

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF MUSLIMAHS ON FACEBOOK

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**A Thesis in the Department of Strategic Communication,
School of Communication and Media Studies, Submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of**

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DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

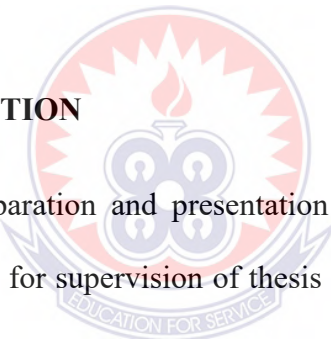
I, **Suraya Iddrisu Kpabia**, do declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work and has not been submitted, either in part or whole for another degree elsewhere.

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 thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



NAME OF SUPERVISOR: Professor Andy Ofori-Birikorang

SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the Almighty Allah for finally seeing me through successfully.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Content | Page |
|---|-------------|
| DECLARATION | iii |
| DEDICATION | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | v |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | xi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | xii |
| ABSTRACTS | xiv |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION | |
| 1.1 Background of the study | 1 |
| 1.1.1 Online identity construction | 2 |
| 1.1.2 Islam and the status of women | 5 |
| 1.1.3 Social media and the self | 6 |
| 1.1.4 Portrayal of Islam by Muslim Women | 8 |
| 1.1.5 Stereotype of Muslimahs and Identity construction | 11 |
| 1.2 Statement of problem | 14 |
| 1.3 Objectives of the study | 16 |
| 1.4 Research questions | 17 |
| 1.5 Significance of the study | 17 |
| 1.6 Scope of the study | 18 |



| | |
|--|----|
| 1.7 Organisation of the Study | 18 |
| 1.8 Summary of chapter | 19 |
| CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW | |
| 2.0 Introduction | 20 |
| 2.1 The identity Construction concept | 20 |
| 2.2 Identity construction in the era of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) | 22 |
| 2.3 Social Media and Social Networking Sites (SNS) | 25 |
| 2.4 Overview of Facebook and identity construction | 28 |
| 2.5 Photos as identity construction “tools” | 32 |
| 2.5.1 Online Photo Sharing | 35 |
| 2.5.2 Profile Pictures | 36 |
| 2.6 Self presentation on Facebook | 37 |
| 2.7 Theoretical framework | 40 |
| 2.8 Theory of Self-presentation | 40 |
| 2.8.1 Principles of self-presentation | 41 |
| 2.8.2 Self-presentation in online environments | 42 |
| 2.9 Goffman’s Presentation of the Self | 45 |
| 2.9.1 Impressions Management | 46 |
| 2.10 Relevance of the theories to my study | 50 |



| | |
|--------------|----|
| 2.11 Summary | 51 |
|--------------|----|

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

| | |
|------------------|----|
| 3.0 Introduction | 52 |
|------------------|----|

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| 3.1 Research approach | 52 |
|-----------------------|----|

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| 3.2 Research design | 54 |
|---------------------|----|

| | |
|----------------|----|
| 3.3 Case study | 55 |
|----------------|----|

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| 3.3.1 Single case study | 58 |
|-------------------------|----|

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| 3.4 Sampling strategy | 59 |
|-----------------------|----|

| | |
|-----------------|----|
| 3.5 Sample size | 61 |
|-----------------|----|

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| 3.6 Data Collection Method | 63 |
|----------------------------|----|

| | |
|------------------|----|
| 3.6.1 Interviews | 63 |
|------------------|----|

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| 3.6.2 Online observation | 65 |
|--------------------------|----|

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| 3.7 Data collection procedure | 66 |
|-------------------------------|----|

| | |
|------------------|----|
| 3.7.1 Interviews | 68 |
|------------------|----|

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| 3.7.2 Online observation | 69 |
|--------------------------|----|

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| 3.8 Data analysis | 70 |
|-------------------|----|

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| 3.8.1 Textual analysis | 71 |
|------------------------|----|

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| 3.8.2 Thematic analysis | 71 |
|-------------------------|----|



| | |
|--|-----|
| 3.9 Ethical Issues | 72 |
| 3.10 Validity and Reliability | 73 |
| 3.11 Summary | 73 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION | |
| 4.0 Introduction | 74 |
| 4.1 Participants of the study | 75 |
| 4.2 RQ1. What kind of identities do Muslimahs construct on Facebook? | 80 |
| 4.2.1 Advocacy | 82 |
| 4.2.2 Religious Identity | 83 |
| 4.2.3 Knowledge level | 85 |
| 4.2.4 Self-awareness | 86 |
| 4.2.5 Exposure to other religions | 87 |
| 4.3 RQ2: How do Muslimahs construct these identities? | 88 |
| 4.3.1 Profile Pictures as Texts | 88 |
| 4.3.2 Cover photos | 90 |
| 4.3.3 Random Posts and Comments | 93 |
| 4.3.4 Maintaining Network | 99 |
| 4.3.5 Promoting their Online Business | 101 |
| 4.4 RQ3: What are the factors that account for the construction of these | |



| | |
|---|-----|
| identities? | 106 |
| 4.4.1 Personal Branding | 106 |
| 4.4.2 Exposure to different cultures | 107 |
| 4.4.3 Religious and personal principles | 108 |
| 4.5 Summary | 108 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION | |
| 5.0 Introduction | 111 |
| 5.1 Summary | 111 |
| 5.2 Main Findings and Conclusion | 113 |
| 5.3 Limitations | 115 |
| 5.4 Suggestions for Future Studies | 115 |
| 5.5 Recommendations | 116 |
| REFERENCES | 117 |
| APPENDIX A | 126 |
| APPENDIX B | 132 |
| APPENDIX C | 134 |



LIST OF FIGURES

| Content | Page |
|--|-------------|
| 1: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Muslimah identity through her profile picture.</i> | 98 |
| 2: <i>A respondent clad in Niqab exhibiting her Muslimah identity through her Facebook profile picture</i> | 89 |
| 3: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook profile picture</i> | 90 |
| 4: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook Cover Photo</i> | 91 |
| 5: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook Cover Photo with the inscription “I love Islam”</i> | 92 |
| 6: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a group photograph</i> | 93 |
| 7: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook post.</i> | 94 |
| 8: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook status update.</i> | 95 |
| 9: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook status update</i> | 95 |
| 10: <i>A niqabbi respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook status update, using her palm to cover her face as a way of shelving her face from being seen</i> | 96 |
| 11: <i>A Niqabbi respondent exhibiting her Muslimah-Niqabbi identity by covering her face with an emoji through a Facebook status update on her Facebook page</i> | 97 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 12: <i>A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook status update.</i> | 98 |
| 13: <i>A participant an older post of performing her identity through a post by sharing a hadith (the teachings of Prophet Muhammed)</i> | 98 |
| 14: <i>A participant performing her identity through a post by sharing the teachings of an Islamic scholar</i> | 99 |
| 15: <i>A participant wishing a Facebook friend well on their birthday.</i> | 100 |
| 16: <i>A participant wishing a Facebook friend well on their birthday</i> | 100 |
| 17: <i>A participant advertising her wares on her Facebook timeline</i> | 101 |
| 18: <i>A participant showcasing her clients after a 'job-done' on her Facebook Timeline</i> | 103 |
| 19: <i>A participant trying to court customers to patronize her wares</i> | 104 |
| 20: <i>A participant advertising her wares</i> | 105 |

ABSTRACT

Employing the theory of Self-presentation, Goffman's presentation of the self, with a touch on Impressions Management, this study is centered on the identity construction of Muslim women on Facebook in Ghana; taking into consideration the kind of identities Muslimahs in Ghana construct on Facebook, the ways in which they perform these identities and the factors that account for the construction of their identities on Facebook. Using qualitative research approach and case study as a design, the study sampled 10 Muslimahs on Facebook. The data for the study was collected using interviews and online observation.

The findings revealed different identities constructed by each participant, depending on their orientation and their understanding of Islam as a religion. It was also discovered that the respondents of the study perform multiple identities based on the salience of that identity to them and the situations in which they find themselves at a given time. The study revealed that participants expect positive feedback from their audiences and tend to be introverted from identities which are not supported by their audiences as they are the shapers of the identities they construct.

The study recommends that in future, using the Uses and Gratification Theory, studies could be done to investigate the identity construction of Muslim women on Facebook in Ghana, concentration only on 'Facebook Status'; one of the newest features added to Facebook, which comprises mostly video updates and a few pictures, seen by only people who follow the subscriber. The study recommends that, to keep Facebook as the easiest form of SNS, changes in the features of the app should be done with people who are less tech savvy in mind. Also, employing Goffman's presentation of self, Muslimahs should ensure that the identities at the backstage conforms with the ones they have on social (the frontstage), as they can never tell who is watching and forming certain impressions that are unintended. Muslimahs should be mindful of their professional image when enacting identities on social media.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background to the study, states the problem and lists the objectives and research questions that guides the conduct of the study. It also states the significance, scope and organization of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

Chapter discusses the background to the study; online identity construction, the status of women in Islam, social media and the self, the way Muslimahs are portrayed in Islam, and stereotype of Muslimahs as regards how they construct their identity. The chapter also states the problem and lists the objectives and research questions that guides the conduct of the study. It also states the significance, scope and organization of the study.

Chapter two entails the literature review. The literature reviewed boarded on the following: the identity construction concept, identity construction in the era of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), social media and Social Networking sights (SNS) an overview of what Facebook has to do with identity construction as well as photos as identity construction tools. The chapter encompassed the Problem Statement, research questions and objectives, the significance of the and describes the scope of the research.

Chapter three examines the research approach, research design, sampling technique, sample size and data collection methods or instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis, ethical issues as well as the validity and reliability of the study. This

chapter also takes into consideration the processes used in the collection of data on the research questions.

In chapter four, a detailed analysis of the findings, discussions and analysis from the data collected during the observation and interviews of Muslim women who construct their identity on Facebook and how this ultimately translates into identity representations are discussed. Themes are generated and coded. This chapter also examines the import of the data collected in relation to the theory of Self-presentation and Goffman's Presentation of the Self as well as other literature relevant to the study.

Finally, chapter five presents a summary of all chapters of the study and states limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research and recommendations.

1.1.1 Online identity construction

Social networking sites allow individuals to construct identities by way of interacting with others to form relationships as well as engage in political, social, economic and religious discussions among others (Alsaggaf, 2015). Self-expression transcends through a simultaneous fitting of an identity and making same mobile. Such fittings could be done using photographs that are transportable, as well as messages which are sent to groups (Jones, 1997). Ebrahimi and Salaverria (2015) contend that social networking sites are connecting people in a way that could hardly have been imagined just a few years ago. As the internet paves way for its users to remain anonymous in the technological world as well as break off any interactions and observation with just a flick on a switch or clicking on a mouse, social media has fast become a hub for all forms of communication and connection among people from diverse backgrounds.

Boyd and Ellison (2008) opine that although there exist primary features which are consistent among various social networking sites, unique cultures have emerged among each site.

Baumeister (1982) avers that people engage in self-presentation for two reasons: (1) to please their contacts and (2) to construct one's public self. Being a virtual world, the internet provides support for its users in a safe space (Ebrahimi & Salaverria, 2015). This is true as social media allows individuals the free space to assume different identities, and it is quite common to have more than one avatar. "Scholars have suggested that the use of these sites may be a source of mutual benefit with regard to formation of social relationship" (Alsaggaf, 2015: p.2). The tenets of the virtual world do allow users to have temporary, anonymous, changeable, multi-dimensional, computer-based identities and also confers on them some amount of freedom that is not marked by a fear for one's reputation (Ebrahimi & Salaverria 2015). According Hall (1996), Identities are never amalgamated, and in the late contemporary times, increasingly bitty and ruptured; never singular, but multiple, constructed across diverse, often overlapping and antagonistic, dialogues, positions and practices (Hall, 1996). This position, though is related to physical, face-to-face identity construction, still has a bearing on online identity construction, since it is neither unified nor singular, it presents multiple facets and is fragmented.

Taylor (2015) posits that;

"The social resources available for the construction of representations have been variously defined and named, for instance, as 'discourses', 'interpretative repertoires' and 'narratives'. They are usually taken to include the meanings,

accrued associations, recognizable logics and previous constructions which pre-exist and enable any construction of identity in language” (p.3).

Facebook, just like all other Social Networking Sites (SNS), is a virtual space where people meet and connect with other people they already know as well as those they meet online for the first time. That space has fast become an avenue where many enact and perform their identities. Users of Facebook consciously or unconsciously construct various identities to represent who they are in real life for several reasons (Kutor, 2017). However, Jones (1997) opines that “a backlash against these technologies has already begun, and some decry the loss of personality that often accompanies the mediation of communication via computer” (Jones 1997 p.7). Facebook users who come from diverse backgrounds are likely to be challenged in adhering to the norms they subscribe to offline while they are online (Alsaggaf, 2015). This means that users may tend to have conflicting identities as they are likely to indulge in certain behaviors online, which they would not engage in on a normal day, offline. Even though some users may have anonymous identities or pseudo accounts, the CEO and founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg opines that for a person to have two identities for their self signifies lack of integrity (Grosser, 2008, cited in Kirkpatrick, 2010). This statement by Zuckerberg explains that Facebook presents one’s true self despite it being a virtual space, as it discourages anonymity of the accounts of its users. Individuals involved in online interactions present their hoped-for possible selves, the self here representing the socially desirable identity that the individual would like to establish (Kutor, 2017). As cited in Ebrahimi and Salaverria (2015), “The complicated marriage of everyday mundane life with a fantasy world in which an inhabitant assumes other identities, opened the door to digital social experimentation and offered a pathway to self-aggrandizement of those

whose ‘real world’ lives are less than ideal” (Solomon & Wood, 2009 viii). This implies the rights Facebook users reserve to enact different identities at different times, depending on what a particular situation presents to them at a given time. According to Grosser (2008), Facebook reduces differences and limits identity. He adds that this is not restricted to the data of its users, which are collected and dispersed, but is also a product of its visual style where every user's profile looks identical, with a picture making the difference, and a list of increasingly standardized identifiers to distinguish its users from one another and is often updated (Grosser, 2008).

1.1.2 Islam and the status of women

According to Lone et al. (2015), women were considered a neglected part of society during the Pre-Islamic era (Lone et al., 2015) they add that this is no longer the case, as Muslim women are revered and placed on a high pedestal in Islam. Muslimahs are not mandated to fast or pray in the month of Ramadan when they are menstruating, even though they are mandated to make up lost days later (Severson, 2011). “Over 1400 years ago, Islam raised the status of women from a position of oppression to one of liberation and equality” (Lone et al, 2015 p.68). Clarke (2010), cited in Severson (2011) opines that the position of women is intensely debated, as Islam has two main beliefs concerning gender; one is referred to as “conservative”, which stands to support the idea of women holding positions of “respect and protection within an ideal system of gender relations” (Clarke, 2010, p.197). The other main belief, herein referred to as the “liberal”, is the belief that at the time that Prophet Mohammed and the Qur’an tried to secure a position for women, “spirit was neglected and obscured by later generations” (Clarke, 2010 p.197) as cited in Severson (2011). This belief

holds that the Qur'an should be reinterpreted and women given back their original ideal. Again, Clarke (2010), as cited in Severson (2011), holds that liberal Muslims most likely would be more interested in matters of prestige concerning independent women, while conservative Muslims would be more interested in matters of womanly virtue and domesticity. Either way, Muslim women are still expected to be reserved in their dealings. Lone et al, (2015) opine that Islam bestows a particular personality on a woman; this personality gives to the Muslimah confidence, security and respect, which in turn enables her to work with men as equals, without necessarily rubbing shoulders with them or trying to overpower them, understanding that men have their roles as well as women do, and none supersedes the other. Lone et al, (2015) contend that women, in their bid to understand empowerment as rubbing shoulders with men and assuming their positions by acting like them, deny themselves of their own God-given lives. They add that even though the rights of a woman are equal to the rights exercised by men, they are not necessarily identical with them as roles differ (Lone et al, 2015). Muslim women do enjoy certain privileges which men are deprived of; some of these privileges are exemption from fasting and prayers during the month of Ramadan in her regular monthly periods and forty days after childbirth, though she is mandated to pay back missed fasts, but not missed prayers (Lone et al., 2015).

1.1.3 Social media and the self

Ebrahimi and Salaverria (2015) opine that people have differing perceptions as regards the internet in relation to what they find and subscribe to online. As such, they exhibit creative individual differences. Following the idea of the self during interactions, Enli and Thumim (2012) focused on the distinction between self-representation and presentation or formation of the self. With an emphasis on the

idea that to fully understand social networking, there is the need for self-representation and socializing with others (Enli & Thumim, 2012). To Enli and Thumim (2012), the individual is open to choices as to what aspects of themselves they want to represent, and as such, users of social networking sites decide how to represent these aspects as a way to complement the work done through presentation and self-performance (Enli & Thumim, 2012). Further, Pool (1997) maintains that social media socialization is a continuation of the postal system, adding that same can be said of the telephone and its historical social significance. In order for individuals to take part in social media networking such as Facebook, they must represent themselves (Enli & Thumim, 2012). Daoud (2017) asserts that online social media activism, mainly, Facebook and blogs open a new space for Muslim women to publish their ideas and feelings and to promote their agendas, opinions, and activism. This assertion tends to give freedom to Muslim women who are mostly thought of as timid and voiceless. Ozyurt (2013) posits that Muslim women are more often than not portrayed as "miserable victims par excellence, handicapped by their culture of origin" (Lutz, 1997, p.96, cited in Ozyurt 2013).

“From the perspective of the Western public, Islam is a religion that represses women and relegates them to the confinements of the private domain” (Ozyurt, 2013, p.240). A sense of place identity, and in this case, Facebook identity derives from the multiple ways in which place functions to provide a sense of belonging, construct meaning, nurture connections, and mediate change for the Muslim woman (Daoud, 2017). This means that Muslim women who use Facebook to construct their identities feel some level of obligation and belongingness to the Facebook community and endeavor to put in their best in portraying their identity. Another aspect of self-representation comes from the social media user’s creation of hierarchies and groups of followers who

receive or see the posts they make. Within this realm, there is an analysis of popularity, which deems more friends online as a badge of higher status among younger Facebook users.

It is difficult to adhere to and or resist gender roles and cultural norms on social networking sites like Facebook, which has expansive features that allow everyone to freely express themselves as well as manage and network with their followers (Roy, 2012). Ebrahimi and Salaverria (2015) posit that Muslim men and women do engage in more open discourses using their digital identities, adding that social media has given Muslims political voices, which in turn gives them freedom of expression, either in social or political terms.

1.1.4 Portrayal of Islam by Muslim Women

According to Ali & Bagheti (2010), Islam is a monotheistic religion which is practiced by way of following the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon Him). They add that the followers of the religion are referred to as Muslims. Many Muslim women usually portray Islam through their dress sense. The hijab, sometimes referred to as a kind of dress code implying modesty, and other times referred to as a headscarf, has scholars holding differing viewpoints (Severson, 2011). Smith (2010) and Rasheed-Ali et al (2004) opine that the Qur'an has no specified dress code for women, although it cautions men and women to dress decently. However, the issue about covering tends to be more centered on women.

It is not all women who feel that they have the avenue to choose whether to wear the hijab or otherwise (Severson, 2011). Muslim women are usually seen to be synonymous to chastity, in order that Muslim women live chaste lives, they do not have to be seen often interacting with the male gender (Salifu, 2010). This assertion

justifies why Muslim women are known to cover themselves and guard their chastity at all times. As stated in the Holy Quran:

and tell the believing women to subdue their eyes, and maintain their chastity. They shall not reveal any parts of their bodies, except that which is necessary. They shall cover their chests, (with their Khimar) and shall not relax this code in the presence of others other than their husbands, their fathers, the fathers of their husbands, their sons, the sons of their husbands, their brothers, the sons of their brothers, the sons of their sisters, other women, the male servants or employees whose sexual drive has been nullified, or the children who have not reached puberty. They shall not strike their feet when they walk in order to shake and reveal certain details of their bodies. All of you shall repent to God, O you believers, that you may succeed (Qur'an 24:31).

By this, Muslimahs are expected to depict Islam through their way of dressing at all times. As “Muslim women have come to live under an extremely conservative, patriarchal, gender-based system that embraces Islam and Shari’a in its most reactionary and transient form” (Abusharaf, 2006, p.2). This study hopes to uncover how this is manifest or otherwise by Muslimahs on Facebook. Cited in Taylor (2015), Butler (1990) argues that “gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (p.33). She disagrees with the notion that there exists a separate gender identity which is being expressed in the performance. Instead, she proposes a more complex, almost dialectical performance which involves “a stylized repetition of acts” (p.179). This is constrained by existing meanings and systems of power (Taylor, 2015).

The performance of gender involves “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted to create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulations of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (Taylor, 2015, p.173). This goes to say that society has prescribed roles for males and females overtime, and, it is these roles that describe who is a female and vice versa. The Muslim community has not been left out in this ‘prescription’, which explains why “the Iranian society, aims to Arabize not only the modes of dress, but also the use of language and customs” (Ebrahim & Salaverria, 2015). However, Severson (2011) contends that not all Muslim women may feel that they have the ability or space to choose for themselves whether or not to wear the hijab due to circumstances they may find themselves in at one point or another, even though the Qur’an describes how a Muslimah should appear. It is clear that much as Islam directs Muslimahs to project their identities in a particular way, certain circumstances may arise to prevent them from manifesting their religion in the manner in which they would have wished to, even while online. He adds that when the topic arises of the hijab and women’s dress, Islamic researchers and those who study Islam have varied views about the topic, which suggests multiple interpretations and conflicting viewpoints. As cited in Caers et al (2013), Facebook users actively think about the images they portray of themselves, and that those believing to portray a hardworking image were less likely to post inappropriate information about themselves than users who portray images of themselves as being sexually appealing, wild, or offensive (Peluchette & Karl, 2010; Caers et al, 2013). This assertion goes to say that Muslimahs, irrespective of where they find themselves, online or in the real world, would want to endeavor to represent Islam by guarding their chastity and applying modesty in all their doings. However, as posits Salifu (2017), the 21st

century Muslim woman may feel that they do not have to be restricted by supposed outmoded practices. It is therefore not surprising to have many a Muslim woman in Ghana put on the veil only to describe their marital status. The social lives of Muslims in Ghana and that of Saudi Arabia is almost the same since Islamic beliefs of both countries are in sync with each other. However, in the case of Ghana, all women in Saudi Arabia, married or not are expected to put on the veil (Russel, 2009 as cited in Salifu 2017). The case of the veil is different in Ghana as Muslim women are not obliged to cover up, though it is expected. There is an existence of different cultural values, which values may be confusing among people of diverse backgrounds (Gregory 2012, as cited in Salifu, 2017). This explains the difference in how Ghanaian Muslimahs portray Islam vis-à-vis how Islam is being portrayed by Muslimahs in Saudi Arabia.

Severson (2011) asserts that “Common beliefs for Muslims are the belief in a day of judgment and in an ongoing line of prophets culminating in the last prophet, Muhammad. The Qur’an unites them and is believed to be literal, handed down through angel Gabriel. At the same time, the range of beliefs is wide” (p.17). This means that even though there are varying beliefs and opinions relating to Islam, there are those that are unanimously agreed upon, and this may include how a Muslimah carries herself in constructing her identity among others.

1.1.5 Stereotype of Muslimahs and Identity construction

Taylor (2015) posits that the general perception that people are social subjects concludes that all identities are ultimately social, and that the experience of ‘who I am’, sometimes referred to as ‘subjectivity’, is itself socially produced. She adds that,

“Recent theorizations of the social subject propose that the sense of being a unique individual is enhanced by a contemporary requirement to undertake the construction of identity as a personal project, and to discipline and govern oneself in pursuit of ideals which ultimately serve the larger political and economic interests of neoliberalism. Identity construction is therefore linked to subjectification and governmentality” (p.1).

This means that, people, by way of constructing an identity in order to fit in, first of all negotiate their identities in order to create a balance as well as prevent ‘othering’; so that people in their new environment would see them as ‘one of their own’ and not discriminate against them. Afrary (2004) opines that;

In majority of Islamic societies, Muslim women strive not only to attain basic human needs and rights, but they also use Islam to demand gender equality through a more liberal reading of the Holy Qur’an and what is acceptable or otherwise in Islam as well as new civil liberties and new relationships to the outside world (Afrary, 2004).

There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the discussion of Islam, Muslim women and gender equality, which controversy has continued to swirl around the inferior position of women (Salifu, 2017). Identities are constructed as public announcements, announcements made either explicitly or implicitly. While explicit identity statements will take the form of personal descriptions given by the actors involved, implicit identity statements are found in the impressions made by the users to others (Kutor, 2017).

Latif et al. (2018) posit that identity work is an ongoing and discursive process for Muslim women in particular, and that an individual engages in it throughout her life

as she navigates her personal growth and development within the ever-shifting public dimensions. This assertion corroborates the view that identity is performed and expressed routinely. In her study, Van Es (2019) found that women working in organizations encouraged each other to challenge prevailing stereotypes through their own behavior and interactions with others in their everyday encounters with non-Muslims. She states that Muslimahs do this as follows,

“By showing others – sometimes explicitly, but mostly implicitly – that they did not fit in the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’ stereotype, they hoped that people would understand that Muslim women were not necessarily ‘oppressed’ or ‘pitiable’, and that Islam was not a ‘backward’ or ‘oppressive’ religion” Van Es (2019).

Van Es (2019) gathered similar views held by other women including Zainab, a young Afghani-Dutch woman active in Ahlalbait Jongeren Organisatie, an Islamic sect, and she holds that:

“Some of the interviewed women even called themselves ‘ambassadors of Islam’, implying that they considered it their task to be a positive representative of their religion. The headscarf was an important element in this strategy” (Van Es, 2019).

The actions of the participants made them immediately recognizable as Muslimahs, and the combination of the hijab (perceived by many as a symbol of Islam) with a particular, non-stereotypical behavior was thought to have strong potential to subvert the dominant image and demystify the stereotypical tag of Muslim women as being oppressed (Van Es, 2019).

Some Muslim women, in trying to construct an identity will usually engage in subtle practices such as making small jokes or meeting people with an upright and confident

posture or engaging in any form of behavior that does not conform to the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’ stereotype (Van Es, 2019). This indicates that many a Muslimah would try to negotiate their identity in order to fit into different societies at different times. This means that the kind of identity these women construct is largely dependent on what is considered normal and at where. Not wearing a headscarf could be a powerful way of breaking stereotypes because the sight of a Muslim woman with light-colored hair does not correspond with the dominant image, however, this only works if an onlooker knows that the woman is Muslim (Van Es, 2019).

1.2 Statement of problem

Grosser (2008) states that Facebook has always greeted its users with the statement "I am:". For an answer, the user is presented with a drop-down list containing two choices they have to select from: 'Male' or 'Female'. In other words, a user can say 'I am Male' or 'I am Female, depending on what gender they belong to. The site does not present its users the privilege to pick choices, whether to add one’s own description or to select a catchall alternative such as other (Grosser, 2008). Like Facebook, which identifies male as male and female as female without having to mistake one identity for the other, Islam spells out the dress sense of male and female. Though there is no particular uniform, a Muslim Woman is expected to be identified as one without needing an introduction, first, through her dress, and then through the manner in which she relates with people, her approach to issues, the way she upholds her chastity among others as well as representing Islam (Alsaggaf, 2015). Quran 24:31 states that “They shall not reveal any parts of their bodies, except that which is necessary”.

(Wittkower, 2014) posits that identity performers are not always well aware of when they are performing a truthful exposure of an existing self or facet of themselves and when they are performing an aspirational or even a fairly fictionalized self. He adds that people performing identities sometimes wish to question whether there is any clear self to be found outside of various self-performances, to which they could possibly be truthful. This confirms how people perform identities on Facebook; where some people sometimes give contradictory information about their person. For instance, a person whose profile says they work at the World Bank may also be enacting an identity that suggests that he or she is a university student.

Past research have focused on the differences in behavior of Facebook users relating to gender, personality, social status, age, race and other disciplines (Caers et al, 2013). Many works have been done on identity construction of Facebook users (Alsaggaf, 2015; Ebrahimi & Salaverria, 2015; Zhao et al., 2008). Some have been done on the Social identity construction of Muslim women in other disciplines. For instance, Severson (2011) conducted a research on the social identity construction of Muslim women, with the aim to better understand how four (4) Muslim women at a large Midwestern research university construct their identities on campus as well as investigate the influences and effects that are posed by the campus climate on the construction of their social identities. Ebrahimi and Salaverria (2015) also researched on the identities performed by Iranian Muslimahs online, as against the identities they enact in real life. They believe that many a Muslimah in Iran present faceless identities online, making room for them to pose different identities online and offline at the same time. Alsaggaf (2015) investigated how Muslimahs in Saudi Arabia construct their identities on Facebook, whether they perform different identities on Facebook and another in real life. All the above mentioned studies adopted qualitative

research approach. Tufekci (2008) also conducted a study on the rapid adoption of social networking sites (SNS); Facebook and Myspace as a way of life using mixed methods. Although quite a considerable studies have been conducted on identity construction of Muslimahs both online and offline such as the ones mentioned above, these studies are situated within the western context. This study contends that although there are studies on identity construction within the Ghanaian context, the focus have been on *identity construction of Muslim women on whatsapp* (Kutor, 2017), *identity construction of Muslim women in mission schools* (Salifu, 2017), *identity construction of ISIS* (Al-Hassan, 2017) among others. There appear to be minimal studies conducted in Ghana on how Muslimahs construct their identity on Facebook. Consequently, this study therefore seeks to fill the gap in literature by investigating the kind of identities Ghanaian Muslimahs construct on Facebook, the ways and forms in which they construct these identities as well as interrogate the factors that accrue to the construction of these identities on Facebook.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the kind of identities Muslimahs in Ghana construct on Facebook
2. To examine how Muslimahs in Ghana construct these identities
3. To interrogate the factors that account for the construction of such identities

1.4 Research questions

1. What kind of identities do Muslimahs in Ghana construct on Facebook?
2. How do Muslimahs in Ghana construct these identities?

3. What are the factors that account for the construction of such identities?

1.5 Significance of the study

Apart from Facebook being a Social Networking Site (SNS) for meeting new people and connecting with people, it is also a virtual world that allows people to get closer to others and live in their world, invited or otherwise, through their posts; write ups and pictures. Against this backdrop, this study intends to interrogate the identities constructed by Muslimahs on Facebook. A lot of people forget that it is the society in which we live that makes the individual, and so the identities constructed through posts and pictures on Facebook have an impact on the personalities of its users. As cited in Kutor (2017), “employers are increasingly using personal information available on online social networks to make hiring decisions” (Baert, 2015, p.18). Due to this, many people have lost job opportunities because their potential employers took a peek at their Facebook profiles and met contrasts of the self being presented, which would have made them doubt their professionalism. According to Kutor (2017), in this age, communication is gradually moving from face to face to Computer Mediated Communication (CMC).

This study therefore seeks to identify the various forms in which Muslimahs construct their identities as well as serve as an eye opener to Muslimahs on Facebook, exposing other possible ways in which they can perform their identities. The study shall also serve as a guide to future research on social networking sites as more of such applications are being developed every now and then. Additionally, this study shall be a resource of reference on research around identity construction.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study investigates the kind of identities Muslimahs construct on Facebook, the factors that account for the construction of these identities as well as the ways in which same identities are being constructed on Facebook. The study also focuses on Muslim women from varying backgrounds, ranging from gender activists to lecturers through to students, business women and housewives who have actively operated their Facebook accounts for at least a year. This selection of respondents, I believe, shall uncover the different perspectives on identity construction by these women from diverse backgrounds, as they may have different lived online experiences. This is because, Muslim women are generally known to be conservative, therefore, the study delves into their Facebook timelines to confirm this assertion or otherwise.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter which is the introductory part comprises the background of the study, the objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study and organization of the study and a summary of the chapter.

The second chapter presents the literature review and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study.

The third chapter highlights the data collection and data analysis processes and procedures.

It entails the research approach and design, sample and sampling technique, data collection instrument, process of data analysis and the method of data analysis.

Chapter four presents the findings and analysis of the data collected. The prevailing are identified themes and discussed.

The final chapter, chapter is a summary of all the chapters, it draws conclusions from the findings and makes recommendations for future research.

1.8 Summary of chapter

Chapter one, the introductory chapter, has presented the background of the study, the objectives of the study, the research questions, significance of the study, the scope of the study as well as the organisation of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The literature reviewed in this chapter dissected relevant literature related to this study in order to provide answers to the research questions of the study. The reviewed literature boards on how Muslimahs construct their identities on Facebook, focusing on the kind of identities they portray, the reasons behind such identity construction and the manner in which they construct these identities. In the quest to interrogate the identity construction of Muslim women of Facebook, the theory of Self-presentation was employed for the study and this chapter expatiates it. The study also made use of Goffman's Presentation of the Self.

2.1 The identity Construction concept

The identity concept is changing with the passing of time as it has increasingly become unstable (Hall, 1992). Identities are also susceptible to varied interpretations (Lawler, 2008). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) opine that "identity is the social positioning of the self and other" (p. 586). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) contend that identity is better perceived as a phenomenon that is emergent, rather than a stable structure located primarily in an individual's psyche or in fixed social categories.

According to Hall (1992), there are three different generalized conceptions of identity; the first being the central, unified "enlightenment" subject which showcases the essential "inner core" or the "real me", which is the individual's identity from birth. He identified the second as the "sociological" subject which is configured through interaction between an essentialised self and the society the individual lives in. By

this, the subject still has an inner core, but identity is understood to be shaped by cultural values and meanings. Finally, Hall (1992), identifies the “postmodern subject”. This pertains a fragmentation of essentialised conceptualizations of identity. The third conception of identity suggests that identity is changeable and is a “social product” which is affected by the surrounding environment (Zhao et al, 2008). Ofori-Birikorang (2014) asserts that the cultural identity of social actors arise at the period they appropriate dialogue, voices, actions and texts within a cultural realm in order to enact and showcase their new identities. This assertion is in sync with Hall’s (1992) second conception of identity which presents identity as being shaped by cultural values, albeit still holding the individual as the core actor.

Hall (1996) avers that identities are never unified. He adds that in late modern times, identities are increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular, but multiple, constructed across varied, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. This confirms the assertion by Zhao et al (2008) that identity is subject to change.

Since this study focuses on women, gender is an important aspect to touch on. Just like other aspects of identity, gender “can shift and change in different contexts and at different times” (Gauntlett, 2002, p.150). Owing to this, I have drawn on work on gender and identity, worthy of mention is the work of Judith Butler (1990) who rejects the essentialised conception of identity and gender. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) challenged areas of feminist thought that invoked both biological and culturally fixed ideas of gender. She went ahead to critique approaches underpinned by the idea that there are significant differences between genders, and that articulated a primary natural sexual division and dismissed all chances for an individual to form his/her own identity beyond that gender binary. She further raised

concerns about the “essentialising” approach to women which treated them as a single homogenous group with common attributes and interests (Butler, 1990). Butler (1990) perceives identity and gender as both social and cultural inventions. She contends that “there is no identity behind the expression of gender... identity is performativity constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler, 1990, p.25). To Butler (1990), gender is a “performance”. She distinguishes between two conceptions: gender as “performed” and gender as “performative”. Her view of gender as performed means that we perform roles that are crucial to the gender we are or sought to present while the “performative” aspect of gender has to do with “a set of repeated acts ... to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1990 p.33). The nebulous nature of the concept of identity makes it difficult to give it a universal definition or a particular, simple, clear-cut explanation (Al-Hassan, 2017). He adds that everyone has a unique identity as two people may be perceived to have the same identities but may differ in practice, explaining that they are likely to enact and perform different identities depending on the situation they find themselves in at a given period.

2.2 Identity construction in the era of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

According to Hopperton (2016), Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is communication between or among people using computer technology as the means for communication. In the twenty first century, there has been a surge in the prominence of CMC technologies. This has made a lot of people spend several hours daily with these technologies (Lengel, 2011). In the same vein, there has been a lot of debate regarding the enormous advantages and disadvantages of CMC. Walther

(2006) asserts that communicators of CMC are more careful as regards what they write. He adds that they are conscious of their audience as they take longer periods to write and edit messages to supposed desirable audiences. The concept of identity in the case of identity construction of Muslimahs in Ghana corresponds with Hall's (1992) assertion that identity is emergent, as it is an unstable phenomenon that is psyched by the person who enacts the identity, depending on their situation at a given time.

According to Alsaggaf (2015), the non-anonymity nature of many social media profiles allow for more personal and direct interaction on the online sphere than was the case of the anonymous, asynchronous interactions of early CMC. This feature makes identity construction less cumbersome and promotes transparency. Turkle (1995) contends that other platforms such as chat rooms enable users to present the self through conversational behavior as well as opened up the possibility for role-playing, such that users of online platforms could present themselves as other than they are in real life. Lin, Sun, Lee and Wu (2008) aver that Junior High School students in Taiwan predominantly use CMC as a means of strengthening their interactions in the offline world or in face-to-face settings. As posits Cortini et al. (2004), construction of identity on CMC technology has gained grounds so fast. They add that communication via text strengthens one's position as an individual within a group, and thus affirm one's own identity.

Ebrahimi and Salaverria (2015) assert that the internet is a platform for interpersonal interaction and collective communication in virtual groups and also serves as a medium with multiple sources of information. Online platforms allow for users to belong to groups which usually house members of shared interests. Baym (2000) asserts that identities constructed in online groups are dependent on the norms of the

groups within which they are constructed. Therefore, what is considered as appropriate identity in one group may not be deemed appropriate in another. Ebrahimi and Salaverria (2015) aver that anonymity is used in CMC depending on the context, as it offers users the opportunity to explore untried identities as well as falsify the self, as online platform users have the opportunity to not only belong to communities that do not share their interests, but also to reshape themselves and adopt personalities for different communities and environments. As regards issues pertaining to anonymity, users minimize how much social cues they expose in terms of identity markers like age, race, gender and so on in text-based CMC as they interact with others by constructing different identities that can be radically different from their offline identities (Wang, 2012). Schouten, Valkenburg and Peter (2005) assert that, a chosen medium of communication influences the level of self-disclosure individuals give out about themselves. They contend that text-based CMC like Facebook is usually characterized by a very high level of self-disclosure as compared to face-to-face interactions. Subrahmanyam et al. (2009) opine that online communities are psychologically connected to offline environments. They add that since their online activities are disembodied, they are consequently disembodied from lives offline (Subrahmanyam et al., 2009).

CMC basically shifts the registers of human experience as it is a modern society (Ebrahimi & Salaverria, 2015). Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) state that “Time and space, body and mind, subject and object, human and machine are each drastically transformed by practices carried out on networked computers” (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006 p.136). Papacharissi (2009) notes that users of CMC platforms usually expose private thoughts, feelings, experiences and emotions online than in face-to-face settings. Walther (2006) asserts that CMC users are able to convey about

themselves a much more discretionary front, better concealing that which they do not wish to convey to the public, while accentuating that which they do. He adds that CMC allows communicators to spend time composing messages prior to their expression. Traditional CMC facilitates idealized self-presentation as users have absolute control over information about their true selves (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). This assertion highlights the situation of a Muslimah who yearns to enact and portray the image of Islam through the ways in which she constructs her identity on Facebook through her dressing and her posts, as Rui and Stefanone (2013) assert that certain CMC enable their users to portray faultless identities.

2.3 Social Media and Social Networking Sites (SNS)

According to Alsaggaf (2015), a Social Networking Site (SNS) is an avenue to construct identities, interact with others to form relationships, engage in social, cultural, and political discussions, as well as negotiate cultural constraints. SNSs center on the profiles of users, which for users is a presentation of their selves to others to peruse, with the intention of contacting them or being contacted by others (Grosser, 2005). According to Boyd (2006), SNSs form a category of websites with profiles, semi-persistent public commentary on the profile, and a traversable, publicly articulated social network in lieu of the profile. Popular among SNSs include Facebook, Instagram Whatsapp and Myspace, which have always been open to the general public. Thanks to the introduction of Web 2.0, users of online fora do not only passively consume online content but also actively contribute to the creation of online platforms (Warren & Leitch, 2012). This implies that there is an upward surge in the use and interest in online platforms by all, including Muslimahs. Boyd & Heer (2006) opine that a chunk of the activity on an SNS is largely a form of presentation of the

self, with reference to Goffman (1959), as users engage in impression management by adjusting their profiles, linking to their friends, displaying their likes and dislikes, joining groups, as well as adjusting the situated appearance of their profiles.

Though devoid of any form of nonverbal cues, SNSs have been able to put into place self-censorship (Ellison et al 2008). This guards and guides the activities of users to exercise decorum in their dealings. This is evident in how Facebook operates, as foul and abusive languages are not tolerated. Persons who feel their freedom is being trampled upon are at liberty to block their abusers or report the actions of such persons to the Facebook authority by tapping on the “report” button to make a case. Facebook in itself has put in place sensors to detect prescribed, decent language and deal with falterers by first giving them warnings and subsequently freezing their accounts depending on the gravity of their “crime”. SNSs such as Facebook, MySpace among others have broadened the modalities through which identities are constructed as well as increased the amount of personal content that individuals share (Alsaggaf, 2015). Boyd & Ellison (2008) opine that though there are certain primary features that are consistent with different SNSs, unique cultures have emerged around each of them. This is true in the case of for instance, Facebook and Whatsapp; while Facebook allows anyone access to timelines and status updates of users, with Whatsapp, a person needs to be in your ‘circle’ in order to have access to their contact’s status updates. This is because in order to have access to someone’s Whatsapp status, both parties should have the other’s phone number saved. Amid the uniqueness of all SNSs from one another, challenges abound (Alsaggaf, 2015). He adds that there have been privacy concerns expressed by users and potential users of SNSs, and that the users find ways of controlling the amount of information that is revealed about themselves. As a control measure, some users of SNSs tend to control

the visibility of their social media profiles such as Facebook; by using nicknames so as not be easily recognized by others (Tufekci, 2008).

Alsaggaf (2015) notes that:

On public platforms such as Facebook, users from different backgrounds may also face difficulties adhering to their offline norms online, especially in conservative societies with strict expectations of women's behavior. Users might thus take the opportunity to break away from offline norms and gender expectations which restrict their freedom of expressions and self-presentation (p3).

Papacharissi (2011) posits that in the process of reshaping the self, privacy and publicity are combined into a single crowd of spectators observing the same performance, but from different angles, depending on their relationship with the self performing the identity. Agboada (2017) avers that SNSs are usually designed with a variety of users in mind. They are therefore different from each other in terms of graphics, purpose etc. She further cites Williams, Terras and Warwick (2013) as asserting that SNSs can be divided into a number of sub-areas depending on their functionality and practice.

Diverse networks make it more difficult to balance the often contradictory expectations of network members, so they may prompt individuals to engage in protective behavior when they detect unwanted other-provided information. More especially, in order not to subvert the idealized image individuals want others to hold of them, identity performers and their SNS contacts need to reach an agreement on what is acceptable to be publicized. Therefore, impressions management in multi-source communication environments like SNS requires coordination between users

and their audiences about the boundaries for information sharing (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). A common communication strategy intended to protect individuals from criticism involves making neutral statements which are acceptable to a wide range of diverse people (Arkin, 1981). This strategy is replicated online and is termed as ‘the lowest common denominator’ by Hogan (2010), only disclosing information appropriate to all users of the network (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Ong et al (2011) opine that self-reported personality traits are good predictors of SNS usage and are reflected in personal profiles or webpages on SNS.

2.4 Overview of Facebook and identity construction

Facebook is a social media platform which was originally developed as a website for students at Harvard University (Alsaggaf, 2015). According to Ellison et al., (2007), it was launched in 2004 and broke into the mainstream when it was opened up to the general public in 2006. By 2007, Facebook had acquired a registered membership of 21 million and extended its membership to approximately 1,390 million users by 2015 around the world (Socialbakers, 2015). Currently, Facebook is considered one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide (Boyd, 2008). According to Vasalou et al. (2010), Facebook is also available in over 70 different languages.

As a platform for connecting people across the globe, Facebook is designed to let people socialize through posts and texts, and present personal profiles, including photos and videos to different audiences (Alsaggaf, 2015). He adds that Facebook profiles are set by default to public, unless users choose their kind of privacy through the features available (Alsaggaf, 2015).

According to Valenzuela et al. (2009):

Facebook has “friendship” as its model: participants request a friendship and the other accepts it, thereby being added to a “friends” list. Connections are then able to view the user’s profile according to the privacy settings chosen by him/her. Facebook also has two systems of messaging: private, where people can send personal messages, and public, in which people can post messages on an individual’s personal “wall”, which others can view and share (p.881).

Whiteman (2012) opines that when a friend makes a post on Facebook, it can be “liked”, shared and replied to in the comments section. Facebook keeps developing and upgrading its features from time to time. The “timeline” feature was introduced in 2011 and allowed users to create a constantly-updated timeline of texts and posts. Recently, “profile video” and “status” viewing sections have been added to the many features that have been developed overtime. Whiteman (2012) contends that these developments have had quite a significant and dramatic impact on users of Facebook and on the visibility of their activities.

Cears et al. (2013) explain in detail how Facebook operates:

Individuals can create an account on the website Facebook.com. After providing some personal information (name, date of birth, gender, email address), the new user chooses a password and gets account access. Facebook opts for a highly standardized layout of user accounts. Regardless of whose account it is, many features appear on the same place on the screen, making it easy to recognize and find the data one is searching for. There are two important pages on this account: home and profile. The profile page, also often called ‘the wall’, is where users present themselves. A small profile picture adds to a large cover photo at the top of the page, below which the name of the

user is presented along with some basic information and a few buttons referring to friends, photos, and “likes.” Below that is the area where “status updates” appear (p.984)

There have been many upgrades on the site after Cears et.al (2013) carried out their study; when a user logs on to Facebook, they find two inscriptions at the top; on the left is to operate using “Data Mode” and to their right is “Go to Free”. When subscribers choose “Data Mode”, they surf the site using their internet bundle. This way, users are able to view every written text, videos and pictures. However, when they choose to “Go to Free”, there is a limit to what they can see. Users who choose to “Go to Free” do not have access to videos and pictures. Below these, one would find symbols or buttons which signify “home”, groups, watch”, “profile”, “notifications” and “menu”. A click on each button opens a new page for the user to take action. Below, there is the profile picture to the left which when clicked takes the user to their own “timeline”. To the right is the question; “what’s on your mind? A tap on this leads the user to create a post on their “wall” or “timeline”. Right under these features follow the “story” feature which allows users to upload pictures and videos. It is noteworthy to mention that it is only friends who consciously tap on pictures or videos here who are able to see what is posted. The user is notified when their stories are viewed. From here, users now delve into posts made by their friends by scrolling through. Subscribers can post anything they want on their status and their friends can respond to their posts by text comments, using emoticons, or by liking it.

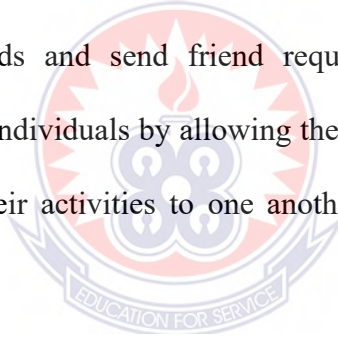
According to Whiteman (2012), Facebook now allows for photo, video or sticker comments. The “like” button has also been expanded to include “love”, “sad”, “angry”, “wow” and “like”. These new additions have given way to friends to express their exact feelings at every given time. Apart from these, Facebook has also added

the “follow” feature which allows people who are not on a user’s friends list to still see their posts by clicking on the “follow” button on the wall of the user.

According to Enli and Thumim (2012), Facebook as a social networking site operates by incorporating routine data through the upload of information about what connections at doing ‘right now’ such as updating statuses and uploading photos.

Cears et.al (2013) maintain that;

On the home page, also often called “news feed,” users are informed on the status updates and other activities of their friends such as when they join new groups. It thus automatically and chronologically keeps the user upbeat on what friends have been up to. Once a profile is created, the new user can start looking for friends and send friend requests. When accepted, Facebook connects the two individuals by allowing them to see each other’s profile page and by adding their activities to one another’s news feed (Cears et.al 2013 p.984)



Against this backdrop, it is safe to conclude that Facebook operates as an online application to see and to be seen (Stroud, 2008). In other words, it “prosume”, that is to say that it produces and consumes at the same time (Le & Tarafdar, 2009).

Facebook is perceived as a hybrid community that challenges the traditional distinctions such as offline and online, private and public Enli and Thumim (2012). It could also be understood as a public environment where individual users contribute with private postings and through their activities negotiate the level of intimacy (Alsaggaf, 2015). Facebook is available in over 40 different languages, and is widely global in its structure as against national media such as newspapers and nationwide broadcasters (Enli & Thumim, 2012). As such, the technological infrastructure

connects with both national and global communities, even though the realities of people's online social worlds vary; some people will develop more international networks than others. According to Enli and Thumim (2012), the introduction and rise of Facebook has been one of the most important social trends of the past decade.

A key feature of Facebook is the mixture of a local or national contexts as well as the global context. According to Enli and Thumim (2012), Facebook users typically express themselves in a mixture of mother tongues and international languages. Consequently, Facebook has no regard for territorial borders of nations and states as traditional mass media, because the bond of friendship and the links between them are based on a totally different logic from traditional media. To Enli and Thumim (2012), the general practices in post-modern societies such as individualization and globalization are reflected in the practices and user patterns in SNSs, as an individual Facebook user might have contacts in their friend-list that exceeds traditional social and national borders in their physical, real-time environment. Enli and Thumim (2012) contend that Facebook is a typical easy-to-use service, and operates like Blogger, MySpace, Flickr and You Tube. They believe that Facebook is the key reason for the fast global spread of online chat engines as it is the dominant social networking site across most of the globe. Facebook's immediate user-friendliness is a key success factor which explains the fast global spread of the application as a social networking site (Enli & Thumim, 2012).

2.5 Photos as identity construction “tools”

Personal photography was alien until the Kodak roll film camera was introduced in the year 1888 by an American named George Eastman (Coe, 1973). Prior to this period, photography was the preserve of only the middle class, this signified the

symbolic class wealth and cultural capital of appreciation of the art and science by the people (Burgess, 2007). According to Taylor (1994), the entry of Kodak into the mass market was a relatively huge success. He adds that owing to the success chalked, several adverts were ran to popularize the brand, targeting to motivate the middle class such as tourists, sportsmen, bicyclists, men who went boating, animal lovers to continue documenting their leisure adventures among others (Taylor, 1994). Digital cameras were later introduced and this eased the burden and anxiousness of having to wait for days and sometimes weeks to be able to catch a glimpse of photos taken as one would usually have to go through this process for pictures to be printed from the photo laboratory as well as pay money to receive these printed copies (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Today, however, thanks to technological advancements and changing trends, one is able to instantly view pictures on the screens of smartphones, computers and digital cameras. According to Murray (2008), photography has transformed from a cultural practice of some key people concerned with the artistic value of photography to a mass public practice for documenting special moments in everyday life as casual events. Chandler & Livingston (2012) posit that the introduction of new and relatively handy digital photographic devices, which are more affordable and flexible, coupled with the ever increasing automation has come to expand the potential of the already existent culture of photography. The integration of the digital camera with cellphones which metamorphosed into smartphones has deeply impacted the world of photography (Chandler & Livingston, 2012). By merging cameras with smartphones, which have become almost inseparable from its users, photography is placed at the center of the everyday experience of smartphone users (Martin, 2009), shifting from the professional arena into daily use by many people (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Regardless the level of a person's technological

knowhow, one is able to create impressive images which with the aid of smartphones can be easily transmitted and shared online, as according to Van Dijck (2008), taking photographs seems to no longer serve its initial purpose of memory, intended to preserve a family's pictorial heritage. He adds that photography has increasingly become a tool for an individual's identity formation and communication. Besides, pictures can be constructed and refined to conceal flaws (Walther, 2007). According to Sontag, (1973) the role of photography as a form for identity formation, even though duly acknowledged, is rated second to its primary purpose of memory. That notwithstanding, pictures perform the function of communication and identity formation at the expense of the use of pictures as a tool for recollection (Garry & Gerrie, 2005).

In their survey of how teenagers take, view, share and store photographs, Schiano et al(2002) concluded that a good number of teenagers, in their responses indicated that they enjoy sharing digital photographs of their friends and family members more often through the emails or Instant Messaging (IM) and further suggested that teenagers, unlike adults use pictures less to capture reality than to communicate, though it is from this communication that identity is constructed with friends and family members with whom an individual interacts in their social setting.

According to Kindberg et al (2005), young people seemingly take less interest in sharing photos as objects than as experiences differing from the previous generation who built up collections of pictures for future reference. For instance, a Muslimah on Hajj pilgrimage may take pictures of interesting scenes and unique places and post on Facebook. By doing this, they construct an identity in the minds of their friends and followers by sharing their Hajj experience through pictures. Rui & Stefanone (2013)

assert that women are often more concerned about their appearances and exhibit greater motivation to protect their physical appearances.

2.5.1 Online Photo Sharing

The idea of sharing photos with connections facilitate the recollection of common memories and helps sustain and maintain relationships (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010) as people with large networks have increasing demands for relationship maintenance, which in turn results in increased photo sharing. However, according to Rui and Stefanone (2013), photo sharing becomes a risky venture as network diversity increases due to conflicting social dimensions. In essence, sharing many pictures with a large and heterogeneous audience may have a boomerang effect on self-presentation and identity construction as identity performers are likely to disclose contradictory information to the expectation of some sections of their audience (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). According to Ong et al (2011), users of Facebook typically select a profile picture to display on their profile page. Beneath the profile picture, the “View Photos” link indicates the photo count that a user has been tagged in, or identified by one’s self or by others as being present in the photo, while the “Friends” box displays the total number of friends the user added on Facebook (Rui & Stefanone, 2013) they add that users can post messages or “status updates” on their own walls as often as they wish to. Buffardi and Campbell (2008) contend that the profile picture has earned the position of the most important feature for online self-presentation because it represents the user on the online platform, as it appears in search results alongside every turn of online interaction such as every written “status update”.

2.5.2 Profile Pictures

Young people engage in acts that show their real identity on social media platforms by using photos as well as reveal other relevant information about themselves in order to construct their identities (Zhao et al., 2008). Boyd & Ellison (2007) aver that online self-presentation takes place on social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, MySpace, Whatsapp and other platforms through the use of profile pictures. Rettberg (2014) posits that profile pictures represent visual expressions of identity, and the user's choice of profile photo defines the form of visual self-representation. Same can be said about many other self-representational forms on social media (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). They add that profile picture is a top requirement in any form of visual communication, as through profile pictures, many people are identified on social media, though it is not all the time that people use their own pictures as profile pictures. Rettberg (2014) maintains that Profile pictures change regularly. They change as users take new images of themselves (Rettberg, 2014). The new images may be used as profile pictures to affirm or assume various posturing such as show affection for a loved one, mourning a departed relation, affirmation of affiliation to a group or anything new they find interesting in order to form new representations of themselves (Rui & Stefanone, 2013), adding that major requirement of owning a Facebook account is the uploading of a profile picture to the user's account, as a profile picture serves as a visual expression of the user's identity. Profile pictures sometimes show the interests of the account holder or their connection to a social group and other interests (Rettberg, 2014), as Facebook profile pictures do not necessarily show the face of the account holder (Rui & Stefanone, 2013).

According to Tufekci (2008), social media platforms do allow users to articulate their social network through links between their profile pages and other profiles. Account

users also construct their identities through pictures as Facebook gives users the opportunity to ‘tag’ their contacts on photographs uploaded to the site (Tufekci, 2008), this means identifying the person in the photograph and thereby linking the picture to that person’s profile, and in effect, creating a searchable digital trail of a person’s social activities (Rettberg, 2014). This makes it easier for Muslimahs to be identified by their friends and acquaintances.

2.6 Self presentation on Facebook

According to Seidman (2012), Facebook satisfies the belonging needs of its users through the art of communicating with and learning about other users of the platform. Jain (2010) posits that Facebook is the most used and by far the most popular SNS, with followers totaling to over a billion users. Enli and Thumim (2012) studied how people socialize and present their identity online. They analyzed how Facebook and technology shape the possibilities for socializing and self-representation. Enli and Thumim (2012) contend that the role of the audience in online identity construction has moved from being the sole preserve of spectators as identity construction has to do with producing, spectating and socializing. They add that Facebook has fast become a popular platform for socializing, and has reached a ‘critical mass’ in Europe and, in the process of socializing, participants must construct self-representations. Self-representation as operationalized in Enli and Thumim (2012) refers to members of the public representing themselves, thereby affecting an intervention into ‘old’ media practices whereby the public is represented by media professionals. Enli and Thumim (2012) cite Enli and Syvertsen (2007) as asserting that the media industry recognizes the potential in institutionalizing people’s desire to be included in communities and to socialize in mediated spaces. As such, they contend that new

media now includes more people in the process as producers, and not just consumers of the product, through avenues like digital storytelling, and that social media platforms like Facebook have institutionalized and mediatized personal processes of socializing and display of identity, which traditionally have belonged to the private and non-mediated platforms (Enli & Thumim, 2012).

To Enli and Thumim, (2012), during the process of self-representation, there must always be choices as to what aspects of the self to represent and how to represent them. Friendship, according to them, moves from offline to online as young people get to form close relationships with people they meet online. However, there are indications that young people have started to escape from Facebook to get away from their elderly relatives despite Facebook still being the number one online social media platform among young people (Rettberg, 2014).

In their study, Enli and Thumim, (2012) identified three (3) categories of practice that users indulge in in their online self-presentation. These practices are the *reluctance* practice, the *sharing* practice and the *promotional* practice.

The *reluctant* practice: This practice is recognized as a ‘user’ practice. It reveals a minimum of private information. During this practice, private disclosure is avoided by providing more mundane information as the level of sharing is comparable to the information one would provide to total strangers or even distant acquaintances. An example of this practice is the status update feature which represents an update report on where the user is located physically at the moment of the update or what they practically are doing, such as “I am @ work”. Enli and Thumim, (2012) add that “These postings are informative, but not private or intimate, and the socializing does

not include sharing of any sensitive information and or revealing information about the user (p.96).

The *sharing* practice, according to Enli and Thumim (2012), is a liberal approach to communicating some sort of private information which is likely intimate or emotional. The level of privacy here varied as the most shared information reveals a personal characteristic or emotion, but not the whole picture and the most intimate details. An example of this practice is a user posting “Insomnia!” on their status. This represents a typically private confession or emotional disclosure. These status updates inform the private life of users, including personal weaknesses and mistakes. Consequently, it invites their online friends to engage in a more private and personal conversation.

The *promotional* practice, as put out by Enli and Thumim (2012), is placed between the *reluctance* and *sharing* practices as it exhibits elements of both reluctance and sharing. This is where status updates share only information that bring the user in a good light. Here, the user serves as their own PR-agent. It reveals a highly conscious approach towards the risky elements of sharing information with friends made on Facebook as well as highlight the potential benefits from sharing exactly the right information at the right time. The three practices showcase the dilemma inherent in online SNSs, and how identity performers could control their representation whilst participating in online socialization. Enli and Thumim (2012) note that another rationale for being present on Facebook is to ensure that users contribute to the creation of their online persona. The three practices on Facebook shows that socializing online requires a certain degree of self-representation.

2.7 Theoretical framework

According to Littlejohn and Foss (2011), a theory is “a unified, or coherent, body of propositions that provide a philosophically consistent picture of a subject” (p.19). A theory represents the views and observations propounded by theorists. It is the lens through which researchers make observations, scrutinized facts and represent the respective facts through predictions.

This study examines the identities constructed by Muslim women on Facebook. Many theories could be employed to explain the findings. the study has adopted the theory of Self-presentation and Goffman’s Presentation of the self. This is because the study looks at how Muslim women perform their various identities, the factors that contribute to ways in which they construct their identities and their use of Facebook as a medium of constructing their identities.

2.8 Theory of Self-presentation

Self-presentation is behavior that conveys some information about an individual or image of a person to other people, representing a class of motivations in human behavior (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987). These motivations, according to Baumeister and Hutton (1987), are somewhat stable dispositions of people, but the people involved depend on situational factors to exhibit them. According to Mehdizadeh (2010), identity construction has been studied as a public process that involves both “identity announcement” made by the individual claiming the identity and “identity placement” made by others who endorse the claimed identity.

“Self-presentational motivations are activated by the evaluative presence of other people and by others' (even potential) knowledge of one's behavior” (Baumeister &

Hutton, 1987 p.71). Consequently, the ‘other people’ present in the case of the identity construction of a Muslimah, who, in this case are their Facebook followers, should have an idea as to the kind of identity the identity performer is expected to enact. Based on this, the audiences are able to tell whether the identity performer is performing the expected identity or whether they are being deviant.

2.8.1 Principles of self-presentation

According to Baumeister (1982a), there are two types of self-presentational motivations that can be distinguished; the first, which he terms as pleasing the audience, is supposed to match one's self-presentation to the audience's expectations and preferences. The other, also known as self-construction, is supposed to match one's self-presentation to one's own ideal self. The audience-pleasing self-presentational motivations vary in force as an occupation of the audience's relevance (Baumeister, 1982a), especially as regards the extent to which the person involved in self presentation depends on the audience (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987). Jones and Pittman (1982) refined the audience-pleasing concept. They opine that self-presentation can be done with the audience in mind, devoid of seeking to make a favorable impression. According to Jones & Pittman (1982), instead of pleasing the audience, the performer may want to present their self as dangerous (strategy of intimidation), as morally virtuous (strategy of exemplification), or as helpless and needy (strategy of supplication). Consequently, people engage in this self-presentational principle in order to create a unique impression on their audiences about themselves for their selfish benefit of enacting a particular identity.

Hogan (1982) posits that during self-presentation, the images of the self that guide the act may sometimes be defensive, as he explains self-presentation to represent having

the tendency of denying some image of the self rather than claiming it. He adds that overall, self-presentation gradually becomes overlearned, automatically resulting in unconsciousness, adding that two fundamental needs of human social life necessitate self-presentational motivations; namely, the need for status and for popularity (Hogan, 1982). Baumeister and Hutton (1987) assert that some people start to use their self-presentational strategies in advance, paving way for an already made excuse before a performance of the self.

2.8.2 Self-presentation in online environments

A person's conception of him/herself can be distinguished by two categories: the "now self," an identity established to others, and the "possible self," an identity unknown to others (Markus & Nurius, n.d). Users can achieve the latter state by withholding information, hiding undesirable physical features, role-playing, etc. This effect is most pronounced in anonymous online worlds, where accountability is lacking and the "true" self can come out of hiding. However, not all online worlds are completely anonymous (Mehdizadeh, 2010). To Nie and Sundar (n.d), self-presentation is a major component of Facebook. They add that Facebook users succinctly construct their online profile and unremittingly edit postings on their pages so as to strategically present their online persona. The individual identity reflected in a user's Facebook account is a major indicator of the degree to which they value their account and identity as valuable possessions as they construct their identity by cautiously articulating their personality and paying rapt attention to how they present themselves to their audiences (Nie & Sundar, n.d).

Stryker (1980) avers that the self cannot be separated from the society because the self can only exist and be meaningful in its relation with other selves or entities. Stets &

Burke (2000) contend that the self “is reflexive. This is because 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 categorization thereby produces identity in the end. In their definitions, Stets and Burke (2000) believe that the self is seen as the conscious essence that has meaningful and effective relationship with other social entities. According to Cinoğlu and Arıkan (2012), the self is a dynamic entity with the ability to interpret and reinterpret their environments and eventually transform themselves into an identity. Identities make meanings after an interaction of some sort takes place between or among other identities (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012).

Facebook offers a public, transparent online setting where relationships are anchored in a number of ways through institutions, residence, and mutual friends (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Unlike anonymous online environments, transparent settings like Facebook place more constraints on the freedom of identity claims. However, they provide an ideal environment for the expression of the “hoped-for-possible-self,” a subgroup of the possible-self. Mehdizadeh (2010) maintains that this state emphasizes realistic, socially desirable identities an individual would like to establish given the right circumstances.

Audiences usually would expect identity performers to be consistent. Consequently, the more the self is enacted, the more they expect the performers to carve a certain identity, these expectations have the tendency of limiting the people engaged in self-presentation to behave in only ways they believe are expected of them by their audience, thereby, limiting their opportunities for freedom, spontaneity and growth, as they constitute social pressure to remain the same (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987). In the event that the persons engaged in self-presentation change, they would have to explain reasons for the change in their behavior to their audiences, so they (audiences)

can "understand" why they deviate from their expectations (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987).

Baumeister and Hutton (1987) expound that society in general values honest, fair, and law-abiding behavior, and so most people seek to present themselves consistent with that image, which implies that the stability and consistency of the self presented depends largely on the public self. They add that when identity performers are being surrounded by people who know them well, it is likely to cause them to remain stable and constant across a long period of time as against when they are constructing an identity in the midst of strange, unknown audiences, as people with high self-esteem endeavor to make positive impressions on others as against people with low self-esteem who merely want to get by and avoid embarrassing situations (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987). Going by this, people with high self-esteem are likely to draw attention to themselves, while people with low self-esteem do the reverse. Since "people with high self-esteem tend to be quite sophisticated and ambitious in their use of self-presentational strategies, unlike people with low self-esteem" (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987 p.83).

Cinoğlu and Arıkan (2012) posit that identity performers usually use inner and outer dynamics to form an identity that is approved and confirmed by the group or society they represent. They add that the individual, in the bid to construct an identity by way of self-presentation, with their new identity, begins to learn to become the individual that his or her group wants him or her to be. Cinoğlu and Arıkan (2012) maintain that the nature of the group or society then becomes the defining factor of the new identity of the self. For instance, in the case of the Muslimah in trying to construct an identity to represent Islam, she would as much as possible incorporate herself in ways that depict Islam, so as for the self to find a way to justify and internalize their way of life.

2.9 Goffman's Presentation of the Self

Goffman (1959) used a theatre analogy to demonstrate the processes people employ to enact social roles and thus express who they are. Apart from people communicating through words, they also communicate using non-verbal communication through appearance, texts etc., performing their desired identity.

Though Goffman's theory explicitly focused on face-to-face interactions and did not have the prerequisites to incorporate Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). However, it is still relevant in today's era of social media. Self-presentation is not solely dependent on CMC (Walter, 2006). According to Littlejohn and Foss (2011), the tenets of this theory indicate that everyday human activities are viewed as a stage, and that people are considered as the actors who perform on the stage to create lasting impressions on their audiences. Just as actors, they communicate not only by word-of-mouth, but also through nonverbal cues such as appearance, manner, and setting. According to Goffman (1959), the appearance of a person signifies their social status. Goffman adds that a setting is the physical elements of a play such as scenery and props that define the situation.

To Goffman (1959), identity forms the "dramatic effects" of interactions with others. He adds that people conduct identity "performances" when they engage in social interactions with others. In effect, they assume a certain "role" and try to create a favorable "impression" of themselves. Goffman argues that identity is closely related to the "performances" we create in our everyday lives. Going by this, identity is the sum of all the roles we play in our lives and not an essence in itself, rather, it is the socially constructed result of all our engagements with our audiences (Goffman, 1959). As cited in Schau and Gilly (2003), Goffman (1959) compares self-

presentation to acting, where performers present themselves in ways that match specific audience expectations and their heightened demand. While Goffman (1959) proposed that interaction was a performance, the aforementioned part of the interaction is only the front stage aspect of identity performance. Goffman (1959) also notes the idea of a back stage where identity performers stop performing and rid themselves of their role so as to assume their true self (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, the kind of identity formed by an individual, according to Goffman (1959), depends on the kind of identity they perform and how they are able to maintain a good balance online.

To Goffman (1959), Self-presentation is the most crucial component of identity where social actors engage in complex intra-self interactions to present a desired impression. The impressions created are maintained by consistently engaging in coherent and complementary behaviors (Schneider, 1981). This process is termed by Goffman (1959) as impressions management. The activities required for self-presentation are consumption oriented and are dependent on individuals displaying signs, symbols, brands, and practices to communicate their desired impressions.

2.9.1 Impressions Management

According to Rui and Stefanone (2013), impression management has become a major motive for a lot of people who actively participate in identity construction on social networking sites. In the current trend of technology, anyone can appear in the media and “broadcast” themselves to the globalized world, making it a ride in the park for ordinary people to present themselves, their pictures, their videos to the world. By means of the World Wide Web, any user of a social media site with minimal knowledge of internet technology is able to reach a potentially huge audience (Rui &

Stefanone, 2013). Thanks to technology, there are several networking sites available than there has ever been. These “interactive” internet sites have millions of users and are referred to as “Web 2.0” applications (O’Reilly, 2005). Users of these sites have more control over their self-presentational behavior than in face-to-face communication, which provides an ideal setting for precise impression management as described in Goffman (1959). By creating online self-presentations, users have the opportunity to think and make decisions as to which aspects of their personalities they want to present or which photos convey the best images of themselves; this allows them to manage their self-presentations more strategically than in face-to-face situations (Ellison et al, 2006). People consciously work towards managing the impressions they create on others about their selves (Rui & Stefanone, 2013).

As cited in Rui & Stefanone (2013), impression management strategies are dependent on social network characteristics such as size and diversity as self-presentation relies on state-level variables like audience characteristics (Goffman 1959). According to Mehdizadeh (2010), it is quite difficult for individuals to project identities and create impressions that are inconsistent with their projected traits or attributes. She however adds that the reverse is the case in online identity construction as online environments enable individuals to engage in a controlled setting where an ideal identity is enacted. Antheunis and Schouten (2011) posit that friend-networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook have become extremely popular and as such, offer a highly controlled environment for self-presentational behavior, which provides an ideal setting for impression management. She adds that personal attributes usually control identity placement, making it quite difficult for individuals to claim identities and create impressions that are inconsistent with their projected traits and attributes. Rui and Stefanone (2013) cite (Rosenfeld, 1979) as asserting that in situations where self-

disclosure is risky, actors tend to withdraw from a certain behavior and disclose less personal information about themselves. “Research suggests that pressures to highlight one’s positive attributes are experienced in tandem with the need to present one’s true (or authentic) self to others, especially in significant relationships” (Ellison et al., 2019 p.417).

According to Walther (1996), online self-presentation is more malleable and subject to self-censorship than face-to-face self-presentation owing to the asynchronous nature of CMC, and the fact that CMC emphasizes verbal and linguistic cues over less controllable nonverbal communication cues. In Goffman’s (1959) own terms, many expressions of the self are “given” rather than “given off.” This greater control over self-presentation does not necessarily lead to misrepresentation online. Due to the “passing stranger” effect (Rubin, 1975) and the visual obscurity inherent in CMC (Joinson, 2001), certain situations may cause participants to express themselves more openly and honestly online than in face-to-face contexts (Ellison et al., 2019). They add that the self is able to manifest multiple aspects based on different contexts at different times. Higgins (1987) avers that there are three different aspects of the self. They are; the actual self, representing the attributes an individual possesses, the ideal self, representing the attributes an individual wishes to possess ideally and the ought self, which represents the attributes an individual ought to possess. He adds that the discrepancies inherent in a person’s actual and ideal self are linked to their feelings of dejection.

Unlike face-to-face interactions, Internet interactions makes it possible for identity performers to better express their true selves, implying that they present aspects of their selves that they have always wanted to express but felt unable to (Bargh et al., 2002). Walther and Parks (2002) assert that the relationship between one’s self-

reported online personality and their offline aspects of the self is less certain and more mutable than in face-to-face environments. According to Goffman (1959), during self-presentation, the most significant tension experienced by participants was one not unique to the online setting, which allows mediation between the pressures to present an enhanced or desired self. Ellison et al., (2019) posit that there is a public debate about online dating being centered on the medium's inability to ensure participants' truthful self-descriptions. And, however debunk this statement as "our interview data suggest that the notion that people frequently, explicitly, and intentionally "lie" online is simplistic and inaccurate" (Ellison et al, 2019 p.431).

Identity represents the relationship between how an individual defines herself and the manner in which she connects to others and social groups in "affiliative" relationships (Kleine & Allen, 1995). Individual identity represents one's unique self as distinguished from others. Individual identities showcase the "me", while "affiliative" identity denotes "we" (Ellison et al, 2019). Identity consumers (audiences) employ signs and symbols to define both types of identities. For instance, Muslimahs who choose not to wear the hijab establish individual identities while Muslimahs who choose to wear the Hijab reflects a desired "affiliative" identity.

Moon (2000) asserts that self-disclosure in Computer Mediated Environments (CMEs) is easier for some people than self-disclosure in face-to-face environment due to the pressure of social desirability. In effect, CMEs pave way for more open self-representation as online identity construction (Nguyen & Alexander, 1996) allows identity performers to express latent and nested identities (Herb & Kaplan 1999). It also allows for more fully disclosed aspects of the self that are difficult to present in physical environments. (Schau & Gilly, 2003).

Rui and Stefanone (2013) aver that people who stake their self-esteem on positive images place prominence on self-presentation and are more likely to manage their public impressions strategically. It is imperative to note that the literature on self presentation and social interaction operationalize individuals as rational and strategic beings (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). They contend that constructing and maintaining a positive self-image is more valuable to those who stake their self-esteem and personal value on these images.

Due to the fact that friends and friends of friends are able to publicly comment on posts and pictures of others referred to as “other-provided information” on SNSs, there is a reduction in the level of control users have over information that is publicly available about themselves.

Identity performers seek to control impressions others form about them in order to achieve individual or social goals whether in online or face-to-face interactions (Kutor, 2017). This is the stage their audiences begin to form impressions about the individual based on the indicators sent. Impressions do matter, managing them well is essential and crucial in identity construction.

2.10 Relevance of the theories to my study

The study employed the theory of Self-presentation to interrogate how Muslimahs construct their identities on Facebook. This theory answered research question one, which seeks to interrogate the kind of identities Muslimahs construct on Facebook by examining the forms of self-presentation they undertake, with a close look at research question three, the factors that influences the forms in which they construct their identities. The study also adopted Goffman’s Presentation of the self and zoomed on to Impressions Management as research question two sought to find out the ways in

which they construct their identities. The theory of Self-presentation dissected the kind of identities the audiences of a Muslimah identity performer, who, in this case are their Facebook followers, expect them to enact. The identities they enact informs the audiences if the identity performer is performing the expected identity or whether they are being deviant. Goffman's Presentation of the Self, partitioned as the front and backstage, allowed identity performers to enact their desired identity as well as their real identity respectively just as in the case of drama acting, allowing Muslimahs to manage desirable impressions about themselves.

2.12 Summary

The literature reviewed allowed for an ample scrutiny of related literature on Muslim women, online identity construction using Computer-Mediated Environments and Social Networking Sites, narrowing on Facebook and what it entails. The study employed relevant theories including the theory of Self-presentation, Goffman's presentation of the self, touching on Impressions Management.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods used to gather and analyze data for the study of how Muslim women construct their identity on Facebook. The chapter also discusses assumptions and principles that surround the methods herein, as well as examine the research approach, research design, sampling technique, sample size and data collection methods or instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis, ethical issues as well as the validity and reliability of the study. This chapter also takes into consideration the processes used in the collection of data on the research questions as follows:

1. What kind of identities do Muslimahs in Ghana construct on Facebook?
2. How do Muslimahs in Ghana construct these identities?
3. What are the factors that account for the construction of these identities?

3.1 Research approach

Qualitative research approach was employed for the study. Qualitative research has to do with an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (Creswell, 2013). It focuses more on the "why" rather than the "what" of a social phenomenon and is dependent on the direct experiences of humans as meaning-making agents in their everyday lives (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

This study on the identity construction of Muslim women was conducted without any attempt to manipulate or influence the phenomena under study since qualitative

research is concerned with the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data of findings and not that of the researcher.

Denzin and Lincoln (2007) posit that qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in their world. This implies that qualitative researchers study a particular phenomenon in their natural settings, making conscious efforts to make sense of or interpret events in terms of the meanings they portray. This justifies the phenomenon of identity construction of Muslimahs in Ghana on Facebook, as the researcher buried herself in the activities of participants on Facebook. Denzin and Lincoln (2007) maintain that qualitative research involves the use of a variety of empirical materials such as case studies; personal experiences, introspection, life story, interviews, artifacts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe recurrences and problematic moments and meanings in the lives of individuals.

Researchers usually employ the qualitative research approach in order to establish the meaning of a particular phenomenon under study as it relies primarily on human understanding (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms through interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source. They then review all of the data and make sense of it, organizing it into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources (Creswell, 2013). Owing to this, this study shall gather data using face-to-face interviews with participants as well as observation of timelines of participants, taking into consideration what they post on their timelines from time to time. According to Connolly (1998), Qualitative researchers seldom make external statistical generalizations because their interest does not lie in making inferences about the population under study, but to attempt to obtain insights into particular educational, social, and familial processes and practices

that exist within a particular location and context. Based on this assertion, the researcher collected data from the interviews conducted with individual participants and also observed the activities that unfolded on their Facebook timelines using cyber ethnography. The researcher analyzed the work based on the individual Facebook activities of participants and the insights drawn from the interviews conducted. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to differentiate between third party posts shared by participants and the original posts they made in order to actually take the original perspectives and perception of participants.

3.2 Research design

According to Agboada (2017), “a research design is an action plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions” (Agboada, 2017, p.45). Al-Hassan (2017) opines that a research design is the entire plan that is used to merge the purported research problems with the relevant empirical research. He adds that the research design spells out the kind of data that is required for the research, the methods the researcher made use of to collect and analyze data, and how all of them help in answering the research questions set for the study. Creswell (2013) opines that when it comes to qualitative research, the research process is emergent. This goes to say that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and that all or many phases of the process may change after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data. For instance, the questions to be asked at the initial stage may change, the forms of data collection may get altered as well as the individuals under study. In the same vain, the sites visited may be modified during the process of conducting the study. The most prominent idea behind qualitative research is to learn

about the problem or issue at hand from participants and also engage in the best practices to obtain the necessary information (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Qualitative researchers use several research designs for their studies. These designs include ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative research and case study (Creswell, 2013). This study shall employ the use of a case study research design.

3.3 Case study

According to Yin (1989), one of the most used research method is case study. He adds that this method examines in-depth purposive samples to present a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. Against this backdrop, the researcher chose this because it offered her the opportunity to probe deeper into how Muslimahs in Ghana construct their identities through their posts and pictures on Facebook. Merriam (2009) defines case study as "an in depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p.40). On the other hand, Yin (2002) refers to case study as "a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (Yin, 2002, p.13). This definition of case study by Yin reflects the particularity of case studies; that they must be issues of interest emanating from an environment, with the researcher having no control over the case by allowing events to unfold naturally. In consonance with this assertion, Yin (1984) earlier on contends that case study is "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1984 p.23). Both statements by Yin expatiate the fact that case studies need to be recurrent activities unfolding within a particular environment over a period. Case studies

involve the development of issues and details about selected issues (Creswell, 2013).

According to him, case study;

explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a unique case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, documents and reports) and reports a case description and case themes (p. 97).

Merriam (1998) views case study as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998, p.27). Since case studies deal with peculiar issues, it was deemed appropriate to use case study for this study as the researcher sought to study how Muslim women construct their identity on Facebook. In Yin (1984), he posits that case study is “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1984, p.23). Case study allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon of identity construction of Muslimahs in Ghana on Facebook by collecting non numerical values on how and why they construct their identities the way they do.

According to Creswell (2013), case study is a description of a particular case or cases and its or their context. Yin (2003) noted as one of the most prominent advocates of case study research contends that the case study approach is of great importance where the context and events being studied is critical and where the researcher has no control over the events as they unfold. This is particularly true as it is evident in the fact that the researcher has no control over how her respondents construct their

identities per the content they put out. Al-Hassan (2017) avers that it is more appropriate and convenient to use the case study approach when examining contemporary events or issues when the relevant behavior cannot be manipulated. In this study, the researcher interrogated how Muslim women in Ghana construct their identities, an activity which occurs in real life situation and context. The study was conducted through the virtual world of Facebook where the researcher did not have any form of control over content displayed by respondents. Another reason for choosing a case study is to ascertain the particularity of the case of identity construction of Muslimahs through the use of their Facebook timelines. Yin (1984) asserts that case studies can be conducted with a small number of research respondents, and, sometimes just a single respondent.

Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). Against this assertion, Facebook, considered as the contemporary setting herein, is used in this study. Further, the researcher decided to use case study as a design because similar works which were done on online identity construction like the works of Kutor (2017), Al-Hassan (2017), and Agboada (2017) who studied the identity construction of students on Whatsapp, identity construction of ISIS and the use of social media by Chief Executive Officers (COEs) respectively, all used the case study approach as research design. Against this backdrop, the researcher used a case study as a strategy for the study in order to gain rich, detailed understanding on the construction of identities by Muslimahs through examining their Facebook profiles in detail. This is in line with the researcher's aim which was to provide an in-depth understanding of the identities being constructed by the respondents. There are three types of case studies, namely; the single case study, the multiple case study and the collective case study (Stake, 1995). This study made use

of the single case study as the researcher focuses on a particular issue within the bounded system of Facebook.

3.3.1 Single case study

Yin (1984) defines case study as an “empirical inquiry that investigates an existing phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1984 p.23). Robert Stake, one of the most cited advocates of the case study approach notes that case study “is defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used” (Stake, 2008 p.443). He adds that “the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system” (Stake, 2008 p.445). There is the need for the cases selected for a particular study to be similar in many ways and somewhat categorically bound together (Stake, 2006). In this study, the researcher investigates the identity construction of Muslimahs and the elements upon which they construct their identities. The researcher adopted the single case of Facebook as a unique or particular case. The reason is that, the researcher’s attempt to use Facebook as a specific, unique and bounded system allowed an in depth or thorough analysis of the complex and particularistic nature of the issues embedded in Facebook as a setting. According to Creswell (2013), the primary reason for the choice of a particular type of case study is the size of the bounded case and the intent of the case analysis. He adds that the researcher has the liberty to select different programs from several research sites or many programs from a single site, for example, Facebook (Creswell, 2013). The selection of these sites is mostly purposive in order to allow the researcher have different perspectives on the issue. Case study is a process that enables a researcher to accurately scrutinize the data within a specific environment

(Zainal, 2007). As such, a case study is usually conducted within a relatively small physical area or comprises a very limited number of participants of the study. It allows for an understanding of modern-day real-life situations through contextual investigation of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. This is what informed the choice of a single case study of the bounded setting of Facebook with few selected respondents out of the lot.

3.4 Sampling strategy

Qualitative researchers use a sampling strategies to help inform their choices of what and or whom to observe to interview (Al-Hassan). According to Daymon and Holloway (2001), the fundamental principle of gaining rich, in-depth data informs the sampling strategies of qualitative researchers. Daymon & Holloway (2001) add that the question of whom you select for your study, where and when depends on a particular benchmark or standard which is determined by the purpose of your study. This birthed the usage of purposive or purposeful sampling strategy. The study made use of purposeful sampling. According to Creswell (2013), there are three considerations that go into the purposeful sampling approach in qualitative research, these considerations vary depending on the specific approach. He adds that the considerations comprise the decision as to whom to select as participants (or sites) for the study, the specific type of sampling strategy, and the size of the sample to be studied (Creswell, 2013). The idea behind this qualitative research was to purposefully select participants that best helped the researcher understand the problem and the research questions in order to arrive at a more appropriate conclusion.

The researcher employed purposeful sampling as sampling strategy in order to get firsthand data on the research as sampling techniques allow researchers the

opportunity to know whom to observe or interview when gathering data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The researcher selected ten (10) Muslim women from varying backgrounds, ranging from gender activists to lecturers through to students, business women and housewives who have actively operated their Facebook accounts for at least a year. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), sample size is an unexplored territory of qualitative sampling strategy. As there are no tests or coefficients available to tell the researcher when the sample is big enough (Agboada, 2017). This selection of respondents was done with hope to unleash different perspectives on identity construction by these women from diverse backgrounds, as they may have different lived online experiences. This is because, generally, Muslim women are known to be conservative, therefore, the study delves into their Facebook timelines as well as their real world through observation of their timeline updates and interviews in order to confirm this assertion or otherwise.

According to Creswell (2013), it is imperative for researchers to decide on the forms data gathering will take, who or what should be sampled, the forms sampling will take, as well as how many people or sites that need to be sampled. The chosen sample units have a bearing on particular features or characteristics which enables detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes the researcher wishes to study (Mason, 2002). Participants or materials selected by the researcher were based on their ability to help in answering the research questions set. Purposeful sampling is usually dependent on a criteria when selecting participants, settings or other sampling units (Mason, 2002). In consonance with Mason's (2002) assertion, LeCompte and Preissle (1997) assert that 'criterion based' sampling is a better term to describe the purposeful sampling technique as a lot sampling strategies, including random sampling, are mostly purposeful. Therefore, the fundamental purpose of my study,

which is to investigate how Muslim women construct their identities on Facebook is the overarching criteria that guided my selection of the participants for this study. Although cases and respondents for a particular study are usually chosen from the population for the purpose of representation, another key consideration for the choice is the richness of the data to be gathered by engaging the respective participants.

The researcher selected ten (10) Muslim women in Ghana from varying backgrounds, ranging from gender activists to lecturers through to students, business women and housewives who have actively operated their Facebook accounts for at least a year. This selection of respondents was done with hope to unleash different perspectives on identity construction by these women from diverse backgrounds, as they may have different lived online experiences. This is because, generally, Muslim women are known to be conservative, therefore, the study delves into their Facebook timelines as well as their real world through observation of their timeline updates and interviews in order to confirm this assertion or otherwise.

3.5 Sample size

Sample sizes are usually not easily stated numerically as qualitative research deals with meaning, rather than numbers. The more manageable data is to the researcher, the better. Daymon and Holloway (2001) view qualitative research as small-scale studies. To them, qualitative researchers are interested in deep exploration in order to provide rich, detailed, holistic descriptions and well as explanations on their studies. Therefore, it is a norm to consider small samples. They add that:

... it is not necessary to specify the exact number of informants in the sample, although you are expected to indicate the numbers involved in your initial

sample, that is, ‘the initial sample will consist of x number of informants’.

This sampling strategy differs from quantitative research where you choose all participants before the project begins (p.158).

The accurate number of respondents chosen for a study largely depends on the type of research questions set, the type of qualitative approach used in the study, material and time resources as well as the number of researchers that would be engaged in the study. Patton (2002) asserts that validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative enquiry usually have more to do with the richness of data gathered on the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than it has to do with sample size. He adds that the participants or subjects selected to be studied at where and when are dependent on a certain criteria which is determined by the purpose of the study. Hence, the term purposive or purposeful sampling as (Daymon & Holloway, 2001) would have it.

Mason (2002) avers that sample sizes are rarely prescribed during qualitative studies due to the fact that there is no formula to determine a research sample size. He adds that in determining the right sample for a study, a key consideration is how manageable the selected sample size would be practically (Mason, 2002). Against this backdrop, it was prudent to work with a sample size that recognizes the fact that the number of participants selected should guarantee an adequate amount of data to be collected in order to understand the complexity of identity construction on Facebook. Considering the above expatiation, ten (10) participants were purposefully selected on Facebook for the study. The criteria included; being Muslim, being female, level of activeness on Facebook, and operating their account for a time frame of at least a year, ability to post on their timeline as well as keep the timeline active among others.

Owing to this, I am interested in studying them in-depth in relation to the phenomenon of their Facebook activity. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) assert that no tests or coefficients exist to tell the researcher when the sample is big enough. Also, Perrin (2001) opines that studies using qualitative techniques usually tend to be relatively small, as the process of reading and coding texts is time-consuming.

3.6 Data Collection Method

Spencer and Snape (2003) opine that some data collection methods have been identified with qualitative research. These methods include observational methods, in-depth interviewing, group discussions, narratives, and document analysis. I was able to collect data to answer my research questions through online observation and interviews. Typical data gathering methods include interviews (structured or exploratory) and observation. O'Leary (2004) avers that "Collecting credible data is a tough task, and it is worth remembering that one method of data collection is not inherently better than another." (O'Leary, 2004 p. 150). Consequently, the type of data collection method to use would depend upon the research goals as well as the merits and demerits of each method used. Owing to the above assertions, interviews and online observation were employed as the method of data collection in this study. The data was collected within a period of 11 months.

3.6.1 Interviews

An interview refers to "a conversation, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meanings of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, p. 174). According to Creswell (2013), in conducting qualitative interview, the researcher must determine the kind of interview

to be conducted, taking into consideration how practical it is and how useful the information that would be gathered would be in answering research the interview questions. Interviews are usually used when researchers seek to unearth activities that participants are engaged in; seeking to know their perspectives and experiences regarding a peculiar issue. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), interview is “a professional conversation with the goal of getting a participant to talk about their experiences and perspectives and to capture their language and concepts, in relation to a topic that you have determined” (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p. 77). Salifu (2017) posits that the researcher conducts interviews with the aim of relying on interview outcomes as the findings. He adds that through interviews, respondents respond to questions in ways that make the researcher’s curiosity satisfied. The number of participants a researcher needs in conducting interviews is flexible as there is no rule binding how many participants a researcher can interview (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Brinkmann (2015) avers that, the number of interviews a researcher needs to conduct is perhaps one of the greatest questions on the minds of most researchers. He contends that people usually hold the notion that “The more interviews, the more valid and reliable the analysis will be” (Brinkmann, 2015, p. 16). This is usually not the case. A person conducting a research is at liberty to interview as many subjects as necessary in order to find out what they need to know. According to (Kutor, 2017), some of the tenets of qualitative interviewing include it being interactional and comparable to a dialogue which may be conducted one-on-one or in large groups. He adds that interviews may also take place face-to-face or through the telephone or the internet (Kutor, 2017). Owing to this, some of the interviews for this study were conducted via Facebook Messenger, Face-to-face and through telephone. Ten (10) participants were

interviewed for this study. The researcher arrived at this number because in her opinion, they would provide accurate information in answering the research questions.

In order to also have a detailed discussion on the topic, semi-structured interview guide was used. Semi-structured interviews involve posing open ended questions. This interview format presented me the opportunity to be profound in following up on interesting developments and also allowed the interviewees expatiate various issues. According to Gubruim and Holstein (2002), semi-structured interviews with open ended questions paves way for better tractability and autonomy on the part of both interviewers and interviewees as regards planning, implementing and organizing the interview content and questions.

3.6.2 Online observation

According to Creswell (2013), observation remains one of the constant tools for data collection when embarking on qualitative research. In her work, Appiah-kubi (2017) posits that observation is a main tool in an ethnographer's toolbox. She adds that ethnographers invest a great deal of time in the field observing, either as participant observers or nonparticipants. This assertion is relevant to this study as I embark on cyber ethnography to observe the activities of my respondents on their Facebook timelines. Hancock (1998) avers that during qualitative data gathering, it is not in all cases that it is appropriate to deal with participants directly. He adds that observation as a data gathering tool is used when data gathered using other means is difficult to validate. For instance, when a participant is asked in an interview as to what picture they use for their profile or cover photo to construct their identity on Facebook, it is most likely difficult, if not impossible, to get a clear, accurate and vivid response, as against observing online to get firsthand information. Observation also paves way for

data to come in their raw state, making data reliable. Hancock (1998) asserts that observation is an excellent way of collecting data of phenomenon. Going by this, Facebook status updates, timeline updates as well as profile and cover photos are easily captured as data sources for identity construction as screenshots were captured in the data gathering process as reference.

3.7 Data collection procedure

This research seeks to interrogate the identity construction of Muslim women of Facebook. This involves cyber ethnography where the researcher collects data online. Creswell (2013) opines that online data collection is advantageous because it is cost effective as it reduces travel and data transcription costs. He adds that cyber ethnography also allows participant to have a lot of time on their hands as well as makes the process flexible as it allows them room to consider and respond to requests for information.

As a way of focusing on this research, the researcher logged out of Facebook. This, she did in order to be invisible online so as to avoid tags to posts as a way of curbing destruction. After a month's absence, the researcher logged into Facebook to observe happenings silently without being noticed. After observing timelines of a number of Muslimahs, the researcher sent inbox messages to some prospective participants in order to enquire their availability and willingness to participate in the study, while the researcher as well placed phone calls to a few of them who were known personally. The researcher spent time observing their timeline activities to be able to identify how they construct their identity. Prior to the researcher's data collection online, the researcher followed participants on Facebook by way of monitoring their timelines in order to get the necessary information that aided the investigation.

Wilso avers that ethnographers are usually sensitive to the way they enter a setting and are often careful about how they establish a role that facilitates the collection of information. Owing to this assertion, the researcher studied the profile pictures, posts and comments made by participants dating as far back as a year ago in order to be well abreast with the kind of identities participants have been enacting all this while. In order to properly get the issues well, the researcher was curious to find out the kind of people participants interacted with so as to ascertain whether their interaction with these people have a bearing on the kinds of identities they construct or otherwise. This was done by finding out how active they were on Facebook and how often they commented on each other's posts as well as the kind of comments they made.

This was done to gain a considerably vivid understanding of their activities for further analysis. The meanings their posts posed were given due consideration and the various themes in the text. The themes identified were the following: advocacy, self-awareness, exposure to different cultures, religious identity and knowledge level of participants.

The expansive issues were identified for interpretation. This was done in relation with the concept of identity construction, self-presentation, Goffman's presentation of the self, touching on Impressions Management and the Uses and Gratification theory. By way of analysis, the researcher raised major thematic issues that aided the description of how Muslimahs construct their various identities on Facebook, taking into consideration latent issues in their posts. The chapters were used as units of analysis.

On a daily basis, the researcher signed into Facebook to monitor activities of participants. In order to accurately track every information, the researcher made sure she liked and commented on every post made by participants as well as do same for

posts and comments that participants were tagged in. This allowed the researcher get notified each time there was an update on the posts or comments. This gave the researcher the opportunity to access the online content anytime the researcher wanted to do so. It is noteworthy to mention that not all posts posted on the timelines of participants were originally generated by them; there were those that they were tagged in as well as posts made by other people that participants shared which all are visible on their timelines.

The researcher also got engrossed in the data by reading and taking down notes. This enabled the researcher to get acquainted with the complexity and extensiveness of the content of their posts. Various repeated and central ideas shared by participants were noted as the central themes. These were later used to respond to the research questions during the findings and analysis. The researcher employed the use of cyber ethnography, interviews and online observation as procedure to collect data. The researcher also used an interview schedule to facilitate the conduct of all interviews.

The researcher followed these steps because they justified the notion that when investigating a phenomenon online, it is only logical for the researcher to use online methods that put him or her in that environment (Lindlof & Taylor, 2012).

3.7.1 Interviews

The researcher used interviews to gather responses for the research questions which focused on the kind of identities Muslimahs construct on Facebook, the ways in which they construct these identities and the factors that account for the construction of such identities. Quite significantly, the interviews allowed me the opportunity to ascertain

the rationalization behind the identity construction of Muslimahs on Facebook and also validate what had been observed.

Participants were prompted for interview. Two of them suggested online interviews and telephone recorded interviews but the researcher insisted on face-to-face interviews, explaining the difficulties that may be encountered, in terms of breakage in network connection and the fact that the researcher may miss out on facial expressions, which add value to meaning of communication as Creswell (2013) notes that in order to net the most useful information to best answer the research questions, the researcher must determine the kind of interview that is practical. Face-to-face interviews were then scheduled, with participants being given prior notification as well as going by their convenient time and preferred venue, with interview guide prepared by the researcher in tow. The face-to-face interviews lasted an average of twenty-five (35) minutes as the researcher had gathered some information during the observation period, which in turn armed the researcher as to what questions to probe. It is noteworthy to mention that Creswell also notes that interviews conducted over the phone tend to be the best source of information in the event that the researcher does not have direct access to individuals. Luckily, in this study, this was not the case as I was able to meet up with all participants, explaining that there is the possibility that I will miss out on their facial expressions, thereby depriving me of making meaning of the nonverbal cues thereof.

3.7.2 Online observation

After purposively selecting the participants, some of them who were not already 'friends' on Facebook but were known personally were contacted to accept 'friend requests' via phone and Facebook Messenger in order to make the observation easier,

as there is a limit to access of information, especially if people are not online friends. The researcher at this point began following posts and updates on the timelines of participants every step of the way. Screenshots of their timeline activities were taken and saved on a file named 'identity construction' on the researcher's phone for easy reference. The data collected were stored in accordance with names used by participants on Facebook.

3.8 Data analysis

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative data is reviewed and re-oriented over and over again in order to unearth new and emerging themes and patterns. During this study, data was continually arranged, sorted, analyzed, interpreted and re-interpreted across several levels including interview and observational and cyber ethnographic levels. All data, including interviews, profile pictures, stories and cover photos as well as posts of others participants shared and those that they were being tagged in were keenly examined, with particular attention being paid to how these instruments are used to construct their identities. Creswell (2013) asserts that data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data. He adds that, in analyzing qualitative data, the researcher has to engage in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. The researcher is said to enter with data of texts or images (e.g., photographs, videotapes) and exits with an account or a narrative (Kutor, 2017). This goes to emphasize the assertion of Miles and Huberman (1994) that "data analysis represents the method of thoroughly probing, arranging and interpreting interview data, images collected through observation in order to increase researcher understanding of a research setting" as cited in Kutor (2017 p.63).

3.8.1 Textual analysis

According to Kutor (2017), textual analysis observes and constructs meanings from communication. In order to understand the phenomenon of identity construction, the researcher chose to undertake textual analysis by studying the profile pictures, posts and comments made by participants dating as far back as a year ago in order to be abreast with the kind of identities participants have been enacting all this while. Whatever it is that can be used as a form of communication can easily be considered a text, such as photographs, images, newspaper, magazine, painting and film (Harris & Tyner-Mullings, 2013). In order for data analysis to make the best of sense, it is prudent to pair or combine textual analysis with other methods so as to ascertain how the Facebook profiles of Muslimahs aid in constructing their identities. Owing to this, data gathered through interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Hawkins (2017), certain factors influence the analysis of textual data. These factors include the researcher's worldview, cultural, political and social understanding of the setting within which the text was made among others.

3.8.2 Thematic analysis

According to Gavin (2013), thematic analysis allows the researcher to construct clear structures and meanings from research participants embodied in a text. The researcher coded all Participants' interviews during the study. The researcher first and foremost transcribed interviews as soon as possible after every interview session. For each interview, audios and transcripts were reviewed and coded for reference, relating to the research questions immediately after the individual transcripts became available. The researcher used a descriptive coding scheme. Subsequently, patterns emerged and the themes were re-examined for new and emerging evidence relating to the research

questions. In addition, for the avoidance of ambiguity, some participants were contacted to ascertain especially some verbatim transcriptions in order to ensure accuracy as well as check preliminary results for errors.

3.9 Ethical Issues

During the process of planning and designing a qualitative study, researchers need to consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and plan how these issues need to be addressed. A common misconception is that these issues only surface during data collection. They arise, however, during several phases of the research process, and they are ever expanding in scope as inquirers become more sensitive to the needs of participants, sites, stakeholders, and publishers of research (Creswell, 2013). These issues may include respecting the privacy of respondents, giving due credit when citing the works of others, etc.

Wimmer and Dominick (2011) admonish that during the study of pre-existing content, one must be ethically concerned about the use of comments or postings of private individuals. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011 p.81). Contrary to this, they add that in the event that the site is intended to reach the general public, the material may be freely analyzed and quoted to the degree considered necessary in the research without the consent of the individuals under the study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Since the identities of the respondents herein are constructed on Facebook, they did not “have an expectation of privacy concerning their posts” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p.81). As part of the ethical issues encountered, the researcher was caught in a fix as to whether to disclose names of research participants or not to disclose. Owing to this, the researcher anonymized data in order to ensure privacy of participants.

3.10 Trustworthiness of the Data

Creswell (2014) opines that in order to make a qualitative research valid, the study should employ variety of data collection methods. This study employed, interviews and online observation in order to be sure of the authenticity of the various responses by participants. Merriam (1995) opines that the validity of qualitative research rests on three factors; “if I am trying to build a hypothesis rather than test them, if I am trying to understand a phenomenon rather than “treat” it, if I am interested in the participants’ perspectives rather than my own” (p. 52). This study sought to investigate the identity construction of Muslim women on Facebook.

3.11 Summary

This chapter submits the methods the researcher employed in gathering data for the study. It covered qualitative research approach and design and why the researcher employed those for the study. The methodology also outlined and discussed the methods used which have been stated above. The research approach used was qualitative, research design; case study, sampling technique was purposive, the sample size was ten (10) Muslim women. The data collection methods adopted for this study were interviews and online observation. The researcher also employed thematic data analysis. Data collection processes, ethical issues, validity and reliability were also extensively discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter highlights a detailed analysis of the findings, discussions and analysis from the data collected during the observation and interviews of Muslim women who construct their identity on Facebook and how this ultimately translates into identity representations. The analysis are done by observing Facebook posts of participants as well as conducting interviews. This chapter also examines the import of the data collected in relation to the theory of Self-presentation, Goffman's Presentation of the Self; focusing on Impressions Management, Goffman's analogy of the Front and Back Stage, the Uses and Gratification theory as well as other literature relevant to the study.

The research findings are unfolded through the data collected from the Facebook updates of participant using cyber-ethnography as well as the interviews conducted with participants.

The research questions posed at the commencement of the study are answered in this chapter through the data collected, which data is reduced into themes. I analyzed the data using the chosen theories and the relevant literature reviewed in chapter two of the study. The researcher, in a bid to protect the anonymity of respondents of the study, made use of the English alphabet as a coding strategy. This was done in order to give every participant a unique identity. Participants were coded with alphabets such as "Participant A". This was a random naming and was done to promote the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

The research entailed three research questions. The following are the research questions that guided the data collection of this study:

1. What kind of identities do Muslimahs in Ghana construct on Facebook?
2. How do Muslimahs in Ghana construct these identities?
3. What are the factors that account for the construction of these identities?

4.1 Participants of the study

To enable me answer the research questions set, I outlined a general synopsis of the participants of the study in order appreciate the identity construction of Muslimahs on Facebook.

Many a participant indicated that they were introduced to Facebook by a friend and others also admitted to have gotten to know about Facebook through some family members who had already subscribed to Facebook.

When participant M was asked about her motivation for joining Facebook, this is what she said;

I first learnt about Facebook six years ago through a former school mate who told me I could pay a few cedis to get thirty minutes to an hour internet time to... to surf the net with the aim of making new friends and... and also to finding old as well or lost friends (Participant M).

She added that “I got more interested in Facebook when my friend told me that I could chat with my Facebook contacts through real-time texts, and that chatting on Facebook is less expensive than normal phone texting”.

Participant K, a National Service Person, asserted that “Facebook is a popular networking platform and I have been using it as far back as when I was in secondary school whenever I was on holidays”.

As social media is an emerging phenomenon, it is not surprising that young people are enthusiastic about it and do not hesitate to share their experiences. Participant J, on how she got to learn about Facebook, narrated how she started using the Facebook application,

I’m sure it would have been my first year in uni., I was given phone on my birthday... a friend who had mentioned the Facebook application to me earlier on helped me download the app as she mentioned to me during our orientation that all I needed was a smart phone and internet bundle to catch up with old friends. With her help, I found surfing through Facebook so effortless. I... I have been using it for a few years now and I must admit that Facebook is a place to be. (Participant J).

From a sustained observation, an average participant of the study typically installed and started using Facebook approximately from 2013. I also observed that an ardent user of the application stays logged in and checks in and out many times within a day, depending on what interests them and how available they are. Participant D affirms that, “...you will always find me on Facebook any day, I am always on the net, if you don’t find me online, it means I am busy tending something important, it’s impossible for me to be offline for a whole day”.

Some of the participants indicated using the platform as a means of communication by way of checking on their contacts; family members, course mates, lecturers and

acquaintances. Upon asking Participant F to describe the caliber of people on the list of her Facebook contacts, she retorted that,

On my Facebook contact list, I have my mummy, my... my siblings, cousins... cousins, my father, my aunties and uncles, friends, my old school mates and random strangers I meet on... on the platform. I could go on and on. I also belong to groups; women's groups like 'TELL IT MOMS', MUMMIHOOD, 'The Trotro Diaries', "Tell it All", 'THE MUSLIM WOMEN' and others. So you see there's a lot I can do with my Facebook handle. I ... I also follow pages like IQRA. I ... particularly, I follow IQRA because fellow Muslim brothers and sisters share their stories there for guidance. So you see, to me, Facebook is not only for fun. I learn a lot from there. Erm... even the women's pages like 'TELL IT MOMS' (Participant F).

Participant B mentions that she uses Facebook to advertise her wares,

Facebook is my marketplace, I buy and sell on Facebook. I pay a token for 'Facebook business' and boom, I make sales. Cos I get to have a wider audience seeing my stuff. I'm also able to search for products and services I need and I get real quick and satisfying results. Even though... the... the delivery charges are sometimes outrageous, it's more fun... yes... it's more fun and convenient (Participant B).

Many a participant revealed that login onto Facebook to view posts made by their contacts is soothing. When I enquired from Participant J as to whether she deliberately searches for posts of particular contacts, pages or groups she belong to or she just surfs through, she said; "Oh! Most 'atimes', I search names of particular people and groups to read about trending issues. I term it 'Facebook policing'".

Participant Y noted that she is an ardent user of Facebook, and her day would not start without her first signing in to catch up with events and activities,

Even though I have been cautioned many times to stop this act, it has become an addiction and seems difficult to stop. When I wake up early in the morning, I... I first put on my data and surf through posts I may have missed while sleep... asleep. I go through these posts mindlessly till my eye catches something of interest. Depending on what it is, I could share the post, leave a comment, react to it or just... 'wakapass'. My action towards a post depends largely on my mood and how much time I have on my hand; if I'm in a good mood, I'll comment on, like as well as share a post I... I identify with. But, on a bad day, I'll walk over the same post, again, based on my... my mood and how much time I have, but I must always log in first thing every morning even before Fagr (Participant Y).

Other participants admit to posting pictures rather on the 'status' or 'story' instead of the normal newsfeed. When asked why, this is what Participant M had to say,

I... I kind of feel safer there. You know, statuses disappear after 24hrs, but if I post my pictures on my timeline, anybody can trace it and use it against me in future. Therefore, I satisfy the desire to post on Facebook and still play safe (Participant M).

Participant L noted that her husband did not want her on Facebook, but she argued her way out. She says,

It's not easy, my sister! I'm an academic, and I follow trends to aid me write and publish my papers. I am also a role model. Once in a while, I post stuff on FB to motivate my mentees, younger ladies who aspire to be like me. I also

post sermons and Islamic teachings on my handle, especially on Friday. And, out of the blue, I meet my supposed better-half who operates his Facebook account and instructs me to delete mine? How's that even possible! I mean, I can't wrap my head around it. I sat my spouse down and had a Tet a 'Tet with him and we... we both arrived at a common ground, with him cautioning that I be more guided and moderate. So yes, I'm very much active on Facebook but I have my reputation to guard and a husband to... to please, if you like. So do not be surprised about the slight change in content, it's still the same old me carving a more... more responsible identity(Participant L).

This is in consonance with the assertion of Ebrahimi and Salaverria (2015) opine that people have differing perceptions about the internet when it comes to what they find and subscribe to online.

Participant Y admitted to finding herself going back to Facebook many times within the day. Below is what she says,

As I mentioned earlier, it depends on my internet bundle and speed, if I have good connection, I log onto Facebook over and over again, like, almost every five, ten to fifteen minutes. This is because as a student, I need to keep up with what is going on (Participant Y).

Participant M expounded the meanings she makes of Facebook profile pictures. She says that: "profile pictures speak about the caliber of person the account holder is. Adding that "the kind of pictures a person uses as his/her profile picture tells a lot about them. It presents a particular kind of personality". Participant C buttressed this assertion as she states that "Observant people are able to tell what a picture means to a person without having them to explain". The assertions made by Participant M and C

respectively reverberates with those of the other participants of the study. This corroborates the assertion of Baumeister and Hutton (1987) that self-presentational motivations are activated by the evaluative presence of other people and by others' (even potential) knowledge of one's behavior" (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987 p.71). these 'other people' are her followers, also known as audiences. The audiences are able to tell whether the identity performer is performing the expected identity or whether they are being deviant. It is also an affirmation of Rettberg's (2014), assertion that the frequency with which a profile picture is changed, especially in situations where account holders snap new pictures to be used on their account as cover photos or profile pictures often represents who they are in real life; their interests, their friends, family etc.

4.2 RQ1. What kind of identities do Muslimahs construct on Facebook?

Facebook, under the Social Networking Sites (SNS) space is considered an evolving phenomenon, a swing in how people discover, read and share news, information and content.

Social media makes users more active as opposed to the previous era where media corporations produced content only for their passive consumers (Agboada, 2017).

Several spontaneous cues exist on social networking sites (Tong et al, 2008). According to Turner (1978), many people exhibit "multiple identities" and perceive themselves in various capacities based on the copious roles they play at different times. For instance, a person's role identities may include the fact that she is a student, a daughter an entrepreneur among others.

Owing to the data collected using interviews and timeline observation of participants, the following identities consisting: advocacy, self-awareness, Knowledge level, exposure to other religions, family, personal principles, promoting online their businesses, religious identity, exposure to different cultures, adherence to religious and personal principles as well as personal branding were identified by the researcher.

Stryker et al., (2005) assert that the self is made up of several identities tidied into a pecking order of salience. Therefore, the participants of this study correspondingly, have several identities they exhibit based on different situations they find themselves in (Stryker, 1980).

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis infer that everyday-life performers, whether online or face-to-face must have something to offer their audience in order to appreciate or reward them. Consequently, an individual's presentation of the self on Facebook is linked to the expectations of their audience, in this case, their Facebook friends and followers. Furthermore, different self-presentations are portrayed to construct varying identities for different audiences and hence, these presentations require consistent variation to the changing trend on Facebook. Therefore, a participant may enact as many of the identified identities as possible, depending on their current situation. For instance, on a particular day, a participant may enact his or her advocacy identity and bring forth a completely different persona in order to bring to bear their most salient identities (Stryker, 1980). Therefore, a self-presentation through posts, statuses and pictures is critical in constructing an identity.

Going by the above assertion, social media users, including Muslim women, take to SNSs like Facebook for various reasons, including learning and teaching their religion, thereby constructing an identity through their posts.

4.2.1 Advocacy

Some of the participants aligned their being on Facebook to advocacy. They intimated that they see Facebook as a platform to create change in society as well as ‘change the narrative of Islam always being the news for the wrong reasons’. Participant G asserted that; “though am a ‘Liberal Muslim’, I want someone to look at me and have a positive impression about Islam my religion”.

A question to participant G on her motivations for using Facebook revealed that:

Well... um... currently, one of my reasons for being on Facebook is that you get to read a lot from scholars, from people who are experienced in the area that you want, and most importantly for advocacy. I see Facebook as a platform that can get a lot of people to act... get people to demand for justice, and get people to demand what is due them. So, I think that is the platform that I really will want to use. Um... even though I try to regulate my Facebook usage, sometimes I just go offline for a month, two, three... cos I try to avoid the addiction with Facebook. So, for advocacy, to meet friends, to... to... to... to speak on issues, to... Yeah... to do what I think I can use it effectively to change issues (Participant G).

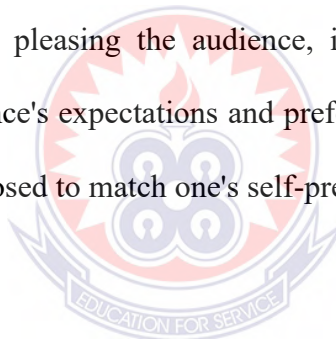
Participant J said she uses Facebook to “change the narrative of Islam being the news for the wrong reasons”. She said:

I’m one person who is so passionate about Islam and... my Deen, especially, I mean, if you follow the news lately, Islam seems to always be in the bad light, and I was so... I mean... with that I ... everywhere I find myself I try to... you know... educate people about what Islam really is, and, how different it is

from... what is being pot... portrayed. So, I mean, it's very intentional... my... the way I do things on Facebook, with regards to Islam.

This is consistent with the assertion of Lone et al, (2015) that Islam bestows a particular personalities on women which allows the Muslimah have confidence, security and respect, by enabling her work with men as equals.

This affirms Daoud (2017) assertion that online social media activism creates opportunities for Muslim women to publish their ideas and feelings and to promote their agendas, opinions, and activism. This assertion tends to give freedom to Muslim women who are mostly thought of as voiceless. According to Baumeister (1982a), there are two types of self-presentational motivations that can be distinguished; the first, which he terms as pleasing the audience, is supposed to match one's self-presentation to the audience's expectations and preferences. The other, also known as self-construction, is supposed to match one's self-presentation to one's own ideal self.



4.2.2 Religious Identity

As the study focused solely on Muslim women, all participants were practicing Muslimahs. Even though some of them mentioned that they are “Liberal Muslims”, others maintained that they consider their Muslimah identity even on Facebook as they let Islam reflect in their write ups, as well as the pictures they post.

This is what participants D had to say on how she projects Islam on Facebook,

First of all, I consider... my... dressing a lot even on Facebook. Every picture that I post, I ... usually make sure that my hair is covered, or am in hijab. And secondly, when am posting anything on my status, I... I make an indication that am a Muslim, either I bring something about Almighty Allah or

Alhamdulillah, In Shaa Allah... and... make some assertion that will indicate that am a Muslim, I... mostly... and, mostly, my comments goes in line with the Islamic principles.

Asked whether how she constructs her identity on Facebook is intentional and is done consciously to project Islam or copied from other Facebook users, participant J said “Actually, that’s my way of living, Islam itself is a way of life, that’s how we live, so, it’s the same life that I’ve been doing one-on-one with my colleagues... that’s the same thing I do on Facebook”.

When participant C was asked by the researcher whether she portrays religion through the pictures she posts on Facebook, she responded that,

The kind of images I put on my wall should depict my religion at all times. As a Muslim woman, a married woman for that matter, there is a way I should dress. I am not supposed to expose parts of my body in my pictures that will show some vital parts of my figure.

This corroborates with the assertion of Baumeister and Hutton (1987) that self-presentational motivations are stable dispositions of people, and the people involved depend on situational factors to exhibit them. Again, “self-presentational motivations are activated by the evaluative presence of other people and by others' (even potential) knowledge of one's behavior” (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987 p.71). The audiences here have fore knowledge of the kind of identity a Muslimah should enact. According to Mehdizadeh (2010), identity construction has been studied as a public process that involves both “identity announcement” made by the individual claiming the identity and “identity placement” made by the audiences who endorse the claimed identity.

4.2.3 Knowledge level

Apparently, among all participants of the study, their knowledge of the religion as observed were in a strata. While some demonstrated deep knowledge of the teachings of Islam, others admitted that they actually practiced because they were born into the religion, with two admitting to have practiced Christianity along the way before embracing Islam full-fledged. Here is what one of the two converts had to say about her knowledge of Islam,

Um... I have been a Muslim for eight years...a practicing Muslim for eight years. I lived with my mum who was Christian for close to twenty years, and, throughout those years, I was a Christian. It was after the death of my mum that I became a practicing Muslim. So, technically, I consider myself as a convert, even though my dad is a Muslim...the death of my mum changed everything about me. That was when I started learning about Islam...the Deen... Islam is a way of life, so as much as possible, I researched enough to be sure of what I was going back to, even though I would have been born into Islam because my dad is Muslim... after research upon research, I made a decision to um... return to my maker, Allah.

This is an affirmation of Ofori-Birikorang (2014) assertion that the cultural identity of social actors arise at the period they appropriate dialogue, voices, actions and texts within a cultural realm in order to enact and showcase their new identities. This assertion is in corroborates with Hall's (1992) second conception of identity which presents identity as being shaped by cultural values, albeit still holding the individual as the core actor.

4.2.4 Self-awareness

Some participants also exhibited that they were conscious of their personality and how their manner of self- presentation impacted their personality. Participant K, though comes across as a practicing Muslimah, she admitted that she did not know much about the religion until recent times. She said,

At the beginning when I joined Facebook, I used not to project anything Islamic about me, perhaps I'll just say...it's my name that used to show that I'm a Muslim, and maybe... as you're there, someone will privately message you on messenger, and ask you... like, the person wants to get to know you... and the person will then have to ask if you're a Muslim or a Christian. But currently, every picture I post... on Facebook... has my... I have my 'hijab' or my 'mayaafi' on that tells people that am a Muslim, am a practicing one.

However, asked how they project Islam on Facebook, some other respondents claimed to be "Liberal Muslims". Participant M said,

Well, I... funny enough, I always say that I'm a liberal Muslim. I... I present myself on Facebook as a human being and not someone who belongs to a religious group... and... mainly, it is because Facebook is different. You meet different people from different religious backgrounds, and so when you begin to... I feel I don't have to project myself as a religious being on Facebook because it's a network that I think we all come to solve issues and not based on where you worship or who you... worship with. So... as a Muslim woman, I present myself on Facebook as someone who is liberal enough to understand other religions and people on the platform

Asked how she got to her current state of projecting Islam, she responded as follows,

Ok... I will say it's a transition, cos, back then, let's say, I was a kid, eh, like, I was young... I didn't see the necessity in taking pictures with my 'hijab', I felt oh, am a normal person, but over the years I've grown up to understand the religion better and I've also come to love the whole idea of 'hijab' or covering the... the hair... as a Muslim, there are certain things that I have to abide by so that people will also identify me with the religion. So, let's... even though I do cover my hair, I make sure... I do it in a fashionable way... that people will also admire... eh...me covering my head. Some of my Christian friends see it to be fashionable and trendy and ...once in a while, they try to cover too.

Traditional CMC facilitates idealized self-presentation as users have absolute control over information about their true selves (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). The participants enact the

4.2.5 Exposure to other religions

Participant L, being a covert, intimated that,

I used to be a catholic, and ...we had a season we used to recite the rosary. So... through that, always I changed my Facebook profile picture or cover photo to depict the season as well as my mood. This has followed me to Islam. I ... I always change my profile picture during Ramadan to something Islamic. It could be the Ka'ba, a tasbih...anything. I do this in order to let people know the season. I also put up Islamic messages on my timeline on Fridays.

This affirms Mehdizadeh (2010) assertion that identity construction has been studied as a public process that involves both "identity announcement" made by the individual claiming the identity and "identity placement" made by others who endorse the claimed identity.

It is noteworthy to mention that while digging into the Facebook profiles of some participants through online observation, I found that participants who admitted to have converted to Islam exhibited some traits of Christianity in their older posts. They portrayed Christian related identities ranging from images depicting Christian religious programs and events of churches, to using images of the rosary as well as biblical quotes to pronounce their past connection with Christianity.

4.3 RQ2: How do Muslimahs construct these identities?

From the data collected during the study, the tools used by the participants in constructing their identities included *profile pictures, cover photos and other pictured updates* that they subscribe to. These tools aided them in portraying and performing their desired identities.

4.3.1 Profile Pictures as Texts

According to Rettberg (2014), self-presentation began in texts, therefore, it is not new for participants to construct their identities using picture texts as tools.

Participants construct these identities by complementing profile pictures with captions that better construct their identities depending on a given situation.

Three (3) of the participants emphasized that they make sure that Islam reflects in all their posts. It was therefore not surprising to find some of their profile pictures depicting Islam as indicates below:

Figure 1: A respondent exhibiting her Muslimah identity through her profile picture.



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline.

Figure 2: A respondent clad in Niqab exhibiting her Muslimah identity through her Facebook profile picture



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline.

Figure 3: A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook profile picture



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook profile

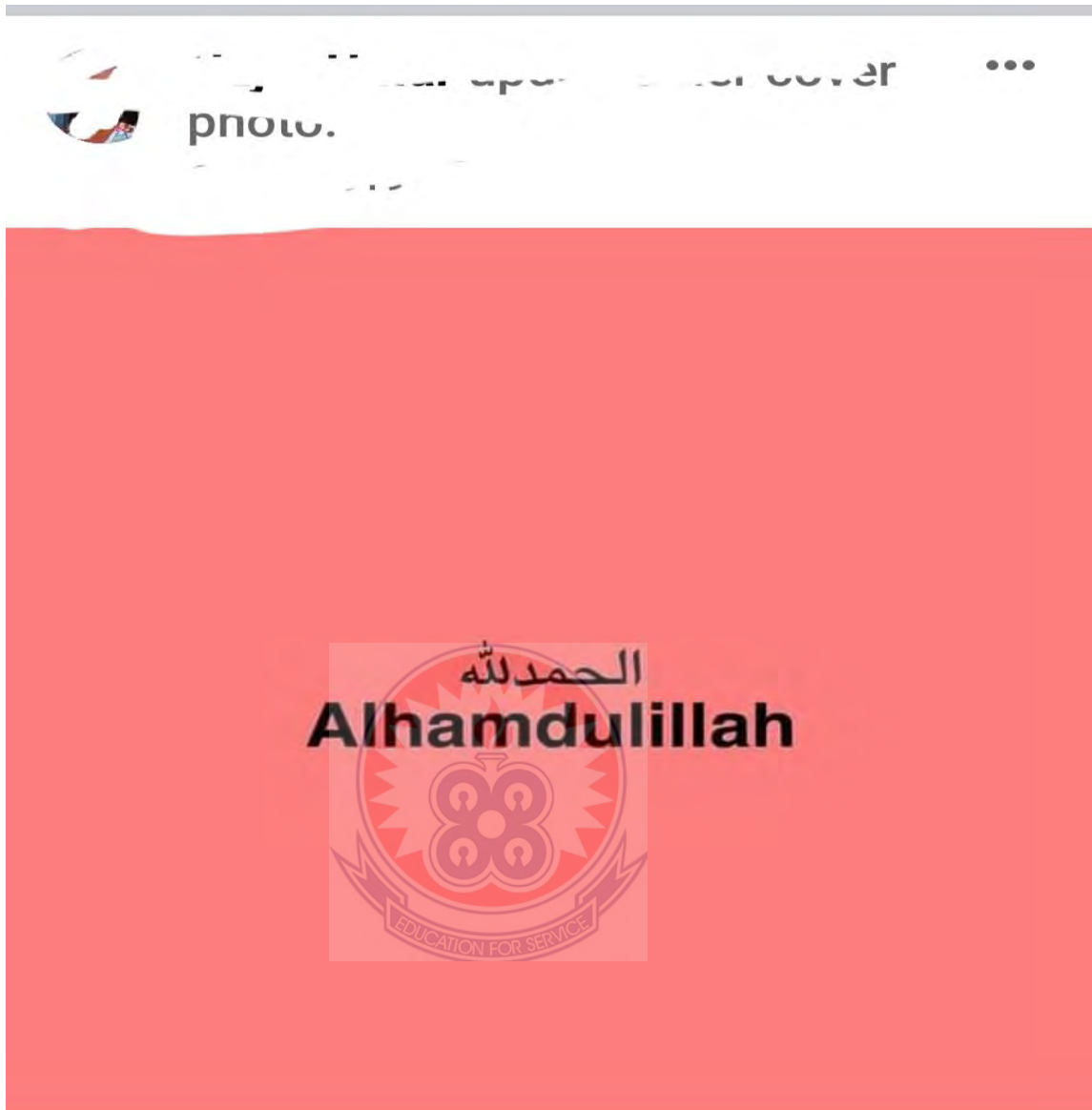
Rui & Stefanone (2013) assert that women are often more concerned about their appearances and exhibit greater motivation to protect their physical appearances.

Buffardi and Campbell (2008) contend that the profile picture has earned the position of the most important feature for online self-presentation because it represents the user on the online platform.

4.3.2 Cover photos

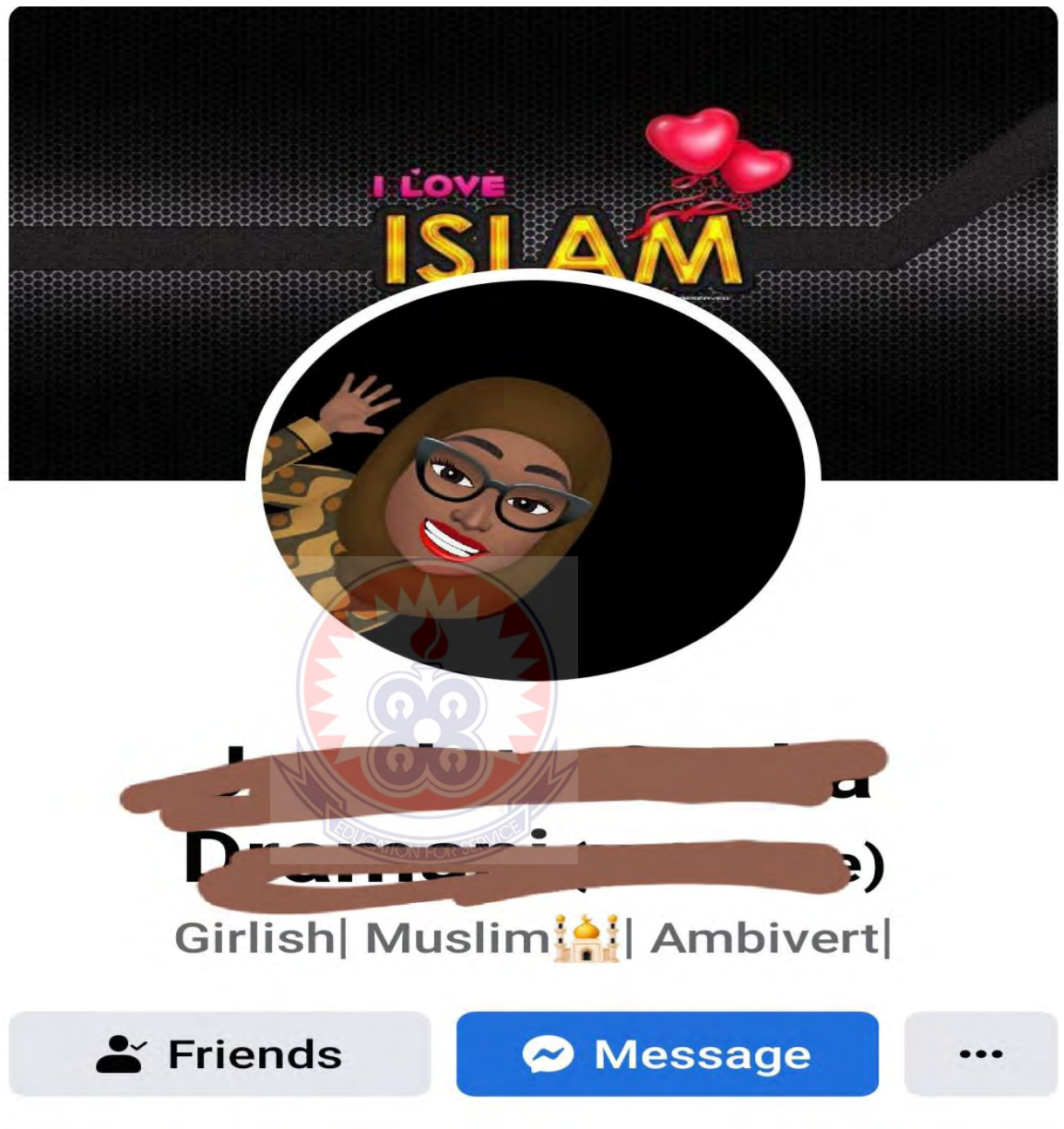
Through online observation and the interviews conducted, participants also mentioned one of the ways they construct their Muslimah identity is through their Cover Photos on Facebook as they upload pictures of themselves or things they identify with. Below are such pictures:

Figure 4: *A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook Cover Photo*



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline

Figure: 5: A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook Cover Photo with the inscription “I love Islam”



Source: From researcher’s online observation of respondent’s Facebook profile

Enli and Thumim (2012) note that another rationale for being present on Facebook is to ensure that users contribute to the creation of their online persona. This corroborates with Alsaggaf (2015) assertion that Self-expression transcends through a simultaneous fitting of an identity and making same mobile. Such fittings could be done using photographs that are transportable.

4.3.3 Random Posts and Comments

According to Taverniers and Ravelli (2003), picture text is an emerging tool that allows images to have texts on them and are used to communicate in order to construct identity and also to present the self and reproduce moments.

Per some of the texts presented at different time intervals, a keen observer is able to tell the emotional condition in which a participant is, based on the frequency and consistency.

Even though others may use similar picture texts, particular and peculiar ones help easily construct the identity of participants.

Figure 6: A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a group photograph



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline.

Figure 7: A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook post.



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline

Figure 8: A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook status update.



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline

Figure 9: A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook status update



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline

Figure 10: A niqabbi respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook status update, using her palm to cover her face as a way of shelving her face from being seen



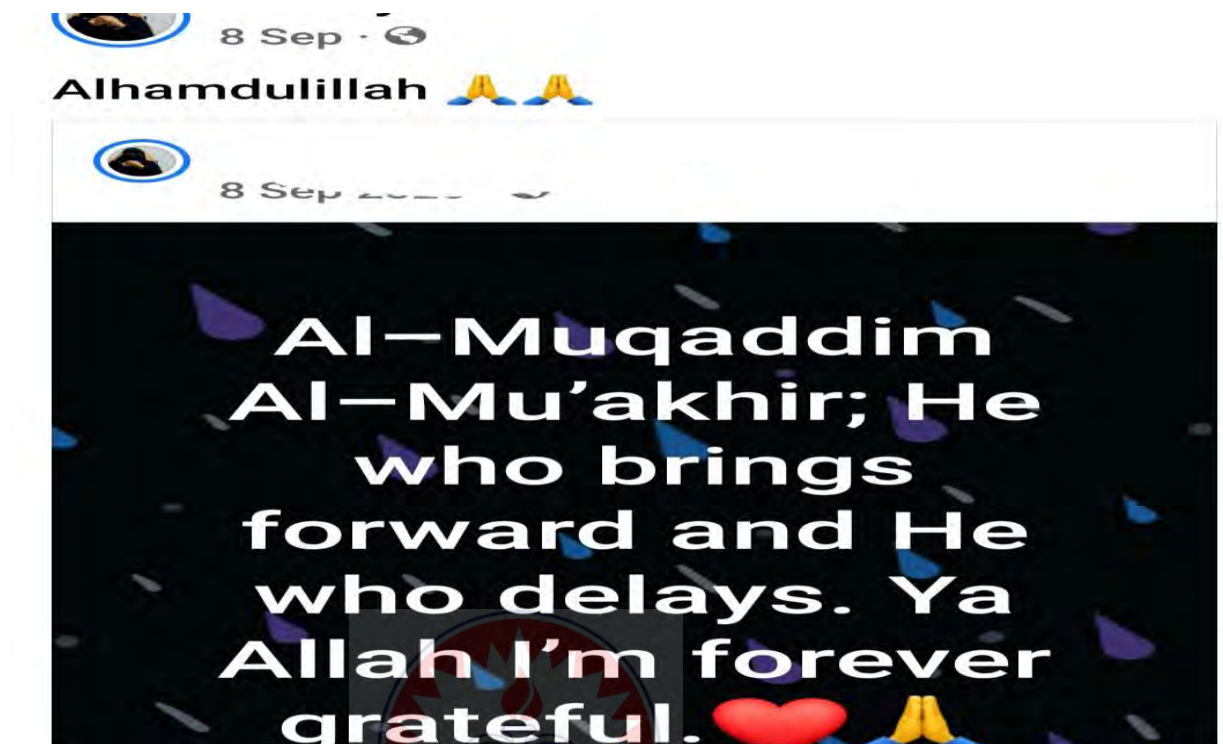
Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline.

Figure 11: A Niqabbi respondent exhibiting her Muslimah-Niqabbi identity by covering her face with an emoji through a Facebook status update on her Facebook page



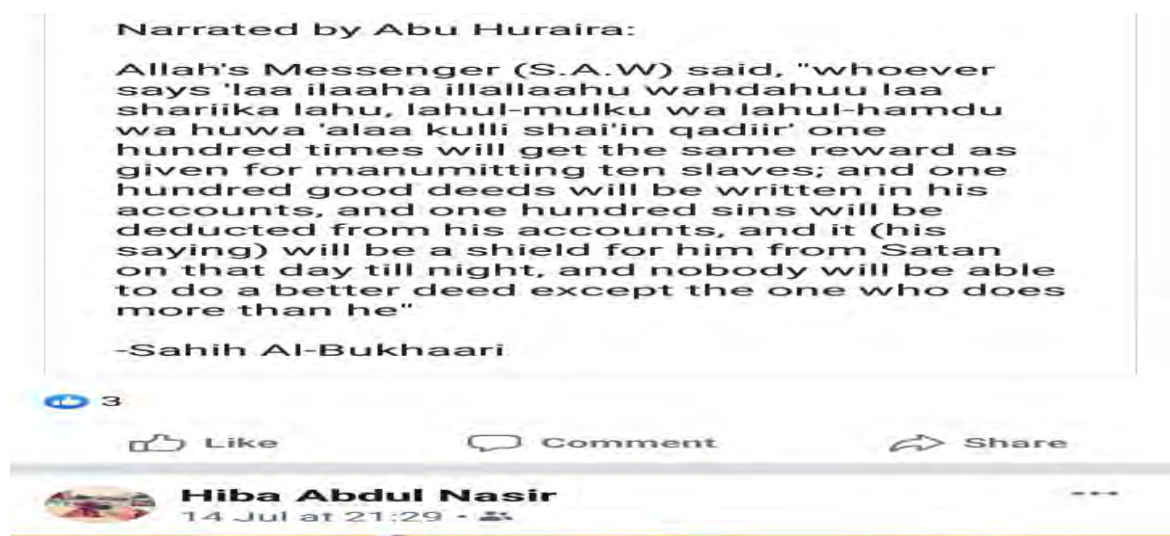
Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook profile

Figure 12: A respondent exhibiting her Islamic identity on her Facebook page through a Facebook status update.



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline.

Figure 13: A participant performing her identity through a post by sharing a hadith (the teachings of Prophet Muhammed)



Source: From researcher's online observation study of respondent's Facebook timeline

Figure 14: A participant performing her identity through a post by sharing the teachings of an Islamic scholar



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline

As a platform for connecting people across the globe, Facebook is designed to let people socialize through posts and texts, and present personal profiles, including photos and videos to different audiences (Alsaggaf, 2015).

This finding is consistent with the assertion of Stroud (2008) that Facebook operates as an online application to see and to be seen, as participants are allowed to put up posts as well as see posts made by others. This is consistent with Le & Tarafdar (2009) that Facebook as an app "prosumes", that is to say that it produces and consumes at the same time.

4.3.4 Maintaining Network

Apart from liking and commenting on posts of Facebook friends, another way to maintain friendship on Facebook is by celebrating friends on their birthdays, and, the Muslimahs in this study are not left out in this phenomenon. Some of them admitted

to wishing their friends well on their birthdays as one way of maintaining their Facebook network. While at this, they still maintain their Muslimah identity by praying for the celebrant and making use of the word “Allah”.

Figure 15: *A participant wishing a Facebook friend well on their birthday.*



Source: From researcher’s online observation of respondent’s Facebook timeline

Figure 16: *A participant wishing a Facebook friend well on their birthday*



Source: From researcher’s online observation of respondent’s Facebook timeline

According to Enli and Thumim (2012), Facebook as a social networking site operates by incorporating routine data through the upload of information about what connections are doing ‘right now’ such as updating statuses and uploading photos.

4.3.5 Promoting their Online Business

It was also discovered during the observation of the timelines of participants that some of them use Facebook as a medium to do business. Two of the participants affirmed this when participant G asserted that “Facebook” is my market place”. Participant M on the other hand said that “I wouldn’t have advanced in my ‘henna’ artistry if not for my presence on Facebook”

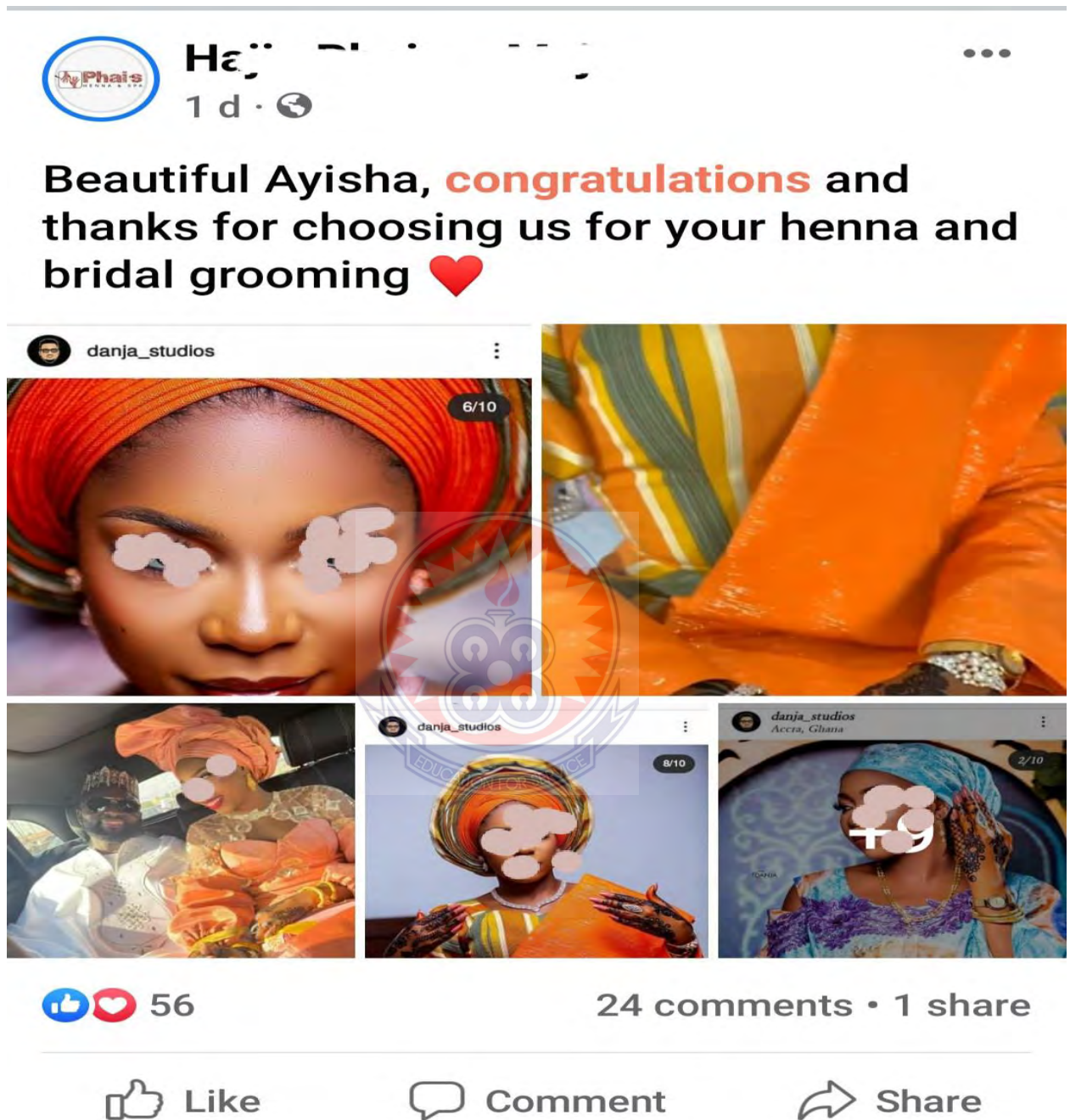


Figure 17: A participant advertising her wares on her Facebook timeline



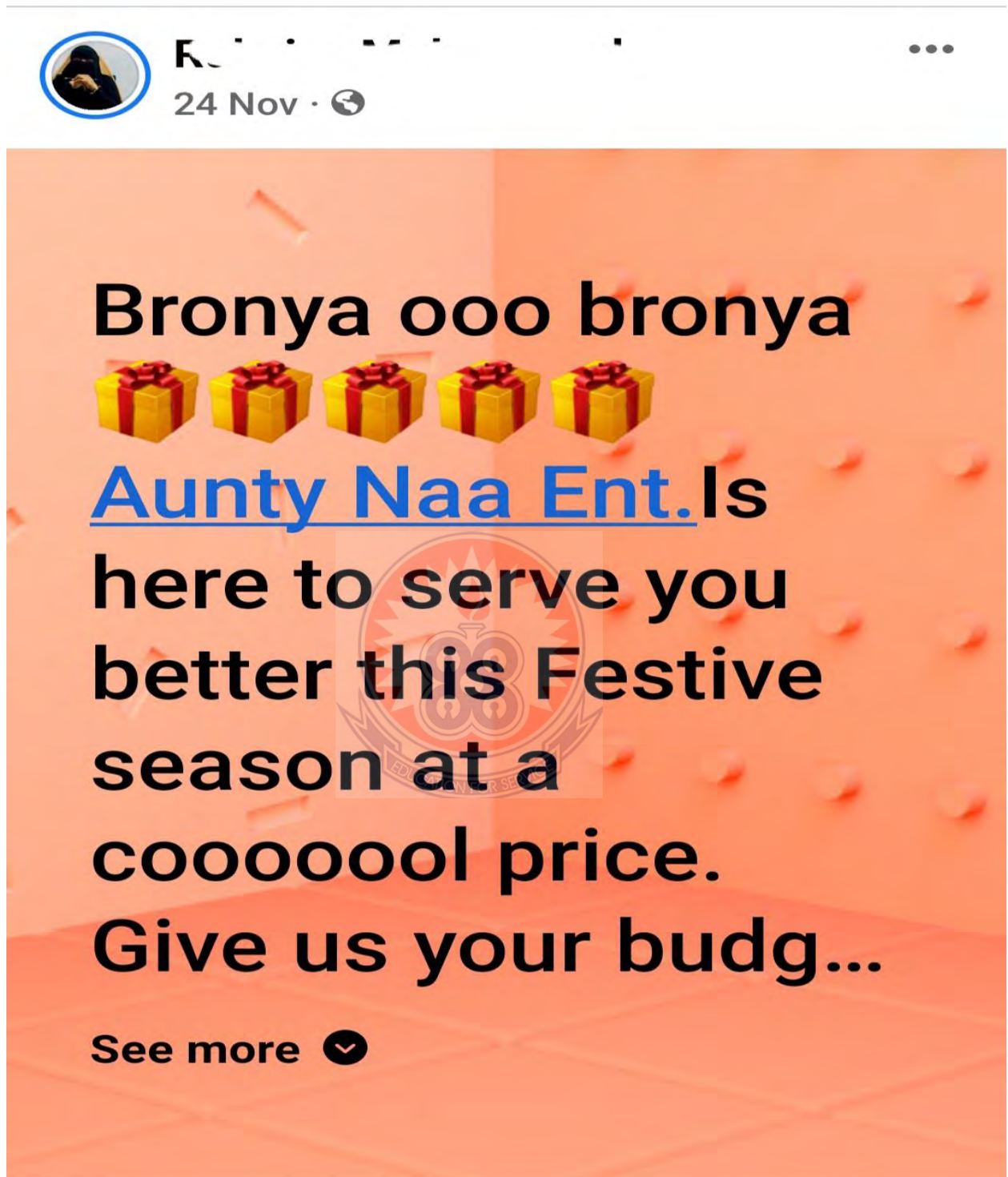
Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline

Figure 18: A participant showcasing her clients after a 'job-done' on her Facebook timeline



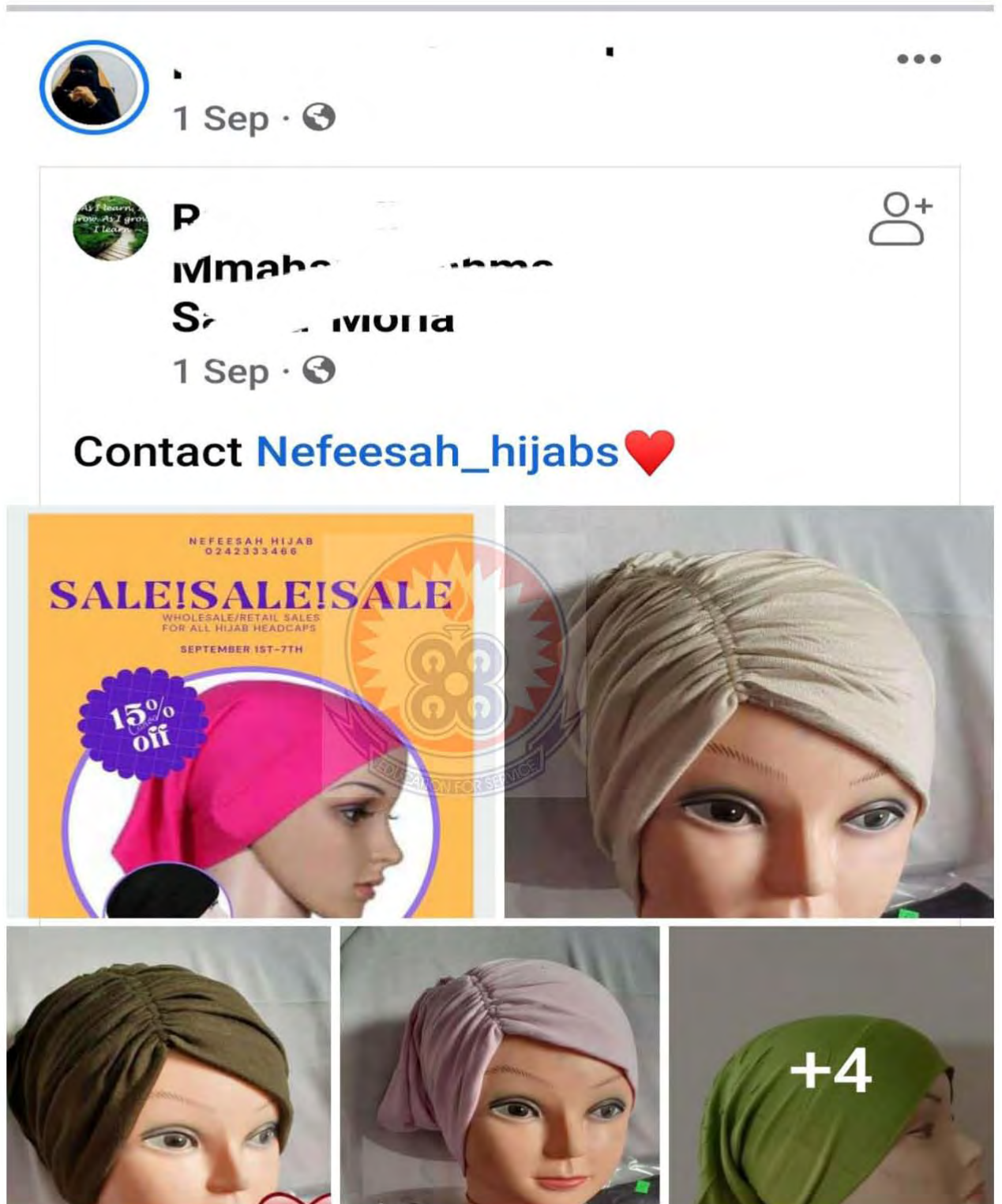
Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline

Figure 19: A participant trying to court customers to patronize her wares



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook

Figure 20: A participant advertising her wares



Source: From researcher's online observation of respondent's Facebook timeline

Social networking sites allow individuals to construct identities by way of interacting with others to form relationships as well as engage in political, social, economic and religious discussions among others (Alsaggaf, 2015).

4.4 RQ3: What are the factors that account for the construction of these identities?

As cited in Kutor (2017), according to Throit (1991), the view that one is performing a role acceptably should boost feelings of self-esteem as perceptions of a poor self or role performance may create doubts about one's self-worth, and may even produce symptoms of psychological pain. Going by this assertion, Muslimahs perform identities on Facebook by portraying their best in terms of the pictures they post, the write-ups they put up, the posts they share, among others.

Participants stay connected to their audience in terms of 'comments' and 'likes'. The audience may send positive or negative feedback in the form of comments and reactions; like, love, angry, sad, etc.

4.4.1 Personal Branding

Participants were keen about the impact of their identity on their person. As narrates participant D,

Islam is a way of life... and... I'm very careful of the things that I write on Facebook... so, I'm very conscious of everything that I put on...because you're trying to... you, you have an image to protect, your identity as a Muslim woman, you kind of... it's not everything that you put on Facebook, you try to... to connect it to your person, is... is it the kind of person you are?

So... so you don't live a double life. So, everything that I write, I make sure that it connects with my person, before I put it on Facebook.

This finding affirms Baumeister (1982) assertion that people engage in self-presentation in order to please their contacts and to construct one's public self, as Baumeister & Hutton(1987) contend that it is not in all cases that self performers expect favorable responses from their audiences, even though presentational motivations are activated by the evaluative presence of "other People". Here, the respondent is constructing their public self and does not seek validation from the audience. This is consistent with Baumeister and Hutton (1987) that society in general values honest, fair, and law-abiding behavior, and so most people seek to present themselves consistent with that image, which implies that the stability and consistency of the self presented depends largely on the public self.

4.4.2 Exposure to different cultures

Participants also expressed deep concern and respect for other cultures they have been exposed to, which has had a role in shaping the kind of identity they construct. Here is what participant G had to say,

As a Muslim woman, and because of my orientation, because of these discrimination and stigma... having been a development worker, I would rather identify as a human being. Yes, I present myself as a human being on Facebook. I project myself as a human being who is there to create change. I ... I try to present myself as someone who is liberal enough to understand other religions, and... people on the platform. And... so... for me, it's just about... trying to... to take away that barriers, and just creating a free world

for everyone to participate. Of course, am a Muslim, and so, it doesn't really erm... it doesn't really affect how I relate with other people.

This finding affirms the assertion of Rui & Stefanone (2013) People consciously work towards managing the impressions they create on others about their selves.

4.4.3 Religious and personal principles

Participants admitted to applying religious and personal principles by using their discretion, based on what the situation presents at a time. Participant G maintained that,

I ... I project myself as someone who abide by some principles of Islam, principles that are... in line with erm... service to humanity. Principles that are in line with giving people a voice, principles that are in line with erm...supporting other people. I ... I ... I ... do reference such principles. I feel my actions would speak louder for me.

The this is an affirmation of the *promotional* practice, as put out by Enli and Thumim (2012). It exhibits elements of both reluctance and sharing. This is where the participant shares only information that brings them in a good light.

4.5 Summary

This chapter presented the findings and analysis of how Muslimahs construct their identity on Facebook. It dissects the various ways in which these Muslimah identities are constructed. The findings were analyzed bearing in mind the theories of Self Presentation and Goffman's front and back analogy, Goffman's presentation of the self, zooming into impressions management.

The findings revealed different identities constructed by each participant, depending on their orientation and understanding of Islam as a religion. It was also discovered that respondents of the study perform multiple identities based on the salience of that identity to them and the situations in which they find themselves at a given time. Participants were given unique identifications using the English alphabet in order to aid identification and confidentiality. The study revealed that participants expect positive feedback from their audiences and tend to be introverted from identities which are not supported by their audiences as they are the shapers of the identities they construct. As succinctly put by Mead (1934), identity is automated, and it is through such interactions that an individual's identity is performed, tested and established, paving way for the obtained emotional gratification.

Various themes were identified during the data collected through cyber ethnography, interviews and timeline observation of participants. Some participants mentioned that they enact their identity through advocacy on Facebook. They said that they use Facebook as a channel to put right what they think are the wrongs in the society. Religious Identity was also identified with participants as some of them maintained that they consider their Muslimah identity even on Facebook as they let Islam lead the way even in their write ups as well as the pictures they post. Again, participants exhibited their knowledge level of the Islamic religion. Their knowledge of the religion as observed was perceived to be in layers. While some demonstrated deep knowledge of the teachings of Islam, others admitted that they essentially practiced Islam because they were born into the religion, as one of them admitted to have practiced Christianity along the way before converting to Islam. Exposure to other Religions by participants was also identified. Participants also expressed deep concern and respect for other cultures they have been exposed to, which help shape the kind of

identity they construct. Participants also displayed Self-awareness. Self-Awareness was also another theme discovered as some participants displayed that they were conscious of their personality and how their manner of self- presentation impacted their personality. They also engaged in Online Business activities through which they enacted their identities as it was discovered during the observation of the timelines of participants and the interviews conducted that some of them use Facebook as a medium to do business. It was also revealed that participants use Facebook to keep in touch with their contacts as they maintained their network by sharing, liking and commenting on posts of their contacts as well as wishing them well during festive occasions and on their birthdays. Participants also admitted to applying religious and personal principles by using their discretion, based on what a situation presented at a given period.

Generally, participants of the study were keen about the impact of their identity on their person. Therefore, they used their posts, shared posts of their contacts, their profile pictures, cover photos and random comments as well as reactions of updates of their contacts to perform their desired identities.

It is noteworthy to mention that though there were few similar identities, no two identities were exact, as each participant enacted a different identity based on their situations and how salient they considered a particular identity at a given time or situation. Whereas some participant came across as strict-extremist Muslimahs, others admitted to being “liberal Muslims”.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This is the final chapter of the study as it sums up the relevant issues that came up for discussion during the conduct of the research. It summarizes and presents a conclusion of the study based on the findings and analysis, as well as submits recommendations, limitations of the study and makes suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary

The study interrogated how selected Muslim women construct their identities on Facebook.

The study also examined the kinds of identities Muslim women perform on Facebook, the various ways in which they perform their identities, and the factors that account for the construction of the identified identities.

The researcher also conducted a wide-ranged review of related literature to mark the basics of the findings of this study. The research made use of the theory of Self-presentation, Goffman's Presentation of the Self; focusing on Impressions Management, Goffman's (1959) analogy of the Front and Back Stage.

The study revealed the prevailing identities the selected Muslimahs perform on Facebook. This was achieved through a study of their Facebook timelines and the interviews conducted. Participants were observed to enact identities of; advocacy, self-awareness, Knowledge level, exposure to other religions, promoting online their businesses, religious identity, exposure to different cultures, adherence to religious

and personal principles as well as personal branding. On the average, each participant enacted an independent identity. However, others presented multiple identities in other situations depending on how salient and convenient the enacted identity was for the real-time. An example is when a participant would present an identity as a student and at the same time enact the identity of an entrepreneur advertising products on their timeline.

According to Enli and Thumim (2012), “in the process of socializing online in Facebook, people construct textual representations” (p.87) The study participants utilized profile pictures, cover photos and random posts of participants as tools to ascertain the various ways in which participants enact their desired identities on Facebook. Enli and Thumim (2012) also assert that SNSs like Facebook have mediatized identity construction, which was customarily the preserve of non-mediated spheres. Participants were found enacting their identities by combing related tools, based on the situation and the salience of the enacted identity. For instance, a participant could typically post a picture captioned with the way they feel at that moment, post only a picture or leave a long post with or without a picture. Their desired identities at a given time determined their posts and pictures posted to construct a particular desired identity.

The study was done using the qualitative research approach and the design was case study. This enabled the researcher understand the concepts of identity construction through Computer Mediated Communication, Social Networking Sites and online self-representations. Participants of the study were selected using the purposive sampling technique.

The study adopted three data collection methods; observation, interviews and cyber-ethnography. The study also used semi-structured interviews with open ended questions and phone calls. Finally, a thematic analysis of the data was conducted so as to allow me vividly shape and describe my data set in a clear, concise detail.

5.2 Main Findings and Conclusion

In chapter four, this study answered the three research questions that underpinned the study. The collected data were critically interrogated and analyzed using the concepts in the reviewed literature as well as the theoretical frameworks.

The data primarily revealed that the research participants are active users of Facebook and easily accessed the necessary avenues to construct their varied identities. The study revealed that Facebook has grown to become a part of its users. Due to this, almost all participants under the study consider it as part of their living space and go there to gratify their need.

Owing to the fact that the study focused solely on Muslim women, all participants were practicing Muslimahs. Even though some of them mentioned that they are “Liberal Muslims”, others maintained that they consider their Muslimah identity even on Facebook as they let Islam reflect in all their activities on Facebook. In answering research question one, some participants wanted to be the voice of the voiceless through advocacy. Other participants also exhibited that they were conscious of their personality and how their manner of self- presentation impacted their personality. Even though some participant exhibited extreme Islamic principles like wearing the niqab, two participants emphasized that they are liberal muslims and therefore are versatile. However, they still practiced Islam, but also believed that Facebook was no place to rub religion in the face of anyone. Other participants also expressed deep

concern and respect for other cultures they have been exposed to, which has had a role in shaping the kind of identity they construct. These findings are underpinned by the tenets of the theory of self-presentation which states that identity performance is based on the presence of an audience and also the zeal of the individual to construct their ideal public self.

All participants displayed various knowledge of Islam and its practices with some admitting not to be well versed in knowledge of the religion. While some participants demonstrated deep knowledge of the teachings of Islam, others admitted that they had a relatively fair understanding of the religion. It was uncovered that participants use Facebook to stay in touch with people they already know as well as make new friends. It was also revealed that participants try to maintain their network by posting pictures and messages that they subscribe to, to enact their identity. The study also revealed that a participant is capable of enacting more than a single identity at a given time depending on the situation. The study found that due to the constant increase in the size of network, there is a corresponding increase in demands associated with maintaining a range of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, participants maintained their network by wishing their contacts well during festive occasions and on their birthdays. They also like, comment on and share posts made by their contacts. Again, the study revealed that participants use their profile pictures, cover photos, random posts and other forms of texts to project their desired identities. This answered research question two which sought to find out the ways in which participants construct their identities. Goffman's presentation of the self underpinned these findings as it was found that participants presented identities to form positive impressions. It was common to find almost all participants covering their hair to depict Islam, with one of them constantly wearing *niqab* and covering her face with

emoticons in pictures she did not have the *niqab* on. Other participants used Facebook as a medium to promote entrepreneurship. Participants also used personal branding, their exposure to other religions and religious and personal principles to answer research question three. This is underpinned by the theory of self-presentation which depends on predisposed motivations to enact an identity

5.3 Limitations

The research focused on identity construction of Mulimahs on Facebook. Typical of many women whom society believe to be keepers and caregivers, it was strenuous for some participants to keep to scheduled time for interview. Though some interviews were done face-to-face, other participants were interviewed via phone calls, and some of them constantly gave excuses as to why they had to reschedule interview time set. Excuses ranged from having to take care of baby alone to juggling between daunting house chores. One participant, among other reasons she rescheduled mentioned that she had a month's old baby and she had to supervise their building project in the absence of her husband. Other participants, albeit the assurance to keep them anonymous, still had reservations and it had to take a lot of convincing to get them to yield. Amid the challenges faced, ample information was gathered for future studies.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Studies

As Facebook keeps evolving and new features are being added on by the day, a detailed interrogation of Facebook statuses could be considered using the theory of Self-presentation. While reviewing literature, the researcher did not come across any work on identity construction of Muslim men or women on Facebook in Ghana. Future studies could investigate the identity construction of Muslim men on Facebook

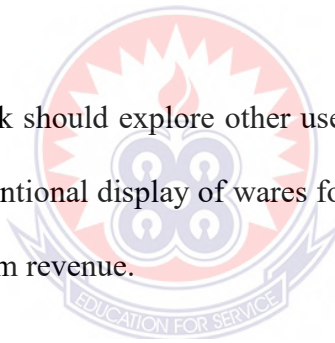
in Ghana using the Uses and Gratification Theory. Future studies should also be done on the motivations for self-presentation from the perspectives of relationship maintenance, and explore the impact of self-presentation on personal relationships, using Goffman's Presentation of the Self.

5.5 Recommendations

The study recommends that Muslimahs should be intentional about their online activities, as they would never know who is watching and forming perceptions about them.

Also, Muslimahs should be mindful of their professional image when enacting identities on social media.

Finally, users of Facebook should explore other uses for the app. Apart from the fun part and occasional conventional display of wares for sale, users can create content on the app that will fetch them revenue.



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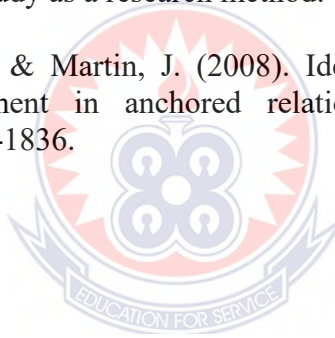
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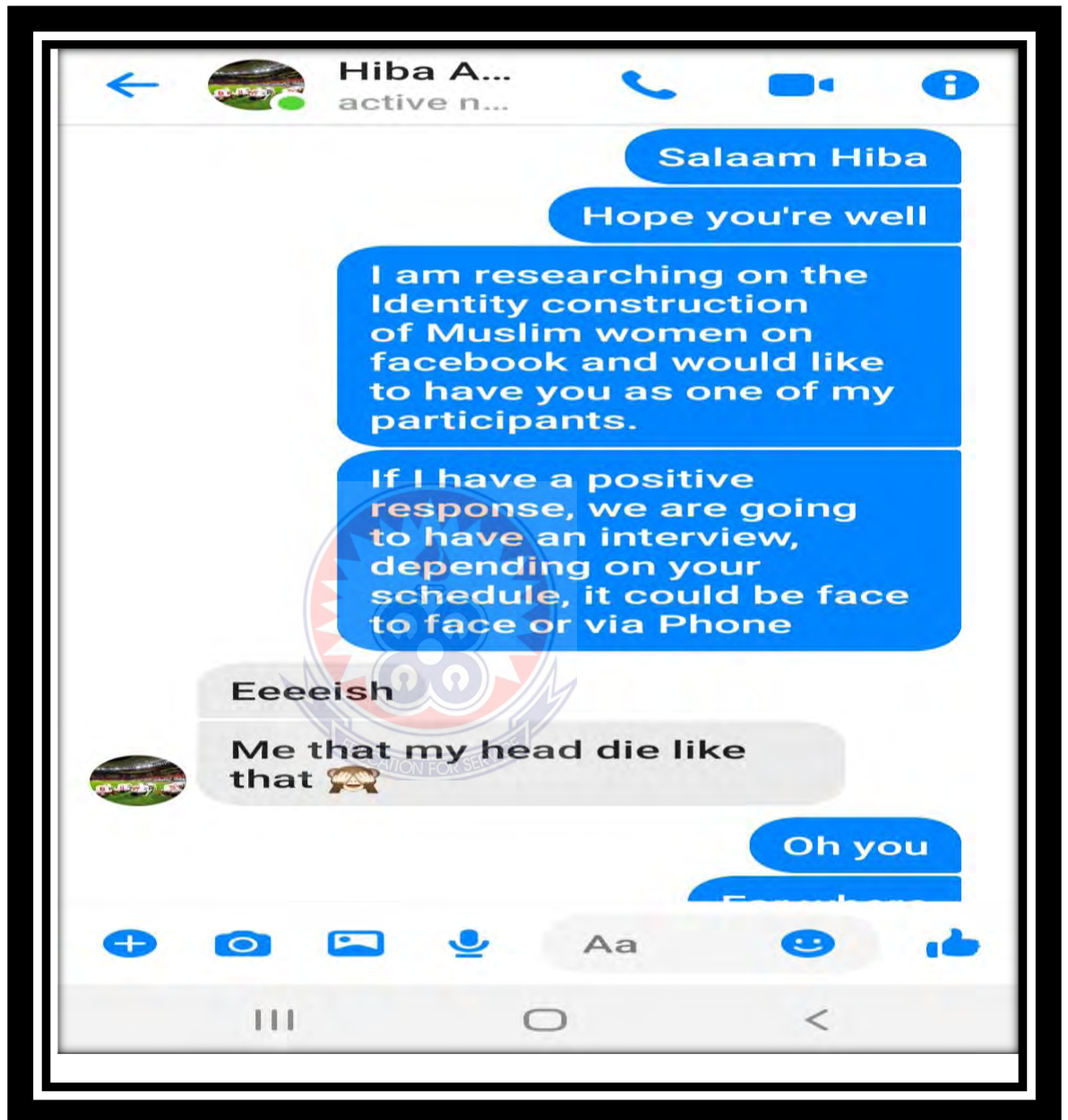
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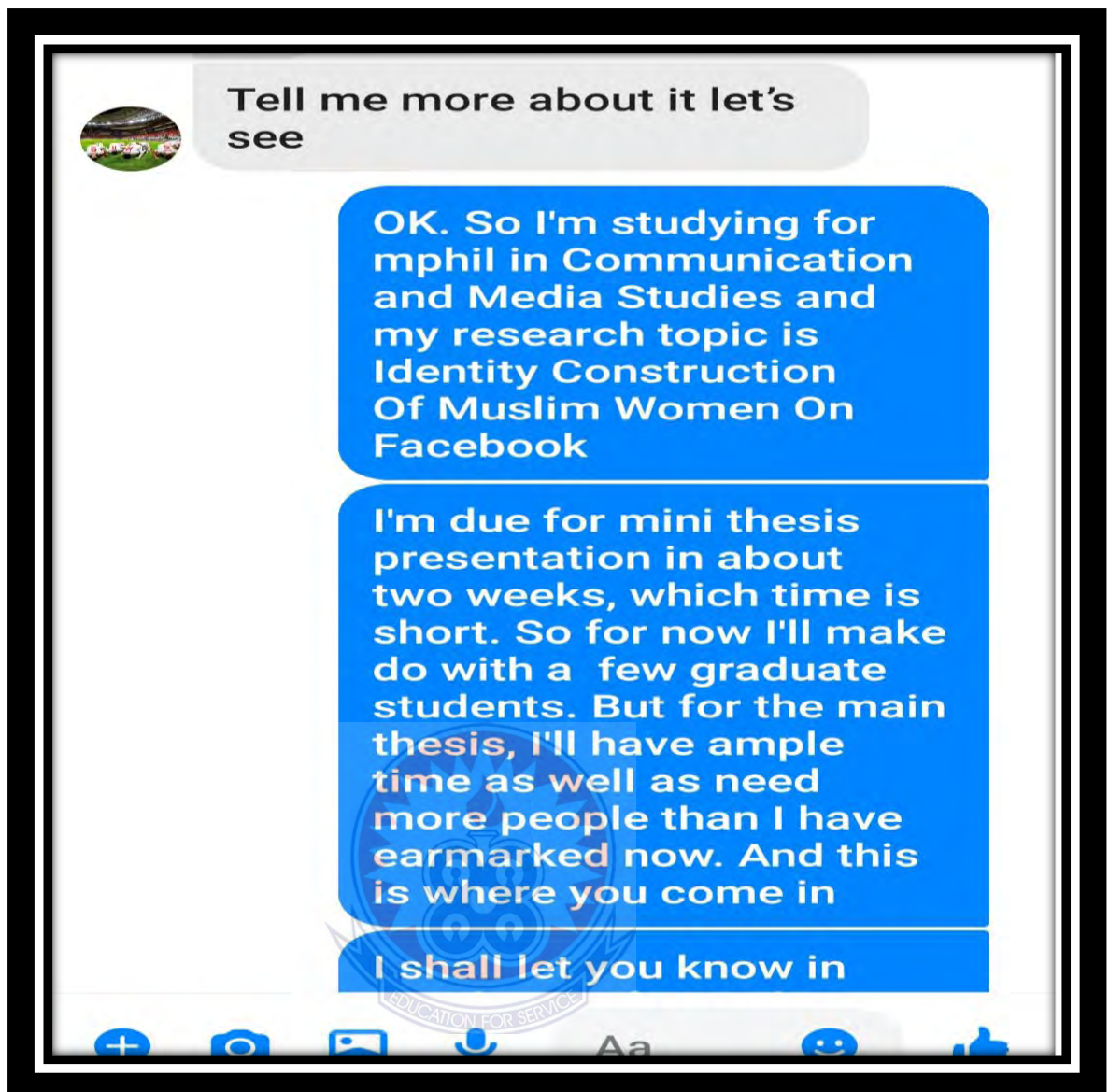
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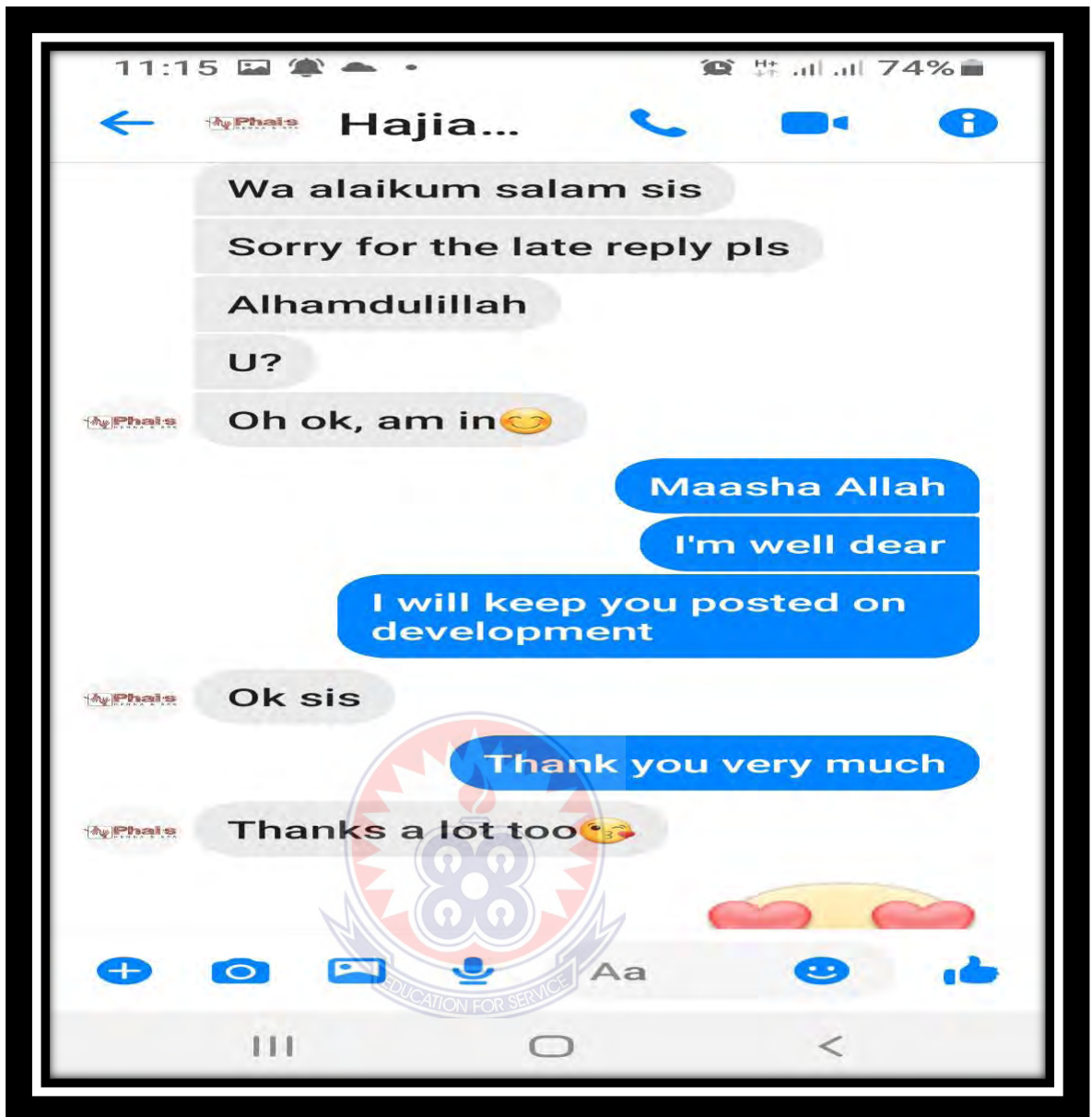


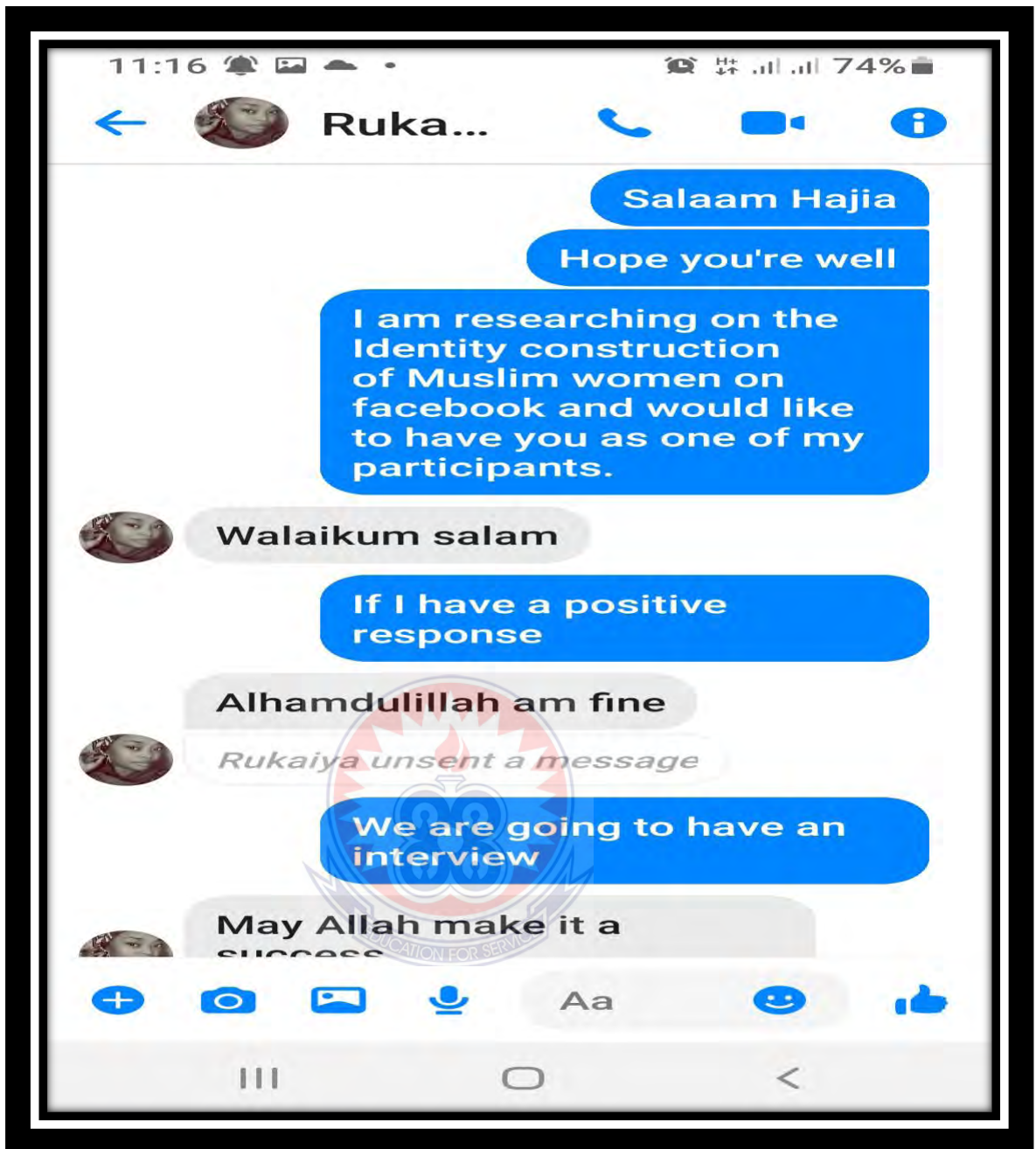
APPENDIX A

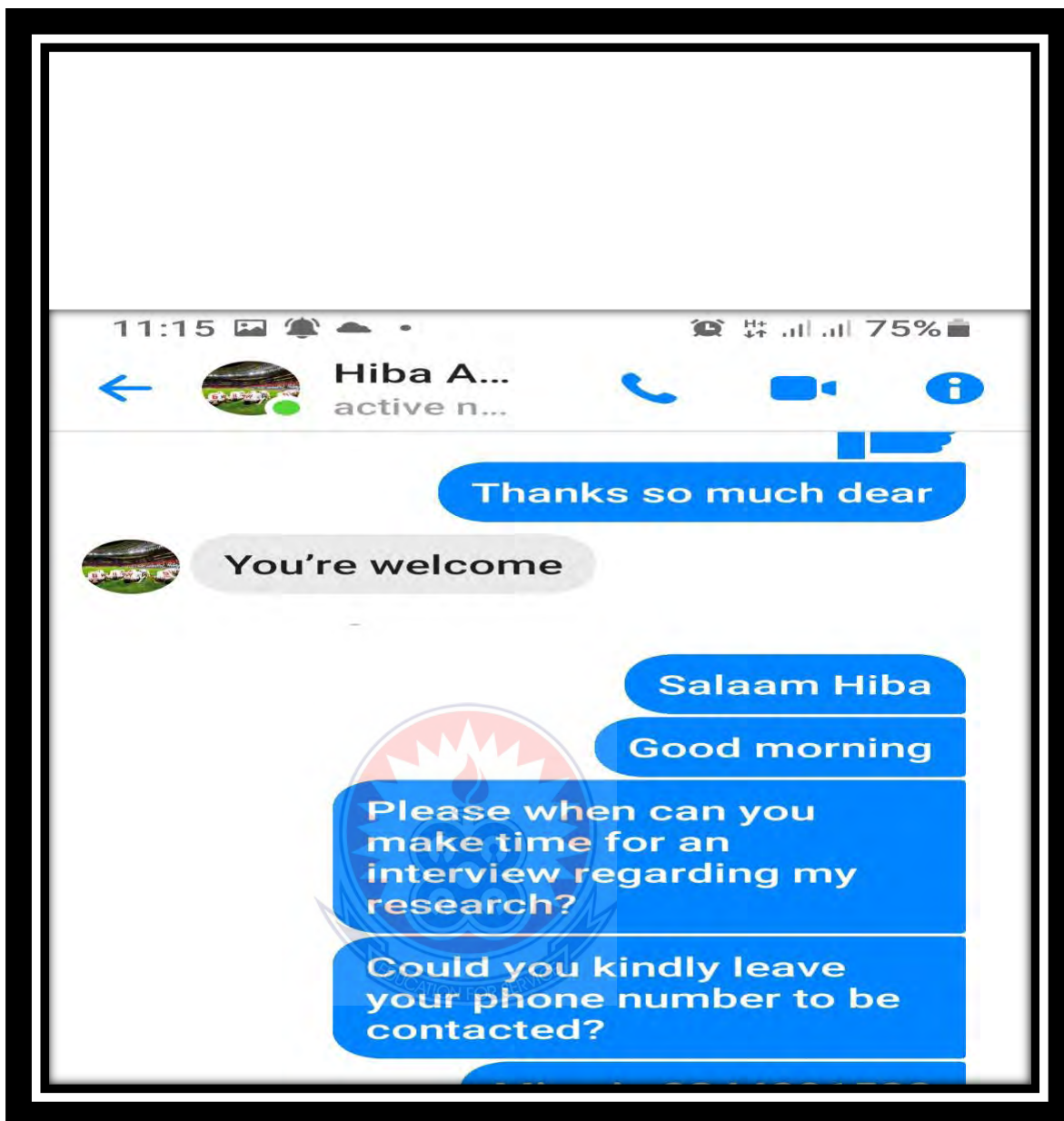
Screenshots of Facebook chat between the researcher and some participants

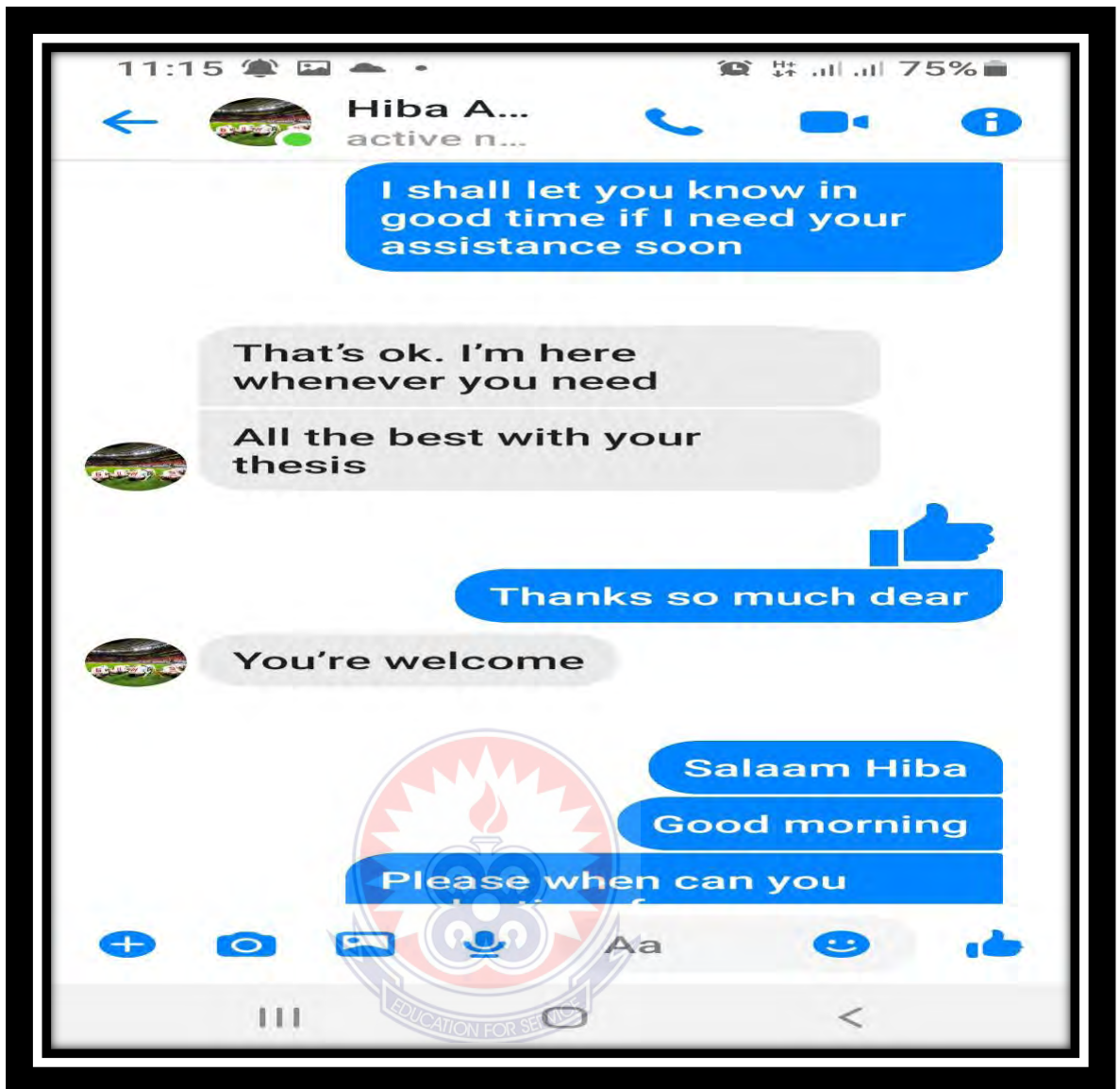












APPENDIX B

Interview guide

General background information

- Kindly tell me about yourself
- What do you do for a living?
- Are you married?
- Do you have children? If yes, how many?

1. What kind of identities do Muslimahs in Ghana construct on Facebook?

- How did you come to know about Facebook?
- When did you join Facebook?
- What was your motivation for joining Facebook?
- Describe the caliber of people on your Facebook friends list
- Can you share your thought on who a Muslimah woman is?
- How are you identified as a person with this faith?
- How have you self-constructed yourself before?
- What factors identify you on Facebook?
- Is the Hijab, pictures, language, assumptions, early marriage, polygamy etc are some assumed attributes of a Muslimah?

2. How do Muslimahs in Ghana construct these identities?

- How is a typical day on Facebook like?
- What else do you use Facebook for apart from meeting friends?
- What meanings come into your choice of profile pictures and cover photos?
Are you intentional about them?
- Social and society pressure/causes

- What do you consider fashion, moderate in appearance or ‘dressing to kill’?

3. What are the factors that account for the construction of these identities?

How often do you feel compelled to say or do something on Facebook?

Do you constantly share your beliefs and knowledge on Facebook?

- What do you consider before you send or accept a friendship request?
- How does fashion/trend affect your faith and or identity?
- Do you consider Muslim Women issues as rights issues?



APPENDIX C

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Muslimah- a Muslim woman

Hijab - a piece of cloth worn by practicing Muslim women to cover the hair, ears and neck, leaving the face uncovered

Deen – religion

Niqab- a piece of fabric, usually see-through, used to cover the face of a Muslim woman

Khimar- a piece of cloth meant for covering the head

