 'Pyjamas' (PJs).

Examples are illustrated below:

I like clothes. I like getting dressed up (for about 30 minutes and then I want to put my PJs back on. - MS on 'The Great Switcheroo'

and,

If I've had any expectation of running this race, it was gone after the first hour with only 5km completed. I was officially hiking Monties and I was OK with that. - MS on 'Mont-Aux Sources Challenge'

These contractions and abbreviations which are generally not acceptable in formal writing were used by bloggers in their posts and this means that bloggers resort to the informal style of writing. William (2012) opines that contractions, abbreviations and clichés are used when the writer is communicating on a casual level with their audience. Again, the study found that with contractions and abbreviations, bloggers had much allowance to communicate their emotions to their readers. Also, Argamon et al. (2003) has said that the involvement dimension is exhibited through the use of contractions.

### **Clichés**

Clichés which according to Pearce (2003) are overused expressions, ideas or elements of a writing and other artistic works, were found in the blog posts. Bloggers were found to employ clichés in their bid to explain situations, phenomena or state of things. Pearce (2003) is of the opinion that though clichés began as striking phrases in the past, they have lost their force through overuse. As a result, most formal communicative platforms avoid the employment of clichés. Since bloggers use the informal style, clichés were a normal group of phrases in their posts; for instance in,

...that you're too broke, while other people are having the time of their lives. - KS on 'Are Shortcuts Worth Taking?'

and,

I think about death quite a lot, in my day-to-day life. More often than I imagine is normal. - PK on 'Death Fear and Living'

The use of clichés by bloggers is evidence of the fact that they adopt informal communication in blogging, and as has been stated by Fang (1991), these elements of the conversational style of writing are targeted at connecting with the reader for effective communication. This shows that African female bloggers employ effective communicative tools appropriate for the blogosphere as well as for the diary style blog in order to communicate effectively to their readers.

These findings are significant for gynocriticism theory which focuses on the content and language of women's writings and how women make use of these in order to construct their identity, (Nodev&Pourgiv, 2012). Again, the identity theory posits that through performance of a perceived role, an identity is expressed. Since bloggers perform through their blogging practices, it can be said that the informal style of writing has implications for their identities.

### **Code Switching**

Finally, one interesting linguistic feature the study found is that bloggers employed the use of local language or expressions in their blog posts. This is called code-switching. The study labeled code-switching under diction in this instance since it also borders around the choice of words in language. It must be however noted that code-switching is a major linguistic variety on its own. According to Shebba, Mahootian and Jonsson (2012), code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety in a manner consistent with the syntax and phonology of each variety. This definition implies that at the time a writer or speaker switches code, it should be able to flow with the structure of the sentence and the relationship between the two languages. Bloggers sometimes switched to their local language in their posts; for instance in,

Kids will be kids and they will be out there playing and having fun, saying, Baba yangu anaeza chapa baba yako. - SP on 'Kiddo Needs a Family'

and in,

Never mind that they live somewhere *hukomashinani* in *Gikambura* where they get electricity only during public holidays. And they probably borrowed the *gikomba* high heels they're using to look down upon you. They probably got *nduthid* half way across Kenya to be in Nairobi but they will flip their weave and have the nerve to tell you they only do hotels like the intercontinental. - SP on 'Socialite by Bankruptcy'

The word "nduthi" is a Kenyan word which means "to carry on a motor bike". Adding a 'd' to it puts it in the past tense form as in "to be carried on a motor bike" or more appropriately in the Kenyan language, "to get motor biked". Hence "they probably got nduthid". This makes the local language fit correctly in the sentence; and which also suggests the writer's confidence and proficiency in both languages.

I want to rescue it but the man in the blue uniform with a gun gives me the "neddanyabo, no enter" look. - KI on 'Kampala City Square, the Lost Park'

Bloggers easily switched from the English Language to their local languages without warning and without translating the local language. According to Jonsson (2011), the majority of the earlier studies have focused on spoken language and code-switching in conversation, but it is clear that today multilingualism is present also in written discourse. William (2002) says that in formal communication, code-switching is mostly done prior to some form of permission and the audience is given some warning and translation.

Mahootian (2010) underlies four main functions of code switching; signaling defiance, promoting a globalised identity, indicating shifts in social status and power, and as linguistic

symbols for emerging ethnic groups. Nurma and Puhta (2009) opines that code-switching performs a more pragmatic function such as expressing identity and Lexander (2011) adds that writers can manage their relationships and their identities through switching between several languages.

It can therefore be said that African female bloggers switching code in their posts helps in expressing their identities. The fact that they do not ease readers in before switching code can be indicative of the fact of their assumed casual relationship with their readers. African female bloggers therefore use code-switching to express their identities and to manage their relationships with their audiences. It indicates their nationality, the easy relationship they have with their readers and their proficiency and confidence in language use.

#### **4.2.4 Tone**

According to Summer (2011), diction plays an important role in setting the tone of a piece of writing. Tone determines the kind of personality that comes through a writer's work. It is also related to the persona, or the image that writers intend to portray to audiences. Tone, like diction is either formal or informal, Scott (2010). The general tone of the bloggers' posts was informal. This was so since bloggers adopted the informal style of writing. The study coded 91% representing informal tone and 9% as formal. This was as a result of the numbers that represented diction in the blog posts. Since there is no slang tone, the study coded both informal diction (62%) and slang diction (29%) as informal tone (91%). The prominent tones that emerged from the blog posts are *passionate*, *intimate*, *critical*, *humorous* and *serious*. Below are the operational definitions of the identified tones;

- ❖ **Passionate** was operationally defined to include tone depicting a blogger's strong feelings or beliefs, excitement and energetic sense about a topic or situation.
- ❖ **Intimate** was operationally defined to include tone arising from writer's sharing of personal information and experiences. It also included tone arising from posts depicting love, relationship and family.
- ❖ **Critical** was operationally defined to include tone arising from the writer's purpose or effort to critique, judge or analyze the relative merits of something or some aspects of a thing, subject or situation. The writer may directly or indirectly state pleasure or displeasure in this case.
- ❖ **Humorous** was operationally defined to include tone arising from the writer's effort to entertain by focusing on comical or amusing situations using funny and joking expression, irony or sarcasm.
- ❖ **Serious** was operationally defined to include tone resulting from providing, interesting, current, thought-provoking fact or instruction on a topic or situation.

Below is a table showing the frequency distribution of the tones that emerged in the blog posts. It should be noted that some of the blog posts conveyed more than one tone and this is possible as according to Summer (2011, p. 3), "a work of writing can have more than one tone."

**Table 3. Frequency distribution of major tones in the blog posts**

<b>Tone</b>	<b>No. of Blog Posts</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
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Passionate	48	27.9%
Intimate	39	22.7%
Serious	37	21.5%
Critical	28	16.3%
Humorous	20	11.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100%</b>

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### **Passionate**

The *passionate* tone emerged as the tone with the highest frequency distribution in the blog posts. This tone emerged from 48 posts with a percentage of 27.9. Bloggers were found to feel very strongly about the issues they wrote about and some of the word choices (including marks and symbols) that were suggestive of bloggers' strong feelings or excitement about their topics were 'emphasize', 'enthusiasm', 'excitement', 'imperative', 'necessary' and 'no!'.

### **Intimate Tone**

*Intimate* was the second highest tone that emerged; depicted in 39 blog posts which represented 22.7% in the frequency distribution. Bloggers were found to relate emerging issues they wrote on with their own personal experiences. While some were their own experiences, others were external issues and yet of an intimate nature. Examples of word phrases, expressions or choices depicting *intimate* tone were 'I felt', 'relevant in my life',

‘personal’, and ‘you know how’. Sometimes, bloggers related issues to readers by guessing their (readers) possible personal experiences too.

### **Serious Tone**

*Serious* was the third highest tone, emerging in 37 blog posts which represents 21.5%. Bloggers depicted an attitude of objectiveness, seeking to provide facts on several issues from *education*, entertainment, *governance*, *health*, *career*, *family* and *gender*. Some of these issues were provided to educate their readers or to simply share information on various topics and situations. According to Summer (2012), the writer presents what is written and presents views without hidden messages or jokes, emphasizes facts and information.

### **Critical Tone**

The *critical* tone emerged as the fourth in 28 blog posts representing 16.3% in the frequency distribution. Bloggers were found to do a lot of critiquing and analysis of issues related to literature and works of art, governance healthcare and human rights. Examples of diction that depicted a *critical* tone are ‘opinion’, ‘think’, ‘believe’, ‘disappointed’, ‘critical’ and ‘the question is’.

### **Humorous Tone**

The humorous tone ranked fifth in the frequency distribution of the tones in the blog posts. 20 blog posts depicted humor, representing 11.6%. Bloggers introduced funny jokes, sarcasm and irony in order to create humor. This seemed to happen even in some of the



‘serious’ (tone and diction) topics bloggers wrote on. Bloggers also used emoticons and expressions of laughter to achieve their purpose.

#### **4.2.5 Categorization of Tone**

Summer and William (2013) grouped tones into five categories; positive, negative, humor/irony/sarcasm, sorrow/fear/worry and neutral categories.

Positive tone depicts a sense of euphoria, strength, dedication and love. Negative tone depicts a sense of uncooperativeness, dismissiveness and negotiativeness. Sorrow/fear/worry tone depicts a sense of aggravation, depression, embarrassment and melancholy. Neutral tone depicts a sense of *impartiality*, objectiveness, lack of judgment and uncritical. Humor/irony/sarcasm tone depicts a sense of hilarity, comic and amusing emotions, (Summer & William, 2013). A single tone can fall under more than two categories due to the possible diverse nature of meanings associated with words.

Upon the categorization of tones by Summer and William (2013), the five major tones that emerged from the blog posts can be labeled under four categories. The table below shows the categories of the major tones;

**Table 4. Categories of the major tones conveyed in the blog posts**

Category	Tone
Positive	Passionate, Intimate
Negative	Critical
Neutral	Serious
Humor/Irony/Sarcasm	Humorous

#### 4.2.6 Positive Category

*Passionate* and *intimate* fall under the positive category. The study found that African female bloggers conveyed a positive tone in their posts through the kinds of attitudes and emotions they attached to the topics and issues in the blog posts. The way bloggers expressed their thoughts, opinions, feelings and level of attachment to the topics effected the tone in the posts. An example can be seen in the excerpt below,

Our rights have been violated a lot in this country that when things like these declarations are made, we tend to rejoice because then we think that someone is looking out for us or doing us a favor. Truthfully, these are our rights, we don't need a declaration to emphasize that we are entitled to them. - KI on 'The Right to *Health* is Justiciable in Uganda'

The above excerpt shows that the blogger feels very strongly about the fact that the right to *health* is not a favor but a necessity and right. The underlined phrases depict how strongly the blogger feels about the issue of right to *health*. Summer and William (2013) say that

such depiction of strength or passion towards a subject exerts a positive tone since it makes readers understand the writer's level of commitment to the particular subject.

Also, bloggers enacted feelings of excitement, cheerfulness or love in other posts. For instance, in

I am very excited with where I am in my training – definitely getting stronger and faster. I can feel it! – MS on 'Time to Focus'

The underlined expressions create a sense of excitement or joy as the emotions the blogger attaches to what she is writing about. Also, the exclamation mark (!) is an indication of those same emotions and the fact that these words appear in the excerpt means that the blogger wants to convey joy, excitement or pride.

In similar ways, bloggers were found to convey the positive tone in their blog posts through diction. The study can therefore conclude that bloggers use positive tone as a result of their stylistic choice to connect with their audience and manage their relationships. Also, with the kind of tone exhibited, readers get the chance to understand the kind of personality that bloggers have. Understanding the personality of a blogger aids in the way the reader relates to that blogger. Hence, the tone aids in expressing the identity of the blogger and also helps in managing the blogger's relationship with their audience.

Furthermore, the study found that bloggers conveyed a tone of intimacy in their posts. Female bloggers were found to bring their experiences into their writing. They related certain situations they blogged about with their own personal experiences or situations. For instance, in,

We have this really frustrating thing in South Africa called load shedding, which basically entails the national electricity supplier cutting off the nation's electricity according to a set, revolving roster in order to ensure that we don't completely run out of power... On other days, however, it happens slap bang in the middle of dinner-cooking and Barney-watching time, which is, of course, less ideal and takes a whole lot more planning and deep breathing. - RR on 'Five Ways to Benefit from Load Shedding'

One can see that the blogger introduces the reader to her home and to her *family* activities which are of a personal nature. Another example is,

If there's one thing that's bound to give you the jitters (besides being the guy that's planning to propose to a beautiful girl), it's being called for an interview...I've been to a couple of interviews myself, as the interviewee. Some I was told NO, others I was offered a raw deal (equivalent to WAIT), while others, I was told YES. The thing I liked about the interviews is that I got the exposure. - KS on 'Have You Been Called for That Interview?'

In this excerpt, one can notice that while the blogger is talking about interviews, she also brings her own experience to bear. Again, she relates it to the effect a proposal can have on a man. Though this is not mentioned as the blogger's personal experience, the phrase 'the guy that's planning to propose to a beautiful girl' suggest a romantic relationship, the basis of which is also of an intimate nature.

The study also found that bloggers brought the readers into issues they blogged about by relating certain situations to possible experiences of the readers. An example can be seen in,

Remember how much simpler it was to get dressed when you had a school uniform? Sure, it didn't fit properly most of the time, provided zero protection against the weather in any season, and made you look like a twat and feel like a prisoner. But it also meant that choosing your outfit of the day was far less confusing or tasking in

the morning. To be fair, you probably also spent a lot less time hung-over as a high school student, which also helps matters. - JM on 'The Great Switcheroo'

The blogger relates the issue of clothes and fashion to the reader's life in a way that is targeted at making the reader feel seen by the writer. Brundage (2011) opines that the writer's effort at including the reader in the story aids in establishing a more intimate writer-reader relationship on the grounds of shared common experience. Fang (1991) reiterates that the use of the first and second person pronouns (I, You, We) is geared towards including the audience in the building of the story and to open up a relationship of shared experiences. The study can therefore conclude that bloggers employ the *positive category* to build and manage their relationships with their audience as Lopez (2009) echoes that women are relationship builders.

#### **4.2.7 Negative Category**

Negative tone is not necessarily undesirable because it reveals the writer's critical mind and their need to question systems and situations that would have otherwise been considered normal, (Summer & William, 2013). The fact is that at the end of the day, what was analyzed, critiqued or judged takes a 'hard beating' as Summer and William (2012) put it. The study found that African female bloggers conveyed negative tone in their blog posts through diction. Bloggers' critique or analysis of certain topics or situations exerted a critical tone. For instance, in

The African society has little regard for all the sacrifices that women make for their families and homes. They forsake education to become breadwinners so that Brothers can have a decent education. This has gone on for so long that the African woman has difficulty finding herself outside of these roles. Woe betides the so-

called modern lady who strives for something else outside the walls of the great kitchen- her mother's hut...But who drew the line between Mother's hut and the tall and mighty walls, a thousand miles across the street?- SP on 'Purple Hibiscus: A Timid Girl Grows Brave'

It can be seen from the excerpt above that the blogger is questioning the systems that have placed women outside of the mainstream. It is also questioning and taking a critical look at *gender* roles in our society. It is therefore true that while the tone is serious, it can also be described as critical and the blogger's questioning of certain systems does not make serious or critical, undesirable. The finding therefore agrees with Summer and William (2013) that the negative tone is not necessarily undesirable.

Another post reads,

Today I read a horrible *article* about the body of a baby that was found in the rubbish. Stories like these, which are 'hot off the press', bring a lot of questions. If the parent had killed this child, was it because it was an unplanned pregnancy? There are a lot of issues that come flooding when faced with an unplanned pregnancy... Society is such that it has engrained in us what is right and wrong in the world.- MM on 'Society's Stigma Against Unplanned Pregnancies'

This excerpt gives off a serious and critical tone as the blogger analyzes a societal issue. The critical and serious nature of the tone also tells readers about the kinds of issues bloggers attach much importance to; and this aids in the bloggers' expression of their identities. This finding agrees with Fang (1991) that the author's style is what places a magnifying glass on his/ her identity because through the choice of style, one understands the author's theme, point of view and dedication to their story.

#### 4.2.8 Neutral Category

Serious emerged under Neutral tone. The study found that some of the bloggers' writings conveyed tone of seriousness. Under the serious tone, the study found that bloggers' writings conveyed this tone when they published posts that were simply to inform or educate. These posts were mostly tagged under general news. For instance, in posts such as,

The winner of Nigeria's presidential election in March, Muhammadu Buhari, has been sworn in as leader of Africa's most populous country. Mr. Buhari is the first opposition figure to win a presidential election in Nigeria since independence in 1960. He has taken over from Goodluck Jonathan, who urged his successor to unite the country in the face of the threat from Boko Haram militants. - AA on 'Buhari is Sworn In as Nigeria President'

and in,

Designer of Ghana's National Flag, Mrs. Theodosia Salome Abena Kumea Okoh, who died on April 19, 2015 at the age of 92, will be buried today. The funeral service will be held at the forecourt of the State House in Accra and the remains will be interred at the Osu Cemetery. - AA on 'Designer of Ghana's National Flag Goes Home Today'

It can be realized that information is given without the personal point of view of the blogger. The study found that bloggers normally wrote these posts using the formal style of writing; and hence, formal diction and tone. This was found to be a negotiation from the predominantly adopted conversational style bloggers were found to use.

The study therefore can conclude that the change in style of writing is indicative of the fact that African female bloggers explore diverse writing skills and styles in order to improve the

quality of their work and to achieve effective communication. Lopez (2009, p. 12) states that “it will be difficult to tag women’s writing under one or two labels. Women have penetrated the numerous spheres of art for centuries.” This agrees with the finding of the study and shows the dynamic nature of female bloggers’ works which also speaks to their identity as dynamic people.

Again, the study finds that African female bloggers employ the neutral tone on informative issues devoid of their personal lives or views. This, they do without bringing in their personal views or personal lives to bear. This finding disagrees with Herring et al (2004), MacCullagh (2008) and Royal (2008) who are of the view that women talk about internal issues while men talk about external issues. It however agrees with the assertion by Somolu (2007, p. 484) that “when women blog, they are documenting and passing on knowledge”.

#### **4.2.9 Humor/Irony/Sarcasm Category**

Spence (2011) refers to humorous writing as one that amuses people and makes them laugh; it can be in the form of jokes, and more often in prose. It can be witty, wry, dry, silly or any other form of humor. The study found that bloggers conveyed humorous tone in their writing such as is shown below:

You can correct this impression by taking time to add the recipient’s name; like, ‘Jade’. This makes me feel like a naughty kid being called out for picking my nose in assembly and as such immediately puts me on my guard.- JM on ‘How to Write ruder Emails without Swearing’.

Or with foul language,



An ellipsis indicates a dramatic pause. Addressing someone and then going for the long, pathos-laden pause right off the bat is the real-world equivalent of: “So, I need to tell you something... I’m just not sure how, because the news I have is so bad that you are literally going to evacuate your bowels when you hear it. - MM on ‘Let the Race Run Itself’

It was also found that bloggers used funny scenarios to create humor in their writing, Bloggers also used sarcasm and irony to create humor which in turn give off a humorous tone in their writing. Goebel (2011) spins off Rod’s (1991) explanation of the sense of immediacy in education in which Rod (1991, p. 353) states that “the value of humor in the classroom may be *particularly* related to its role in promoting a sense of immediacy. Immediacy is an educational concept referring to the degree to which a teacher makes a close personal connection with students, as opposed to remaining distant and aloof.” According to Goebel (2011), immediacy is applicable in writing in that shared positive humor tends to create personal bonds between writers and their readers despite differing backgrounds.

Cornett (2011, p. 37) notes that “laughter decreases social distance among people and causes a feeling of connectedness. Rapport is built by laughing together.” It can therefore be said that bloggers create humor in their writing in order to bond with their readers. Hence, supporting the finding of this study that African female bloggers are relationship builders.

Also, Donahue (2000) says that humor reduces anxiety and improves readers’ receptiveness and understanding of the flow of the story. This means that when readers feel personally connected to the writer, they are more willing to engage with even the more challenging part of the piece without losing interest. With this, the study can conclude that bloggers use

humor to achieve their communicative purposes which means that African female bloggers are strategic in their work.

African female bloggers use the positive, negative and neutral tones in their blog posts. They also adopt the humor/irony/sarcasm tone to achieve their communicative purpose. They adopt the informal and slang diction to express their identity; to inform and educate their audiences; to build their desired relationship with readers and to maintain those relationships.



#### **4.3.0 RQ3: What are the implications of thematic and stylistic issues for African female bloggers' identities?**

The third research question looks at the implications of the themes and styles embedded in the bloggers' posts as far as their identities are concerned. Before underlying these implications, the study did a close examination of bloggers' profiles in order to find out how bloggers profiled themselves on their blogs. The bloggers' profile is one of the first things visitors encounter on a blog. A reader or visitor wants to know the person or voice behind what they are enjoying on the blog, (Newson&Oberlander, 2006).

One of the ways of activating one's identity is through profiling. This is normally tagged by bloggers as "About Me or About the Author". Sometimes, bloggers replace "Me" or "The Author" with their own name. According to Davis (2014), the profile tells readers who the blogger is just as would be disclosed in an essay of "My Self", so that readers do not feel like the blogger is only a figment of their imagination.

Upon analysis of the blogger profiles, the four themes that emerged are;

- ❖ **Occupation** was operationally defined to include bloggers' reference to their profession, job, skills and other details about the profession, job or skills.
- ❖ **Accomplishment** was operationally defined to include bloggers' reference to their achievements in their education, career and other endeavors.
- ❖ **Interest** was operationally defined to include bloggers' reference to things or issues they are particularly passionate about. The theme also included bloggers' reference to their hobbies.

- ❖ **Purpose** was operationally defined to include bloggers' reference to the objectives of their blog or their blogging practice, the topics or issues the blog seeks to address or what readers can expect as far as the blog site is concerned.

The table below displays frequency distribution of the themes as they were represented in the profiles.

**Table 5. Frequency distribution of the themes as they were represented in the profiles**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>No. of Profiles Represented</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
	<b>by Themes</b>	
Interest	9	29%
Occupation	8	25.8%
Purpose	8	25.8%
Accomplishment	6	19.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Interest**

The theme of Interest emerged as the highest among the four themes embedded in the blogger profiles. Out of the 10 profiles, the study coded 9 as using the theme of Interest, representing 29%. Bloggers described their personalities making reference to the things or issues they are most passionate about. For instance, some profiles listed their interests stating that,

...practicing as a Marketer, an Online or Digital Marketer to be exact. It amuses me. It is after all, what I am passionate about. I am also a sucker for content that builds people, useful content. Content that inspires, impacts, or influences someone (even if it's just one person) in one way or another. - KS

and,

Dorcas Aba Annan... loves to tell African stories that teach the rich African culture.

- AA

Bloggers mentioned their interests and hobbies in their profiles; which indicates their desire to let readers or audiences know them as such. Among the interests mentioned are writing, social media, digital marketing, African stories, conviviality, *inspiration*. This means that African female bloggers identify themselves as people interested or passionate about *art*, culture, business and *technology*, building *relationship* and also inspiring others.

### **Occupation and Purpose**

The themes of Occupation and Purpose emerged as the second highest themes in the blogger profiles. 8 profiles depicted both themes, representing 25.8% in the frequency distribution of the themes in the profiles. Bloggers defined their identities in terms of their profession, job or skills. They also defined their identities with reference to the topics or issues their blogs seek to dwell on. With reference to occupation, bloggers wrote that,

She is the CEO of NABA FOUNDATION and Co-Founder of Founders Project. She is a Human Rights advocate, well versed in Research and Monitoring. Aba works in fields dedicated to promoting girl-child education. -AA

Contact me for copywriting, content strategy, blogging and PR work. - JM

and,

I am a Social Media Content Marketer and Development Practitioner with. - SP

The study found that bloggers profiled themselves through their professions. According to Antunovic and Hardin (2013), their investigation of how sports women frame their identities in their blog profiles revealed that sports women attach much importance to their profession or *career* due to the fact that it suggests the important role they play in their various fields. The figures in this study suggest that not only sports women but also African female bloggers attach much importance to identifying themselves with reference to their profession. Making reference to professional backgrounds shows that African female bloggers identify themselves as *career* women.

Also, the majority of bloggers stated the purpose of the blog or the motivation behind their setting up a blog site. Bloggers states in their profiles that,

I created Kahill Insights as a blog to create content and share things I was learning about Social Media marketing and Creating Content. – KI

and

I dream of doing crazy stuff that makes me happy; I dream of becoming a multi-sport athlete in the not-so-far future :-). This blog is my platform for sharing my stories and experiences while chasing my dreams. - MS

The purpose of the blog informs readers about what they can expect. The purpose of the blog again serves to support the interests of the bloggers or things that they are passionate about. It also helps to point readers to the identity of the bloggers. For instance, the last

excerpt above by My Million Miles (MS) suggests that the blogger is athletic or is an athlete.

### **Accomplishment**

The theme of Accomplishment ranked fourth among the major themes that emerged from the bloggers' profiles. 6 profiles out of the 10 that were analyzed focused on accomplishment, representing 19.4% of frequency distribution of themes in the profiles. The study found that bloggers identified themselves through the achievements they have made in several endeavors including *education* and *career*. Some of the profiles read,

She has won two awards including Leadership Excellence Award (2014) and Best Journalist Student. She has written several *articles* on development issues in Ghana, disability issues, oil and Gas production and many more. - AA

Armed with an IT (Bachelors Degree at Strathmore University), Project and Strategic Management (MBA at Daystar University) *educational* background...I serve as the VP of Lennon and Fox. – KS

and,

What I began as a blog site-Now Kahill Insights, a registered company that offers digital media services mainly content creation and marketing. We market and develop any materials that are share-able online.

Bloggers were found to state their successful endeavors in their profiles. This indicates how they want to be known and with what they want to be associated. For instance, the excerpts above suggest that African female bloggers are highly educated women who are also independent individuals. It can also be said that African female bloggers are women in high management positions or that they are women who own their own businesses. Again, it can

be said that African female bloggers are well versed in social and digital *technology* and media.

The findings of the study can therefore conclude that through profiling, African female bloggers construct their identities along the lines of their professional and personal interests; through occupation, through accomplishment and the purpose and motivations for their blogging practice. This is inconsistent with Newson and Oberlander (2006) who have said that female bloggers identify themselves through their *gender* roles and positions as well as their *gendered* relational connections such as “wife” or “mum”.

Inconsistent with Oberlander and Newson’s findings, the minor theme this study found was *Gender Role*. However, out of the 10 profiles, only 2 bloggers identified themselves as “wife” or “mum”. These blogs are Musings of a Millennial Mum and Running the Race which are for the most part “Mummy blogs”. This suggests that a very significant majority of African female bloggers do not identify themselves through *gendered* roles. This finding is consistent with Antunovic and Hardin (2013) who found in their study that 64% of their participants (sports bloggers) did not make any *gendered* reference in their profiles. Majority of those who identified themselves with *gendered* reference used the *gender-neutral* word “parent”.



### 4.3.1 Implications of the Thematic and Stylistic Issues on African Female Bloggers' Identities

Nodev and Pourgiv (2012) underlie the importance of the linguistic approach of feminist gynocriticism theory as they explain its focus on content or language and how women make use of it in order to construct their identity through the employment of areas such as theme and style in writing. Humm (2004) states that gynocriticism focuses on women writers and the identified themes that speak to the identity of the woman. "Their texts give women writers a history, describe women's choices of literary expression, and to make an identificatory *celebration* of the power of women writers", (p. 4).

Before engaging the study in the implications of the thematic and stylistic issues for African female bloggers' identities, it is important to outline the major findings from research questions 1 and 2. This is to aid the study in underlying their implications for bloggers identities.

#### Summary of Thematic Issues

- ❖ Bloggers depict the theme of *inspiration* in their posts
- ❖ Bloggers display conviviality and gregariousness through the themes of *celebration, family and relationship*
- ❖ Bloggers debate national and international issues through the themes of *education, governance, health and gender*
- ❖ Majority of bloggers write on reversed *gender* roles
- ❖ Bloggers write on the themes of business, *technology* and *art*.

## Summary of Stylistic Issues

- ❖ Bloggers use informal or conversational style of writing
- ❖ Bloggers use the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular pronouns ('I' and 'You') as well as the 1st person plural pronoun (We) which indicate informality in style
- ❖ Bloggers ask direct questions in their posts; an indication of the conversational style of writing
- ❖ Bloggers use informal diction and slang. Features include colloquialism, contraction, clichés and swear words.
- ❖ Bloggers employ code-switching in their posts
- ❖ Bloggers employ different stylistic tones including positive, negative, neutral and humor/irony/sarcasm to achieve communicative purposes.

Researchers like Davis (2011, 2012), Nodev and Pourgiv (2012), Antunovic and Hardin (2013) and Lopez (2009) agree that the theme and style of writing has great potential in telling the reader about the author. This means that in examining the themes and style of writing by African female bloggers, the study points itself in the direction of bloggers' identities.

According to Table 8, African female bloggers depicted the theme of *Inspiration* in their blog posts. Bloggers published posts that were geared towards inspiring or motivating readers concerning diverse courses such as *education, career, relationship* and dealing with the normal encounters of everyday life. Juxtaposing the theme of *Inspiration* with the themes of Interest and Purpose that emerged from the analysis of the blogger profiles in this

study, it can be realized that the issues embedded in these themes reflect on one another. For instance, under the themes of Interest and Purpose, bloggers were found to state that,

I am also a sucker for content that builds people, useful content. Content that inspires, impacts or influences someone (even if it's just one person) in one way or another. And that's the main reason I run this blog. - KS

and,

If you're feeling particularly whacky- why not sample a short story or two? Take your shoes off, put on your fat pants, have a riffle through the bathroom cupboard and make yourself at home. - JM

The finding of the study which indicates that the theme of *Inspiration* was reflected in 54 blog posts, out of the 100 that were analyzed therefore shows clearly that bloggers were constructing and expressing their identities as *inspirational* bloggers or motivators. Burke and Tully (1977) and Thoits (1986) as cited in Stets and Burke (2000) opine that there are expectations associated with the roles or positions people occupy in social structure and these expectations lead to the performance; and there are meanings attached to the performance of the roles. This is important for bloggers and their blogging practices since after activating their identities through profiling, they begin to perform roles associated with the expectations of their identities; which is by publishing posts on their blogs. Here, what and how they post speak to their identities; hence, the themes and style of writing. The study can therefore conclude that the theme of *Inspiration* found in bloggers' posts imply that African female bloggers construct their identities as *inspirational* bloggers or motivators. This is consistent with Antunovic and Hardin (2013) who have said that female bloggers use their blogs to motivate and advice others.

Furthermore Table 8 shows that African female bloggers displayed conviviality and gregariousness through the themes of *Celebration*, *Family* and *Relationship*. Upon analysis of the blogger profiles, the study found that conviviality and gregariousness are not out of character for African female bloggers since bloggers mention in line with the theme of Interest that,

I am definitely a people person. I enjoy together times almost too much so don't look for me in the pictures. I'm always the person behind the camera. My very happy place! – MM

My Shane set this blog up for me, he is one of the nicest things that I have in my life.  
- LP

and,

I am a lover of people, spending time with friends and family... - RR

The excerpts above from the blogger profiles analyzed in this study reflect the themes of *Celebration*, *Family* and *Relationship* that emerged from the blog posts. The operational definitions of these three themes all emit a sense of 'fondness of company', 'festive', 'lively' and 'sociable' and the blog posts are evident of the common characteristics identified here. This is indicative of the fact that through their blog posts, African female bloggers play the role of *family*, *celebration* and *relationship* bloggers; and which in tend implies that bloggers perform these roles to express their identities as convivial and gregarious people.

In addition, the themes of *Celebration*, *Family* and *Relationship* go to support the claim by Lopez (2009) who has said that women are generally relationship builders. According to Lopez, women have the tendency to connect more easily than men do. The fact that bloggers identify themselves as ‘people lovers’ in their profiles and blog to depict these themes shows that African female bloggers play roles that border on connecting and bonding with their readers.

Again, this is evident in the earlier finding of this study that African female bloggers use informal or conversational style of writing in their blogging practices. Features of the conversational style of writing which include 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular pronouns, 1<sup>st</sup> person plural pronouns, simple sentences, direct questions, and informal and slang diction were all evident in bloggers’ posts. Tannen (2000) asserts that the personal pronouns (so found in this study) are indications of the authors’ effort at establishing a closer and intimate *relationship* with readers. Also, William (2012) opines that informal and slang diction depicts a level of casualness in a *relationship*. To add to that, Messner (2010) has said that,

The increase in first person pronouns over time might be explained by the realization that blogs carry an interactive and personalized potential. Perhaps users have become more comfortable with the platform and, therefore, are moving away from replicating journalistic structures to instead be more innovative, (p. 138).

The theme of *Family*, *Relationship* and *Celebration* which are implicative of bloggers’ expressed identity of conviviality and gregariousness can also serve as the reason for bloggers’ choice of conversational style of writing. As has been put out by Serpe (2011), being a certain kind of person with a *particular* identity determines the person’s

*relationship* to others. It is therefore clear that African female bloggers' identity as *relationship* builders serves as a major determinant for their choice of style in writing.

Table 8 shows that that bloggers adopt code-switching in their blogging practices, particularly in the posts they publish. The study found that African female bloggers switched code in their writing. According to Mahootian (2010), code switching functions to signal defiance, promote a globalized identity, indicate shifts in social status and power, and serve as linguistic symbols for emerging ethnic groups.

This assertion is important for bloggers' identity because their ability to switch code in their writing implies that African female bloggers are not dormant rule followers but that they take the opportunity to explore other concepts of writing in their blogging practices. Again, through code switching, bloggers emphasize the importance of globalization and its effect on the identity of users in the virtual social structure. Hence, bloggers express their own global identity as a result of their presence on social media and their involvement in popular culture. Code switching also implies bloggers' confidence and proficiency in the languages they use.

Furthermore, Table 8 shows that Bloggers wrote on national and international issues through the themes of *Education, Governance, Health* and *Gender*. A look at the analysis on blogger profiles shows that in the themes of *Occupation* and *Accomplishment*, bloggers' description of themselves tell readers the kinds of endeavors they are involved in whether career or other projects. For instance, in excerpts such as:

She has written several articles on development issues in Ghana, disability issues, oil and gas production. She is a Human Rights advocate, well versed in Research and Monitoring. Aba works in fields dedicated to promoting girl-child education. – AA

and,

A Models of United Nation Security Council former chair lady in Palestine and Germany. The fallen standard of education, maternal mortality and gender issues are of great concern to me. My OLLY Drama Troupe is dedicated to addressing these issues through Theatre for Development. -PK

It can be realized that through profiling, bloggers activate their identity to their readers by stating the roles they play in their respective fields. These identities reflect in the issues and topics they subsequently address through blogging. Therefore, the themes of *Governance, Education, Health* and *Gender* have implications for African female bloggers' identities that they are people involved in the socio-economic development of both the national and international spheres. This finding is consistent with Harp and Tremanye (2006) who have said that though women write on national and political issues, they are less likely to use strong and offensive language.

Again according to Table 8, majority of bloggers who wrote on the theme of *Gender*, related issues of 'reversed *gender* roles'. This has implication for African female bloggers' identity. The study found that while bloggers actively debated *gender* issues related to *health, education* and leadership, they did not actively debate issues related to reversed *gender* roles. However, bloggers wrote more on reversed *gender* roles using narrative form as if to recount experiences or to mention these issues in passing. For instance, in the excerpts below,

Will who had been away on business for the week, was back. It was his weekend to babysit the kids. Super! So I took a half-day running holiday. - RR

and,

He was my first cooking and now baking buddy. He taught me how to grill (or basically use the oven). We also baked our first cupcakes together☺. -KS

It can be realized that though the bloggers are writing about reversed *gender* roles, they do not actively argue these issues out but rather they mention them in their posts and sound happy about it. The study has revealed that the sense of excitement about a *particular* issue or topic falls under Passionate tone. Summer and William (2013) who term passionate tone under the Positive Category Tone assert that the passionate tone reveals the high level of importance the writer attaches to the topic or issue. This means that, though subtle, African female bloggers are passionate about the issue of gender roles. According to Messner (2010), although literature points to the feminist potential of the blogosphere, very few bloggers tag their blogs as such. Messner is of the opinion that this might suggest that these bloggers do not consider their writing as a feminist act. However, Antunovic and Hardin (2013, p. 21) argue that “women’s *participation* in the blogosphere- especially on *gender* issues- is a form of feminist activism”.

The study therefore concludes that the theme of *Gender* has implication for African female bloggers’ identity in *gender* activism or as has been argued by Antunovic and Hardin (2013), in feminist activism.

Last but not the least, Table 8 shows that African female bloggers wrote on the themes of Business, *Technology* and *Art*. The study found that bloggers mostly provided information or resources on issues related to *Technology*, Business, *Health*, *Governance* and *Education*.



Bloggers adopted the Serious tone (Neutral Category) in these instances since such posts took the form normally associated with filter blogs (journalistic style of writing), that is, using formal and impersonal language. These blogs posts generally informed or educated readers and bloggers tagged these posts under “General News” or tagged the posts by the themes; for instance, “Technology”.

Also, on the theme of *Art*, bloggers were found to do reviews on topics related to music, film, books, fashion and design. Here, the study found that bloggers adopted the Critical tone (Negative Category) as the major tone in addressing such issues. However, they also used the Humorous tone (Humor/Irony/Sarcasm Category) and the Passionate tone (Positive Category) since these reviews were done from diverse angles; positive, negative or humorous. For instance, in excerpts such as,

I was however, disappointed with the other lead, Tip, voiced by Rihanna. Her voice did not match the character. You could also hear that she wasn't making much effort to play the character, just spitting out lines from a script. - MM (Critical Tone)

and,

It (Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*) is such genius that it often made me struggle to put the damn book down but I had to because I wanted to savor every morsel of the book. Every sentence, every word, every punctuation mark. I now must visit *Nssuka* someday and while there I must enjoy a meal of *MoiMoi* and *Egusi soup*. -SP (Humorous and Passionate tones)

It can be realized that while bloggers wrote on *Technology*, *Business* and *Art*, they also shuffled among their choice of tones in order to cultch their messages in the best ways. The study can therefore conclude that the themes of *Business*, *Technology* and *Art* imply African

female bloggers' identities as resource bloggers as well as people who are well-versed in technology and art.

In addition, African female bloggers are critics of the *arts* and this is evident in their critique of art as demonstrated in the excerpts above. Furthermore, African female bloggers' choice of different tones in their writings has implication for their identity as people who have the intelligence of navigating the dynamics of writing in order to achieve their desired communicative purposes.

#### **4.3.2 Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of analysis on bloggers' posts and profiles. The findings reveal that female bloggers are relationship builders and they exhibit this in their writing. Also, contrary to the popular notion that women avoid debating topics related to governance, technology and career or business, the findings reveal that women in fact has great interest in confronting issues related to such areas as have been mentioned. Again, the findings reveal that female bloggers are challenging stereotypical identities bestowed on them by society and are constructing their own desired identities through the themes they depict in their writing. These findings support the feminist gynocriticism theory which allows for women's writings to be appreciated void of any oppressive patriarchal standard of literary analysis, which is referred to by Nodeh and Pourgiv (2012) as masculine linguistics and male aestheticism standards.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter captures the summary and the conclusion based on the findings of the study. It also includes the limitations of the study and draws conclusion and recommendations.

#### 5.1 Summary

The study examined the thematic and stylistic issues in African female blogs and the implications of these issues on African female bloggers' identities. The study employed the Identity theory and Feminist Gynocriticism theory.

The study revealed that the dominant themes employed by African female bloggers in their writing are Inspiration, Celebration, Career, Relationship, Art, Family, Gender, Governance, Technology, Education and Health. Even though the blogs are authored by different people from different countries across the African continent, all the bloggers happened to employ these themes in their writing. The most dominant theme employed by African female bloggers was the theme of Inspiration while the least dominant theme was the theme of Health. Inspiration scored 15.2% while Health scored 4.5%.

The findings of the study revealed that African female bloggers write about male-dominated themes like governance, health, technology, career and education, contrary to popular

assertion by researchers such as Newson and Oberlander (2006) and Herring et al. (2004) who have speculated that women are more likely to blog about personal issues while men take on business, technology and political issues. The study revealed that African female bloggers express their identities as resource bloggers by providing information and resources on topics such as health, technology, career and education. The findings of the study therefore challenge the kinds of stereotypic portrayals given to women in society or the false impression of what women are or should be concerned with in society.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that women increasingly debate the issue of gender through blogging even though it was previously unheard of as has been stated by Lopez (2009). Not only are female bloggers dealing with gender on the blogosphere but they are also challenging the status quo and making a case for reversed gender roles in society. The findings of the study revealed that female bloggers express their identities in the sphere of gender activism. This is consistent with Antunovic and Hardin (2013) who argue that women's participation in the blogosphere- especially on gender issues- is a form of feminist activism.

Also, the study revealed that African female bloggers adopt the informal or conversational style of writing, which in tend supports the informal and slang diction. The findings of the study revealed that such a style of writing speaks to African female bloggers' identity as relationship builders. This is consistent with the assertion by Lopez (2009) who has said that women are relationship builders and have the tendency to connect more easily than men do. This claim again supports Davis (2014) who is of similar view on women as relationship builders both in the physical and virtual space.

Finally, the study revealed that the thematic and stylistic issues in African female blogs have implications for their identities in championing their desired roles in fields in career, technology, governance, education and health; remaining true to their convivial and gregarious nature as a people and challenging stereotypical portrayals given to them by society.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

Women as writers have always been evaluated under the influence of male patriarchal and literary tradition and therefore have struggled to have their own original, innovative and independent art, (Humm, 2004). Gradually, the phase of research on women in the virtual space is shifting as is evident by works of researchers such as Antunovic and Hardin (2013), Lopez (2009), Somolu (2007), Miller (2001), Nardi et al. (2004) and Davis (2014).

The prospects of gynocriticism theory afford the uniqueness of women's writings to be explored without using masculine linguistics and male aestheticism as the standard. African female bloggers are continually challenging the status quo, and critiquing the patriarchal society by relating issues of gender roles in their writing. They however do not actively debate issues related to gender, patriarchy, and feminism and this has been recognized by Harp and Tremanye (2006) who have said that women converse in a less authoritative manner. Still, women use blogs to challenge gender stereotypes, (Herring et al., 2004).

It is clear by the findings of this study that women are gregarious and convivial and this identity is very much depicted in their writing. It shows that they are keen on building community and relationships and this is recognized by Somolu (2007) that women's

engagement is significant for feminist scholars, as women use the blogosphere as a tool for organizing and community building.

It is important that African female bloggers in the blogosphere begin to actively debate issues of gender, patriarchy and feminism which the findings of this study clearly reveal are of great importance to the female bloggers.

### **5.3 Limitations**

The study set out to investigate the thematic and stylistic issues in African female blogs and their implications for African female bloggers' identities. However, the findings must be seen in the light of its limitations. The researcher faced certain constraints during the study.

As a result of the fact that this was a study primarily conducted on the internet, receiving permission to conduct the study involved a comprehensive process. Also, the pace of the study depended on how early or late the authorities involved in releasing data for the research responded to the researcher. This put constraints on the pace of the study.

Again, while some bloggers were willing to participate in the study, majority of them failed to respond on time. Therefore, instead of 20 bloggers for the study, the researcher was able to use only 10 bloggers from across the African continent. However, the ten bloggers adequately represented the top blogs in Africa.

In spite of the above limitations, the study has critical implications for future studies; studies on women's literature, identity construction and for gender and feminist studies.

#### **5.4 Future Research**

This study opens up a number of opportunities for future research. A more in-depth analysis that goes beyond the blog posts and profiles can help to better understand how African female bloggers verify their identities.

Also a phenomenological approach to this study will help to have a better understanding of blogging practices and identity construction. Talking to the bloggers would offer an opportunity to find out more about their motivations for blogging and the kinds of identities they wish to construct through their blogs. This will help researchers understand whether bloggers' conception of their identities is adequately enacted through performance or not.

Future research can also look at blogs written in African local languages to offer understanding into the correlation between blogging practices and the African identity.

#### **5.5 Recommendations**

Blogging is a web-based form of communication that is rapidly becoming mainstream, (McDonald & Towle, 2004). According to Nardi et al. (2004, p. 2), "blogs have been featured extensively in the popular media and have entered political campaigns, news organizations, businesses, and classrooms".

The impact and the penetration of blogging into mainstream discourse cannot be over emphasized. Somolu (2007) has emphasized the importance of women's presence on the blogosphere for feminist scholars. However, literature on the feminist gynocriticism theory shows that researchers primarily employ the theory to study women's poetry and other books written by women. The study did not find any work that employed the theory to study

women's writings on social media, especially the blogosphere. As a result the approaches of the theory seemingly favor women's historical writings more than the recent virtually produced works of women.

The study therefore recommends that the feminist gynocriticism theory expands its territories to include the virtually published writings of women since these works- especially as seen in blogging- are contributing to community building and assisting women's efforts toward social change and provide visibility to their endeavors, as has been stated by Antunovic and Hardin (2013).

Again, the study recommends that African Blogger Awards intensify its screening of the blog entries in order to filter the blogs which do not meet the criteria for Personal/Diary Blogs. A number of the blogs screened by the study were found to belong in either Filter Blogs or Knowledge Blogs. Since this might be a lack of understanding on the part of bloggers as to the requirements that categorize a particular blog, the study recommends that the African Blogger Awards in collaboration with Webfluentia device a strategy to educate African bloggers on the various categories of blogs.

This will help bloggers to better understand and appreciate their contribution and role on the African blogosphere. It will also help African Blogger Awards and Webfluentia in improving upon their work done so far.

Miller (2009) emphasizes the importance of the African blogosphere in bringing together the African richness and diversity in experiences, technology, news, art and culture. Even so, very little work has been done on the African blogosphere while those done on the United States blogosphere, the British blogosphere and the blogosphere of other non-English speaking countries remain uncountable. The study did not come across any



academic research on the African blogosphere. It, however, came across articles written by some renowned bloggers and social media users across Africa.

The study therefore recommends that researchers turn their attention to the African blogosphere in order to expand literature in this sphere of African endeavor.

Finally, gender advocates and feminists must pay attention to female bloggers since their blogging practice is fast becoming a tool to addressing issues of gender, feminism and patriarchy. Also, this is important because blogs have the potential to reach a wider audience when well managed and it will help mobilize women from across the continent of Africa and beyond in dealing with these societal issues as have been mentioned.

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter summarized the findings of the study. It also drew conclusions based on the findings of the study. Again, the chapter looked at the limitations that the researcher faced in the course of the study; recounted the possible areas to be considered based on the present study; and made recommendations to various bodies and institutions directly and indirectly affected by the major issues raised in the study.

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**APPENDIX I: AFRICAN BLOGGER PERSONAL EXPORT 2015- TOP 50 BLOGS**

No.	Name of Blog	Sex	Site URL
1.	Dad and the Code	M	<a href="http://www.craiglotter.co.za">http://www.craiglotter.co.za</a>
2.	Lucky Pony	F	<a href="http://luckypony.co.za">http://luckypony.co.za</a>
3.	Kawi Snippets	F	<a href="http://kawisnippets.com/">http://kawisnippets.com/</a>
4.	My Voyage in Med	M	<a href="https://myvoyageinmed.wordpress.com/">https://myvoyageinmed.wordpress.com/</a>
5.	The De-shelled Introvert	M	<a href="http://sykestings.wordpress.com">http://sykestings.wordpress.com</a>
6.	Frank Mwenda	M	<a href="http://www.frankmwenda.com">http://www.frankmwenda.com</a>
7.	Dalene Rayburn	F	<a href="http://dalenereyburn.com">http://dalenereyburn.com</a>
8.	Beewol	M	<a href="http://beewol.wordpress.com">http://beewol.wordpress.com</a>
9.	Musings of a Millennial Mum	F	<a href="http://millennialmum.blogspot.com">http://millennialmum.blogspot.com</a>
10.	My Million Miles	F	<a href="http://mymillionmiles.com">http://mymillionmiles.com</a>
11.	Patricia Kihoro	F	<a href="http://www.patrickihoro.com/">http://www.patrickihoro.com/</a>
12.	Kahill Insights	F	<a href="https://pkahill.wordpress.com/">https://pkahill.wordpress.com/</a>
13.	Sonofolwa	M	<a href="http://sonofolwa.wordpress.com">http://sonofolwa.wordpress.com</a>
14.	The Black Pen	M	<a href="https://senyafi.wordpress.com/">https://senyafi.wordpress.com/</a>
15.	Running The Race	F	<a href="http://www.runningtherace.co.za">http://www.runningtherace.co.za</a>

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16.	The Life's Way	M	<a href="http://www.thelifesway.com">http://www.thelifesway.com</a>
17.	Zaake Paul	M	<a href="http://zapweb.yu.tl/">http://zapweb.yu.tl/</a>
18.	Jade Mitchell Writing	F	<a href="http://jademitchellwriting.com">http://jademitchellwriting.com</a>
19.	Ramblings of a Third World Elite	M	<a href="http://misterburundi.wordpress.com">http://misterburundi.wordpress.com</a>
20.	Shaping Opinion with a Pen	F	<a href="http://injeyabox.com/">http://injeyabox.com/</a>
21.	Xtiandela	M	<a href="http://xtiandela.com">http://xtiandela.com</a>
22.	All About Africa	F	<a href="https://dorcasabaa.wordpress.com/">https://dorcasabaa.wordpress.com/</a>
23.	Chizzy Signature Blog	F	<a href="http://chizzysignature.blogspot.com">http://chizzysignature.blogspot.com</a>
24.	Tyranny of Pink	F	<a href="http://tyrannyofpink.com/">http://tyrannyofpink.com/</a>
25.	Victor Mochere	M	<a href="http://blog.victormochere.com">http://blog.victormochere.com</a>
26.	The Entrepreneur	M	<a href="http://www.theentrepreneur.blogspot.com">http://www.theentrepreneur.blogspot.com</a>
27.	HagenHouse.Com	M	<a href="http://www.hagenhouse.com">http://www.hagenhouse.com</a>
28.	RustyGate	M	<a href="http://rustygate.org">http://rustygate.org</a>
29.	Thought Leader	F	<a href="http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/lizettelouw">http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/lizettelouw</a>
30.	The Blessed Barrenness	F	<a href="http://www.theblessedbarrenness.co.za">http://www.theblessedbarrenness.co.za</a>
31.	SirraajCasiem	M	<a href="http://sirraajcasiemsa.com/">http://sirraajcasiemsa.com/</a>
32.	Makupsy	M	<a href="https://makupsy.wordpress.com/">https://makupsy.wordpress.com/</a>

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33.	Memoires of a South African Freelancer	F	<a href="http://liamarus.wordpress.com">http://liamarus.wordpress.com</a>
34.	MrsMwiti.Com	F	<a href="http://www.mrsmwiti.com">http://www.mrsmwiti.com</a>
35.	Dear Doris	M	<a href="http://www.mydeardoris.com">http://www.mydeardoris.com</a>
36.	Girl with a Bum	F	<a href="http://www.girlwithabum.com/">http://www.girlwithabum.com/</a>
37.	The Nocturnal Wenchy	M	<a href="http://www.thenocturnalwenchy.com">http://www.thenocturnalwenchy.com</a>
38.	The NathiXinwa	M	<a href="http://thenathixinwaexperience.blogspot.com">http://thenathixinwaexperience.blogspot.com</a>
39.	Manouchery-	F	<a href="http://manouchery.me">http://manouchery.me</a>
40.	Sempiternal Adventures	F	<a href="http://sempiternaladventures.blogspot.com">http://sempiternaladventures.blogspot.com</a>
41.	Fashionable Passion	F	<a href="http://www.fashionable-passion.blogspot.com">http://www.fashionable-passion.blogspot.com</a>
42.	Chronicle of a Kid Next Door	M	<a href="http://gracemusing.com">http://gracemusing.com</a>
43.	Cooked Culture	F	<a href="http://cookedculture.co.za/">http://cookedculture.co.za/</a>
44.	Femmegypsy	F	<a href="http://www.femmegypsy.com">http://www.femmegypsy.com</a>
45.	Miss Milli B	F	<a href="http://missmillib.co.za/">http://missmillib.co.za/</a>
46.	News24 Voices	M	<a href="http://voices.news24.com/author/marck-maphori/">http://voices.news24.com/author/marck-maphori/</a>
47.	Kumwesu Modeling Agency	M	<a href="http://kumwesumodelingagency.blogspot.com/">http://kumwesumodelingagency.blogspot.com/</a>

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48.	KingLife	M	<a href="http://www.kingvalentinodclxvi.wordpress.com">http://www.kingvalentinodclxvi.wordpress.com</a>
49.	The Kate Tin	F	<a href="http://www.thekatetin.com">http://www.thekatetin.com</a>
50.	Sex and Stuff	F	<a href="http://nollyodbanks.wordpress.com">http://nollyodbanks.wordpress.com</a>

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**APPENDIX II: SPECIFIC DETAILS OF THE POSTS RETRIEVED FOR THE  
ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY**

<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>Selected Posts</b>	<b>No. of Words</b>	<b>Images(M), Video(V)</b>
<b>Lucky Pony (LP)</b>	Johannesburg Street Fashion	207	13M
	Dark Interiors	118	18M
	Photo Shoot with Anna-Belle Soon to be Durrant	168	16M
	PUMAGram- Braamfontein	115	12M
	Fisherman's Plate	110	7M
	Mango Winter 2015	355	14M
	Baked Strawberry Cheesecake	701	14M
	I Would Live in Copenhagen	60	17M
	Justine Mahoney	156	18M
	Nina James at 9 Months and 12 Days Old	663	12M
<b>Kawi Snippets (KS)</b>	Are Shortcuts Worth Taking?	1,016	1M
	The Elusive Two Cornrows	531	6M
	Have You Been Called For That Interview?	1,354	1M
	Irreplaceable Values in Friendships	581	1M
	Book Review: "Nice Girls Still Don't the Corner Office" by Lois P. Frankel, PhD.	823	1M
	#ThrowBackThursday: Chicken Burritos.	296	5M
	Are They Any Different?	1,077	1M

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	Be Your Beautiful Self	393	1V
	The Quick Fix	445	-
	Mirror Mirror on the Wall	653	1M
<b>Shaping with a Pen (SP)</b>	<b>Opinion</b> Kiddo Needs a Family	764	2M
	To The Unpublished Writer	1,564	4M
	My Arm Candy	251	11M
	I Am a Homosexual, Mum	187	2M
	Meet Kay	512	1M
	Purple Hibiscus- A Timid Girl Grows Brave	490	2M
	Socialite By Bankruptcy	530	4M
	Kite Runner- Friendship and Betrayal	798	3M
	60 Seconds of Hell with a Bank Teller	834	2M
	Short Story: Initiation into Manhood	1,033	1M
<b>Musings Millennium Mum (MM)</b>	<b>of a</b> Society's Stigma Against Unplanned Pregnancies	664	1M
	Kid in the Cupboard: My Crèche Phobia	501	3M
	Kid in the Cupboard: My Crèche Phobia	683	15M,1V
	So Much to Do and See at uShaka Marine World	547	9M, 2V
	How Weddings Should Be	395	4M
	My Thoughts on the Movie "Home"	430	7M
	A Sweet Surprise from wicked Donuts	421	5M
	Fast and Furious 7 VIP Screening	392	3M
	The Lighter Side of Parenting	550	6M
	Giving Back at "I Care"	534	2M

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 The Birthday Debate

<b>My Million Miles</b>	Let the Race Run Itself	684	2M
<b>(MS)</b>	Celebrating Comrades Peak Training	661	3M, 1V
	Parkrun Playtime	395	13M
	Time to Focus	619	7M
	My Ultra Amazing 2014	532	10M
	Running the Winelands	125	17M
	My 10K Fun Runs	1,694	5M
	Mont-Aux-Sources Challenge	4,024	18M
	Marathon Des Sables 2014	81	18M
	GroenKloof 10km Trail	55	28M
<b>Patricia Kihoro</b>	Dignity	512	1M
<b>(PK)</b>	Death, Fear and Living	3,133	1M
	Taking Stock- Two	1,145	4M
	Taking Stock- One	1,635	4M
	Ngoma (The Acoustic Fooling Around in the Living Room Version)	52	1M
	Boxes, Darkness, Ashes	325	-
	Your Song	498	-
	Changing My Mindset About Saving	850	6M

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	Songs I like, With Sharon Nyaboe	941	3M
<b>Kahill Insights</b>	One Year as an Online Freelancer	500	-
<b>(KI)</b>	Can I Keep You?!	120	-
	The Stranger and Her Warning...	391	-
	At Least Arua Town is Getting Reorganized...	202	-
	The Right to Health is Justiciable in Uganda	301	-
	Part 1: Are Girls Afraid to Lead?	843	1M
	Kampala City Square, the Lost Park	161	2M
	Mbarara Identified as One of the Unexpected	257	-
	“Boom Towns” by DHL in Africa		
	Why the Uganda Tobacco Control Bill Needs	623	-
	Protection From the Tobacco Industry		
	Rights to Maternal Health	505	2M
<b>Running the Race</b>	Five Ways to Benefit From Load Shedding	717	4M, 1V
<b>(RR)</b>	Something to Look Forward to	424	3M
	A Giant Leap for This Mom	406	5M
	Roxy Performance Gear Review and Giveaway	580	7M
	Five years of Running Tips in a Single Post	498	5M
	How to Have the Perfect Birthday	354	5M
	Five (Fun!) Ways to Share a Love for Running	512	5M
	and Fitness With Your Kids		
	A Giant Leap for Big Heads Everywhere	297	5M
	Half-day Holiday	267	3M

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		Five Tips for Making race Day a Success	380	5M
<b>Jade</b>	<b>Mitchell,</b>	5 Simple Online Things I wish Every Business	758	-
<b>Writing</b>		WOULD Do...But They Don't		
<b>(JM)</b>		Putting the "Fun" Back in "Fundraising"	652	1V
		The Great Switcheroo	615	-
		Feeling Flush- How I learnt to Manage a	888	-
		Monthly		
		Budget with an Up-and-Down Income	1,096	-
		(Unedited)	665	-
		There are No Words- ON Sadness and Silence	737	-
		How to Get the Most out of Complaining on	284	4M
		Social Media	725	-
		How to Write Ruder Emails Without Swearing-	690	-
		PART 1		
		Michelle's Little Monsters		
		Good Manners for Grown Ups		
		Spamalot- A Fresh Take on Classic Comedy		
<b>All About Africa</b>		Inside Africa: Buhari is Sworn In As Nigeria	127	4M
<b>(AA)</b>		President	107	1M
		Did You Know: Designer of Ghana's National		
		Flag Goes Home Today	50	1M
		Did You Know: Today is International	541	1M

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Children's Day			
Did You Know: Some Signs to Reflect That You	1,317		1M
Have Cancer			
African Union Day 2015:Full Statement of the	72		4M
Chairperson of AU	251		1M
Photo of the Day: Nana Ama Looks Hot In Her			
Outfit	342		19M
Inside Africa: Thousands March in	340		1M
Commemoration of National Unity Day in			
Cameroon	251		1M
Photos: Massive Turnout At "DumsorMustStop"	394		19M
Vigil			
Inside Africa: Burundi President Flies Home	342		-
After Coup Attempt, Airport Closed			
Inside Africa:Malawi 'Cashgate': Ex-army Chief	255		1M
Odillo Arrested 'Over Corruption'	231		1M
<b>Total of Post Details</b>	<b>100 Blog Posts</b>	<b>59,648</b>	<b>476M,7V</b>

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### APPENDIX III: CODING INSTRUMENT

#### Part one

Title of blog \_\_\_\_\_

Number of posts \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part Two

Thematic Categories

Yes = 1; No = 2

Inspiration \_\_\_\_\_

Celebration \_\_\_\_\_

Career \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

Family \_\_\_\_\_

Art \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Governance \_\_\_\_\_

Technology \_\_\_\_\_

Education \_\_\_\_\_

Technology \_\_\_\_\_





## APPENDIX IV: CODING INSTRUMENT

### Part one

Title of blog \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Profile \_\_\_\_\_

### Part Two

Thematic Categories

Yes = 1; No = 2

Interest \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose \_\_\_\_\_

Accomplishment \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX V: CODING PROTOCOL

This coding protocol is in relation to the study on the thematic and stylistic issues of African female blogs and their implications for African female bloggers' identities. This protocol series serve as a guide to a coder to code effectively and correctly devoid of biases. Explanations for various expressions, text and symbols on the coding sheet are outlined as follows. Please read each section carefully and indicate your corresponding answer in the space provided beside the questions

### Instructions

1. **Title of Blog/Blogger Profile:** Write the corresponding letters beside the title of the blog that is being coded. Note that the letters representing each blog are the same letters that represent the blog's own profile. For instance, if you are coding, the blog, "Lucky Pony", indicate LP and if you are coding Lucky Pony's blogger profile, indicate LP

Title of Blog/Blogger Profile	Corresponding Letters
Lucky Pony	LP
Kawi Snippets	KS
Shaping Opinion with a Pen	SP
Musings of a Millennial Mum	MM
My Million Miles	MS
Patricia Kihoro	PK

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Kahill Insights	KI
Running the Race	RR
Jade Mitchell, Writing	JM
All About Africa	AA

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2. **Number of Posts:** To ensure accuracy, count the number of posts in the blog being coded and write it in the space provided. The bog post is the published content in text and images which appears on the interface of the blog site. The end of a post is typically marked by sharing buttons indicating activities such as “share on Facebook”, “like”, “tweet” and “e-mail”. This does not apply to the blogger profile since it is a single static page.
3. **Thematic Categories:** This refers to the various themes that were identified in the posts of the blog. Write “1” for Yes and” 2” for No.