

**IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION ON WHATSAPP: A STUDY OF SELECTED
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION,
WINNEBA**



ERIC TERKPER KUTOR

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UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION ON WHATSAPP: A STUDY OF
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ERIC TERKPER KUTOR



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JULY, 2017



DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Eric Terkper Kutor, declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, 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: **DR. ANDY OFORI-BIRIKORANG**

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:.....

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to God Almighty, He who makes a way where there seem to be no way.



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ABSTRACT

This study examined identity construction on WhatsApp through the profiles of some selected undergraduate students in the University of Education, Winneba, Winneba Campus. The research was conducted qualitatively through interviews and observation of participants profiles on WhatsApp. Data collected included images of participants' WhatsApp profiles which were analysed textually and thematically. The study was anchored on the Theories of Symbolic Interactionism, Identity Theory and Goffman's Presentation of Self. The study found that, religion, self and personal interest, family, business, friendship and relationship, and institutional/socio-academic group affiliations were the main identities constructed on WhatsApp by participants. These identities were mainly constructed through the use of tools such as text, pictures and picture-text images on their profiles. It was also found that the identities constructed on WhatsApp were not free from influences such as participants; friends, family, religion and the 'self'. From the study, it was revealed that religion and the self as well as comments from family and friends on participants' profiles influence the identities they construct on WhatsApp.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Global enthusiasm for mobile, digital communication equipment including smartphones has been phenomenal (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) and has diffused quickly into all aspects of our lives. According to the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) estimation in 2014, there are almost seven billion mobile phone subscriptions at the global level and three quarters of these subscriptions are from developing countries such as Ghana. Also, according to Deloitte's estimation, smartphone sales and usage crossed the 1 billion and 2 billion marks respectively at the end of 2013 (Deloitte, 2013). The popularity of mobile technology devices has transformed their use into an almost mandatory part of the human body in modern life with most people taking their phones everywhere they go (Bullock, 2013).

Similarly, according to Nielson (2010a), the use of social media and social networking applications have also increased with young people being the first adopters and the most frequent users of email, social networking sites (SNSs) and instant messaging (IM) applications. Mobile Messaging (also referred to as Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) or Mobile Chat) – refers to IM services that are developed specifically for use on mobile devices, and typically serve as alternatives to SMS messaging. Some examples of Mobile IM applications include: Apple iMessage, BlackBerry Messenger, Facebook, WhatsApp, Kik Interactive and others (The Radicati Group, 2015).

Instant Messaging is becoming a mainstay for online one-to-one communication (Baron, 2004). IM differs from other online textual communication channels, such as

email and chatrooms. Firstly, IM users mainly engage in messaging with known persons in their contact. One-to-One and small group chat characterizes its use within peer groups where it is considered an essential communication tool. A study on IM communication among young and older adolescents found that it is predominantly used among individuals and their real space friends““ being people known to the user in face-to-face physical settings, such as old secondary school mates, members of individual’s religious and groups or mere friends (Grinter & Palen, 2002).

Worldwide IM user accounts grew from over 3.2 billion in 2015 and expected to reach over 3.8 billion users by year-end 2019. By this projection, it presupposes an average yearly growth rate of about 4 percent (The Radicati Group, 2015). IM is popular among young people especially users within 18–27 years age group (Shiu & Lenhart, 2004). Therefore online communication in general, and IM in particular, has become a common way for young people to communicate with peers, friends and family and also become a key tool for students to stay connected with existing friends and family (Mesch, Talmud & Quan-Haase, 2012).

Not only is it popular among young people but also very popular among undergraduate students (Judd & Kennedy, 2010) especially in Ghana where according to Ainooson–Noonoo (2016) the use of mobile technologies in the senior high schools of Ghana is prohibited except at the tertiary institutions where students can fully use their mobile phones without any restriction.

A research conducted by Potgieter (2014) suggests the level of MIM dominance among student population aged 16 and 24 years is led by WhatsApp (79%), followed by BlackBerry Messenger (57%), Apple’s iMessenger (45%) and Mxit (28%). University

students, a subset of the age group cited above, use IM extensively. IM's extensive use among students have also been confirmed by another study of Canadian university students which showed that IM is enormously popular such that 97% of respondents confirmed as being users of IM applications (Quan-Haase, 2007).

Instant Messaging is a cross platform messaging application for smartphones which allows users to exchange messages without having to pay for SMS. It is considered a synchronous form of communication, where users send a message to other users of the application and receive replies instantly thus engaging in an almost instantaneous text-based communication (Baron, 2004; Faulhaber, 2002). Instant Messaging is generally free or inexpensive, immediate, easy to use and accessible on a wide range of different platforms and devices (The Radicati Group, 2015).

Among other features of IM applications include a "pop-up" mechanism to display messages the moment they are received, a visible list of contacts compiled by the user and an indicator to signal the user when his or her contacts are available online (Alvestrand, 2002). Another unique feature of IM applications is the ability of a user to engage in multiple conversations with contacts simultaneously thus allowing dyadic conversations and group chats (Grinter & Palen, 2002).

Since IM users know each other and share experiences in face-to-face interactions, this same interaction is similar to that which takes place online. In this regard, communication and identity construction and self presentation in real life is performed in the virtual world aided by instant messaging applications (Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Grinter & Palen, 2002). IM removes the physical "gating features" such as stigmatized appearance, stuttering, shyness usually experienced in face-to-face settings,

thus enabling all and especially certain disadvantaged people to bypass the usual obstacles that prevent them from constructing desired identities in face-to-face settings (McKenna et al., 2002).

As in every human interaction, both in face-to-face and in online, Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) assert that individuals involved in these interactions portray their hoped-for possible selves, being the socially desirable identity an individual would like to establish. The actualization of hoped-for possible selves can also be blocked by the presence of physical “gating features,” such as unattractive appearance, stuttering or shyness that are associated with certain people during face-to-face interactions but can be eliminated completely online. Therefore online communication applications like WhatsApp provide a conducive environment for individuals who hitherto are restricted in face-to-face interactions to actualize their identities.

1.2 WhatsApp

According to Jisha and Jebakumar (2014) WhatsApp has become an extension of today’s youth’s life. It is extremely difficult to do without and has become sort of a necessity. It enables youth get in touch with friends and family while satisfying their need for information, entertainment and educational purposes as a whole to harmonize their lives.

As such, as WhatsApp has witnessed worldwide growth in recent years, it allows users or groups to receive and send real-time messages in the form of texts, images, emoticons, audio and videos based on wireless network connection which become a major threat to the previously dominant short message service SMS (Sahota, 2014; Church & de Oliveira, 2013).

WhatsApp Messenger is a messaging application for smartphones created in 2009 by two former Yahoo employees, Brian Acton and Jan Koum. The name “WhatsApp” is a pun on the phrase “What’s Up”. It is one of the most successful messaging apps to date with an unprecedented growth story that relied on little marketing (Business of Apps, 2015). The application since its inception to date has more than 1 billion people in over 180 countries that use WhatsApp to stay in touch with friends and family anytime and anywhere in the world provided the user has internet connection on his or her device and installed the application. WhatsApp is free and offers simple, secure, reliable, messaging, calling and recently video calling features available on smartphones all over the world (WhatsApp, 2016).

The application is so easy to use after downloading, it shows you who is using WhatsApp in your contacts and also helps those who are yet to download and use WhatsApp for messaging, sharing audio files, video files, updating status (Jisha & Jebakumar, 2014).

According to Jisha and Jebakumar (2014) WhatsApp is so popular among youth because, it offers unlimited texts to their friends and family members at no cost other than their internet data plan that they already use in their smart phones. Also the relative cost-free nature clearly explains the success of WhatsApp in addition to its function across different smartphone types such as Apple, Android et cetera and its international functionality are also important contributors to WhatsApp’s popularity (Montag et al., 2015)

About one billion messages were being sent in a single day by its users as of February, 2013, the app reached 200m active users and Sequoia invested another 50

million dollars after its initial 8 million dollar investment in April, 2011. The additional investment in WhatsApp Inc. is indications of the funders believe that it is a promising venture especially shortly after its establishment increasing the company's value to 1.5 billion dollars. WhatsApp hit 600 million active users in January, 2015 making it the most popular messaging application as at the time and rose to 900 million by September, 2015.

The company was acquired by Facebook in February 2014 for \$19bn (business of Apps, 2015) nonetheless continues to operate as a separate app with keen focus on building a messaging service that works fast and reliably anywhere in the world (WhatsApp, 2016).

As of February 2016, users of WhatsApp were sending more than 1.6 billion photo messages per day. The app also enables the sending and receiving of voice and video messages (Statista, 2016). Also, its use has risen to more than 1 billion monthly active users, up from over 700 million in January, 2015. WhatsApp is not only seeing increasing adoption rate in Ghana but also significantly impacting the culture, the people and the society at large (Salkovic, 2015).

According to Salkovic (2015), WhatsApp is deeply impacting and transforming Ghanaian society in the area of interpersonal communications such that relationships are enacted, experienced, performed and maintained online as a lot of young people's day-to-day interactions have moved from face-to-face to WhatsApp (Gu et al., 2012; Schwarz, 2011).

1.3 Identity construction

Identity researchers have proposed that a person's identity is a collection of role identities (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Role identities are essentially role-specific self-descriptions made up of the characteristics a person ascribes to him/herself in a particular social role (Burke & Tully, 1977) which the person or individual wants to be known by others.

As such, Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012) have identified varying aspects of the self which include affective (self-feelings), cognitive (self-images) and behavioral (self presentation and self-disclosure) components. These identities of young people according to scholars such as Brown (2007) are enacted and understood via self-presentation in offline (face-to-face) or online (computer mediated) environments. Such self-presentation according to Manago et al.'s (2008) study carried out among some college students present on MySpace explained that they use comments and photos to present aspects of their personal, social and gender as well as status updates to express their identities (Manago et al., 2012). Recent studies have also shown that identity-related explorations especially among the youth are migrating to online spaces (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam & Dennis, 2015).

According to Bargh and McKenna (2004) some individuals find it easier to disclose their inner feelings in online communication than in face-to-face interactions, thus suggesting that, online communication is suitable for maintaining and even developing closeness between both individuals one knows and strangers alike.

So, for the youth, online identity affords them the opportunity to break free from the restrictions, norms and values of the society in which they belong by providing the

opportunity to construct themselves in their preferred forms (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). This freedom can sometimes lure university students by the impersonal nature of computer-mediated technologies to share their information with all and sundry without an idea of the negative consequences to their offline identities (Shafiea, Nayan & Osman, 2012).

According to Kapidzic and Herring (2011) the view that online communication is a space where the constraints of offline or face-to-face communication norms and restrictions of interaction, identity and behavior are eliminated is not wholly true as some research have repeatedly found that such characteristics of offline communication is carried over into online environments and shape self-presentation online such as a user's selection of profile pictures which may be influenced, consciously or unconsciously.

Self and identity are sometimes used interchangeably and other times used to refer to different things. This ambiguity extends to whether the self and identity is singular or plural; that is, whether there is one or multiple selves, identities and self-concepts (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012) of an individual. As a concept, identity is complex. It includes how a person sees oneself as well as how one notices the interactions between the self and others (Hall, 2004) in society or during interactions.

Roberts and Donahue (1994) conceptualize that the total identity is comparable to the general self-concept. Both involve a full description of the attributes related with each individual's social world. The difference between specific role identities and the general self lies in how people describe themselves. So, an individual may take on any identity he or she wishes others to view or perceive him or her. General self-descriptions require that people combine their attributes from several specific role identities into a single overall

rating. Thus, the single general self-rating represents a unique combination of role specific information. It is therefore suggested that the general self reflects to a large extent those role identities that are relatively most important to the individual. Therefore, an individual who considers political affiliation as very important may portray identities to show the importance of the political party as part of the general self of that individual. Hence, one would expect that the similarity between role-identity descriptions and general self-descriptions would be a function of factors such as role commitment and satisfaction.

Each of us has a range of different, cross-cutting, social identities, including those derived from highly meaningful and clearly delineated groups for example as university student as well as those referring to more abstract and perhaps ambiguous social categories such as strong belief in being African. An important result of the different portrayal of the self to others then emerge depending on which identity is most salient (Crisp & Hewstone, 2001).

Self-presentational performance by any individual is intended to create, modify or maintain an impression of that individual in the minds of others. By this, whenever we are attempting to lead people to think of us in a particular way, we are engaging in self-presentation (Eliot, 2013) be it in face-to-face interaction or online in a virtual environment. In the present era of webcams and digital photography, a social networking application user has available nearly unlimited number of potential photos from which to choose from; one can take multiple pictures all in an attempt to capture the right effect as other users tend to judge the attractiveness and the personality of profile owners based on

how users present themselves through photographs online (Walther, Van Der Heide & Kim, 2008).

Identities are the qualities and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). Identities are orienting, they provide a meaning-making lens and focus one's attention on some but not other features of the immediate context (Oyserman, 2007), hence, identity are the sign posts that are capable of giving people an idea of where an individual is headed.

Identity is also an important part of the self-concept. Self-concept is the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings in reference to oneself as an object (Rosenberg, 1986) and identity is that part of the self by which one is known to others (Altheide, 2000). Typically, the construction of an identity is purely a public process that involves identity announcement" made by the individual claiming an identity and identity placement" made by others who give approval and associate the individual to the claimed identity. An identity construction process is complete when there is a coincidence of placements and announcements" (Stone, 1981, p. 188 as cited in Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). In constructing an identity online by presenting the self to others, Baumeister (1982) argues that people engage in self-presentation for two reasons: (1) to please their contacts and (2) to construct one's public self. The first motive for self-presentation being to please their contacts and the need to belong is the most common idea of what is involved in self-presentation on WhatsApp.

Identities are not the fixed markers people assume them to be but are instead dynamically constructed in the moment of time. Therefore an individual's preferred identity of say a "studious student" at one point may differ in another situation where that

same individual may prefer a religious or ethnic identity in another situation (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012).

According to Donath (1999), identity can be expressed online at any of these three levels. These are; true identity, pseudonymity, anonymity:

True identity: This level of online identity is the most basic unit of self in the offline world—a person’s true identity. Expressed through a profile that shows the individual’s real name, real demographic information and real pictures.

Pseudonymity: Users of online platforms who fall in this category have some level of anonymity with the ability to accrue a reputation. A user usually creates a fake name and images for his or her profile to represent the user and his or her online activities.

Anonymity: Considered as the fullest level an individual can conceal identity online, the individual refrains from sharing any type of information be it name, location or images on his or her profile online.

Identity construction and presentation are public announcements made either explicitly or implicitly. While explicit identity statements often take the form of personal descriptions given by the users, implicit identity statements can be found in the impressions given-off by the users to others. For example, by selectively listing one’s affiliations with certain groups, activities, or hobbies, an individual is implicitly making an identity statement about him or herself (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008).

1.4 University of Education, Winneba

The University of Education, Winneba (UEW) was established in September, 1992 as a University College under PNDC Law 322. University of Education Act, Act

672 was enacted on May 14, 2004 to upgrade the status of the University College of Education of Winneba to the status of a full University.

As University College of Education of Winneba, there were seven diploma awarding colleges located in different towns in Ghana. These Colleges were: the Advanced Teacher Training College, the Specialist Training College and the National Academy of Music, all at Winneba; the School of Ghana Languages, Ajumako; the College of Special Education, Akwapim-Mampong; the Advanced Technical Training College, Kumasi; and the St. Andrews Agricultural Training College, Mampong-Ashanti.

The three Colleges in Winneba now referred to as the Winneba campus is the main campus of the University which hosts the seat of the Vice-Chancellor with satellite campuses at Kumasi, Asante-Mampong and Ajumako. These satellite campuses focus on specific disciplines such as Business and Technology, Agriculture and Health, Languages and the Education respectively although the lines between these disciplines are getting blur by the year as some programmes are duplicated on more than one campus of the university.

Presently, the university has a total of Fifty-Seven Thousand, Five Hundred and Ninety-Three (57, 593) students studying by full-time, sandwich and distance modes with a gender ratio of 36% females to 61% males (UEW, 2016).

1.5 Statement of the problem

A large part of interpersonal interaction has recently been relocated to instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp application and phone text-messages (Schwarz, 2011). WhatsApp is the most popular mobile messaging app worldwide as of April 2016,

based on the number of monthly active users of the application estimated at 215 million (Statista, 2016).

Today, young people entering university are so used to new technology so much that it has become an integral part of the way they live, think and communicate (Jones & Healing, 2010; Simoneaux & Stroud, 2010); and are heavily immersed in social media such as social networking, shared photos, instant messaging and discussion groups (Bicen & Cavus, 2011).

The term “digital natives” is one of the most prominent terminologies in recent years used to describe this new group of students entering universities who are described to be essentially different from previous generations because of their constant and frequent use of digital technologies (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b). WhatsApp as a new media application has been widely adopted among higher education students in Ghana as a preferred medium of communication especially among peers and family (Adu-Kumi, 2016). The high adoption of WhatsApp by students is not only for communication among their friends and family but also allows these students to construct and maintain their identities.

A lot of research works have been done globally on the WhatsApp application focusing on varying issues. For example, Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) conducted an exploratory research on WhatsApp use between teachers and high school students for communication employing a qualitative method. Their findings suggest that WhatsApp groups are used for four main purposes: communicating with students; nurturing the social atmosphere; creating dialogue and encouraging sharing among students and as a learning platform.

Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) also referred to educational advantages, such as the creation of a pleasant environment and an in-depth acquaintance with fellow students, which had a positive influence upon the manner of conversation. The members of the anonymous groups used the personal messaging function of WhatsApp for assessment, whereas the non anonymous groups used the group chat function of the application. WhatsApp was confirmed to be a valid tool for peer assessment, and it was shown that the required anonymity of the method was appropriate for the task. The students' perceived attitudes toward the procedure were found to be rather high, with no significant difference identified between the sophomores and junior groups related to the procedure.

Some studies have also been conducted on WhatsApp in the Ghanaian context including one by Tawiah, Nondzor and Alhaji (2014) who investigated the usage of WhatsApp and voice calls to determine the preference of polytechnic students in Ghana in which they collected data from a sample of 600 students in three polytechnic institutions now Technical Universities. They concluded that students' attention is switching to WhatsApp application as the preferred mode of their day-to-day communications than voice calls on mobile phones especially in communications involving peers and mates.

Yeboah and Ewur (2014) also investigated the impact of WhatsApp Messenger usage on students' performance in tertiary institutions in Ghana. They sought to empirically identify the impact of WhatsApp on the performance of tertiary students in Ghana from the perspective of the students. The researchers interviewed 50 students from five tertiary institutions as well as 500 questionnaires administered to students from same institutions. Their findings show that, WhatsApp has impacted negatively on the

academic performance of tertiary students in Ghana contrary to its basic use of improving communication among individuals. Other findings include, WhatsApp takes much of students study time, resulting in procrastination related problems, poor spellings and grammar, reduces student concentration during lectures and also distracts students from finishing their assignments including difficulty adhering to their private studies time table.

Adu-Kumi (2016) also investigated WhatsApp as a site for sexual exploration among College Students in Ghana. Using the mixed method research and drawing on Uses and Gratifications, the study surveyed 314 students, along with in-depth interviews with eight respondents from the College to investigate the practice of viewing and circulating sexually explicit materials on WhatsApp. His findings assert that, there is no statistically significant difference in sexual gratifications on WhatsApp.

Yee, Harris, Jabon, and Bailenson (2011) stated from their research that accurate identity can be created based on an individual's online profile. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) in their study of identity construction found that research in on online platforms like WhatsApp have not been well studied. From the preceding research works cited above, it is quite clear that most of the research works conducted on WhatsApp application focus largely on the communication, academic and academic performance and sexual exploration on WhatsApp.

This study therefore seeks to examine identity construction of undergraduate students of the University of Education, Winneba on WhatsApp to identify the kind of identities, how they construct these identities and the motivations for the identities constructed on WhatsApp.. WhatsApp users construct their identity through the selection

and emphasis placed on specific types of images and text uploaded as display profiles to variety of their contacts. Hence, these images and texts are the performances a user puts across to construct the desired identity to his or her audience.

1.6 Objectives of the study

The study seeks to:

1. Identify the kind of identities undergraduate students of UEW construct on WhatsApp.
2. Examine how undergraduate students of UEW use their WhatsApp profiles to construct their identities.
3. Examine the motivations for the identities constructed by undergraduate students of UEW on WhatsApp.

1.7 Research questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

- RQ1: What kind of identities do undergraduate students of UEW construct on WhatsApp?
- RQ2: How do undergraduate students of UEW use their WhatsApp profiles to construct these identities?
- RQ3: What are the motivations for the identities constructed by undergraduate students of UEW on WhatsApp?

1.8 Significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding on how identity is constructed on WhatsApp application among undergraduate students of the University of

Education, Winneba. Identity construction on WhatsApp does not only have to be for others only but also a way of constructing oneself.

Knowledge of how identity is constructed and maintained effectively can be applied not only to personal identity but to a larger extent personal branding and also in the area of marketing where one can better understand how to use images and text as a way of communicating and building a company's identity and image. The power of WhatsApp should therefore be harnessed mainly because of the possibilities it provides the user, whether that is a company or an individual user to alter and construct an identity and image desired.

Social networking sites such as instant messaging applications have now existed for several years but WhatsApp immediately became a success upon its launch in 2009. Studying and portraying how the application is used in constructing and maintaining identity will provide both academic and practical insights into the field of personal branding and marketing mainly by displaying the possibilities that exist with such a growing and powerful tool.

Findings from this research will be significant to all especially the youth as according to Davey, Envall, Gerner, Mahomes, Monroe, et. al. (2012) in this age, communication is gradually moving swiftly from face-to-face to computer mediated communication such as WhatsApp aided by technologies such as the cellphone and mobile devices have become the main source of everyday interactions and as such a guide to future research works on WhatsApp as an important communication application since it is evolving constantly.

With regard to students, this research will afford them the opportunity to understand how to perform their identities on WhatsApp in order to better manage these identities as they graduate and enter into the world of work. A concrete example is from Boyd (2014) who wrote in her book *It's Complicated* a young African American from South Central Los Angeles who wrote a college application letter about how he wished to get away from the gangs in his community, but had a social network account with gang-related imagery profile. The college admissions office contacted the young man inquiring why he would falsify in his admission essay while it was so easy to discover his 'true' self online.

In the area of employment, Baert (2015) suggests that employers are increasingly using personal information available on online social networks to make hiring decisions. This trend then means WhatsApp users need to understand how to effectively manage their identities when using the application in order to positively affect their careers.

1.9 Scope of the study

This study is focused on understanding how undergraduate students in the University of Education, Winneba construct their identities on WhatsApp Instant Messaging application. The study is limited to the Winneba Campus of the University of Education, Winneba. The University currently has four campuses at Winneba, Ajumako, Kumasi and Asante Mampong.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Computer mediated communication and identity construction

The twenty first century has been characterized by the prominence of computer mediated communication (CMC) technologies, so much so that today, most people spend several hours daily with these technologies (Lengel, 2011). Hopperton (2016 p.2) defines Computer-mediated communication (CMC) as “communication between people using computer technology as the medium, or interface, for that communication”. Verrijdt (2009), however, suggests there is much debate on the various benefits and dangers of CMC. In this regard, not only are today’s youth using this technology such as e-mail, Instant Messaging (IM) and Short Messaging Service (SMS) profusely but it also impacts their lives so much.

IM is a system of communication that is comparable to e-mail in some respects, but relatively different in others. Unlike e-mail, IM is a synchronous communication tool which affords users the opportunity to communicate in real time, as if they are in a face-to-face setting separated by a screen (Newman, 2007). Studies suggest its unprecedented growth and influence on interpersonal relationship on and offline (Lin, 2007). What started as an afterthought when the mobile phone created Short Message Service (SMS) due to poor appeal from users has taken the whole mobile experience to unimaginable limits (Underhill et al., 2001)

Gradually, I predict an era in about five years when CMC tools will replace conventional means of communication. E-mail has replaced letters, the SMS and Instant Messaging applications (WhatsApp) are gradually replacing phone calls and networking

sites like Facebook and WhatsApp have replaced social clubs. This assertion is supported by Lin, Sun, Lee and Wu (2008) in Taiwan showing that Junior High School students are predominantly using CMC as a means of strengthening their interactions in the offline world or in face-to-face settings. Construction of identity on CMC technology has been gaining grounds very fast that Cortini et al. (2004) in a research they conducted with almost 4000 SMSs concluded that communication via SMS serves to strengthen one's position as an individual within a group, and to thus affirm one's own identity.

CMC are primarily used as a means of expression or communication for young people who wish to express themselves, WhatsApp groups for example is perfect media that assist young people to express themselves through the formation of relevant groups on the application (Mullen & Wedwick, 2008).

Schouten, Valkenburg and Peter (2005) state that, the medium of communication influence the level of self-disclosure individuals gives out about themselves. They further suggested that text-based computer mediated communication such as WhatsApp, for example, is usually characterized by a very high level of self-disclosure as compared to face-to-face interactions. In sum, Individuals commonly expose private thoughts, feeling experiences and emotions in computer mediated communication platforms than in face-to-face settings (Papacharissi, 2009).

In constructing an identity in computer mediated platform, self-disclosure – a situation whereby a user uses the Display Profile (dp) function by selecting an image to self-disclose to others. According to Dindia (2002) using the dp accelerates the establishment and sustainance of social relationships by engendering liking and intimate feelings.

2.1.1 Computer mediated identities

Wang (2012) in his writing indicates that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is relevant to our understandings of the construction of the self because it offers us the opportunity to disclose aspects of ourselves to others and get feedback, serving as an important interpersonal and relational function (Tong & Walther, 2011).

CMC is characterised by its ability to enable and afford users the opportunity to be open or deceitful, thus producing a contradictory relation between identity and CMC (Leonard, Withers & Sherblom, 2010). Some initial research into CMC on the internet were of the view that, due to issues pertaining to anonymity, reduced social cues and absence of identity markers of age, race, gender and so on in text-based CMC, users would be able to use the internet to interact with others by constructing different identities that can be radically different from their offline identities (Wang, 2012). Indeed, when it comes to WhatsApp as a computer mediated communication platform the dp is subject to varied manipulation which falls in line with the preceding argument, users are capable of creating identities far different from themselves.

Turkle (1996) recognises the importance of identity construction and argues that the disembodied and anonymous interactions in these virtual, text-based environments can be considered as workshops for persons to construct their identities. With the freedom available to individuals, computer mediated identity researchers such as Turkle (1994) interrogates the convention that interactions and construction of identities in CMC is free from the influence of offline social contacts. In fact, Subrahmanyam et al. (2009) established that online environments are ‘psychologically connected’ to offline

environments, contesting the notion that, since the online activities are disembodied, they are consequently disembodied from lives offline.

Researchers such as this are becoming more and more interested in learning how young individuals construct their identities online such as the exploration, performance, play, construction, maintenance and even subversion of aspects of their identities with a focus on how the display profile (dp) of selected undergraduate students of UEW construct their identities through the use of their dp on WhatsApp; an online instant messaging application. Such profiles are communicative tools and suggested by Boyd and Heer (2006) as a medium for a continuous conversation between individuals as the dp are changed from time to time. The importance of photographs in CMC as a form of self-disclosure in constructing identities is known; the visual cues in photographs reveal as much rich information about the self as verbal communications (Donoso & Ribbens, 2010). Images used as dp in WhatsApp are a way to represent memories of what are important to the individual which tend to form personal meaning, express the self, ideas and emotions that may not be easily spoken (Suler , 2009).

2.2 Photos as identity construction “tools”

According to Coe (1973), the practice of personal photography was unpopular until the introduction of the Kodak roll film camera onto the US mass market in 1888 by American George Eastman. Prior to that time, photography was a pursuit of the middle class which signified their symbolic class wealth and cultural capital of appreciation of the art and science (Burgess, 2007).

After a successful entry of Kodak into the mass market, the camera promoted through advertising intensified targeting to motivate the middle class: tourists,

sportsmen, bicyclists, men who went boating, animal lovers to continue documenting their leisure pursuits (Taylor, 1994). This era can be said to be the beginning of the “democratization” process of the camera to all aided by the what according to Rubinstein & Sluis (2008) are the two digital camera innovations which brought down the barriers to amateurs engaging in photography being delay between taking a picture followed by waiting period before finally viewing it in print from the photo laboratory as well as the cost of each print of photo taken as photographs taken during these periods can only be viewed after processing but current photographs can be viewed on screen on the smartphone or digital cameras.

Further technological innovations as stated by Murray (2008) of the camera broadened and segmented the market leading to the transformation of photography 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.

New digital photographic devices being smaller, more affordable, more flexible coupled with the ever increasing automation has come to expand the potential of the already existent culture of photography (Chandler & Livingston, 2012), providing photographers, both amateurs and professionals for a larger image production.

These new digital photographic devices were soon incorporated into a wide range of other technologies, but their integration with the cellphone and presently smartphones has deeply impacted our relationship with photography. By merging with smartpones that have become almost inseparable from its users, photography is placed in the centre of the everyday experience (Martin, 2009) departing from the professional arena into daily use

of most people. Regardless of any individual's technical skills, one can create impressive images which with the aid of smartphones can be easily transmitted and shared online.

As Van Dijck (2008) rightly puts it, taking photographs seems to no longer serve its initial purpose of memory, intended to preserve a family's pictorial heritage, but increasingly becoming a tool for an individual's identity formation and communication. Photography's function as a means for identity formation although duly acknowledged was always rated secondary to its prime purpose of memory (Sontag, 1973).

To the contrary, other research findings suggest that photographs favor the function of communication and identity formation at the expense of photography's use as a tool for recollection (Garry & Gerrie, 2005).

Schiano, Chen and Isaacs (2002) in their survey of how teens take, view, share and store photos found out that the majority of teens indicated that they enjoy sharing digital photos of friends or family frequently via email or IM and further suggested that teens—like adults use photos less to capture reality than to communicate. It is from this communication that identity is constructed with peers and family with whom an individual interacts with in his or her social setting.

Young people now appear to take less interest in sharing photos as objects than in sharing them as experiences differing from the previous generation who spend time and effort in building up collections of pictures for future reference (Kindberg, Spasojevic, Fleck & Sellen, 2005). For example, an individual travelling as a tourist in Ghana may take photos of interesting and unique places to show and in so doing is constructing an identity in the minds of relations the individual is connected to by communicating and sharing that experience through photos.

2.2.1 Display profile (DP), profile picture or photo

Self-presentation online takes place primarily on WhatsApp and other social networks platforms through profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Profile photos on WhatsApp according to Rettberg (2014) change regularly, either as users take fresh selfies they like, as they use the images in profile picture to show support for a political cause, friend, friends, family or a group, or as they find that they are changing and want new representations of themselves.

One of the major steps in creating a WhatsApp account is to upload a profile photo. Photographs usually used are often those taken of us by other people for our profile pictures but in simple terms, a profile picture is a visual expression of identity, and our selection and use of profile photos is clearly a form of visual self-representation and identity construction on WhatsApp. WhatsApp Profile pictures do not always show an individual's face. Occasionally these profile pictures show a connection of an individual to a social group or political other interests (Rettberg, 2014).

Young people tend to show their real identity on these social networking sites through photographs and other information that they provide about themselves (Zhao et al., 2008) to construct their identities. Additional way of using the profile picture or image as an identity construction tool is by using a picture showing the profile holder or WhatsApp user with an acquaintance, friend, a child, a lover or a group of friends (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011). Several users even use photos of themselves as a child, or a photo of their kids instead of a photo of themselves, in a move that at the same time anonymises them a little.

Peluchette and Karl (2008) suggest a difference in the profile images of young males from females. In a research of profiles pictures on several social networking sites, such as Facebook, these researchers indicate that female participants from the U.S. informed them of using “cute” pictures, while their male counterparts used more pictures they describe as self-promoting (Peluchette and Karl, 2008 p. 4).

2.3 WhatsApp and identity construction

Like most Instant Messaging applications, WhatsApp application operates on smartphones and recently on computers but that has to still be enabled with a smartphone and a phone number to activate the service. Once activated, the application scans the user’s phone contacts with permission and enabling the user to see and communicate with other WhatsApp users in their list of contacts. Once the application is installed and setup, the service is continually connected once there is internet data connection available without an option to log off from the application except disconnecting internet data on the phone.

The user sets up a profile photo using images from the gallery of the phone either downloaded from sources on the internet or images taken from the camera of the mobile phone. Fridgen (1987) defines image as “a mental representation of an object, person, place, or happening which is not physically in front of the observer” (p.102). The user is offered the freedom to use any image which is unrestricted except with technical size specifications allowed by the application. These images are commonly referred as “display profile” by the application which can be updated as and when needed (Salkovic, 2015).

According to (Rettberg, 2014, p.40) a “profile picture is a visual expression of identity, and our choice of profile photos is clearly a form of visual self-representation” and like most self-representations in digital media, profile photos are part of a serial and cumulative visual communication. Access to another WhatsApp user’s phone number gives any user of the application the opportunity to view other users profiles unnoticeable unless the security settings on the application are set to prevent this situation.

Accordingly, an identity is constructed of the self, modified and played in interactions with other people and it is often in our best interest to influence the impressions that others form of us using images selected as profiles pictures to present the desired image (Tufekci, 2008).

Identity is constructed on WhatsApp when one engages in self-presentation and becomes the stage on which one presents a public image of the self to others and attempts to control the impressions that others form of us (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010). Online self-presentation goes beyond text-based descriptions with the profile photograph being a central part of online self-presentation (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Visual content such as photos displayed online plays an important part of self-presentation, prior research suggests that users are very conscious of picture selection and they use photos not only to visualize their looks, but also to emphasize qualities that are very important to them (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006).

The role of images is of great importance and especially on a virtual interactive platform like WhatsApp can add new dimensions to the possibilities of projecting images. Different people have different understandings, which they bring to the viewing

of an image. Symbols within images will mean different things to different people at different times (Lindahl & Öhlund, 2013).

According to Shafie, Nayan and Osman, (2012) social network profiles act as identity substitutions for university students to replace their real interests with peer influenced interests in their profiles which was cited in their work from the study of Latisha et al. (2011) which found that university students in Malaysia for instance value their social connectedness to the extent that they are willing to trade their privacy in order to be well-connected in social networks. Hence these students choose peer-approved identity as their online identities.

According to Donath (1999) virtual or online identity can be expressed at any of these three levels: (1) True identity: This level of online identity is the most basic element of self in the physical world—a person's true identity. With this level an individual's true identity is expressed online by creating a profile that includes information such as the individual's real name, real and real pictures. (2) Pseudonymity: This level allows the individual a level of anonymity with the ability to construct a reputation. The individual creates a fake name or a "handle" that is used to represent his or her online contributions. Under pseudonymity, the individual often creates an identity that does not reflect his or her true identity. (3) Anonymity: This is the fullest level of true identity obscurity; an individual in this category does not share any type of identifying information. They do not construct any identity in online social platforms such as WhatsApp as those who might choose a pseudonym. Such individuals can be said not to have any identity on line.

2.4 Identity

The term "identity" is ubiquitous in contemporary social science, cutting across most academic disciplines such as psychoanalysis, psychology, political science, sociology and history. The common usage of the term identity, however, belies the considerable inconsistency in both its conceptual meanings and its theoretical role.

Some use identity to refer essentially to the culture of a people; indeed they draw no distinction between identity and for example, ethnicity. Thus they obscure the theoretical purpose of its introduction. Others use identity to refer to common identification with a collectivity or social category, as in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982). Finally, some use the term with reference to parts of the self, composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies.

Burke and Reitzes (1981) note some distinctive features of identities. First, identities are social products that are shaped, sustained and established through the processes of 1) naming or locating the self in social categories 2) interacting with others in terms of these categories and 3) engaging in self-presentation and altercating to convey and approve the imports and behavioral implications of the social categories. Second, identities are self-meanings (Burke & Tully, 1977) that are developed in certain circumstances and are constructed on the similarities and differences of a role in relation to its counter-roles (Turner 1956). Third, identities are symbolic, calling up in one person the same responses as are called up in others. Finally, identities are reflexive such that, individuals can use images on their WhatsApp dp to construct their identities as reference

points to evaluate the implications of their own behavior including the behavior of others in their WhatsApp contacts they interact with.

Identities are a source of motivation to the individual involved, particularly actions that result in the social confirmation of an identity (Hull & Levy, 1979). An identity becomes motivated (invoked) in a social setting like WhatsApp platform when a person perceives that the meanings of the situation match the meanings of an identity. For example, “entering a church may activate one’s Catholic identity because the meanings of the environment match the meanings of the identity” (Carter, 2013 p. 204).

Individuals categorize and identify themselves through various ways, this could be in terms of an individual’s enduring qualities such as being sincere, gentle, intellectual; their leisure time activities like footballer, athlete, guitarist; their physical appearance including plump, short, tall, good-looking; their membership in broad social groups for example ethnic extraction, Ghanaian, African, Catholic; and their social roles such as student, spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, employee among other attributes (Thoits, 2013).

Walker (2016) asserts that the key or main motivation behind an individual’s construction of identity on WhatsApp for example is self-enhancement, this he argues impacts an individual’s psychological well-being. From this argument, it means individuals in the process of constructing identities tend to seek the portrayal of an overall positivity of the identities that they construct to satisfy their desire to create, sustain or increase the positivity of their self-concept. Blaine and Crocker (1993) found that individuals are inclined to interpret their actions in ways that show positively on the self or guard one’s self image from undesirable portrayals. The preceding argument

suggest that, individuals in the construction of their identities on WhatsApp, for example, will use images that give them positive attributes in line with the positive outcomes to their own appearances and also highlight negative consequences to situational reasons that are out of their control.

2.4.1 Role identities

Symbolic interactionists such as Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902) considered the self to be a product of social interaction, in that, people come to know who they are through their interactions with others; in this perspective, a core mechanism is that of "taking the role of the other." Because people tend to interact in groups, it is perhaps not surprising that people may have as many distinct selves as there are distinct groups whose opinions matter to them (James, 1950).

In identity theory, the self is viewed not only as an autonomous psychological entity but also as a multifaceted social construct that emerges from people's roles in society; variation in self-concepts is due to the different roles that people occupy. Stryker therefore proposes that we have distinct components of self, called role identities, for each of the role positions in society that we occupy (Stryker, 1980). Individuals have for a long time, according to Turner (1978), commonly had "multiple identities" and conceptualization of themselves as a result of the numerous roles they play. For example, a person's role identities may include the fact that she is a mother, a wife, a daughter, a student and entrepreneur. So, those identities to which one is extra committed, with greater salience and which are closely linked to other identities of the individual tend to be more stable.

Role identities are self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a result of the societal roles or positions they occupy, and through a process of labeling or self- definition as a member of a particular social category (Thoits, 1991). Roles, are sets of expectation guiding performances that are considered appropriate by others (Simon 1992). So that on WhatsApp, satisfactory performance of roles not only confirms and approves a person's status as a role member (Callero 1985) but also shows positively on self-evaluation. Therefore, the view that one is performing a role acceptably should boost feelings of self-esteem, whereas perceptions of poor role performance may create doubts about one's self-worth, and may even produce symptoms of psychological pain (Thoits, 1991). Psychological pain may arise if response from others-in the form of comments suggested by others is perceived to be different with one's identity.

Role identities provide meaning for self, not only because they refer to concrete role specifications, but also because they distinguish roles from relevant complementary or counter roles (Lindesmith & Strauss, 1956). Ultimately it is through social interaction that identities actually acquire self-meaning; they are reflexive (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Others respond to a person in terms of his or her role identities. These responses, in turn, form the basis for developing a sense of self-meaning and self-definition. Identity is key in the formation of self-concept as in linking social structure with individual action; thus identity can lead to the prediction of behavior which depends on the relationship between self and social structure which is also an "active creator of social behavior" (Stryker, 1980 p.385).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

2.6 Symbolic interactionism

The interactionist tradition is connected with the works of diverse sociologists described as the “Chicago School,” including, W. I. Thomas, Robert E. Park and George Herbert Mead; whose approach was instrumental to the tradition (Adams & Sydnie, 2001).

The term Symbolic Interactionism (SI) is attributed to Herbert Blumer who came up with the term and the first to form Mead’s ideas into a cohesive theory. This is the result from his work which focused on how humans take control of their lives as “acting people” in a society that is a “complex of ongoing activity” (Blumer, 1969, p.85).

Symbolic interactionism is built upon these three assumptions: 1) communication occurs through the creation of shared significant symbols; 2) the self is constructed through communication; and 3) social activity becomes possible through the role taking process, which is initiated when children begin to pretend to take the roles of others (Mead, 1932). It is through this interaction that individuals learn to see themselves through the eyes of others.

Flowing from the above assumption which forms the foundation of Symbolic interactionism, Carter and Fuller (2016) state their position that SI is a theoretical perspective in sociology that examines the way by which society is shaped and sustained through face-to-face, frequent, meaningful exchanges between individuals. Such interactions or exchanges between individuals responsible in shaping society is carried forth in similar fashion on WhatsApp where a user interacts with his or her contacts through images used as display profile between a user and his or her contacts in a frequent, sustained and meaningful manner.

Blumer also asserted some three basic guidelines that have shaped the interactionist approach. First, individuals act in and to the social world including users of WhatsApp application who being in a virtual social world act towards their contacts on the basis of meaning making. Second, meaning from these interactions are not fixed or unchallengeable in the “give and take” of everyday life on WhatsApp as users of the application pursue their aims in collaboration and at some point too in conflict with others in the course of the interaction. And third, meaning is used, and frequently converted in a continuing process of interpretation in which self-consciousness forms a key part (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010 p. 2).

Human beings are symbolic persons, for whom linguistic symbols are the principal basis for creating, experiencing and acting meaningfully in social interactions. So therefore, a symbol is defined by Adams and Sydie (2001 p.3) as “abstract meanings attached to things, people, and behavior so that they can have different meanings for different individuals” also, Jackson II and Hogg, (2010 p. 2) as “anything—a word, an image, a gesture—that stands for something else”. These definitions of symbols as words and unlimited pictures forms the basis for an individual user to use singly or in combination to form his or her desired symbols as a dp image. An individual who uses a symbol induces thoughts, feelings and ideas in the minds of the contacts of a WhatsApp user.

Individuals according to Dingwall (2013) mostly react to stimuli as symbols, indications that require cognitive transformation before becoming the source of an action. Mead also emphasised the degree to which the meaning of acts was not derived from the actor's intention. A WhatsApp user may select a dp in an imagined anticipation of the

responses from his or her contacts. However, the meaning(s) from that dp would only develop or arise from the actual responses which might even lead to a revision or correction of the portrayed dp.

In sum, central to symbolic interactionist thought is the idea that individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others. Rather than addressing how common social institutions define and impact individuals, symbolic interactionists shift their attention to the interpretation of subjective viewpoints and how individuals make sense of their world from their unique perspective (Carter & Fuller, 2016).

2.7 Identity theory

Over the past years, Identity Theory (IT) has become a robust theory of the self (Burke & Stets, 2009). Researchers in this area have revealed a lot concerning how identities function within the self which is supported by abundant empirical evidence that shows how identities motivate behavior (Carter, 2013) but Identity theory emanates from the writings of George Herbert Mead, serving as a framework for the theory.

Mead's framework asserted a principle: "Society shapes self shapes social behavior." which provided the genesis for Identity theory by attempting to specify and make researchable the concepts of "society" and "self" in Mead's frame which coordinates these as explanations of specified behaviors (Stryker, 1968).

Identity theory is mainly a microsociological theory that sets out to provide meaning to an individual' role-related behaviours (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Identity theory according Stryker and Serpe (1982), explains social activities in terms of the mutual relations connecting self and society. The theory posits that role choices are

derived from identities so conceptualized and that identities within self are organized in a salience hierarchy to depict the importance of hierarchy to an individual in society. From Mead's "self reflects society" maxim implies that the self is multifaceted, made up of interdependent and independent, mutually reinforcing and inconsistent parts. Identity theory thus adopts James (1890) idea of individuals possessing several selves as the groups with which the individuals interact with. In short, the theorists chose identity theory to assert that individuals have several identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles.

Three relatively distinct usages of identity exist, some use identity to refer basically to the culture of a people where they show no distinction when it comes to, for example, identity and ethnicity. Others use identity in reference to general identification with a social category as supported by social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982). Finally, the term identity is also used in relation to the various parts of the self and the meanings that individuals attach to the several roles typically exhibited in highly differentiated contemporary societies. According to Ritter and Safron (2004) individuals call out identities based upon the relevance to the situation they find themselves. Upon invoking an identity, then the process known as identity verification is initiated (Stryker & Burke, 2000). In addition, an individual's portrayed identity such as images used on WhatsApp according to Burke and Stets (2009) holds a set of meaning known as identity standard which the individual works to verify that identity standard through further interaction on the WhatsApp platform towards the achievement of congruence of the portrayed identity and the situation.

Identity theory predicts that the probability of a certain identity being exhibited in a social interaction will be considerably influenced by the salience of the identity relative to the salience of other identities an individual holds. So, according to Stets (2006) an identity is an internal positional designation“ that represents meanings for actors which can be images used by individuals as their display profile (dp) to reflect this internal positional designation or to identify themselves as distinct (person identities), role occupants (role identities), or group members (social identities).

In identity theory, the self is spontaneous, in that, it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. This process in identity theory is called Identification. It is an individual's formation and expression of his or her uniqueness (MacCall & Simmons, 1978) and finally an identity is enacted. On WhatsApp, this process of identification is achieved through the use of images as display profile (dp) which is available to the user to select which ever image he or she wishes to use as an identification on the platform through which he or she forms an identity.

According to Burke and Reitzes (1991), identities act as cybernetic control systems which serve as a dissonance reduction mechanism in situations whereby individuals vary their performances to accomplish equivalence with their internalized identity standards. This process in turn reduces the psychological pain. Identity theory thus, predicts the social interaction as a cybernetic response loop through which individuals present themselves in agreement with an identity, get reactions from their interaction partner(s), and modify their supposed identities based on the reactions to achieve identity verification.

2.7.1 Identity salience hierarchy

Stryker, Serpe and Hunt (2005) argue that the self is made up of several identities ordered into a hierarchy of salience. Persons seek out situations in which they can construct their most salient identities (Stryker, 1980). The ordering or the probability of an identity being enacted is dependent on the individual's commitment to the identity and the commitment is also dependent on how often the particular identity is enacted. (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

Identity theory links role identities to behavioral and emotional outcomes, and acknowledges that some identities have more self-relevance to an individual than others. Identities are organized hierarchically in the self-concept with regard to the probability that they will form the basis for action. Those located near the top of the hierarchy have a higher likelihood to be invoked in a particular situation, and hence are more self-defining than those near the bottom (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

Identity salience is defined as the probability that a given identity will be invoked in social interaction (Stryker, 1968, 2003) or, on the other hand, as a high propensity to label circumstances in a manner so as to provide an opportunity to perform that identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Clearly, an identity motivates performance through images to represent that identity of an individual due to its high ranking on the individual's salience hierarchy (Carter, 2013).

Whether an identity is important depends on some factors, including salience which according to Stryker (1980) refers to the likelihood that an actor will enact the identity across situations. An identity's salience indicates its relative position in a hierarchy of salience ranked by its propensity of being called up: identity theory predicts

that a highly salient identity is likely to be enacted or to define a situation to promote its own enactment. But to the contrary where salience is conceptualized as a mindful ordering of identities, other theorists such as Burke and Reitzes (1991) and Stryker and Serpe (1994) are of the view that an identity is salient when it is invoked, irrespective of it being intentional or not.

Even though identity theory specifies plainly the hypothesis that salient identities produce role-congruent behaviour, Stryker (1968) accepts that in some situations, contextual demands may be so strong that the selection of behavior is determined solely by the circumstances rather than by identity salience.

Stryker and Serpe (1982) showed that the salience of religious identity for example predicts time spent in religious activities or frequency an individual use images that depicts an individual's religious affiliation on as dp on WhatsApp and the salience of religious identities is predicted by commitment to role relationships based on religion. Callero (1985) also provides an example to show that the salience of a donor identity predicts the regularity of blood donations. Some research works conducted by Serpe (1987); Serpe and Stryker (1993) indicate that frequently displayed identities may be attributable to the openness of the social structure or in the case of this research the freedom for one to enact several possible identities without any restriction on WhatsApp and for this reason these researchers suggest fluid changes in identity salience as a result of this freedom and tend to enact less identities when they are limited in options for their identities to portray leading to a more stable identity portrayal.

2.7.2 Subjective importance and invocation readiness identity salience

According to Thoits (2013) identity salience should be considered an umbrella term for two broad conceptions of salience: subjective importance and invocation readiness of identity salience, the former is linked to the subjective importance attached by an individual to each identity he or she calls forth and the latter linked to the individual's tendency to portray a specific identity within and across situations.

Some researchers who accept the subjective importance sense of identity salience do not clearly use the term salience. For example, McCall and Simmons (1978) describe role identities as arrayed in a hierarchy of prominence,“ which provides an idea of the degree to which each identity of an individual is supported by other people, the identity performance matches personal ideals, followed by commitment to the identity providing rewards from identity performance. Simply, the greater the rewards obtained from an identity, the higher prominence it is given in the individual's relatively stable, idealized self-structure.

Rosenberg (1979) also prefers the term psychological centrality,“ defining it as the importance attached by an individual to some identities over others he or she holds. Thus, Rosenberg structure view identities as a set of rings around the individual at the core; identities with higher importance occupy the inner set of rings, whereas identities with lower importance occupy the peripheral rings.

Others such as Callero (1985) and Thoits (1992) although employ the term salience as a direct referral to the personal, subjective importance that people attribute to each identity they hold. Thoits (1992) suggests a simple salience hierarchy“ in which multiple identities are gathered and rank ordered from maximum to minimum importance

to the self while Callero (1985) suggests identity salience is evaluated with a set of ratings.

On the other hand, invoking an identity means describing oneself to other people in terms of a specific role and choosing to enact that role when there are few behavioral constraints. For Stryker, identities that an individual is more readily to invoke in these ways rank high in an ordered hierarchy of salience; identities that are more unlikely to be displayed as self-descriptions or enactment preferences rank low.

In summary, identity theory postulates that self reflects the wider social structure insofar as self is a collection of identities derived from the role positions occupied by the person. Society in the form of role positions provides a person with a sense of self-meaning and influences social behavior through these role-related components of self. Hence the impact of society on behavior is mediated by self-referent role identities. In an extension to this basic proposition, identity theory distinguishes among identities in terms of their hierarchical position in a person's structure of identities—a distinction that is used to account for variation in behavioral choice and that has implications for affective outcomes. The relative salience of different identities, in turn, is based on the number and strength of important social relationships that depend on occupancy of specific roles. Central characteristics of identity theory are that 1) it represents a social psychological model of self in that social factors are seen to define self; 2) the social nature of self is conceived as derived from the role positions that people occupy in the social world; 3) in an enduring sense, these role identities are proposed to vary in regard to their salience; and 4) although identity theorists acknowledge that reciprocal links exist between self and society, they have been most interested in individualistic outcomes of identity-related

processes. The impact of role identities on relations with others has not been an important focus of the theory, and their influence on the broader social structure has not been spelled out clearly.

2.7.3 Identity prominence

McCall and Simmons (1978) adopt a multiple self, multiple identity viewpoint where they use the concept of identity prominence to illustrate major variations in selves and identities. So, for McCall and Simmons, there is no clear cut distinction in the function of prominence hierarchy and identity salience in connection to social behaviour except that, prominence hierarchy reflects the individual's ideal self. In their argument they assert that, although identities can be forced on individuals by members of the outside world, they are usually negotiated in interactive settings. Therefore while an individual may claim an identity, such as on WhatsApp, where a user may decide to use images which in his or her opinion reflects his or her preferred identity, others who she interacts with on the platform may not recognize this individual's claimed identity as individual's personal interpretation of an identity also is important (Brenner, Serpe & Stryker, 2014).

2.7.4 Identity commitment

Drawing on earlier research on identity of (Kanter,1972), Burke and Reitzes (1991) conceived commitment as the total of forces that guide an individual to sustain congruence between their identity and the external contribution members of one's social network. From this a user of WhatsApp application will ensure this congruence as they take contribution in the form of comments from members of their social group on WhatsApp.

These researchers propose two bases of commitment: cognitive commitment, which basically refers to the judgment of reward/cost ratio of maintaining an identity; and socioemotional commitment, which also refers to the level to which an individual's relationships with others depends on him or her depicting a particular identity. In sum, commitment to an identity can be considered by the social and personal "costs" related when detaching from satisfying the expectations of a particular identity (Stryker, 1981).

Commitment in identity theory proposes that the salience of a particular identity will be determined by the individual's commitment to that role. Commitment is thus defined as, the "degree to which the individual's relationships to particular others are dependent on being a given kind of person" (Stryker & Stratham, 1985 p.345), reflects the extent to which important significant others are judged to want the person to occupy a particular role position. Commitment to a particular role identity is high if individuals reason that many of their key social relationships depend on an individual's occupation of that role. The consequence of detaching from such a role is loss of a social network that is psychologically important.

Stryker (1980) recognized two types of commitment: 1) interactional commitment, giving the number of roles related with an identity (the extensivity of commitment) and 2) affective commitment, which deals with the importance of the relations connected with the identity, or, the level of affect related to the potential loss of these social contacts (the intensivity of commitment). The strength of commitment an individual has towards a particular identity in both affective more strongly committed a person is to an identity-in terms of both interactional and affective commitment-the higher the level of identity salience will be.

In terms of network relationships, the more fully a person's important social relationships are based on occupancy of a particular identity, in comparison with other identities, the more salient that identity will be. Similarly, the larger the number of persons included in such a set of social relationships, the more salient the identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). By acknowledging the impact of social networks on people's self-concepts, identity theory links the wider social structure (in terms of role positions) and the person's more intimate social networks (through levels of commitment to different role positions) to the self-concept, and also connects social structure to the development and maintenance of social relationships (Serpe, 1987).

2.8 Goffman's presentation of Self; The dramaturgical model

According to Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012), self and identity researchers believe that the self is both a product of situations and a shaper of behavior in situations. Therefore making sense of oneself-who one is, was, and may become and hence provide direction for one in his or her journey in the world. Self and identity theories assume that people care about themselves, want to know who they are and in turn use this self-knowledge to make sense of the world.

Whereas there are a myriad of definitions of the self including Rosenberg (1979) who defined the self as, the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings that refers to him or herself as an object of thought. Also, Leary and Tangney relate self to the behaviour of an individual and describe the self as a merging construct of self-esteem, self-awareness, self-consciousness, self evaluation and self-presentation among others (Leary & Tangney, 2003).

Tesser on the other hand defines the self as a “collection of abilities, temperament, goals, values and preferences that distinguish one individual from another” (Tesser, 2002) while Wicklund and Eckert (1993, p. 21) simply defines it as a person’s “behavioural potentials” but Erving Goffman is probably the most important sociologist in relation to the self.

As issues of self and identity are more often than not conceptualized at the level of the personal self, this belief emphasizes the importance of social roles and social interactions towards the understanding of whom one is (Banaji & Prentice, 1994) and I think that is the foundation of Goffman’s Presentation of the self. Drawing on Goffman’s presentation of self theory, this study sought to understand how undergraduate students of UEW construct their identity by presenting the self on WhatsApp.

According to Markus and Nurius (1986), a person’s conception of himself or herself can be categorized into two (1) the now self, which express the self as it presently is perceived by the individual, and (2) the possible selves, which are images of the self that have not yet been realized but that are hoped for or feared. Possible selves serve as guide to individuals’ behavior in an attempt to establish their hoped-for possible selves, being their socially desirable identities.

Goffman used a theatrical metaphor to explain how individuals as communicators present the self to at least a person or people. In his view, every human performance or interaction can be seen as a theatre and the communicator or individual is considered as an “actor” on stage who performs to make an impression on his “audience” being the person or people the actor is socially connected to.

Although Goffman's observations took place in a different era, where technology, the internet and social networking sites and applications were absent his insights are just as relevant in today's more complex society where social interaction is moving very rapidly into computer mediated technologies and the self must be understood in order to meet the challenges of diverse audiences.

From Goffman's work, it can be inferred that, actors are capable of either genuinely or otherwise presenting a face in order to convince people that they are playing according to the rules defining their interactions. Hence, his theory gives an understanding of how actors are continually interpreting the rules of particular social situations and are adjusting their performances accordingly (Bolton, 2013).

These self-presentations, according to Goffman (1959) tend to come in the form of two different daily life "performances": front stage and backstage. Front stage performances being those that take place in front of others, or an audience, and hence individuals tend to be more concerned of impressions created by their acts in the minds of others.

Whereas backstage performances take place, either no audience or a more familiar audience is present. Because of this ability to receive and process feedback, which demonstrates an individual's spontaneous understanding of a social situation, it is convenient in an individual's best interest to present an "idealized" version of themselves that fits the understanding of their audiences' expectation rather than act as they do when not in public (Goffman, 1959). Efforts made consciously or unconsciously by an individual geared towards conveying a consistent and meaningful image and

consequently, to persuade the audience's belief in their performance (self-presentation) is termed ~~–~~impression management.”

2.8.1 Impressions management

Under Impressions Management, an individual makes effort to control the impressions made during the course of an interaction. The main aim of this is to prevent embarrassing situations. The art of impression management involves among other things, dramaturgical loyalty, dramaturgical discipline, and dramaturgical circumspection. Impression management, then, signifies how actors—through their utterances, body language, attire, images and so forth—seek to gain control of the impression formed by the audience but also the collaboration expected on the part of the audience.

Viewed through the metaphor of dramaturgy, everyday-life face-to-face and even virtual online interactions emerge as continuous series of staged negotiations or exchanges. In Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, everyday-life performers must offer something to others he or she is interacting with to appreciate or reward. In other words, our presentations of self must be adapted to the expectations of the audience present at any given time in a given situation. Different situations have different audiences and thus different expectations. Therefore self-images presented by everyday-life performers need constant adaptation to the changing social situations.

Thus, by interpreting this assertion on a virtual platform like WhatsApp, a performer on this ~~–~~WhatsApp Stage” will present images in his or her display profile he or she deems fit to available audience in his or her WhatsApp contact list. In doing so, the actor selects the best images which in the actors' opinion will lead to the formation of the best impression in audience's minds.

Impressions management according to Goffman differentiates between the information that actors “give” and the information they “give off”. The first type of information concerns the verbal or nonverbal symbols we consciously use in order to convey a specific meaning. For example an actor on WhatsApp who puts up an image as display profile in doing so “give” information he or she seeks to give to his or her audience. The other type of information consists of the signs and expressions that actors unconsciously “give off”, hence these signs are interpreted by the audience and perceived as characteristic for the actor (Goffman, 1959, p. 14).

Simply, an individual in the presence of others, be it virtual or face-to-face will inevitably seek to control the impression that others form of him or her in order to achieve individual or social goals. The actor will engage in impression management. In doing so, the other participants in the interaction will also attempt to form an impression of who and what this particular individual is.

So, by inference, we present a different version of ourselves in each profile picture we choose while interacting on WhatsApp.

2.8.2 Goffman’s front and back stage

Another key concept in Goffman's dramaturgical analysis is that of performances. An important part of performance is a person's “front.” The front consists of the attitudes, presence and expressions actors—consciously or unconsciously—use in order to construct a certain image of who they are (Fine & Manning, 2003, p. 46).

Thus, from Goffman's point of view, a person's chances of being taken seriously, say, as a university student does not only depend on his or her presentation but also highly on that person's presence and comportment during social interactions online. With

regard to the distinction between the signs and expression that are “given” and those “given off,” respectively, the university student in an effort to manage the audience's perception of information on him or herself consciously shows signs which are interpreted by his or her audience. These signs that are unconsciously revealed are expressions of that person's “true” identity (Fine & Manning, 2003, p. 46).

2.9 Summary

This literature review has provided a comprehensive examination of a wide range of relevant literature on identity construction, computer mediated communication as well as WhatsApp. The main theory for this study is Identity Theory, which looks at how individuals act on the basis of their identity meanings, and how they regulate the meanings of their behaviour so that those meanings are consistent with their identity meanings. Also, Goffman's Presentation of Self, through a dramaturgical model sheds light on how individuals described as actors manage their identities in the presence of others also described as audience and the motivations in the model he describes as the backstage and the front stage being where the actors show-off how they want their audiences to perceive them also known as impression management.

Also, the construction of identity and tools used to undertake this task on WhatsApp was examined in detail to include photographs and the profile picture function of WhatsApp.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research context and strategy, the empirical techniques applied and the methods chosen for data collection, analysis and interpretation. The chapter discusses methodologies and design used in the study including; instruments used, data collection and analysis methods, while explaining the stages and processes involved in the study.

The research methods and procedures used in the study are described under the following subheadings: Research Design, Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure, Data Collection Instrument, Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis, Ethics, Triangulation and Summary of the chapter.

3.2 Research approach

The gathering of information for research purposes is generally categorized under two main approaches; quantitative and qualitative research (Hancock, 1998) and also mixed methods.

3.3 Qualitative research

According to Creswell (2014) the historic origins for qualitative research comes from anthropology, sociology, the humanities and evaluation and have become very prominent from the 1990's to this day.

Confirming this assertion, Yin (2011) suggests that, qualitative research has become the main, smart, acceptable and convention of successful research for academics and experts in the field of social sciences. This has become so due to the opportunities it

affords researchers to comprehensively examine a wide range of issues encountered on a daily basis while eliminating the restrictions of other forms of enquiry that are likely to bring to bear on a researcher in choosing a topic to study. Such restrictions like the difficulty in establishing essential environment similar to what takes place in experiments; the unavailability of adequate statistics or wide coverage of respondents often used in economic research studies tend to make qualitative research an obvious choice. So, for this study, confining students to examine such a phenomenon outside the normal settings where the phenomenon takes place will be a herculean task and hence the decision to conduct this study qualitatively.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002) qualitative research seeks to identify and explore in depth phenomena such as reasons, attitudes etc. It also preserves and analyses the form content of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other forms of analysis. This study, similarly seek from participants information in order to understand how they create identities for themselves through their WhatsApp profiles, it further seek the form or ways in which they undertake the creation of these identities through their profiles and also the motivations that encourage or limit the creation of their identities on WhatsApp.

Flick (2011) states that the choice to conduct a research work qualitatively should not be borne out of a general sympathy but rather on a careful reflection of the issue under study, the research questions linked to it, the existing knowledge of the issue based on literature and the population. Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge (2009) provide one common criticism of qualitative research which is the inability to generalise the findings

of the research due to the usually small sample size and participants also selected non-randomly.

The researcher, after a careful examination of the phenomenon realised that the outcome or data to provide answers to the research questions would be in the form of qualitative data such as images and participant recount of their experiences on the issue and hence a qualitative research approach will suffice.

3.4 Research design

Dawson (2002) posits that a research design is the conceptual structure within which research would be conducted. In this regard, this study adopted the descriptive research design. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) also describe research designs as types of investigation within qualitative study approaches which provide detailed path for procedures when designing a research. So, the research design served as my detailed guide in conducting this study.

3.4.1 Single case study

Case study as Zainal (2007) describes it is a process that enables a researcher to strongly scrutinize the data within a specific environment. As a result, a case study is usually conducted within a relatively small physical area or a very limited number of persons as participants of the study. It produces understanding of modern-day real-life situations thorough contextual investigation of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships. The above description provided the basis to choose case study of a bounded setting of the Winneba Campus of the University of Education, Winneba with few selected students out of the many.

Yin (1984 p. 23) defines case study research method –as an empirical inquiry 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.”

There are a number of advantages for the choice of identity construction on WhatsApp through the profiles of selected undergraduate students as a case study. First, the examination of the phenomenon was conducted within the context of its use (Yin, 1984), that is, within the situation in which the activity takes place. This differs sharply with experiments where for instance, phenomenon is intentionally isolated from its setting focusing on a narrow set of variables (Zaidah, 2003). In contrast with experiments, being the researcher, I planted myself in the setting of WhatsApp in order to understand the phenomenon of how undergraduate students use their display profiles (dp) to construct their identities.

Also, the thorough interpretations often produced in case studies did not only allow me to explore or describe the data collected in participants’ setting, but also assisted in clarifying the details of real-life construction of identities on WhatsApp usually difficult to capture using experimental or survey research. Conducting this study of identity construction of selected undergraduate students of University of Education, Winneba as a case study afforded me the opportunity to understand the phenomenon of identity construction using WhatsApp dps by collecting non numerical values of the reasons for the choice and motivations for the images used as display profile to answer the research questions of this study (Zaidah, 2003).

Despite the opportunities case studies afford a researcher, Yin (1984) downplays its importance as they offer extremely little foundation for generalisation due to the fact that they can be conducted with a small number of research participants so much that some studies were successfully conducted with a single participant. Some researchers also assert that case studies usually generate very large volumes of data particularly ethnographic research, thus leading to difficulties in handling the data collected.

3.5 Sampling Method

According to Daniel (2012) purposive sampling also referred to as purposeful sampling is categorised under nonprobability sampling strategy in which elements or participants are chosen from the target population based on how they fit with the purpose or purposes of the study. Yin (2011) also describes purposive sampling in qualitative research as a process in which participants are deliberately chosen with the intention of producing enough data of high relevance in connection with the study at hand.

Yin (2011) also differentiates purposive sampling from other kinds of sampling: Convenience sampling; which collects data from participants because of their availability and hence even called “availability sampling” by some researchers. It is ineffective in providing a complete view or understanding of the study as participants’ availability to participate in a study does not also completely provide the needed information for the study.

Daniel (2012) categorised purposive sampling as one of four main types of nonprobability sampling designs: availability sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, and respondent-assisted sampling and also describes a five-step process in selecting participants purposively a) Define the target population b) Identify inclusion

and exclusion criteria for sample c) Create a plan to recruit and select population elements that satisfy the inclusion and exclusion criteria d) Determine the sample size e) Select the targeted number of population elements.

Not only is the research interested in gathering data from participants in favour of the research topic but also to “obtain the broadest range of information and perspectives on the subject of study” (Kuzel, 1992 p. 37). Using the preceding description of purposive sampling participants for this research, the researcher made effort to include participants who in my opinion would provide detailed as well as divergent views or opinions on how they use their dps on WhatsApp to construct their identities. Hence, participants offered counter views and opinions on the study in order to prevent bias to fully understand the phenomena.

According to Mabry (2012) gaining in-depth understanding is time consuming and hence a small number of cases can be usually considered even for multi-case studies.

Even though cases and participants are usually chosen from the population for their representativeness, another key consideration for the choice is the richness of information anticipated to get from participants. Therefore in carrying out the study, the researcher purposively selected participants who typically fall within the net-generation as well as those students who indicate profuse use of WhatsApp from the recruitment and consent form.

Interestingly, in qualitative study, there is no strict prescription for defining the desired number of participants in collecting data but generally, more participants can lead to higher confidence in the findings of the research (Yin, 2011).

3.5.1 Sample Size

As Mason (2002) notes, sample sizes are difficult to prescribe in qualitative research due to the fact that there is no formula to determine a research sample size stating that in determining the right sample for a study, a key consideration was how manageable the selected sample size would be practically. As such, Emmel (2014) suggested that the primary consideration ought to be personal and practical limitations on resources in deciding how many participants' to include in the research as qualitative data can even consume huge hard-drive space. Therefore it was prudent to select a sample size by taking into cognizance the fact that the number of participants selected should guarantee adequate amount of data to be collected in order to understand the complexity of identity construction on WhatsApp using dp.

For Patton (2002, p.245) the key consideration in justifying sample size is focused around "validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry (which) have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size". Due to the above considerations, twenty undergraduate students of University of Education, Winneba, Winneba Campus were selected as participants.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

3.6.1 Observation

According to Merriam (2009), observations are conducted in the setting where the phenomenon under study is taking place and serves as a first-hand researcher view of events taking place in the setting.

Hancock (1998) indicates that not all qualitative data gathering approaches involves direct dealings with participants. Observation is a technique used when data collected via other means may be inadequate in value or difficult to validate. For example, when asked in an interview what images a participant use as display profile in an attempt to construct an identity, there is no guarantee that they can perfectly provide an answer in such an instance. Observing them in this situation is more reliable, it is prudent to see how the images participants actually use.

Hancock (1998) further states that, observing photographs are excellent ways of collecting observable data of phenomenon which can be captured in a particular shot or series of shots. The researcher therefore observed the display profiles of participants in this study by taking “screen shot” of participants’ WhatsApp display profiles daily at 9:00 am in the mornings and at 9:00 pm in the evenings from March 7 to May 7, 2017. WhatsApp display profiles are by default available for all contacts in a user’s contact list to view except when the user restricts who can view their display profile and status under the privacy settings headed, “WHO CAN SEE MY PERSONAL INFO” with options; “Everyone”, “My Contacts”, “Nobody” settings of their WhatsApp privacy contact as well as those who are not even present in the user’s WhatsApp contact list.

3.6.2 Interviews

According to Mason (2002), interview, also called “qualitative interviewing” is one of the most used methods in qualitative research data collection. It is often used because of its ability to allow the researcher to conduct exhaustive, flexible forms of interview.

Some qualities of qualitative interviewing includes it being interactional and comparable to a dialogue which may be conducted one-to-one or in a large group interviews called focus groups it may also take place face-to-face or through the telephone or the internet. Guided by this information, interviews for this research were conducted via WhatsApp which operates over the internet to collect data from respondents who are university students.

It is prudent to conduct these interviews over the internet because first of all, the participants in this research are heavy users of WhatsApp and are conversant with its operation and finally the transcript of the interview is generated without any difficulty as the interview session all recorded.

Research interviews are not ordinary conversations. During a research interview, the focus is thus not on the interviewer but rather the participant who provides the interviewer the opportunity to learn something from the participant as the latter does most of the talking. Questions asked during the interview should make the participant feel at ease while ensuring a smooth interview by moderating the entire process as well as guiding the information derived from the interview through the questions asked (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

According to Magnusson and Marecek (2015) there is flexibility in the number of participants a researcher needs in conducting interview. In their opinion there is no rule cast in concrete about the number of participants a researcher can interview. To buttress this point, Magnusson and Marecek (2015) cited some research works including Lisa Capps and Elinor Ochs who conducted several interviews with just a woman with severe agoraphobia for a period of two and half years.

Brinkmann (2015) identifies that, how many interviews a researcher needs to conduct is perhaps one of the greatest questions on the minds of most researchers. In arguing this issue, the author states that people normally pose this problem with a quantitative sense of mind: “The more interviews, the more valid and reliable the analysis will be” (p. 16) which is often not the case. To provide clear focus on the issue, Kvale and Brinkmann, (2008 p. 113) suggest a researcher “Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know.”

Twenty participants were interviewed for this study as they showed in the researcher’s opinion as being key to providing information to answer the research questions of this study.

3.7 Online interview

When qualitative research is based on interviews, it is often the face-to-face contact and the personal relationship, based on verbal and non-verbal communications that are its strengths. In this situation, the researcher stimulates the dialogue in details and specifics, which allows the participant to provide more information, a condition that improves data quality.

Transcribing interviews as data collection is a cost to researchers before they analyze the data as you have to meet participant to interview. With my interviewees busy attending lectures and other campus-related social activities it was very difficult to organize multiple face-to-face interviews. For these reasons, the researcher was led to do interviews online over WhatsApp due to the fact that all the participants of the research are users of WhatsApp.

Online interviewing can be organized in a synchronous form, which means that you get in touch with your participant in a chatroom such as WhatsApp where you can directly exchange questions and answers while you are both online at the same time. This comes closest to the verbal exchange in a face-to-face interview.

3.8 Data collection procedure

In order to collect research data from participants, the researcher used two main instruments which were; observation and in-depth interviews. The researcher obtained an introductory letter attached as Appendix A from the Communication and Media Studies Department of the University of Education, Winneba in order to give gatekeeper in this instance, the Heads of the various departments the researcher was interested in administering the recruitment and consent form.

Hewson (2014) stressed the need to use consent forms in which participants specify that they understand and are willing to participate in the study. Arguing for this stance, she indicates that obtaining consent for the use of data gathered or collected from online observational research has also been considered important and ethical practice.

Therefore to collect data through observation, the researcher administered a consent and recruitment form to the population in order to gain entry into the site. Fulltime undergraduate students of University of Education, Winneba, Winneba Campus who consented to participate in the study were recruited to participate in the study.

In getting informed consent as a requirement for participation, I utilized Allmark (2002, p. 13) criteria to do so: (a) The consent should be given by someone competent to do so (b) The person giving the consent should be adequately informed (c) The consent is given voluntarily.

By using the above principle, aided with the researcher's designed recruitment and consent form (See Appendix B for research recruitment and consent form) I administered the form over a seven-day period.

Twenty students who met the criteria described above consented to participate in the research and their mobile phone numbers which support WhatsApp application were added to the researcher's phone contact on a 7-inch wide screen Samsung Tab 2 10.2 model.

Pseudonyms were used in saving the contacts of participants in order to protect participants as well as encourage confidentiality. As a result, their names were saved uniquely with the initials IMR (Instant Messaging Research) followed by a unique numerical figure in no particular order, such as; IMR 5, IMR 8, ... IMR 50 to the 20th participant. After the successful addition of the participants, the researcher's WhatsApp contact application was refreshed which automatically added and made visible participants profiles in the researcher's WhatsApp contact list. With this, the researcher quickly sent a notification of their participation in the research and how data is to be collected, this notice is added as Appendix C.

At this point, active observation of images used as display profile by participants taken was initiated and snapshots of the participant's display profile (dp) were automatically saved in a folder named "Screenshots" on the researcher's mobile device. Data of profile images were then collected at regular intervals in the mornings at 9:00 am and in the evenings at 9:00 pm daily during the eight-week observation period from Tuesday, March 7 to Sunday, May 7, 2017. Within the active observation and collection of images (data) changes in dp observed outside the active observation and daily

download times were also observed and downloaded as data. The data collected were then sorted into participant specific folders named exactly how their contacts were saved. During observation, there was no interaction with participants.

After a successful observation, participant interviews on WhatsApp began in the fourth week of data collection period using an interview guide (See Appendix D). It began with asking the participants to tell me a little about themselves and the rest of the interview followed as a guided conversation or discussion.

Online interviews were initially used in the conduct of the interviews for this study. However, due to the difficulties experienced including prolonged breaks in internet connection and delay in participants' response to interview questions from the researcher posted to them on WhatsApp; the delays in responses to interview question on WhatsApp due to engagement in other academic activities such as long lecture periods, group discussions and presentations; which tended to delay the smooth flow of the online interviews hence the researcher resorted to face-to-face interview with participants.

Face-to-face interviews were thus scheduled with participants at their preferred location, time and the interview conducted with the interview guide developed by the researcher. The same device was used to record the interview. In the course of the interview, participants were shown some of their profiles to elicit further information in line with the research questions.

The facet-to-face interviews which lasted an average of twenty minutes also provided the researcher the opportunity to ask probing and detailed questions as the period of observations armed the researcher with so much information to ensure a

successful in-depth interview as well as observe the participant's facial expressions and gestures to complement the shortfalls of the online interviews.

3.9 Data analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p.145), –Analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others.”

Data analysis represents the method of thoroughly probing, arranging and interpreting interview data, images collected through observation to increase researcher understanding of a research setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In data analysis, qualitative data is repeatedly reviewed and re-oriented to find out new and emerging themes and patterns (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis for this study was performed throughout the data collection period. Data was continually arranged, sorted, analyzed, interpreted and re-interpreted across several levels including interview and observational levels. All data, including interviews and images were examined meticulously paying particular attention to how WhatsApp profile images used by students of the University of Education, Winneba to construct their identities.

3.9.1 Textual analysis

Textual analysis observes and deduces meanings from communication. In understanding the phenomenon of identity construction the researcher chose to perform a textual analysis of the images used as display profile (dp) on WhatsApp in order to seek understanding and interpret what participants through their dps communicate to their contacts. Whatsoever that can be used as a form of communication can be conveniently

considered a text, such as photographs, images, newspaper, magazine, painting and film (Harris & Tyner-Mullings, 2013).

Hawkins (2017, p.2) suggests that a researcher might select textual analysis to interpret his or her research data in the quest to seek answers to questions pertaining to how the images (text) are used as WhatsApp display profile (dp).

A further suggestion is for researchers conducting textual analysis to understand the various explanations obvious in the WhatsApp dps under study within the realm of several lenses. As such, it is prudent to pair or combine textual analysis with other methods in order to maximize the sense-making of the WhatsApp dps and how they are used to construct identities by some selected undergraduate students of UEW. To this end, (interview) data obtained from participants was thematically analysed.

In analyzing the dps of this research, a single image used as dp is thoroughly examined and various signs such as words, images, colour in the dp are analysed to see how the elements in the dp are organized in order to make sense. This also enabled me to consider the signs in the dps which are usually overlooked easily in normal day-to-day encounters with WhatsApp dps. Some factors, according to Hawkins (2017), that influence the analysis of textual data include (a) the researcher's worldview, (b) cultural, political and social understanding of what the the setting within which the text was made, and (c) an understanding of creator of the WhatsApp dp intended at the time of using that display profile.

Issues identified were interpreted using what Drew, Hardman and Hosp (2014) call "Thick Description". Thick description allowed the researcher to record what was observed on WhatsApp to create exact images of the setting, bringing alive participants'

identity construction on WhatsApp to the reader taking caution not to exaggerate observed activities of the setting in a quest to provide thick description.

3.9.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis involves the process of building clear structures and meanings from research participants embodied in a text (Gavin, 2013). It is acceptable without any worries in qualitative research analysis to put forth strong subjective points as part of the process (Brown, 1996), Gavin (2013) suggests a need for the researcher to handle this subjectivity responsibly.

Participants' interviews were coded throughout the study. First, interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after each interview. Each interview, audio and transcript were then reviewed and coded for evidence relating to the research questions immediately after the individual transcript became available.

A descriptive coding scheme was employed and as patterns emerged, these themes were re-examined for new and emerging evidence relating to the research questions. Also, some participants were contacted to ascertain especially some verbatim transcriptions for accuracy and check preliminary results for errors, therefore providing an initial "member check" on the interviews.

3.10 Ethics

Research ethics has now become much more essential to the research process in recent times than it was in the past, especially in qualitative studies. Qualitative research raises some key ethical issues due to the flexible research designs and ability to collect comparatively unstructured data in participant's natural settings since the middle of the twentieth century (Traianou, 2014).

According to Simons (2012), an essential ethical principle in research, irrespective of the nature, is to do no harm. As straight-forward as it may seem it can also be deceptive as harm may be understood differently by different people and even at different time periods. As a result, a researcher might be compelled to adopt research steps that deviate from the research in question or unable to see the possible harm that may result from the use of the researcher's methodology.

In conducting any study, researchers have frequently argued for respect for research participants' independence which empowers them to make decisions about their personal lives which a research should not undermine, hence, the need for informed consent (Traianou, 2014) factored into the collection of data which include images of participants which can only be collected with informed consent which was duly addressed attached as Appendix C. This disclosure is to avoid the covert collection of participants profile images without their consent as most online data can be collected in that manner, as a result, participants of this study were informed about the type of data the researcher sought to collect which includes WhatsApp profile images of participants (Herrera, 1999).

According to Traianou (2014) privacy is key in qualitative research depending on whether the study is taking place in a public or private setting. Depending on the information or data sought for the study, research information and data can be public or private.

3.10.1 Confidentiality

Houghton, Casey, Shaw and Murphy (2010) attest to the fact that maintaining confidentiality can be difficult in qualitative research studies as the researcher usually gives exhaustive description especially in this research a lot of data collected were participants personal pictures and others not directly involved in this research such as friends of participants used on participants WhatsApp profiles and hence the need for utmost confidentiality.

In order to ensure confidentiality, the faces and any other identifying information of participants on the WhatsApp profiles were blurred to make them unidentifiable but also cautious to also maintain the symbols and message in the images presented. Polit and Tatano Beck (2006) advise the address of confidentiality issues on individual participant basis by using pseudonyms which was effectively used in this study by the researcher who assigned all participants unique pseudonyms right from the recruitment form and onto the storage of their contacts on the researcher's phone with pseudonyms.

3.11 Triangulation

Mathison (1988) suggests that as part of standard research practice, every researcher ought to triangulate, that is, adopt processes such as multiple methods, data sources and researchers to improve the validity of research findings and continues that, irrespective of researcher's perspective, it is still necessary to use multiple methods and sources of data in the performance of a study in order to endure criticism. The rise and importance of triangulation in, especially, qualitative research is the control of bias and establishment of valid propositions.

Data collected during the study was methodologically triangulated. This involved the examination of the data via multiple data collection methods. Since different observers may notice different things or may read between the lines of the same things differently, therefore through triangulation, an observer can help expand meaning-making, balance interpretations and safeguard against excessive researcher subjectivity (Mabry, 2012).

The data collected from the observations and interviews were triangulated; participants claim and assertions from the interviews were compared to what the researcher observed on participants WhatsApp profiles.

3.12 Summary

This chapter examined the various methods adopted for the study. The design for the study is described in detailed including the research design and approach. The sampling procedures, research instruments, data collecting procedures, and data analysis and ethics governing this study were also looked at.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to describe how some selected students in the University of Education, Winneba use their WhatsApp display profile images to construct their identities.

In particular, this study addressed three research questions: (1) what kind of identities do undergraduate students of UEW construct on WhatsApp? (2) How do undergraduate students of UEW use their WhatsApp profile pictures to construct these identities? (3) What are the motivations for the identities constructed by undergraduate students of UEW on WhatsApp?

Guided by Farquhar (2009) who in stating findings from his research used “Textspeak” explained it as the presentation of the words and writing style of participants with minimal or no alteration so that all information presented including grammatical errors, shorthand, abbreviations, acronyms, emojis are studied.

4.2 Participants of the study

In order to understand the phenomenon of WhatsApp and identity construction of undergraduate students of UEW and answer the research questions, a general overview of participants of this study is highlighted.

Most participants ascribed the initials IMR (Instant Messaging Research) in this study indicate that they got to know about or were introduced to WhatsApp through friends and also some family members who were already using WhatsApp application. As put by participant IMR 8, when asked by the researcher how she got to know about

the application, she said –Through my friends, that is back in SHS, I started using WhatsApp for three years now”. Also, IMR 44 also suggested the application was recommended to her by a friend as, –an inexpensive way of communicating with family and friends through real time texts than SMS and phone calls which are substantially higher in terms of costs these days”.

Some participants also suggested that WhatsApp has become so popular that they began using WhatsApp from senior high school even though according to Ainooson–Noonoo (2016), the use of mobile technologies in the senior high schools of Ghana is prohibited in school not at home.

So, from the responses of participants on the period of use, it is clear that most of them began using WhatsApp earlier before entry into the University of Education, Winneba and can therefore be conveniently described as experienced users of WhatsApp which is summed up by IMR 12 when asked how she got to know about WhatsApp and when she started using the application,

WhatsApp, I think way back from my senior brothers, I was given phone by my father and they did the downloading and stuff for me and then they taught me how to use it, I have used it for quite a while now about five years ago when I was in JHS.

A typical participant in this study is one who installed and began using the application averagely from 2014 and another heavy user of the application who visits or uses the application several times a day. IMR 44 responded to the interview, –I am always on WhatsApp, I am always online, unless I am busy doing something, I can’t go offline even for a day”. Others use it to communicate with their contacts including family, course mates, lecturers as indicated by IMR 8 when asked to describe the contacts

in her WhatsApp, “I have my mum, dad, aunties and uncles, friends, course mates and even strangers. The list is endless, the people I know and have their phone numbers are on WhatsApp”. There are also religious membership contacts, social club members, friends on campus and few acquaintances and even strangers as described by IMR 103, “I have people I don’t know may be by chance they get my number from a friend who gives my number to them”.

IMR 91, for example, supported the assertion of most participants of and claimed to have business partners, “I have my friends and some few people I did business with then my family”.

Participants indicated visiting WhatsApp to view display profiles of their contacts often usually deliberately. IMR 44 had this to say when asked by the researcher whether she deliberately looks at dps of her contacts. She answered,

Yes, I look at people’s dp and I call it, dp tour, in the morning when I wake up and after dawn prayers I go through dps and see which people have changed their dps what are they talking about and then based on that you will see somebody display something of interest then you will get to know the mood of that person.

Some participants claim to view their contacts profiles to while away time.

IMR 70 said he looks at his contacts dp “probably if I am not doing anything and I just want to see some nice pictures of my contacts”. This they do when not busy, bored or stressed out from academic pressure or campus activities. Some participants said they do this several times a day IMR 20 said,

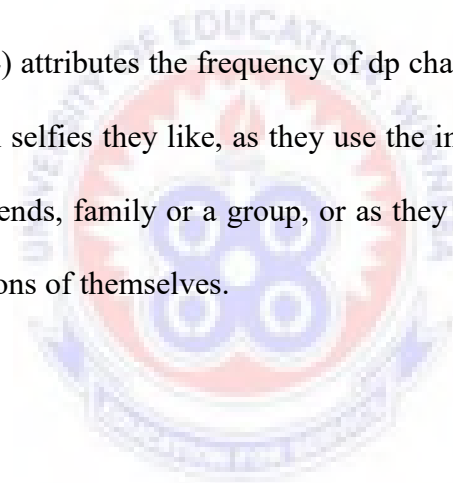
Depends on my bundle, if I have a bundle I visit WhatsApp almost every five to ten minutes. Because as university student we have class WhatsApp pages groups and things I normally go there to seek information on what is going on campus. If I am not on campus and what is going on on university campus as a whole.

Overall, IMR 70 summed up what the images used as WhatsApp profile means to him that, –sometimes it speaks about who you are, the kind of images you use as your dp, it portrays a certain character or persona about you”. This was supported by IMR 26 who also stated that,

Any pic you post as dp comes with explanation looking at it critically because anyone who looks at your picture used as your profile even without any explanation can give you what they think is in the picture and even tell your personality from it.

These assertions of IMR 70 and IMR 26 resonate with most of the participants of the study.

Rettberg (2014) attributes the frequency of dp changes on WhatsApp to situations where users take fresh selfies they like, as they use the images in profile picture to show support for causes, friends, family or a group, or as they find that they are changing and want new representations of themselves.



4.3 RQ1. What kind of identities do undergraduate students of UEW construct on WhatsApp?

Individuals have for a long time, according to Turner (1978), commonly had "multiple identities" and conceptualization of themselves as a result of the numerous roles they play. For example, a person's role identities may include the fact that she is a mother, a wife, a daughter, a student and entrepreneur.

From the data collected through interviews and observation, the following identities consisting: *religious, self and personal interest, family, business, friendship and relationship* and *institutional/socio-academic group affiliation* were identified by the researcher.

Stryker, Serpe, and Hunt (2005) assert that, the self, is made up of several identities ordered into a hierarchy of salience. As such, participants of this study similarly, have several identities they enact or construct especially depending on the situations they find themselves.

Goffman's dramaturgical analysis suggests that everyday-life performers whether online or face-to-face must offer something to others they are interacting with in order to appreciate or reward them. Thus an individual's presentation of the self on WhatsApp must be adapted to the expectations of the audience he or she has in his contacts. Also, different self presentations are enacted to create identities for different audiences and therefore such performances or identities need constant adaptation to the changing social situation on WhatsApp.

Therefore, for the identified eight identities in this study a participant may enact as many as possible identities at different times depending on the situation. For example,

a participant may on a day enact his or her religious identity and on the next day bring forth his or her family identity in order to construct their most salient identities (Stryker, 1980).

4.3.1 Religious identity

The *religious identity* is common to most participants of this study depending on their religious beliefs. The most common religious identities enacted by participants are Islamic and Christian religious identities.

When IMR 44 was asked by the researcher –so, does religion play a role in your identity on WhatsApp through the images you use as your dp?” she answered, –The type of picture I put there should depict my religion and as a muslim and a married woman, I am not supposed to show some pictures that will show some vital parts of myself in the dp”.

IMR 75 also collaborated on the assertion of IMR 44,

I am catholic and we have a season we recite the rosary, so through that sometimes I change my dp to that of the virgin Mary. Sometimes I use the rosary as the dp, so that those people that know about Catholics will realise that we are in rosary month. So through my dp I normally communicate to people.

So, participants especially female Muslims, in enacting their religious identity show images that show they cover their hair including their ears with veils. The veil, from the researcher’s interaction with them, is a religious prescription for them to cover their hair and ears. Also, the dps become fashion statements for these female Muslims who adorn themselves with colourful and beautiful veils in the pictures they use as their dp. One participant’s (IMR 43) profile, for example, had a status text which reads –The beauty of every Muslim lady is the hijab”.

On the contrary, the Christian religious identity of participants is usually enacted through images depicting Christian religious programmes and events of the churches they belong, others use images they claim to be that of Jesus Christ and also biblical texts and texts in general to proclaim their connection with Christianity.

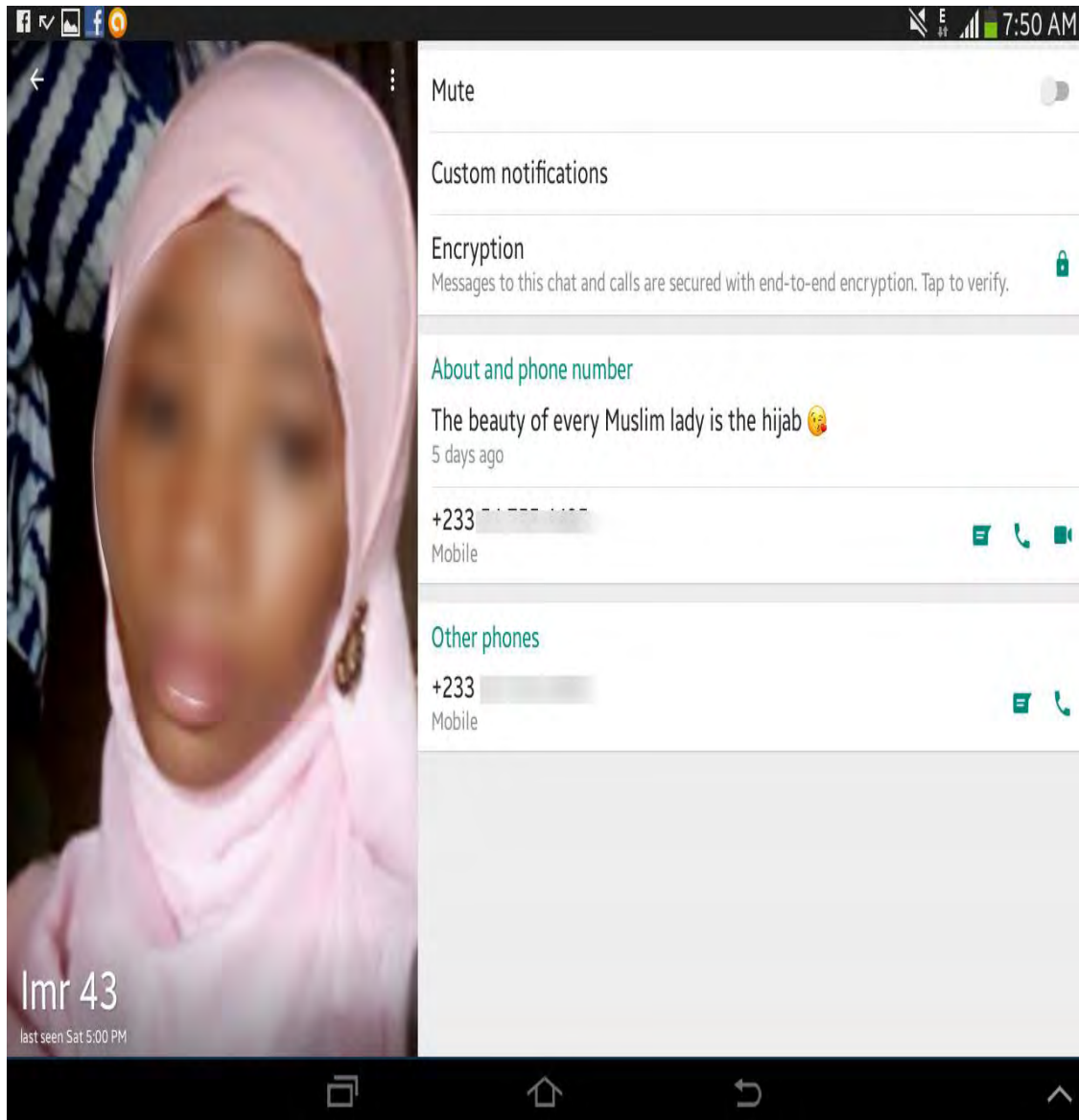


Figure 1: A participant enacting her Islamic religious identity on her WhatsApp profile

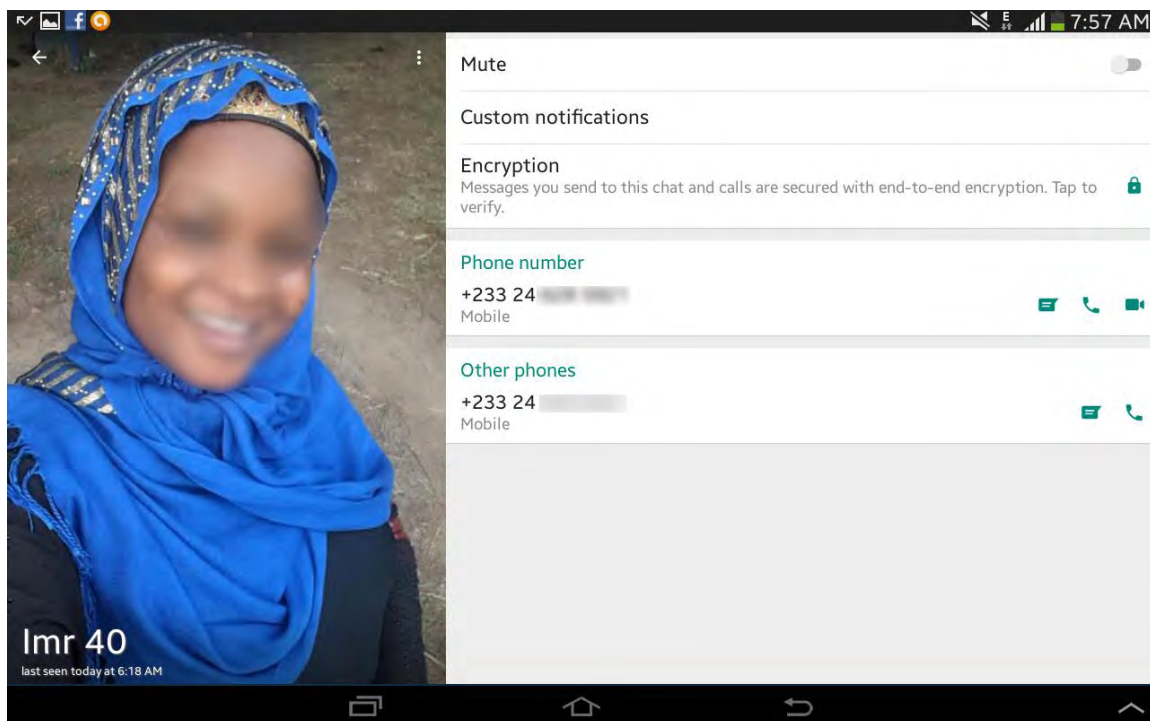


Figure 2: A participant enacting her Islamic religious identity on her WhatsApp profile

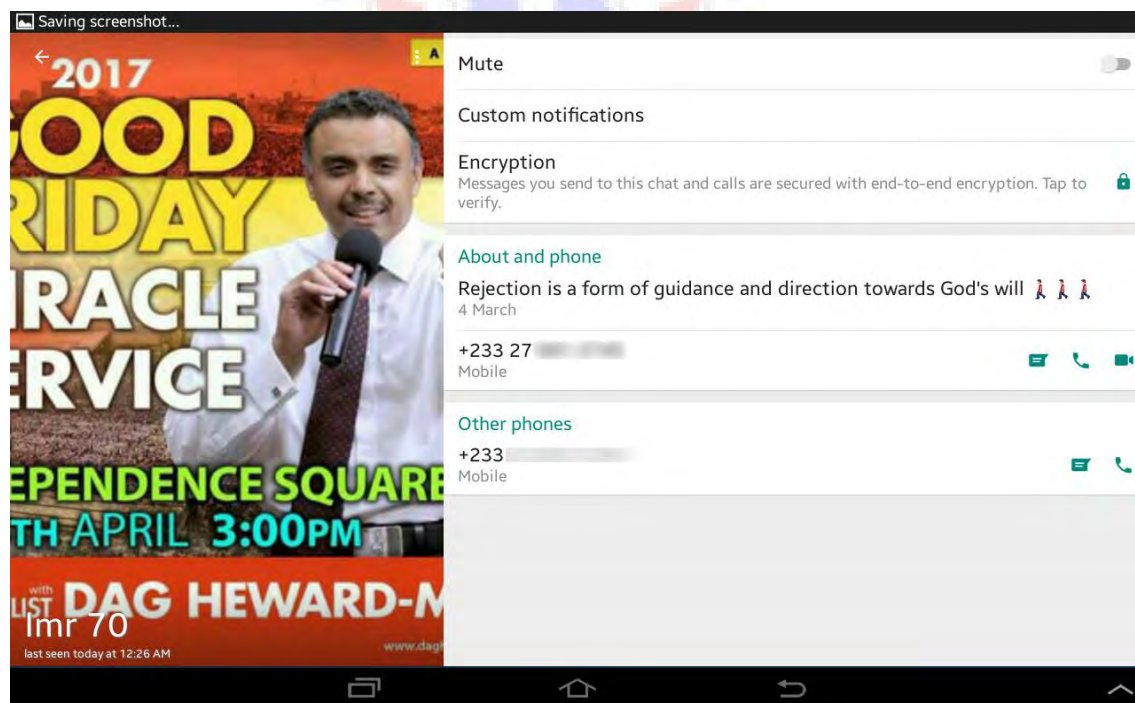


Figure 3: A participant enacting her Christian religious identity on her WhatsApp profile



Figure 4: A participant enacting her Christian religious identity on her WhatsApp profile

4.3.2 Family

The *family* identity was also dominant among participants identities identified from the study. In constructing this identity, participants often use images that depict their family members with whom they have strong connections. Participants are likely to use their mother, father, cousin, uncles, brothers, aunts, siblings and child or children.

For participants who hold the family identity as very important, they stay committed and tend to enact this identity. Burke and Reitzes (1991) conceived commitment as the total of forces that guide an individual to sustain congruence between their identities. This is so for IMR 44 who finds the family identity important to her and tends to stay committed to this identity construction.

IMR 12 for example claims to portray family identity, when she was asked, she said,

In school for instance, when I come after reopening, during the first few weeks or about a month, I normally miss my parents, my brothers, so, within that week I tend to use my mum, dad and so others as my dp.

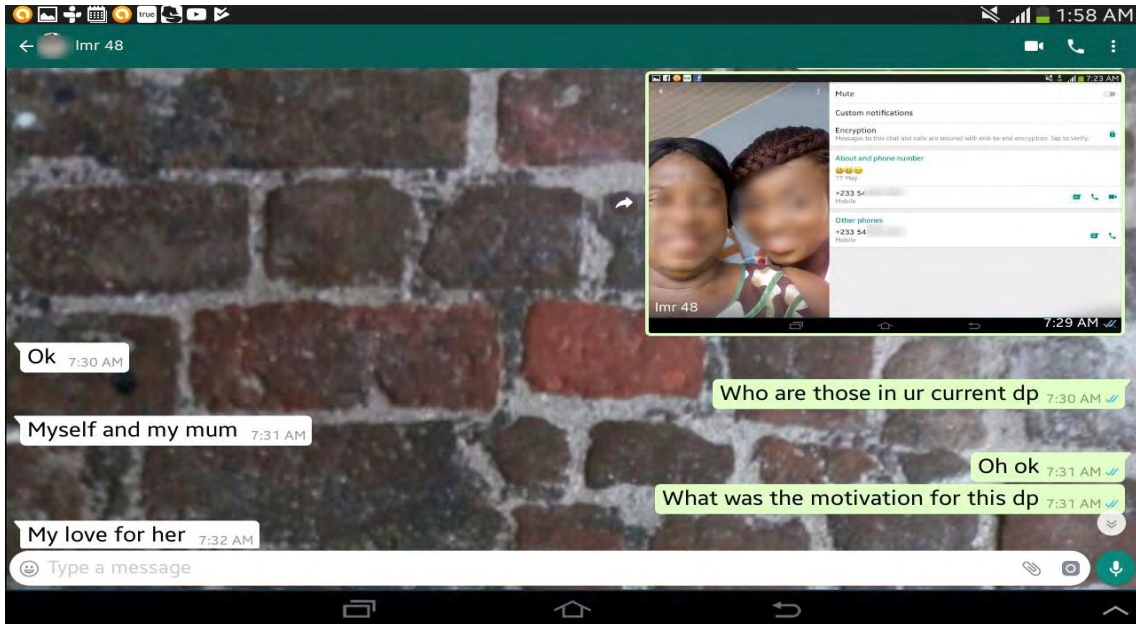


Figure 5: A participant enacting her family identity with her mum on her WhatsApp profile in a chat with the researcher

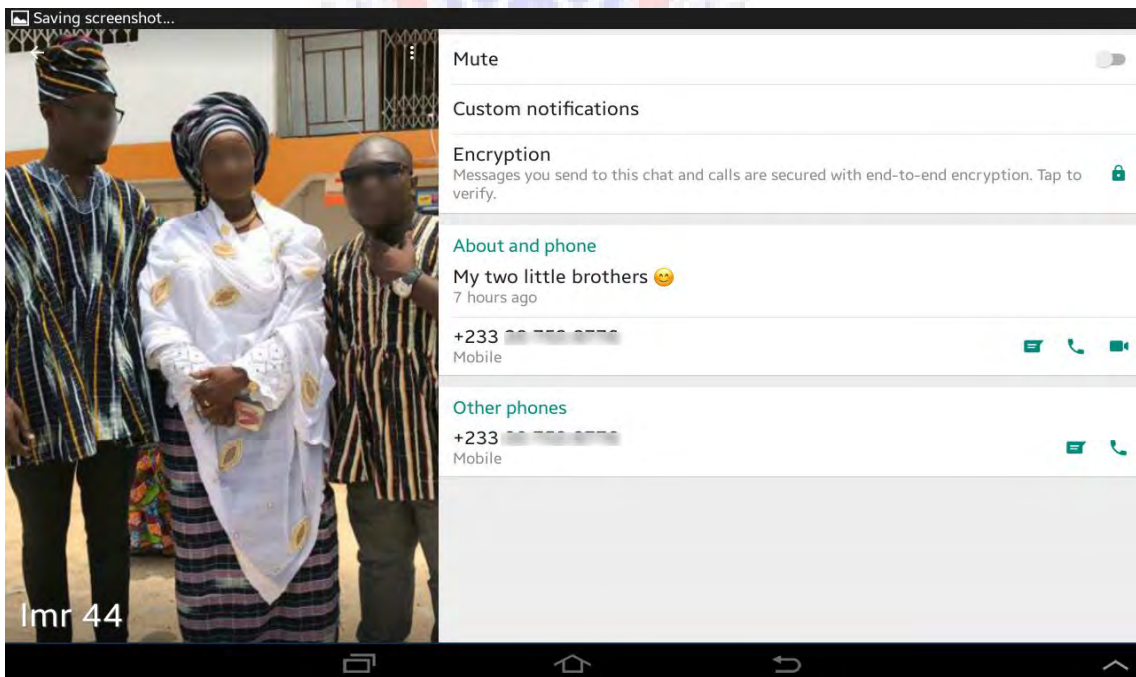


Figure 6: A Participant enacting her family identity with her siblings on WhatsApp

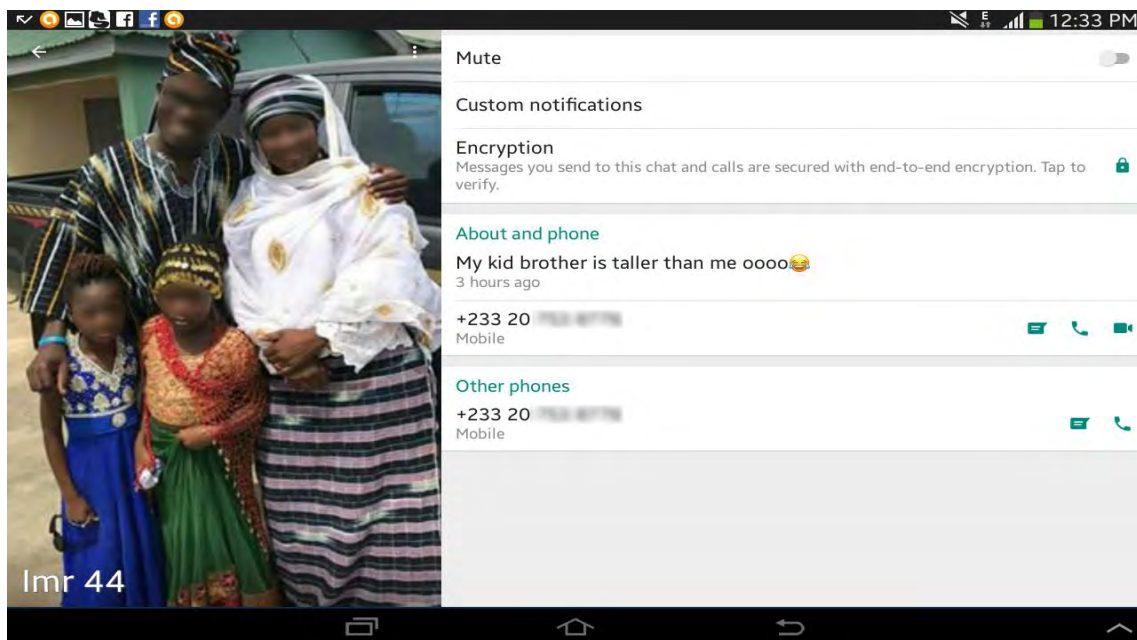


Figure 7: A Participant enacting her family identity with her brother and children on WhatsApp

4.3.3 Business

The *business* identity was not so common among the students. Only few portrayed this identity from their WhatsApp profile. This low performance is due to the fact that few students of the university engage in business activities.

IMR 91, among the few business minded students stated,

My current dp is using a shirt, and am using it as an advert. As I said, I and my are planning to do business on campus although it will be started next semester but we want to sell ourselves. We are informing people so people will be aware so when the time is due we can find it easy to sell our products. That is why I have used this, so I will be using different shirts to portray my business side.

IMR 91 continued when asked of his view on the dp feature of WhatsApp, –At times I use my WhatsApp dp to advertise, if you are selling a product and you use the product as your dp, it attract customers‘ attention and they show interest in your products”.

This is an important tool for participants, as one participant stated that her contact usually initiates conversations with her upon looking or viewing a new profile she puts up on WhatsApp.

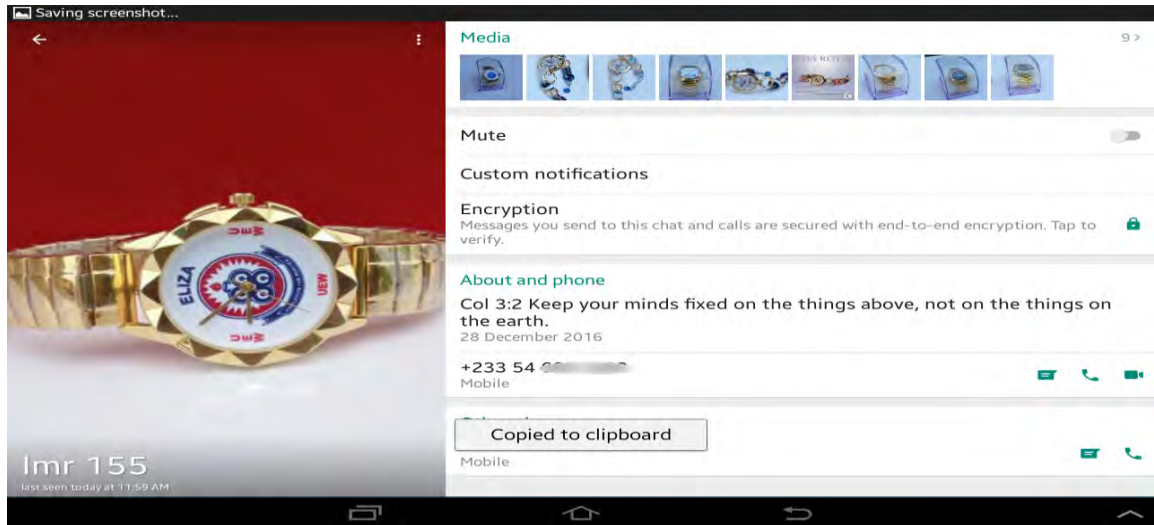


Figure 6: A participant WhatsApp profile showing a product she sells to construct her business identity

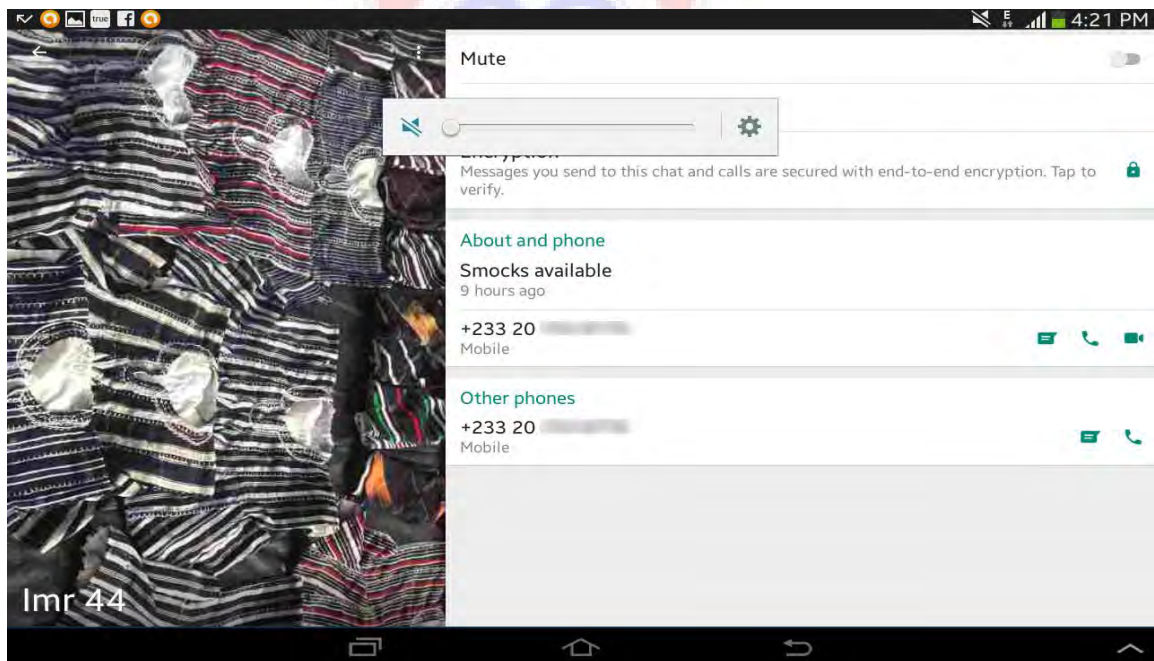


Figure 7: A participant advertising smock for sale to construct her business identity on her WhatsApp profile

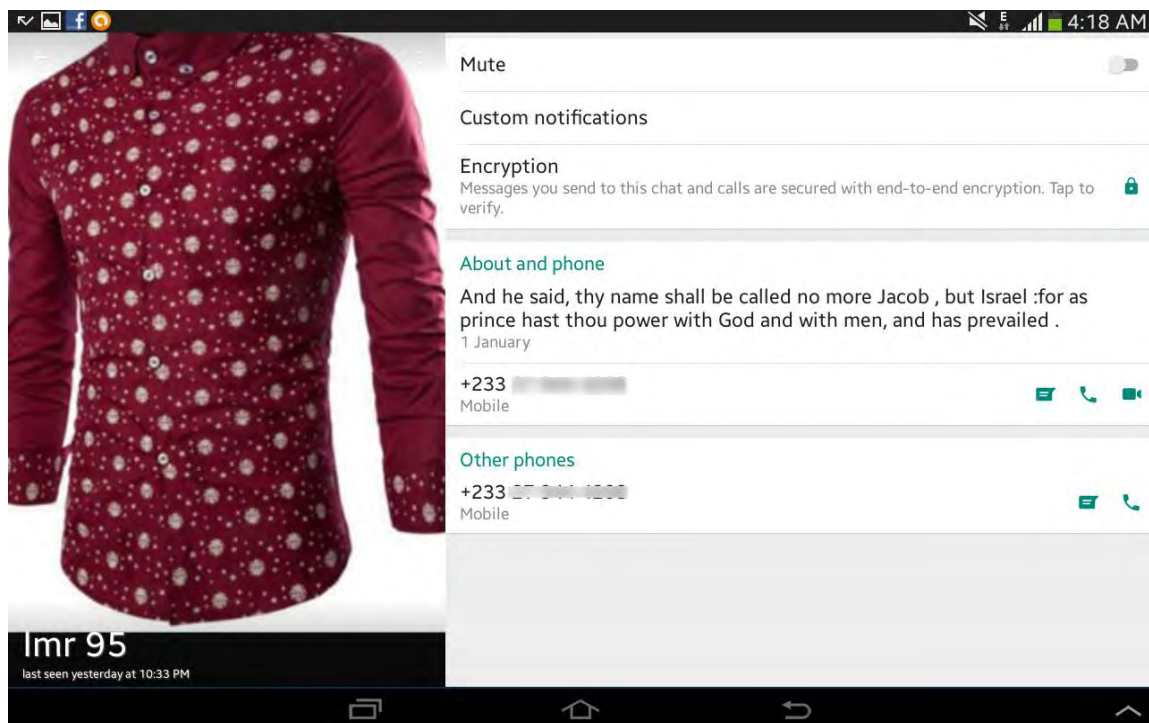


Figure 8: A participant advertising a shirt he intends to begin selling on his WhatsApp profile to construct his business identity

4.3.4 Friendship and relationship

From the data collected, friendship and relationship identity was one of the highly enacted identities on WhatsApp by participants. To construct friendship and relationship identity, participants use pictures showing the profile holder or WhatsApp user with an acquaintance, friend(s), a lover or a group of friends (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011).

This identity is high during special occasions such as birthdays, graduation ceremonies and also events during which friends, including the participants, share a memorable time together.

Participants use their friends and partners in relationships pictures on special occasions as their profiles, to the same way when individuals miss friends in face-to-face settings they contact them. IMR 64 stated during an interview with the researcher that,

I edited my former mates once, I used photo grid; an application where you can combine several pictures of friends with their names into one image and I included myself. Because I felt that I had missed them, and showed how we were in a group back then. So I edited the pictures and wrote “I miss you all”.

IMR 26 puts it perfectly during an interview when I showed a WhatsApp profile of her with friends, she responded “We went to have fun and wanted to show my other friends that we are chilling that’s all”. IMR 75 also described how she constructs her friendship identity to the researcher in her narration below,

For instance, when we close from church and we take pictures, sometimes with my friends and I use as dp then some contacts of mine will call and ask who is that person, she is nice, I want to be her friend. So through that I introduce my friends to the other friends I have. I use WhatsApp dp to show off friends that I have.

Not only do participants of this study use their profile pictures to announce and show-off their friends, but they also display persons with whom they have intimate relationships.

IMR 39, for example, indicated,

He is my boyfriend, I normally use his pic as my dp on my profile when I miss him since I have been in school for about four months now or I usually use his picture as my dp on his birthdays.

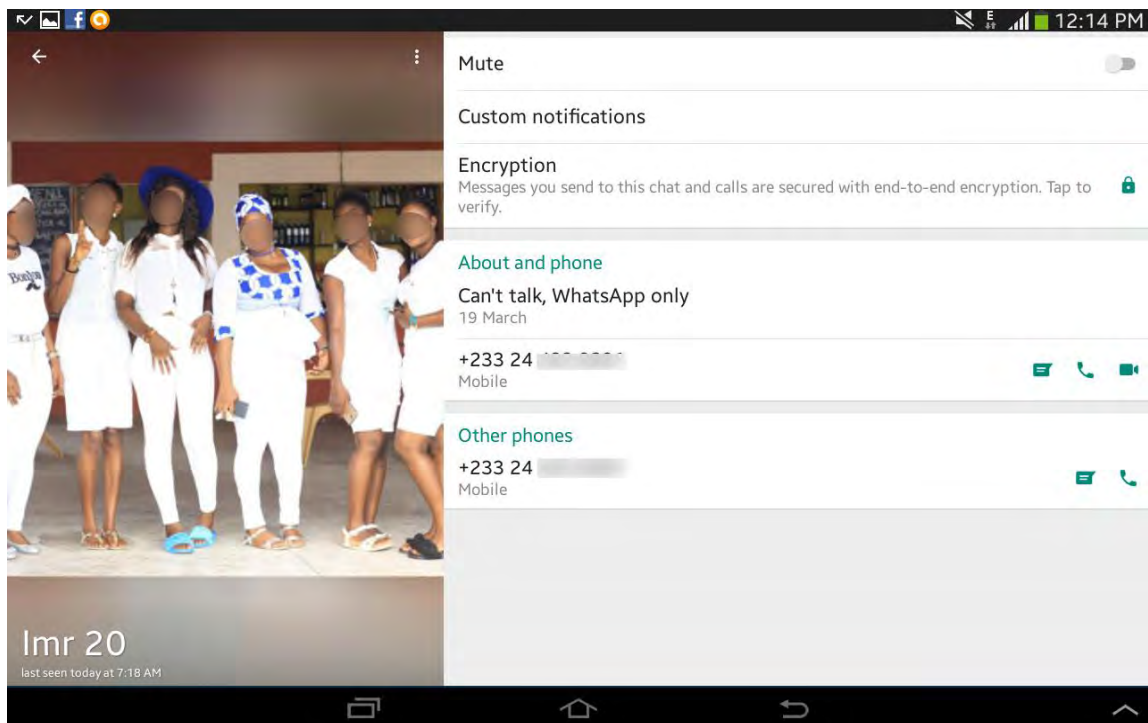


Figure 9: A participant WhatsApp profile showing her with her friends at a socialization event

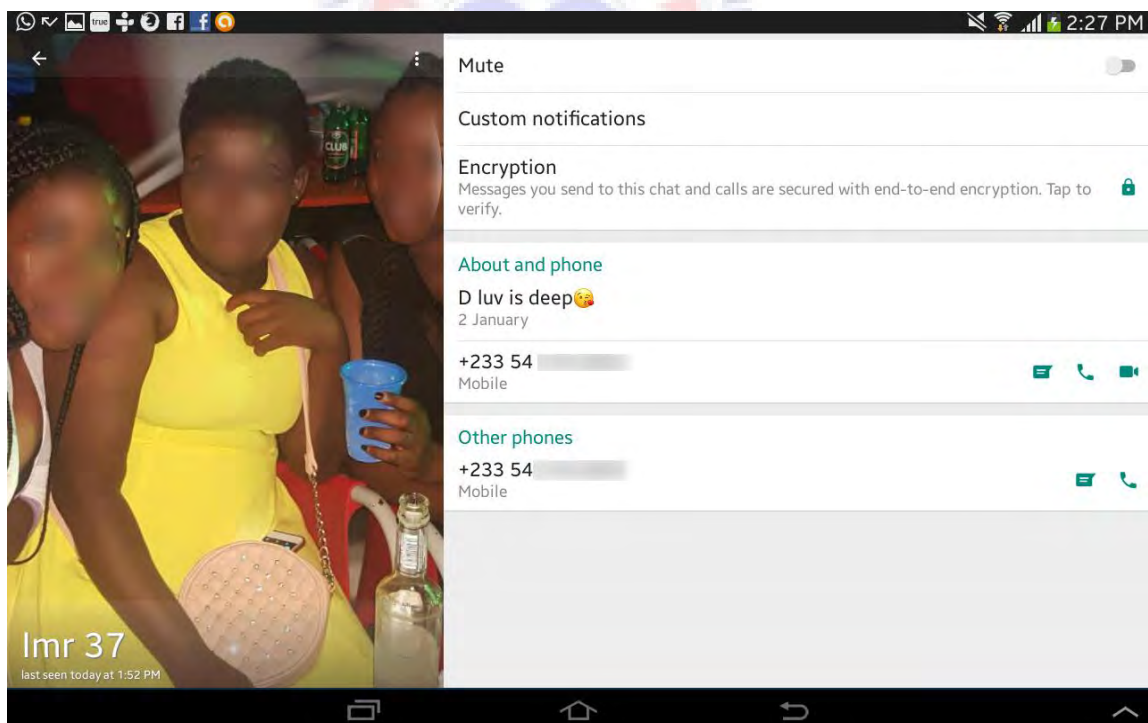


Figure 10: A participant's WhatsApp profile showing her with her close friends at a bar having some drinks and fun

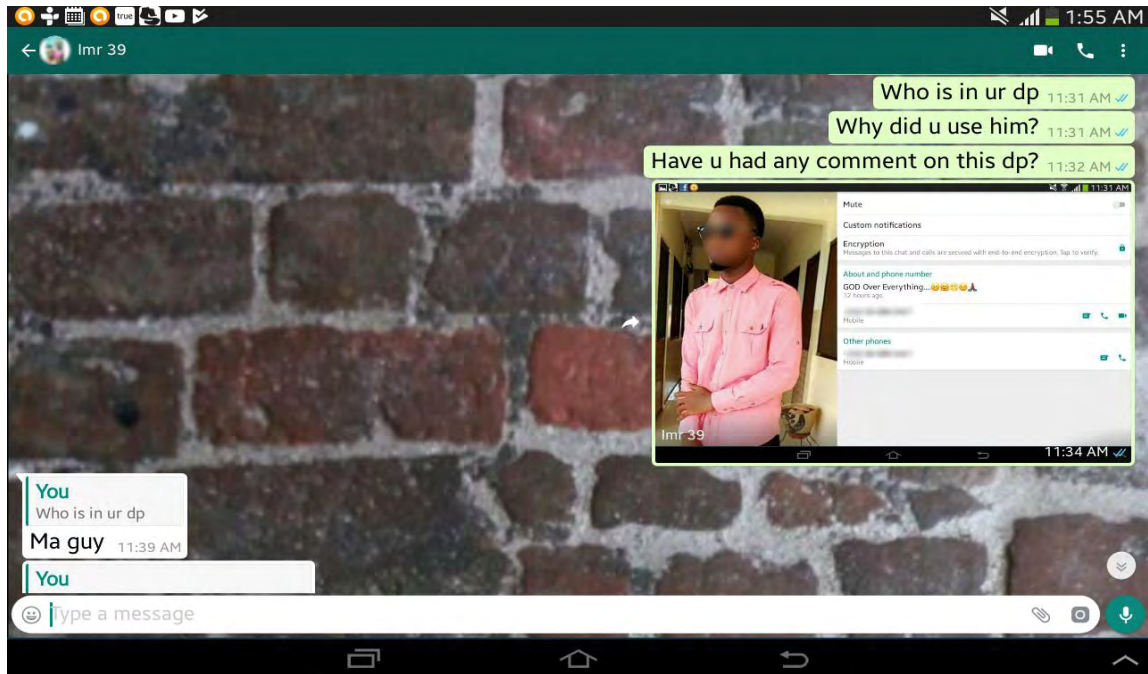


Figure 11: A participants WhatsApp chat with the researcher providing details on a profile she used to portray her friendship and relationship identity on WhatsApp

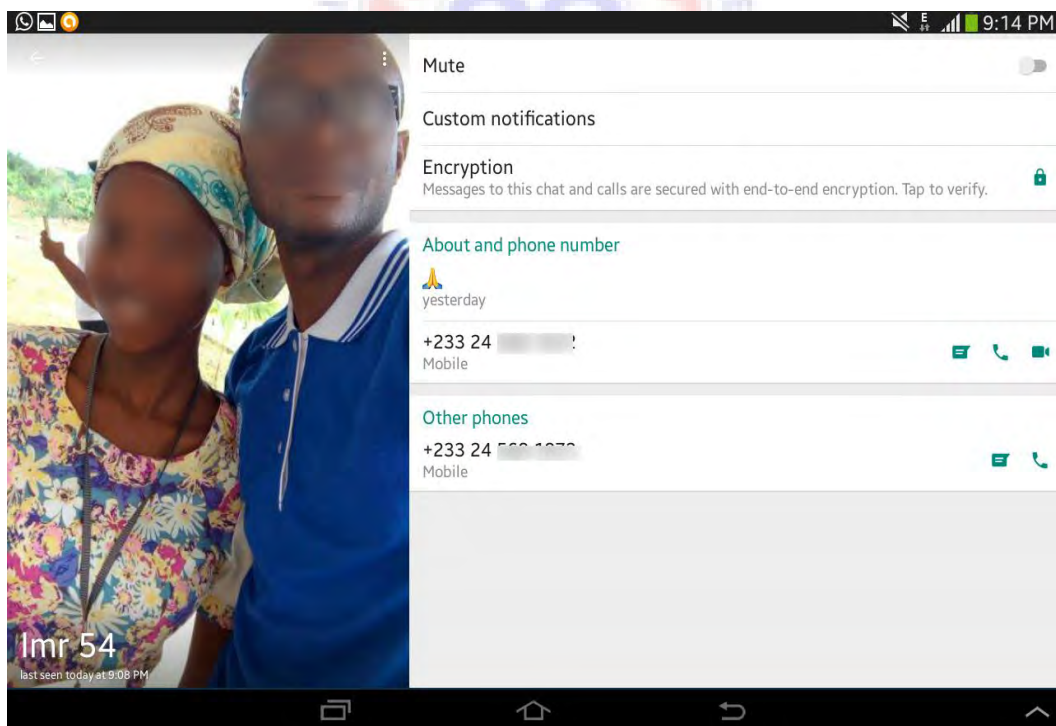


Figure 12: A participant with her boyfriend on her WhatsApp profile

4.3.5 Self and personal interest

Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012) have identified varying aspects of the self which include affective (self-feelings) and cognitive (self-images). These identities of the youth, according to scholars such as Brown (2007), are enacted and understood via self-presentation in offline (face-to-face) or online (computer mediated) environments typically like WhatsApp.

This identity of the self to others, according to Baumeister (1982), is geared towards first pleasing contacts on WhatsApp and second constructing one's public self. This leads the user often gaining the psychological effect of good-feeling. The first motive for self-presentation being to please the audience is the chief idea of what is involved in self-presentation on WhatsApp.

One participant, IMR 44 informs the researcher –I specifically choose beautiful pictures of myself to use as my dp because, when you put a beautiful picture on it and people comment on it, it makes me happy”. This assertion is also in line with Walker (2016) claim that the key motivation behind an individual’s construction of identity on WhatsApp for example is self-enhancement so as to make the individual constructing that identity feel good about him or herself.

From the interviews and observation, the researcher notes that most pictures of the self used as dps show the user looking happy and good and satisfied. Most participants informed the researcher that it was a deliberate act in presenting those pictures as dp. The deliberate nature of portraying the self on WhatsApp leads users to go great lengths to get the perfect pictures in their opinion to use as their dps. Therefore, an identity is constructed of the self on WhatsApp in the user’s best interest to influence the

impressions that others form of him or her using images selected as profile pictures to present the desired image (Tufekci, 2008).

For example, IMR 39 explained to the researcher that even though she loved a particular picture and was willing to use it as dp, she did not like how some portions of her hair looked in the picture and hence used an emoji to modify it by covering some of the portions of the hair she found less admirable with the emoji before using it as dp. She indicated during our interview, “I used the emoji to cover my wig”, was hanging der”

Another participant, IMR 64 reiterated during the interview with the researcher on the feel-good effect obtained from presenting the self to his contacts,

I post images that I look good, that talk good about me. When I use such pictures as my dp, it means I want to flex with it or to show it to my contacts that this picture is nice.

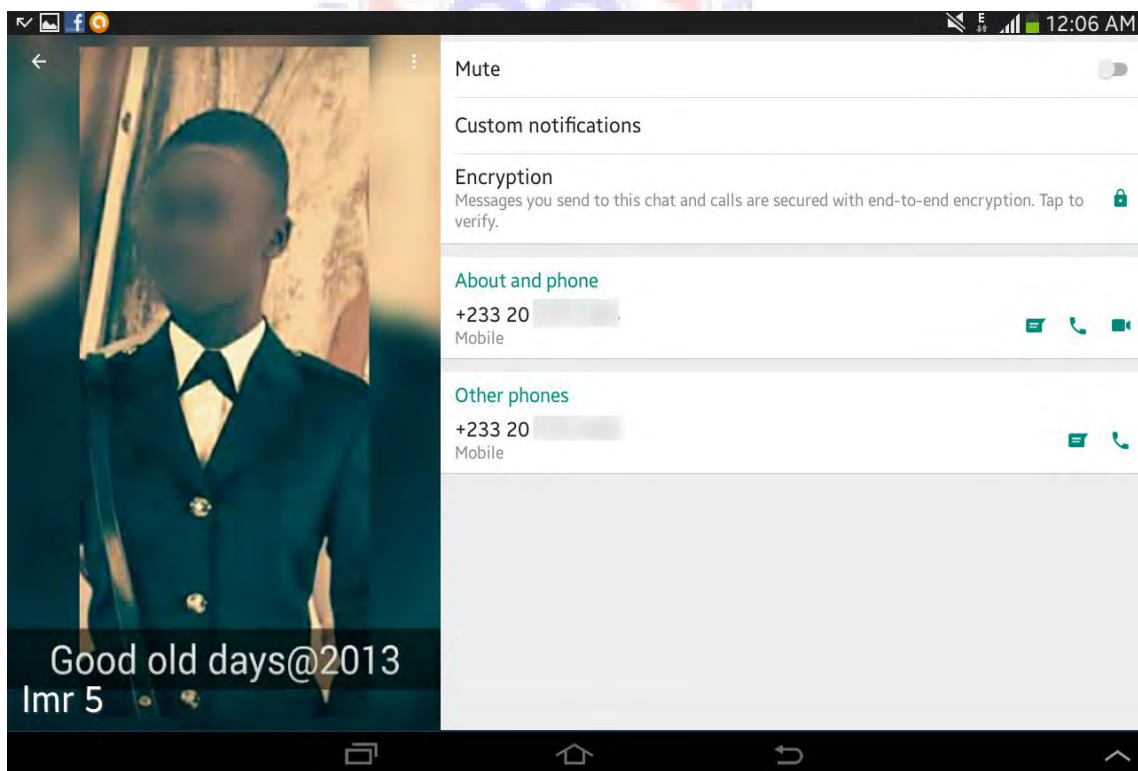


Figure 13: A participant portraying the self -identity on WhatsApp

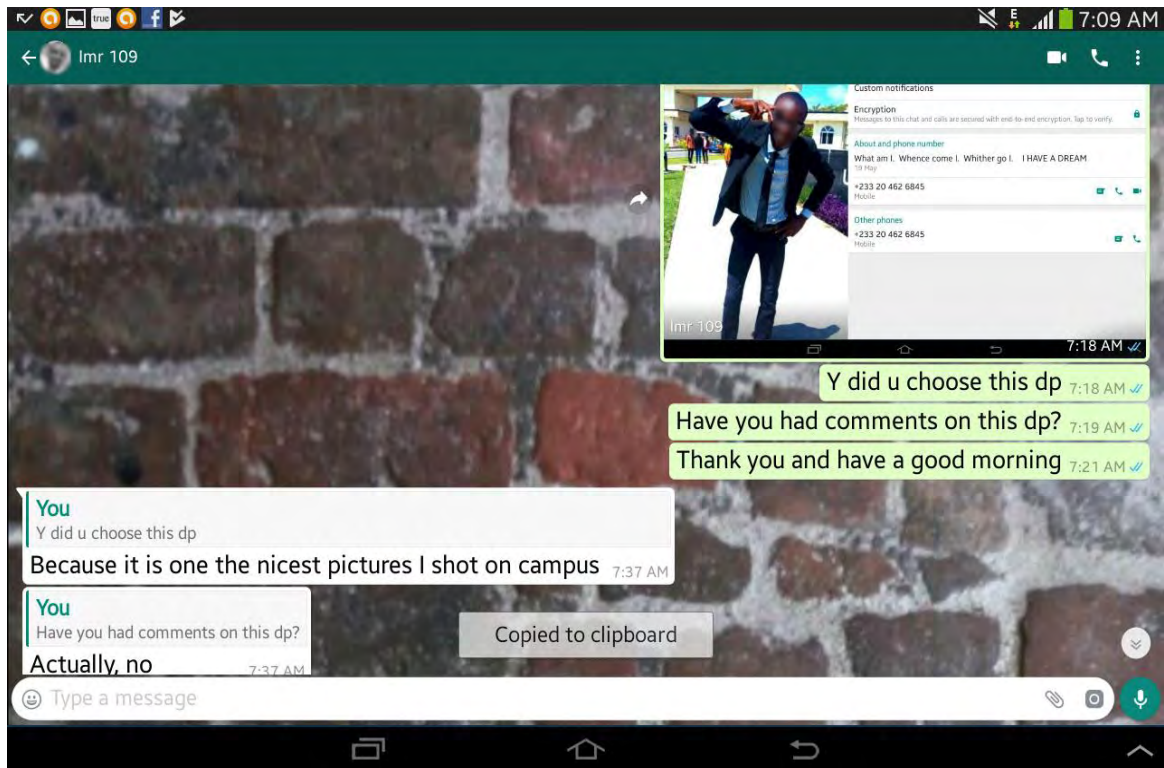


Figure 14: A participant portraying the self identity on WhatsApp

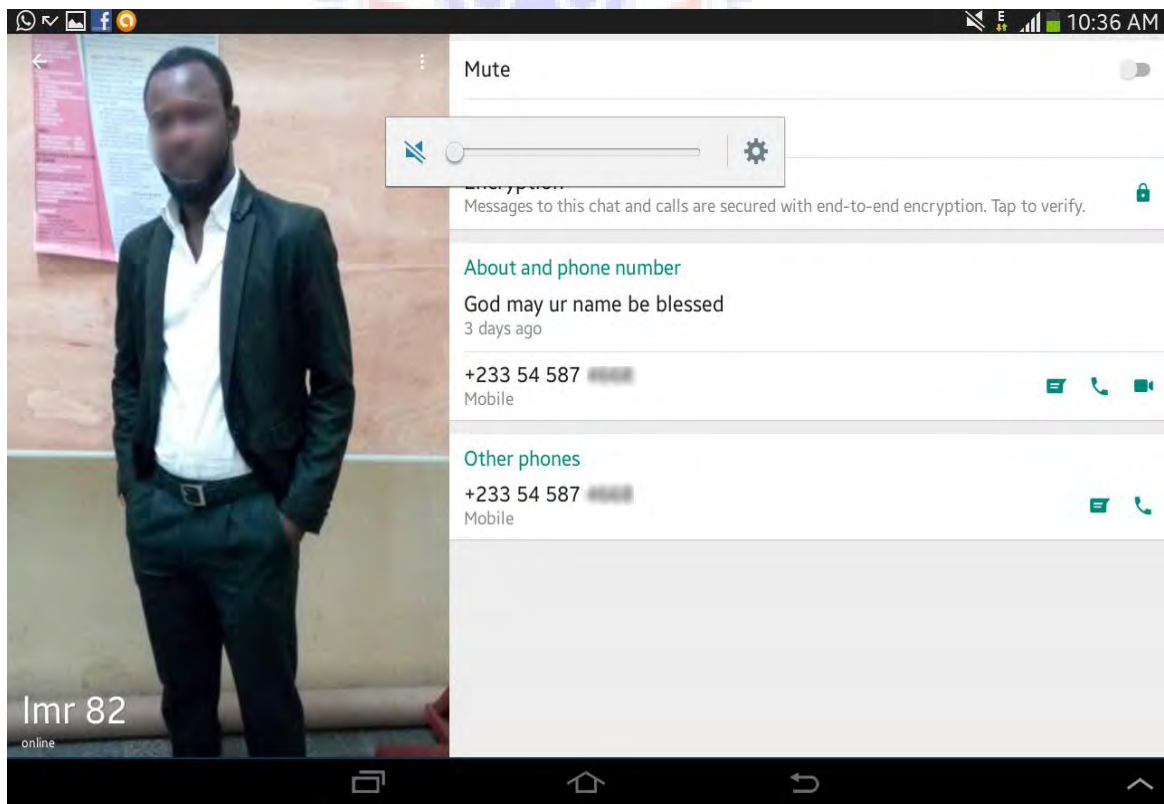


Figure 15: A participant portraying the self identity on WhatsApp

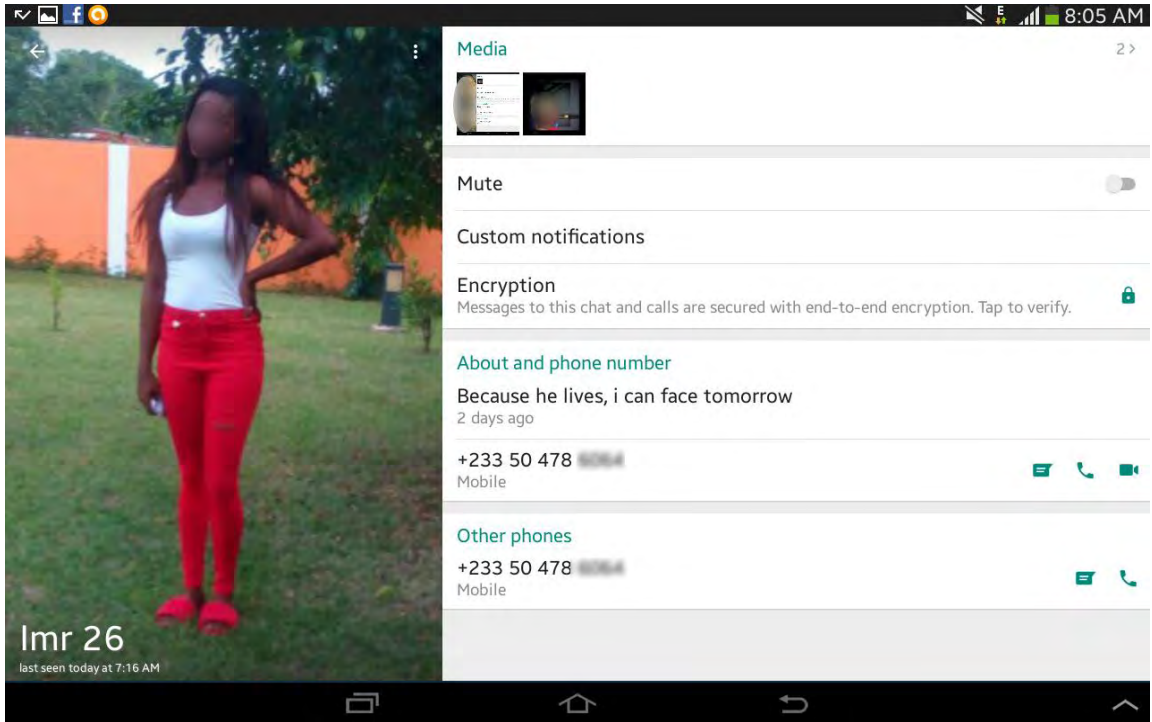


Figure 16: A participant portraying the self identity on WhatsApp

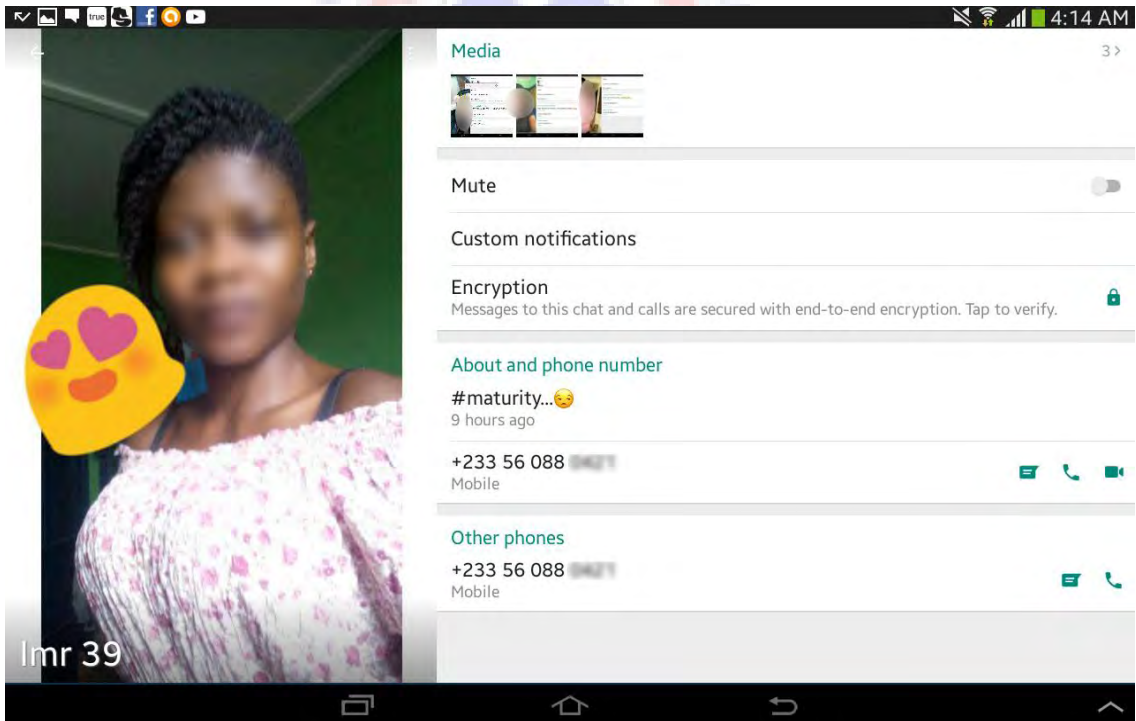


Figure 17: A participant portraying the self identity on WhatsApp

With the ability of participants to live their entire life on WhatsApp, with such affordance, participants personal interest activities are also enacted on the platform by using pictures of them participating in activities which they have interest in such as games, fashion accessories and instruments of their personal interest.

Farquhar (2009) asserts the affordance given to users of social networking platforms to create identities of their personal interests through photos uploaded to their profiles. To achieve this, participants put themselves in pictures performing their sport or leisure activities as their profile on WhatsApp.

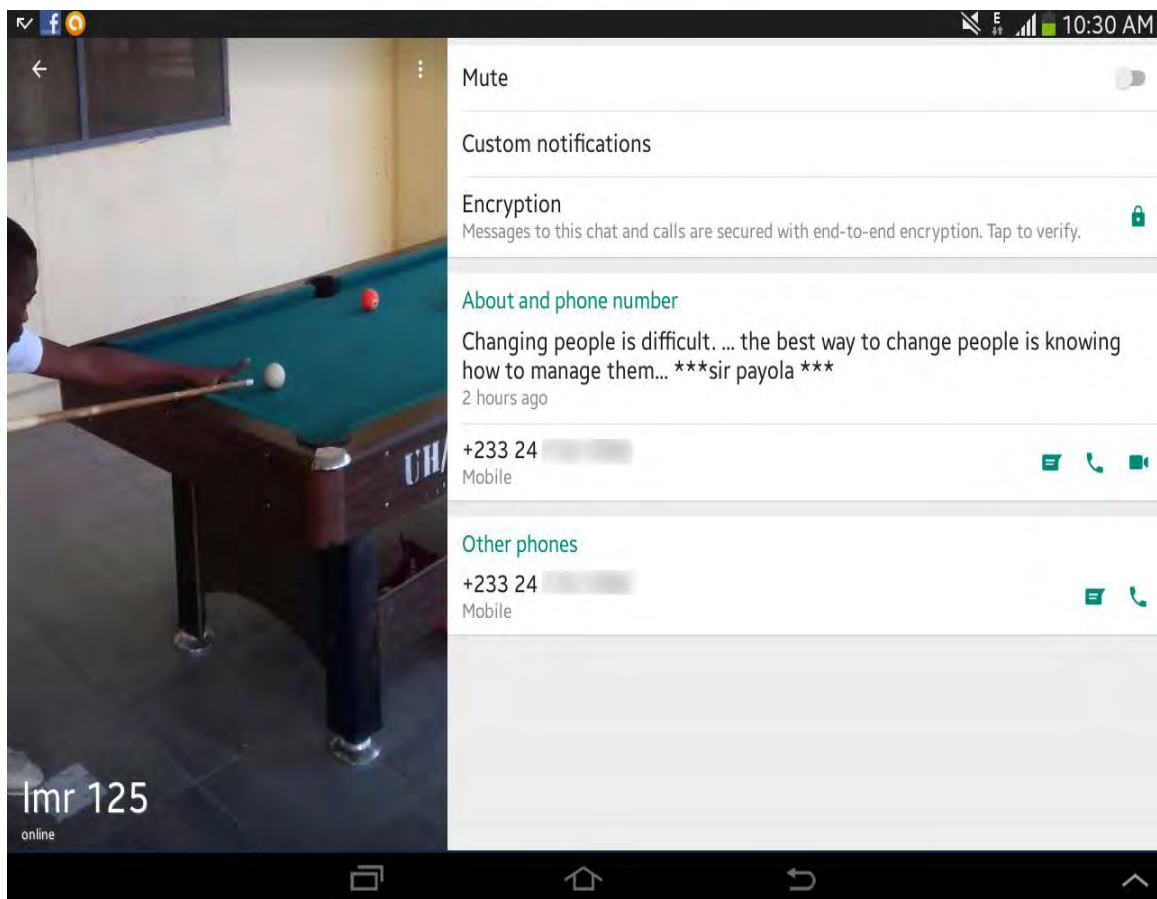


Figure 18: A Participant's profile showing him playing snooker as a personal interest activity

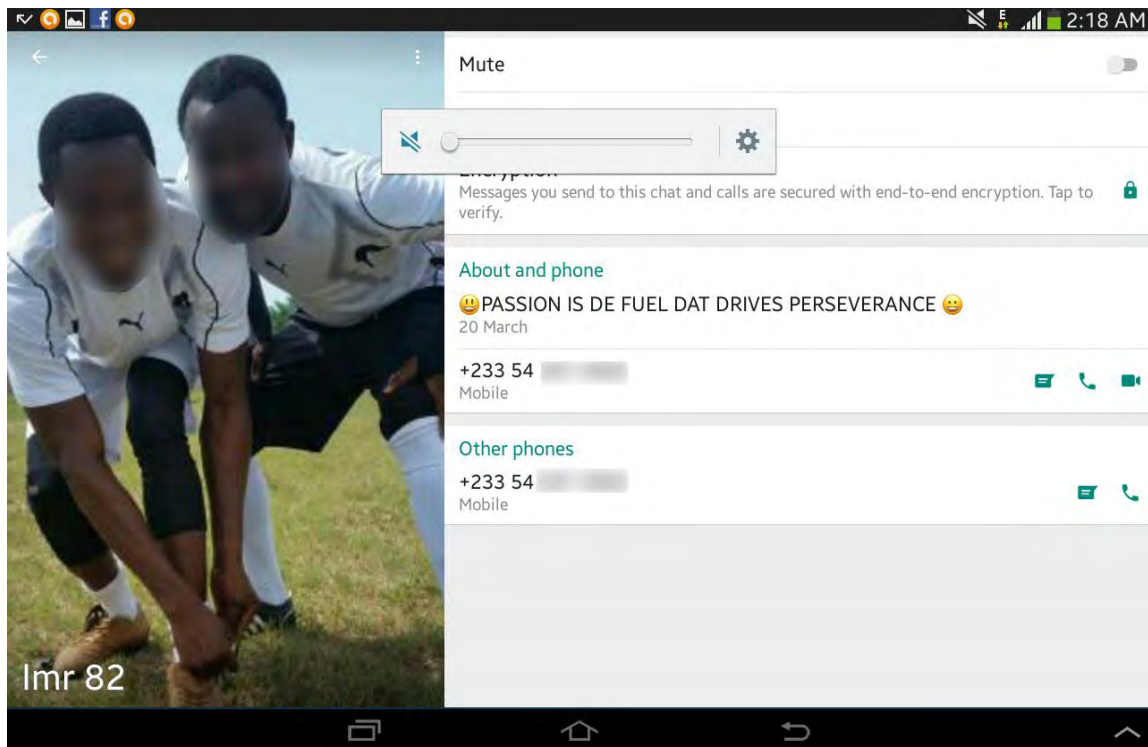


Figure 19: A Participant's profile showing him playing snooker as a personal interest activity

4.3.6 Institutional/Socioacademic group affiliation

Participants use their WhatsApp dp to show their affiliation to certain institutions such as senior high school, university and other groups the researcher describes as socio-academic groups.

This identity, constructed around institutional/socioacademic group affiliation identity, is often used to show the pride of belonging or the connection with a particular institution or socio-academic group. It is also enacted to strengthen the bond between existing friends as well as gaining new friends as one participant, IMR 20, narrated in her interview with the researcher,

Once I used my former senior high logo as my dp and a guy in my class group on our WhatsApp platform who I didn't know also went to the same senior high but

completed earlier before me started chatting me online and we have become friends since then.

IMR 64 another participant provided the researcher with insight to give credence to the researcher's assertion of pride of being affiliated with an institution,

Sometimes I use some images saying I am proud to be an old student of my senior high school, or during our senior high school home-coming or our celebration I want people to know I use it for my dp.

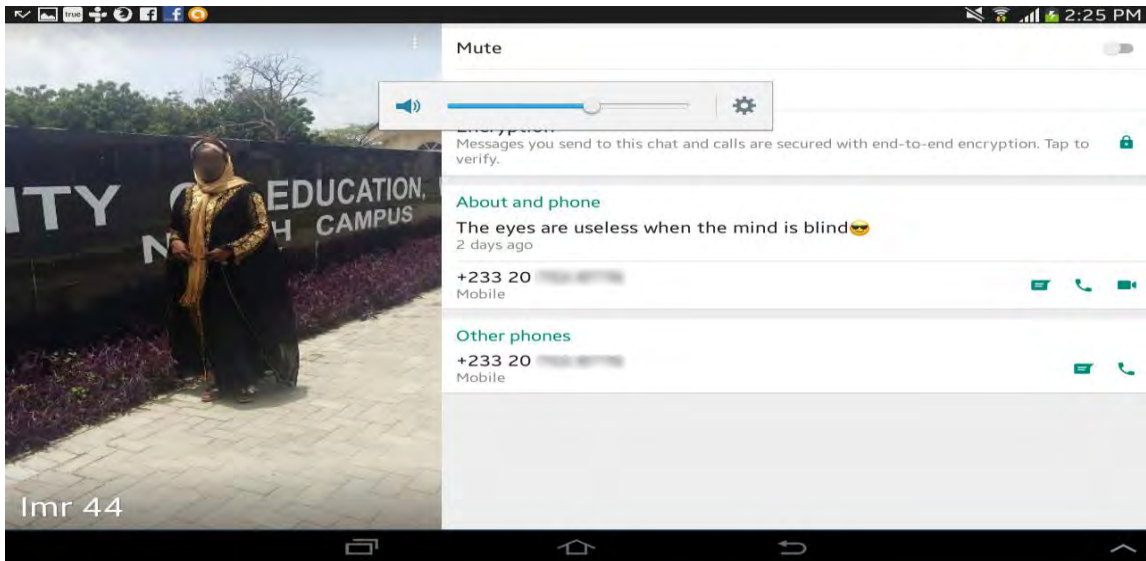


Figure 20: A participant WhatsApp profile showing her affiliation with UEW

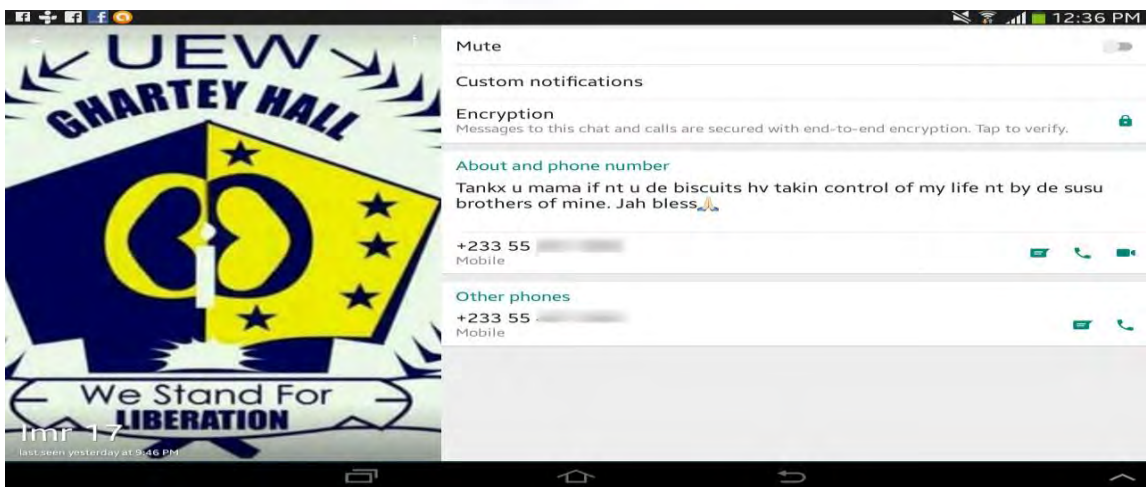


Figure 21: A participant's WhatsApp profile showing his affiliation with hall of affiliation

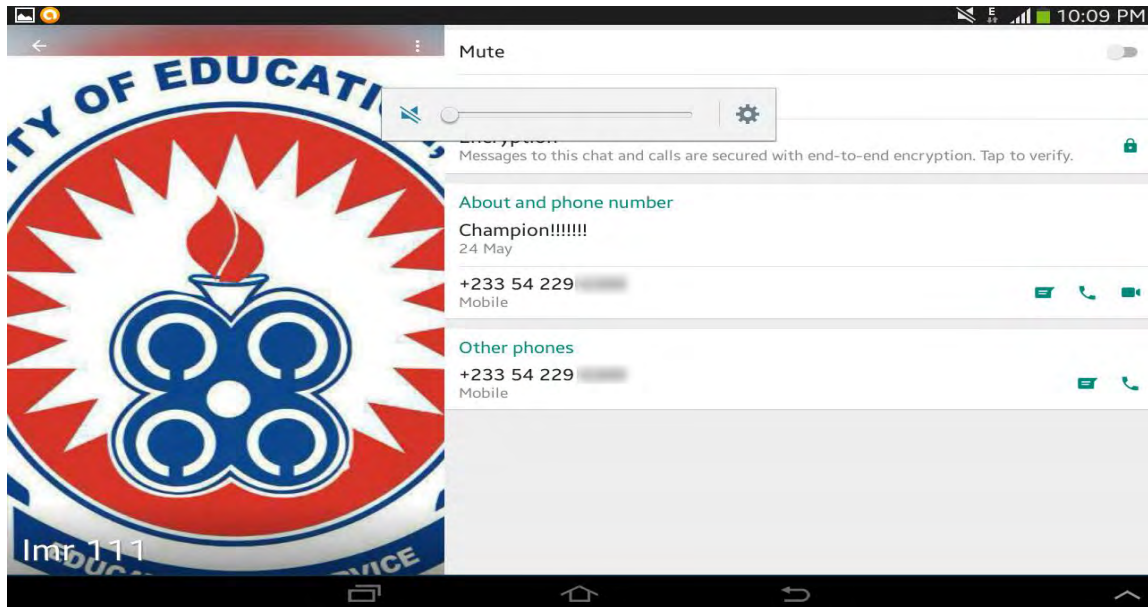


Figure 22: A participant's profile showing an affiliation with UEW

4.4 RQ2: How do undergraduate students of UEW use their WhatsApp profiles to construct these identities?

From the data collected from participants of this study, *Text, Picture, Picture-Text* images were identified as “tools” in constructing identities. These tools, according to participants enable them construct whatever identities they seek on WhatsApp.

Similar to a workshop with tools to create or construct objects and items imagined to life so do these tools aid participants, to portray their desired identities.

4.4.1 Text dp

As Rettberg (2014, p.3) suggests, identity construction and “self-representation online began in text”: it is therefore natural for participants to construct identity on WhatsApp with text as tool.

Through these texts, participants can construct their desired identities to their fullest. Participants choose words carefully to construct and give meaning to communicate to their contacts in their desired format. Farquhar (2009) in his study notes

that participants use text on their profiles to construct their desired identities to “stimulate and spark people’s attention”. Davey et al., (2012, p.12) also suggest that individuals on social networking sites use “text from everything from personal stories through inspirational quotes to Bible verses” to construct and asserting their identities. This assertion confirms the findings of this study where participants construct their identities on WhatsApp with text ranging from single-letter word to the use of hundreds of words and even entire passages. Farquhar (2009) offers a divergent opinion and suggests that the use of text on profiles serves social communication purposes rather than identity construction.

But findings from this study contradicts Farquhar’s (2009) assertion above as participants agree that the text tool is straight forward in conveying meaning and creating of the preferred identity especially in situations where images fall short. Texts as tools do not miss in pushing the message to a user’s contacts. Users have the advantage of being straight to the point. In using text, the researcher notes that participants use contrasting colours to get their contacts attention to read the texts in their profile. A participant, explained,

I usually use texts as my dp when I want to communicate to someone who has hurt me especially and don’t want to call or talk to that person directly then I use my dp through texts to send the message.

According to IMR 12, she uses text as a tool in constructing her identity in order, “To show the exact situation I am in, whether sick, bored, having fun and so on”. Also, IMR 103 claims, “I use religious texts, life, motivational ones, normal ones, it can even be a word of mine or a sentence that is important to me”.

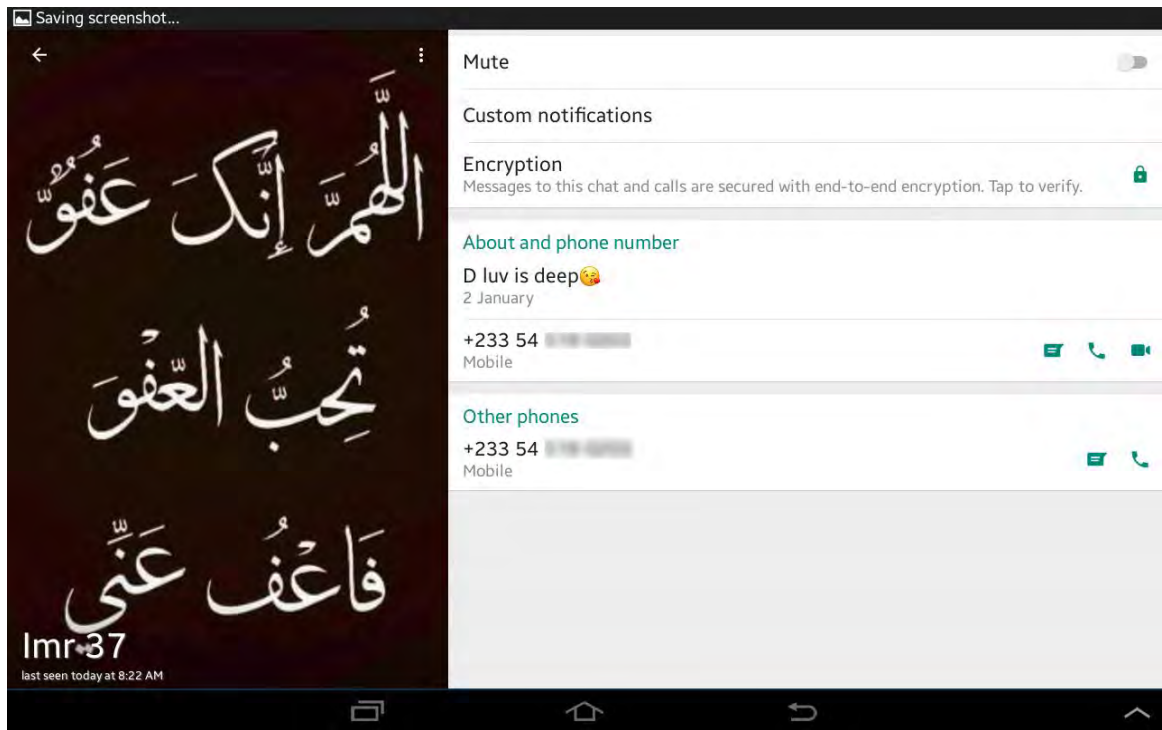


Figure 23: A participant's profile showing her Islamic religious identity with text in Arabic meaning "Oh Allah, you love to pardon your slaves, so pardon me"

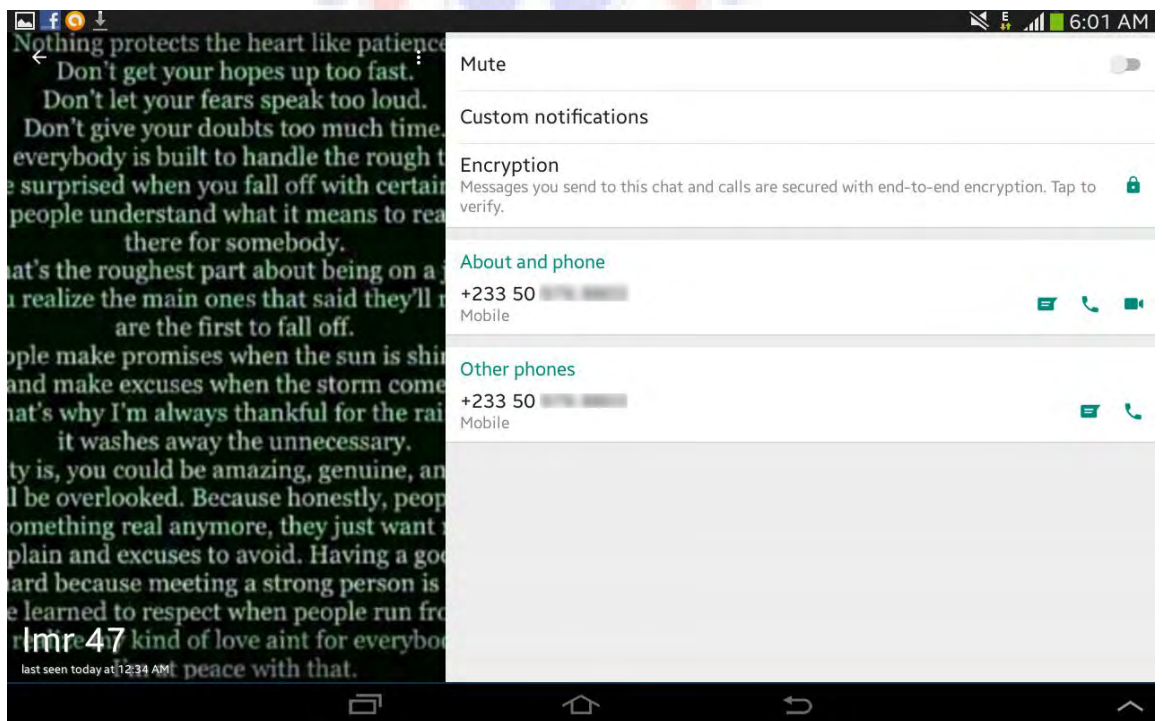


Figure 24: A participant's profile depicting the use of text as tools to create identity

4.4.2 Picture dp

Another vital tool used widely in the construction of identities of participants in this study is the use of pictures. From the data collected, it was the dominant tool used. It has no limits and it ranges from whatever a user's phone can capture to all sorts of computer generated pictures. It is widely used because it is easier and convenient for participants to take pictures to use as dp than the rest of the tools such that a picture taken can instantly be uploaded as a dp often without editing than the other tools used in identity construction on WhatsApp. This is confirmed by Walther et al. (2008) who assert that users of WhatsApp have available at their disposal and nearly unlimited number of potential photos from which they choose to construct their identities.

A disadvantage of the picture dp tool in constructing identities for participants is that different people have different understandings, which they bring to the viewing of a picture used as a display profile on WhatsApp because symbols and images will mean different things to different people at different times (Lindahl & Öhlund, 2013). Nonetheless, it serves the purposes of identity construction very well to students.

Participants such as IMR 70 when asked if he uses the picture-dp tool to construct identity on WhatsApp replied, –Yes, sometimes it speaks about who you are, the kind of images you use as your dp, it portrays a certain character or persona about you and your identity”. IMR 50 also supports the convenience of the picture-dp tool to construct identity, –First of all it must be beautiful to catch people's attention so that my contacts will comment and you know as they say –a picture is worth a thousand words””

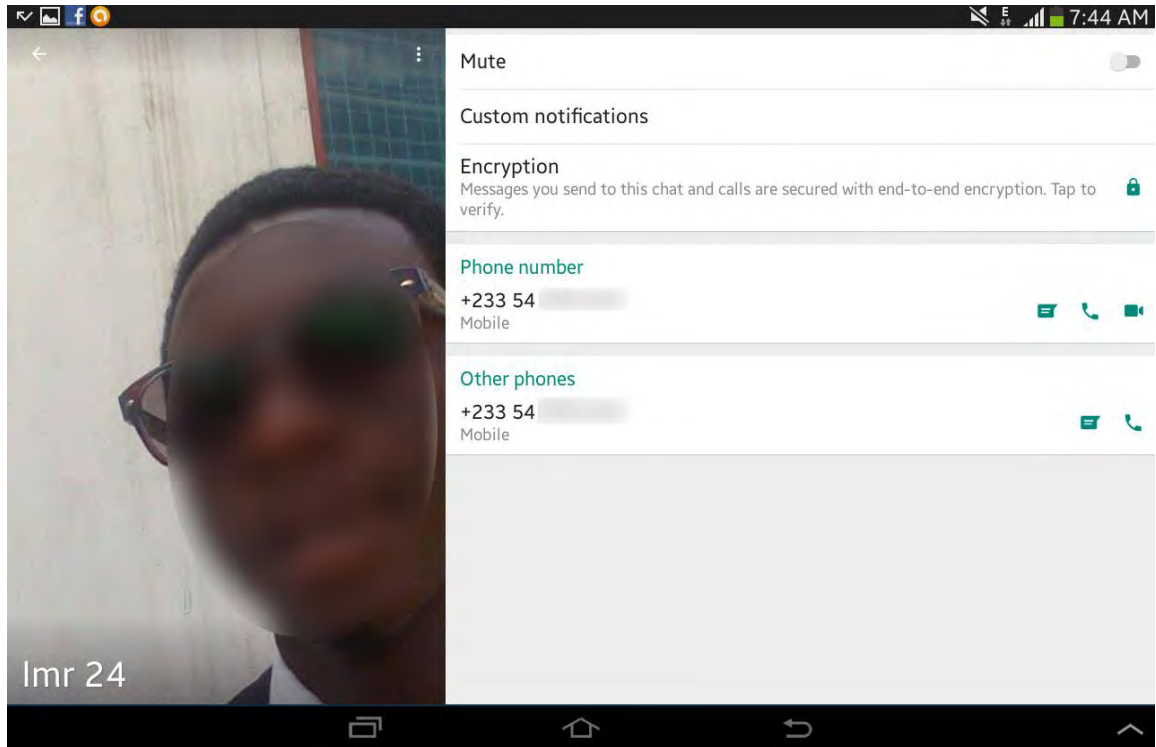


Figure 25: A participant's profile showing how he used a picture-dp tool to construct his identity on WhatsApp

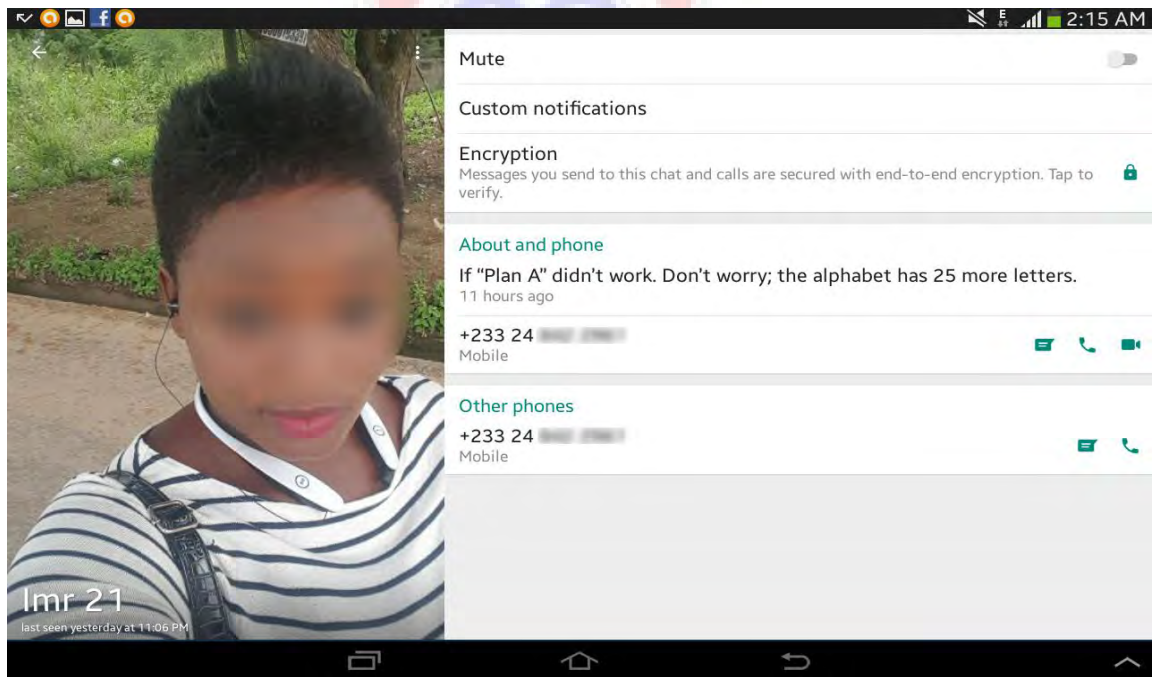


Figure 26: A participant's profile showing how she used a picture-dp tool to construct her identity on WhatsApp

4.4.3 Picture-text dp

The last tool used by participants of this study is the picture-text dp tool. This tool from the researcher's analysis is the best tool as it is a combination of the previous tools and hence has the advantages of both tools. It is also seen by researchers such as Simon-Vandenberg, Taverniers and Ravelli (2003) who describe the picture-text dp tool as an emerging form of tool where images that have texts on them are used to communicate to create identity. This tool is employed to construct identity when participants want to send the message to create the accurate impressions they seek "undiluted".

Perkel (2008, p.9) calls this type of tool 'remixing' where an individual mix texts with images form new images to construct identity on social networking profiles from skills acquired informally on social networking platforms and applications. Hence participants are able to communicate their intended message to construct their desired identities. Even though similar images may be used, the picture-text tool makes them unique and making the identity construction process very effective.

IMR 75 provides the researcher answers to the reason she uses the mixed picture-text dp tool in constructing identity,

Yes, especially when I want people to get the meaning of my dp without a lot of questions like who is this, especially when it is a guy and they keep asking, is he your boyfriend and so on. For example, once I put my younger brother's pic as my dp and people were commenting, is he your new guy? Is he the lucky one? And a whole lot of stuff and hence decided to use text with the pictures so as to avoid these question.

Another participant IMR 10 alludes to the assertion above about sending the right message in order to create a preferred identity without any ambiguity to her contacts.

When asked why she uses the mixed picture-text dp tool in constructing her identity, she responded,

I do use other pictures with words when the words are ok for me, I use them. The text for instance, you see they have meaning, so may be someone may read it and understand my situation as it is not always that an image can communicate your situation.

Finally participant IMR 51 described an instance she used the mixed picture-text dp tool,

I used two kids, who are twins, who worry me at home. I have used my dad, my mum and most of my family members as a way of appreciating them and showing them out to the world like this is my dad, this is my friend, my crazy friend and then I caption, combine the images with text, them so that you know what is really going on, like my dad with a swag.

Overall, this tool, mixed picture-text dp tool, when used by participants add texts to support the image they intend to communicate to their contacts in creating whatever identity they wish. This tool is also a remedy to the shortfall of the previous two tools: picture dp and text dp tools used to create identities.

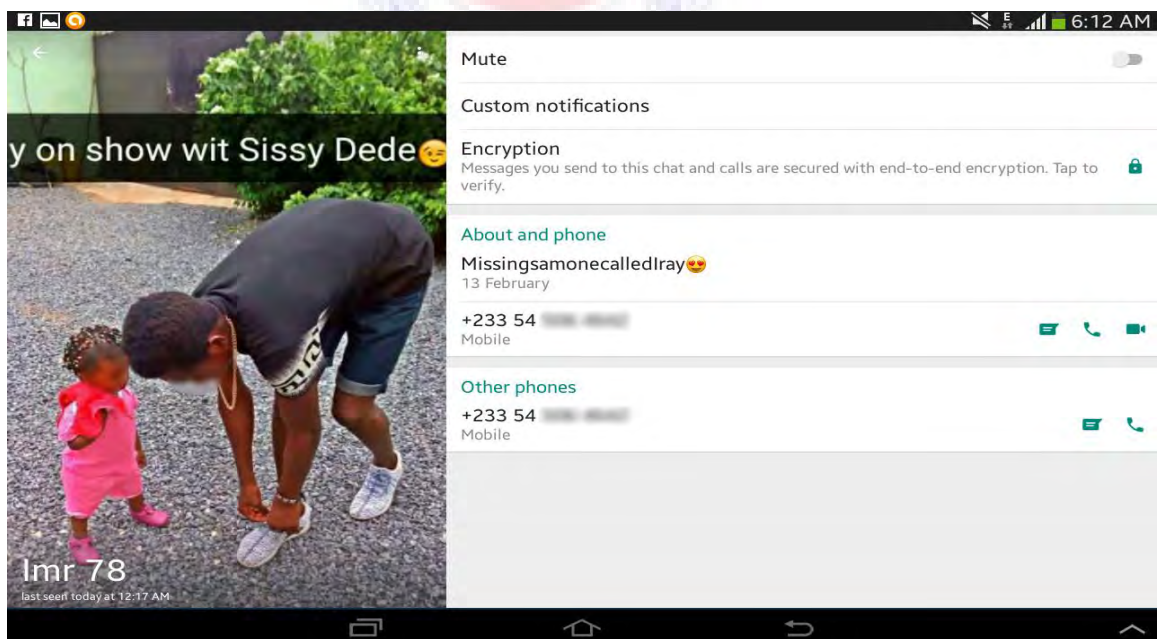


Figure 27: A participant who uses the picture-text dp tool to construct family identity on WhatsApp

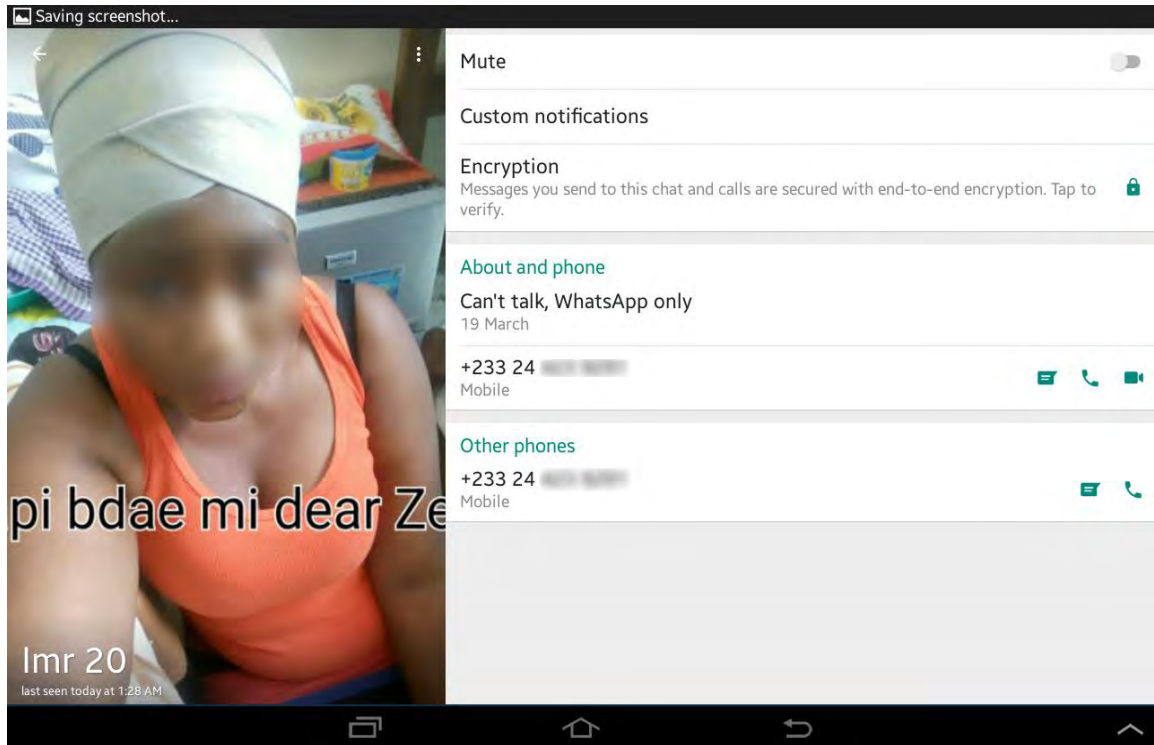


Figure 28: A participant who uses the picture-text dp tool to construct friendship and relationship identity on WhatsApp

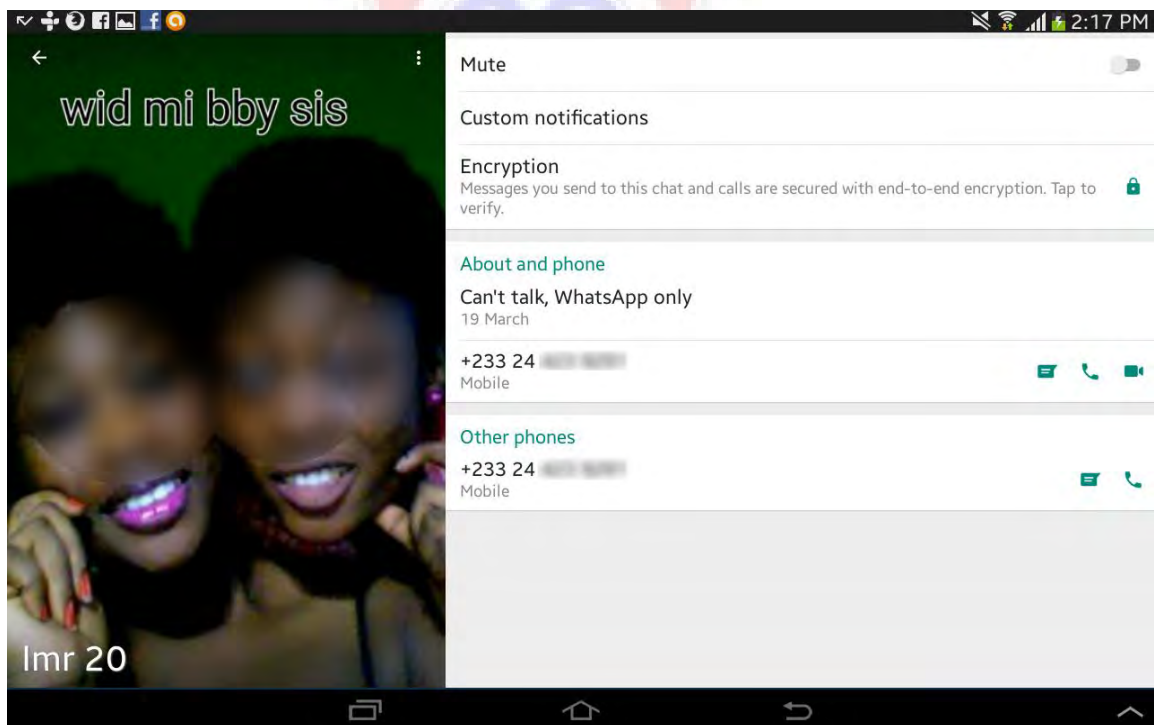


Figure 29: A participant who uses the picture-text dp tool to construct family identity on WhatsApp

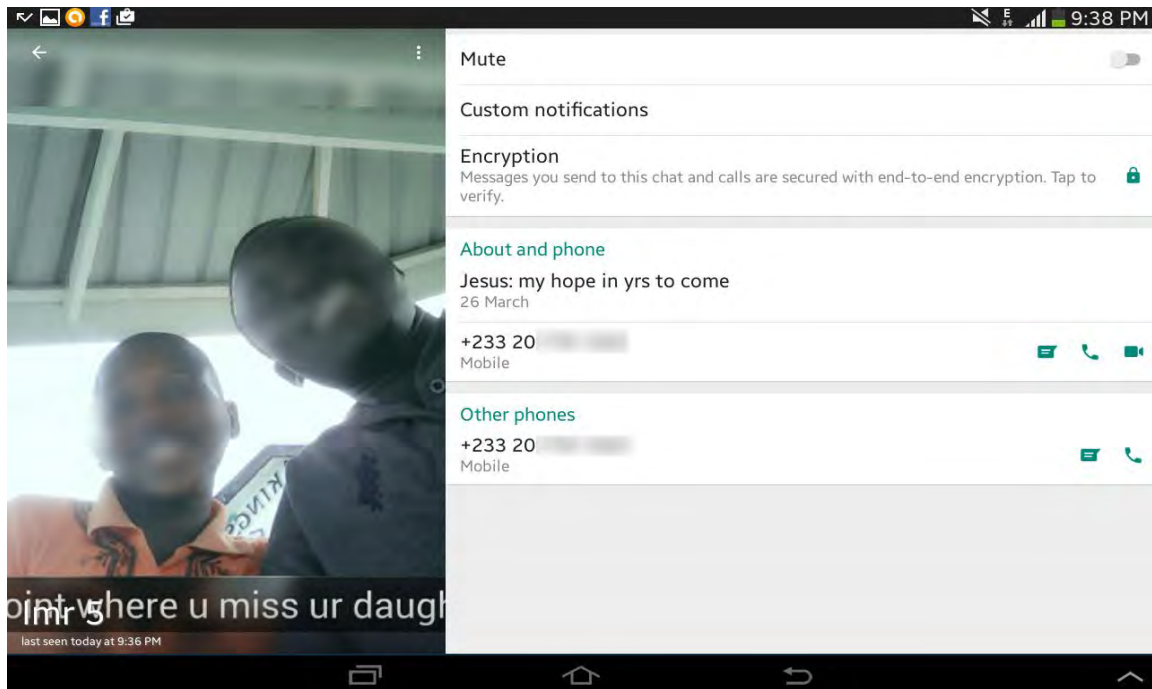


Figure 30: A participant who uses the picture-text dp tool to construct family identity on WhatsApp

4.5 RQ3: What are the motivations for the identities constructed by undergraduate students of UEW on WhatsApp?

Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) suggest that online communication and online identity construction such as WhatsApp affords the youth the opportunity and freedom to break free from the restrictions, norms and values of society to construct themselves in their preferred forms. To the contrary, this research findings suggest otherwise that the freedom asserted by Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) is not completely availed to users to construct their identities with the affordance of online communication applications such as WhatsApp as their findings suggest.

Even though identity theory specifies plainly the hypothesis that salient identities produce role-congruent behavior, Sueda (2014) accepts that in some situations, contextual demands may be so strong that the selection of behavior is determined solely by the circumstances rather than by identity salience. Therefore, the view that one is

performing a role acceptably should boost feelings of self-esteem, whereas perceptions of poor role performance may create doubts about one's self-worth, and may even produce symptoms of psychological pain (Thoits, 1991).

From this research finding, the following have been identified as key motivations for the identities undergraduate students of UEW construct on WhatsApp through their dps: Family, Religion, Friends and Self.

In addition, an individual's portrayed identity such as images used on WhatsApp according to Burke and Stets (2009) holds a set of meaning known as identity standard which the individual works to verify that identity standard through further interaction on the WhatsApp platform towards the achievement of congruence of the portrayed identity and the situation.

According Burke and Reitzes (1991) participants stay committed to their identities to conceive commitment as the total of forces and as such individuals are motivated or demotivated to construct these known identities. In order to maintain some congruence with contacts, participants get input from contacts in the form of comments, negative and positive feedback on their profiles of participants on WhatsApp. Further, participants stay committed to identities due to the reward/cost ratio of maintaining an identity known as cognitive commitment, as one participant IMR 137 suggested,

There was a picture of me in an orange dress and it was so so tight I was in the house and then I took that picture. I didn't even cover my hair. I just plaited my hair and it was new and wanted to show it, used it as my dp and went offline. I came back and saw like twenty six messages from people telling me –change your dp”, –what is that”, –eei today we have seen your hair”, those kind of comments made me uncomfortable. So I deleted the picture from my profile.

This participant had feedback by way of comments when she attempted to shift from her new identity hence she reverted back to the verified identity. She also commit to this identity in order to show socioemotional commitment: the level to which a WhatsApp user's relations with his or her contacts such as family, depends on a continuous commitment (Burke & Reitz, 1991).

4.5.1 Family

Most participants from the study assert that family: uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, father and mum as well as cousins influence the choice of identity they portray through their WhatsApp dp and IMR 44 describes a situation when she had negative feedback on a dp she used compelling her to pull the said dp down,

There was a time I kept this dp like, when I was growing up, I use to think money and luxury is everything but now I know peace of mind is the basis of something, something , I can't quote exactly, so a brother asked me that, why my sister are you not happy in your marital home or what? I never answered him and removed the image there, but it spoke a lot to him.

Another participant, IMR 64 indicated,

An uncle had a six-month old child and I used her picture as dp and he told me not to use her picture. I asked why and he told me that she is not grown yet, and someone may see her picture and so since she is not mature her spirit too is not mature so if someone sees her picture that person can use it for something bad so I should not display her picture to the public.

Another participant IMR 12 narrates to the researcher how a family member's comment on her dps influence the identities she constructs on WhatsApp. When asked whether the feedback she receives from her contact affects her identity construction on WhatsApp, she said,

Oh to me feedbacks are very important, because, every human being is born to make mistakes, so when you are corrected you have to accept it and change it. So he being my uncle I take him as my father, so if I use something and he doesn't like it ... I just change it and that is all, or sometimes probably delete that picture from my phone and don't use such pictures on my dp.

4.5.2 Friends

Another category of shapers of participants' identity on WhatsApp are friends in their contact. They are very powerful as the portrayals on WhatsApp are mainly to create positive impressions of the user in the minds of their contacts.

IMR 64 states,

For instance, when I was coming to this school, it was not all my friends who were happy about me coming to university, so if I am putting my dp there that I am in university or lecture hall or this it will hurt them and affect me so I don't use pictures displaying my presence in school. In addition, during the first year in this school, I was working before coming to school but I did not inform my employers and colleagues I was. I just told them I was travelling so, through that first year, even my matriculation pictures I did not use them for dp and all the pictures I used I did not show that I am in university.

When asked whether friends influence the identities they construct on WhatsApp, IMR 70 also responded,

In a way, because I don't want to put a picture whereby the people I have as friends would perceive me to be differently or maybe they will get a different impression because a lot of time the picture I put there, so they influence it.

Participants are verified and accepted based on the kind of identity portrayed on their dp. According to Stryker (1980) people often seek opportunities to enact their most salient identities so that the identity salient to enact and any other enacted modifications can generate reactions from contacts on WhatsApp. One participant provided examples of the

images she used during my interview to show how she went through several images with different portrayals of her Islamic religious identity.

4.5.3 Religion

Religion is also a key influence on the identities participants construct on their profiles on WhatsApp. Most participants assert that their religious traditions and beliefs influence what motivations propel them to construct their identities on WhatsApp.

IMR 64 provided evidence when asked whether religion plays any role in her identity construction process she said,

Yes, it actually influences me. I am a Christian you know, I can never use a picture of Mohammed as my dp so religion actually influences my dp. So because of my religion, there are some pictures I can never use.

Another participant collaborated the assertion that religion, and in this instance Christian religion is a motivation for the identity he constructs. IMR 70 said,

Yes it affects it. I don't know, but I think that at the end of the day I want to be seen as the Christian I am, so I don't want to put pictures that do not connote or do not agree with the kind of person they know me to be because a lot of people know me to be a Christian. If I put any picture that they don't know as portraying the kind of religion I belong to, then a different thing all together is communicated.

It was realized from the data collected through the interviews that religion as a motivation for the identities participants create on WhatsApp did not cut across all participants even though it was asserted strongly by some. For example, a participant with a divergent opinion on religion being a motivating factor for the identity she enacts on WhatsApp said, "Not really, I don't go by religion as affecting what image I use as a dp even though I am a Christian".

4.5.4 Self

Blaine and Crocker (1993) found that individuals are inclined to interpret their actions in ways that show positively on the self or guard one's self image from undesirable portrayals. Participants of this study consider the social and personal "costs" implications when detaching from a verified identity and therefore take the expectations of their WhatsApp contacts before constructing an identity on WhatsApp (Stryker, 1981).

Another concept in Goffman's dramaturgical analysis is that of the "front" and "back" stage performances. The front consist of the attitudes, presence and expressions actors a WhatsApp user—consciously or unconsciously—use in order to construct a certain image of who he or she is (Fine & Manning, 2003) whereas the backstage is the internal motivations for the individual to construct the presented identity on WhatsApp for his or her contacts.

IMR 64 narrates,

Sometimes me, myself, I think it is not good to put some pictures as dp, I don't just put any image there because some images talk about your attitude or something like that so it is not any image that I use for dp.

IMR 70 also described how his own "self" influences the identity he constructs on WhatsApp.

Yeah, I really consider a lot of things, I look for the picture that I want people to see me as who I am. Like to people to see me in a certain way, I have to be careful with the picture I put there.

IMR 103, gave an instance where she stood her ground to be herself to express herself, assert it and ignore comments to modify her identity enacted. She said,

There was a time around last year, I was celebrating male friends week, I started in July and female friends were like, don't you have female friends because I use

only my male friends as my dp because I have a lot of male friends and I don't normally like indulging myself with ladies. Yeah, and I also use it to show the kind of people I move with or this is the kind of people I call friends, the male friends that I have.

IMR 109 provided answers to how he is committed to a particular identity influenced by the –self” when asked how the –self” motivates the construction of his identity,

I don't feel like publishing myself so much, some people change their picture everyday, may u go to a party, u change your picture, the following day you go somewhere, you take a picture. For me I just feel like using one picture as my dp.

He continued,

Very well, because I know I am posting something to the public so at least it should be something me myself I like before posting to the public, you cant just take anything at all and send to the public. So I look at it critically before using a dp.

Findings from this study suggest that WhatsApp is used by students not only to fulfill their communication needs of messaging but also used to construct identities such as religious, family, business, institutional and socioacademic affiliation and the self and personal interest to their contacts. Students basically seek acceptance and the feel good effect or psychological wellbeing as the most important outcome of the identities they construct on WhatsApp. To this extent, they employ tools such as text, pictures and picture-text images on their profiles to construct their identities. They also take inputs from their contacts on WhatsApp in the form of their comments and how these contacts will perceive their portrayal into their identity construction process on WhatsApp.

4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the findings of analysis of some selected undergraduate students of UEW WhatsApp profiles. The findings show that participants construct

multiple identities depending on the salience of the identity to them and the situation or context within which they find themselves.

It was also revealed from the research that in constructing their identities participants seek positive feedback and tend to shy away from identities which are not supported by their contacts especially family members, friends, the self, and religion as shapers of the identities they construct. This is supported by Mead's assertion that identity is reflexive and it is through such interactions that an individual's identity is enacted, verified and accepted and the expected psychological satisfaction is obtained.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

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

5.2 Summary

The study examined identity construction of some selected undergraduate students of University of Education, Winneba on WhatsApp through the Symbolic Interactionism and Goffman's Presentation of Self.

The findings of the study reveal that the dominant identities constructed by participants on WhatsApp through their profiles are religious, self and personal interest, family, business, friendship and relationship, institutional/socioacademic group affiliation identities. It was also revealed from the study that participants typically enacted at least one of the identified identities but most of them enact multiple identities.

The tools used in undertaking the construction these identities are text, picture and picture-text as images on their profiles to enact their desired identities. Similar to the identities they construct, they combine these tools depending on their circumstances and the message they want to put across to construct their identities.

The study finally revealed that identity construction on WhatsApp does not take place based on only 'the self' as motivation but also family, friends and religion also motivate or inhibit the construction of identity. This supports the view of some authorities such as Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) who assert that for the youth especially,

social networking and instant messaging platforms are a “free-highway” to construct their identity.

5.3 Conclusion

WhatsApp as an instant messaging application is gradually mimicking our normal everyday face-to-face interactions. It is clear from the findings of this study that participants (students) are heavy users of WhatsApp and it provides them with the tools with which they construct their diverse identities. WhatsApp is continually providing its users more freedom to live fully and freely online through the constant addition of interesting features.

As such, it has become a virtual living space especially for participants of this study who are mainly university students. Furthermore, being experienced users of WhatsApp, participants exhibit knowledge in the selection and use of text, picture and the picture-text depending on their circumstances to get maximum acceptance of their identities from their contacts.

Also, the influences that promote or inhibit the identities students construct on their WhatsApp profiles have been shown from this study to be some key contacts on WhatsApp who, through their input in the form of comments on their profiles affect the identities they construct contrary to what some researchers such as Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) suggest that online applications such as WhatsApp provides its users unbridled freedom to construct identities without any restrictions such as norms and values of the society in which they belong.

5.4 Limitations

The study investigated undergraduate students of the University of Education, Winneba identity construction on WhatsApp. However, the findings must be seen in the light of its limitations. The researcher faced certain constraints during the study.

Since some data for this research collected over the internet WhatsApp, an instantaneous communication platform, there were delays in sending and receiving data or information from participants in a timely manner due to bad network connections between the researcher and participants. Again, some participants were not regular online as some run-out of data or were offline in order to concentrate on their studies during lecture hours or group discussions as some find the constant alerts of new WhatsApp messages very destructive. Therefore responses to some interview questions delayed and prolonged the anticipated time for the conduct of interviews online. However, this limitation was surmounted by conducting face-to-face interviews with participants.

Although, some participants were willing to participate in the study and duly completed the recruitment forms voluntarily, some of them failed to provide the researcher with further information.

5.5 Future research

WhatsApp as an online social networking and instant messaging application is fluid in its architecture and can still be said to be in its early stages of development. This notwithstanding, its potential can however not be underestimated.

This study opens up a number of opportunities for future research. An in-depth research on, for example, a recent WhatsApp status feature which afford users to show their contact pictures, video and audio which expire within twenty-four hours with

comments feature from their contacts to see who view user's status will make for an excellent research on identity construction based on a user's status.

5.6 Recommendations

WhatsApp has undoubtedly become part of today's youth and especially university student's life. Some estimates conducted in 2014 by Potgieter suggested the dominance of WhatsApp among student population aged 16 to 24 years to be 79% which in the researcher's opinion is a conservative estimate judging from the researcher's interaction with participants during data collection.

The impact of WhatsApp and its affordances in everyday social lives of these participants is also enormous due to WhatsApp elimination of some physical gating features such as stigmatized appearance, stuttering, shyness usually experienced in face-to-face settings, thus enabling all to participate freely in constructing their desired identities online (McKenna et al., 2002).

This freedom can sometimes lure university students by the impersonal nature of computer-mediated technologies to share their information with all and sundry without an idea of the negative consequences to their offline identities (Shafie, Nayan & Osman, 2012).

It is important for users of WhatsApp to become abreast of how to portray their identities to their contacts and even unknown contacts as contacts saved by unknown persons depending on the user's WhatsApp settings of their profiles can be easily viewed by these unknown contacts remotely with the user being aware.

WhatsApp has broken down the barriers of space and time experienced in identity construction in face-to-face interactions and has made participants and users perpetually

present online and therefore careful management of identities on WhatsApp will not only yield to participants benefit but will carry over its benefits outside the walls of the university as many employers and people now have the tendency to “know” whoever they interact with through WhatsApp. It is therefore important for a user to fine-tune the setting of their profile to ensure an individual’s identity is communicated to effectively to their intended contacts.

Finally, the appropriation of WhatsApp as an educational tool, where lecturers can share lecture notes and conduct group discussions on WhatsApp will be very beneficial to supplement the usual class.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory Letter from Researcher's Department

 <p>UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA FACULTY OF HUMAN LANGUAGES EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES</p>
<p>Accr. No. 1012</p>
<p>Attn: Head of Department University of Education, Winneba, Winneba</p>
<p>Dear Sir/Madam,</p>
<p>LETTER OF INTRODUCTION</p>
<p>We write to introduce to you Mr. Eric Tetteh Kesse a Graduate Student of the Department of Communication and Media Studies, University of Education, Winneba.</p>
<p>Mr. Eric Tetteh Kesse with student registration number: 1151010010 is undertaking his research work on the topic "Parents' Contribution on WhatsApp: A Study of Selected Junior High Schools of Suburban Level of Winneba and their Implications for Policy Research".</p>
<p>Please, kindly give Mr. Eric Tetteh Kesse any assistance you would wish.</p>
<p>Thank you in anticipation of your kind response.</p>
<p>Yours faithfully,  Gifty Tetteh (Mrs.) Deputy Ag. Head of Department</p>

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment and Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND CONSENT FORM

I am Eric Terkper Kutor, an MPhil. Communication and Media Studies (Business Communication) student conducting my research work on identity construction on WhatsApp.

Data will be obtained through your WhatsApp Profile images and subsequent interview on WhatsApp when necessary.

Information obtained through this research will be treated with maximum confidentiality. You are at liberty to withdraw from this research at any point.

Tick as appropriate and fill spaces provided with answers.

Age: below 17 17-20 21-23
24-27 28-31 over 32

Gender: Female Male

Department: _____

Level: _____

How long have you been using WhatsApp, between?: 2009-2011

2012-2014

2015-2017

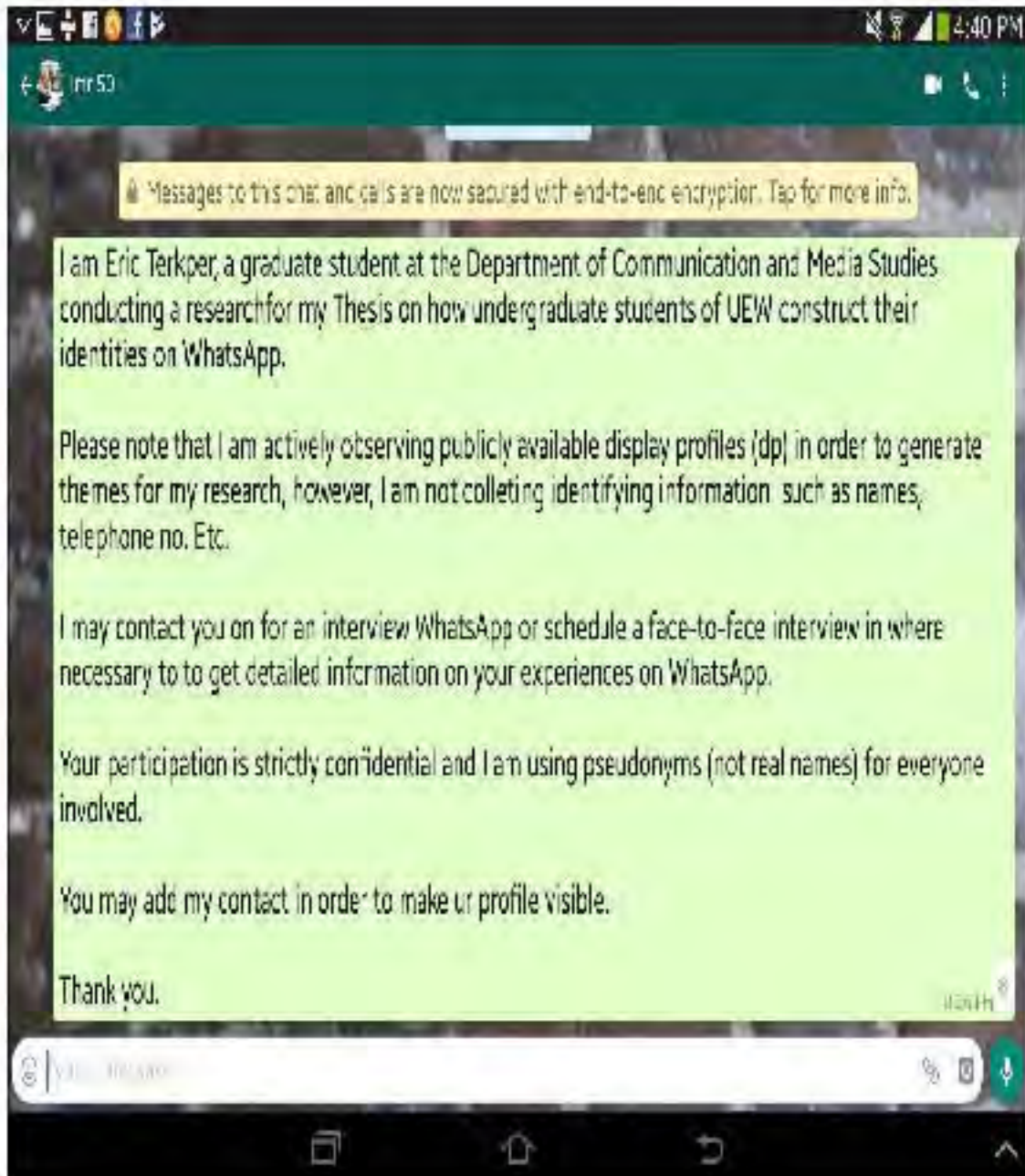
I use WhatsApp: Very Often Often Moderate Less often Not Often

Are you willing to participate in this study: Yes No

WhatsApp Phone no.: _____

Thank you.

Appendix C: Data Collection Notification on WhatsApp



Appendix D: Interview Guide

Participant Interview Guide

Erasing

I am a graduate student at Communication and Media Studies Department of the University of Education Winneba. My masters thesis research is on Identity Construction on WhatsApp: A Study of Selected Undergraduate Students of UEW. This interview is conducted to seek information for my thesis only and will not be used for any other purpose. Please feel free to share anything you want with me. If there is any question that you do not want to answer, please feel free to let me know.

Interview Questions

General Background information

Tell me a little about yourself?

What level are you?

Which programme are you studying?

How have you found living in Winneba so far?

WhatsApp use

How did you get to know about WhatsApp?

Why did you decide to use the application?

How long have you been using the application?

Is WhatsApp meeting your expectations?

Why WhatsApp? But do you know of other similar platforms

If you use more than one instant messaging application, what purposes do you use them for?

How long have you used WhatsApp?

What led you to start using WhatsApp?

What kind of information do you share on WhatsApp?

Describe a typical day on WhatsApp?

How often and how long do you stay per visit on WhatsApp?

What do you usually do on WhatsApp (activities)?

What motivates you to log on to WhatsApp?

Contacts on WhatsApp

Describe your network of contacts on WhatsApp?

What categories of people do you have in your contact. Friends, colleagues, family, relatives, acquaintances, etc.?

How well do you know the people in your contact?

Do you share the same information to all your contacts on WhatsApp?

WhatsApp Profile and Display Profiles

How open is your profile?

Do you know if others can go in and see your profile pictures? How do you feel about that?

Do you look at other people's photos, even people you may not know?

How often do you share images on WhatsApp?

What kind of photos you share?

Can everyone see your photos?

Why are you sharing these photos?

Identity Construction on WhatsApp

How do you think your visitors perceive you as a person and your use of WhatsApp?

How do you want people to perceive you?

Do you care about how people perceive you through your use of WhatsApp?

How do you write about yourself on your WhatsApp status?

Do you write only positive about yourself or otherwise?

Is it normal that you change on the pictures and status? What is the motivation for that?

What audience do you have in mind before putting up a profile picture? And do these

Appendix E: Participant Details

ID#	NAME(SURNAME)	AGE RANGE	GENDEK	LEVEL	EDUCATION	USE PERIOD	USE FREQUENCY
1	MR 98	15-20	MALE	100	THEATRE ARTS	2013-2014	VERY OFTEN
2	MR 04	21-23	MALE	200	BUSINESS EDUCATION	2012-2013	MODERATE
4	MR 118	14-21	MALE	100	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	2015-2016	MODERATE
5	MR 24	21-23	FEMALE	200	BUSINESS EDUCATION	2013-2014	OFTEN
6	MR 78	21-23	FEMALE	200	BUSINESS EDUCATION	2012-2013	OFTEN
8	MR 91	15-21	MALE	100	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	2015-2017	OFTEN
10	MR 42	21-23	FEMALE	100	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE	2015-2017	OFTEN
11	MR 7	15-21	MALE	100	MUSIC EDUCATION	2012-2013	OFTEN
12	MR 20	21-23	FEMALE	200	SPECIAL EDUCATION	2012-2017	OFTEN
16	MR 70	24-30	MALE	200	BUSINESS EDU	2013-2014	VERY OFTEN
17	MR 108	11-21	MALE	100	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE	2015-2017	VERY OFTEN
18	MR 10	21-23	FEMALE	200	ENGLISH EDUCATION	2012-2014	VERY OFTEN
19	MR 14	15-21	FEMALE	100	BUSINESS EDUCATION	2013-2014	VERY OFTEN
21	MR 105	15-20	MALE	100	POLITICAL SCIENCE	2013-2014	VERY OFTEN
22	MR 44	21	FEMALE	100	SOCIAL STUDIES	2012-2014	VERY OFTEN
28	MR 6	15-21	FEMALE	100	THEATRE ARTS	2013-2014	VERY OFTEN
29	MR 8	15-20	FEMALE	100	THEATRE ARTS	2012-2013	VERY OFTEN
30	MR 12	17-20	FEMALE	100	THEATRE ARTS	2015-2017	VERY OFTEN
41	MR 14	17-20	FEMALE	100	THEATRE ARTS	2013-2014	VERY OFTEN
42	MR 21	21-23	FEMALE	100	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE	2015-2017	VERY OFTEN