

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the research

The advancement of technology has allowed people to communicate without barriers across the globe. Such advancement has penetrated into most countries including Malaysia. Hence, for the last two decades there has been a rise in communication via the usage of Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) such as electronic mails (e-mails), online chatrooms, blogs and forums. Recently, social networking sites have become very popular among Internet users and these sites continue to mushroom due to the large number of participants (Boyd, 2007). Friendster, MySpace and Facebook are examples of commonly used social networking sites.

Studies in relation to identity construction started when Erving Goffman published his book entitled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in 1959. Various aspects of identity have since been continuously studied (Zhao, et. al., 2008). Identity studies then proliferates during the last two decades especially in the late 1990s in which Coffman & Odlyzko (2001) described the “level of activity being feverish” (p.1). This has also given the opportunity for the rise in studies which have been conducted to explore identity construction on the Internet over the last decades. Zhao et. al. (2008) cited several research examples of online identity construction in various anonymous contexts such as MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), chatrooms, bulletin boards and online dating sites.

Although early studies about identity construction gave attention to online environments such as chatrooms and online dating sites (Zhao, et. al., 2008), many researchers began to turn their attention to social networking sites due to the increasing popularity and participation among online users. Researchers are keen to understand

communication patterns as well as the connection between “impression formation” (p.2) and social networking sites (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Researchers have since found that many users are publishing favourable images and information of themselves in order to maintain an ideal self (Zhao, et. al., 2008).

Social networking can be defined as the categorizing of individuals into specific groups. These groups build small communities among the individuals as they have commonalities among each other. While building commonalities, the individuals construct not only certain group identities but also their own identities (Debatin, et. al., 2009).

Facebook is a common ‘hangout place’ for youngsters on the Internet. Originally created by Mark Zuckerberg for Harvard University students, individuals who wished to participate in this social networking site had to register themselves with their university email address (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Initially, the creation of Facebook was solely purported as an online yearbook for the university students as a substitute of the hard bound yearbooks (Nir, 2012) and therefore, it was not meant to be used as a way to meet new friends online. However, when users started updating their profiles regularly, Facebook slowly developed into a social networking site, which allows users to interact with one another via status updates and photo-sharing. Currently, it is available to anyone who is at least 13 years old and has a valid e-mail address (Kelley, 2007). This site has become a primary instrument for many to interact, construct personal identity and build a network among each other (Debatin, et. al., 2009).

Upon registering, Facebook users can start adding friends, exchanging messages with other Facebook users, posting their status updates, commenting on other individuals’ uploads etc. Facebook users can also join groups of their interests by clicking “Like” on the group’s page. By “Like-ing” the page, users are entitled to access the group’s contents. Besides having the feature “Like”, Facebook also has another

feature, i.e. “Poke”, which allows one user to virtually poke another user. In recent years, Facebook has also introduced many other interactive features that allow more communicative interactions among users. Some examples of these features include Facebook chat via live video calls, “follow button” (which allows users to access to another user’s content without befriending them) and the most recently introduced “Timeline” (a virtual space which was commonly known as the Facebook profile, to show happenings in a user’s Facebook homepage in a sequenced order (Buck, 2012).

The users of Facebook participate in this network by creating a profile, adding friends, updating personal status and posting comments on friends’ status/comments as ways for self-representations within their network (Boyd, 2007). The “Like” button is also a trend among users. “Like-ing” is an alternative way of letting people know that one has seen and liked the content without commenting (Facebook, 2012). This social plug-in acts as an invitation to express support, interest or agreement within the users’ social networks.

Facebook enables users to manage their online and offline social lives and communication as well as to construct and present a preferred identity. Facebook also develops precise social interactions which can be clearly seen from the way its users manipulate their social and personal information by taking into consideration the appropriateness of preferred self-representations (Vanderluis, 2008). Through Facebook, users perform their online self-representations by using meaningful symbols as they would use in their offline communication. To a certain extent, Facebook has created a more complicated level of self-representation reconstruction because it is more likely that an individual makes an effort to show different self-representations for different groups of people (Kelley, 2007). Facebook has become more and more popular since its introduction and Kelley (2007) argued that it has become one common

computer-mediated mean for youngsters not only to interact with their friends but also to perform their identities.

Besides, the easy accessibility to the global network has allowed youngsters to express their thoughts about personal or social issues in an open manner (Sabo et. al., 2009). The choice of words in their expressions is a way to portray and express themselves in their preferred image projection within their social network. By using social networking sites, participants can construct multiple self-representations according to their preferences in different circumstances. For example, User A is both a graduate student and a full-time teacher. User A uses Facebook to interact with her colleagues, students and classmates. On her status updates, she shares information of various topics such as teaching tips that benefit her colleagues, revision tips that are important for her students or campus activities that may interest her classmates. By sharing information of different topics, User A portrays different identities to her targeted audience. She portrays herself as a helpful colleague to her colleagues, a responsible teacher to her students and an active student to her classmates.

According to Boyd (2007, p.1), social networking sites are “common destinations for young people in the United States.” It is no doubt that this trend has also influenced young people in Malaysia. Malaysians are found to be actively using Facebook for work or entertainment purposes. According to Pring (2012), there are currently more than 800 million active users and more than 50% of these users log in daily. Pring (2012) also mentioned that a user has an average of 130 friends in their list. Internet World Stats (2012) stated that there are 183.9 million Facebook users in Asia based on the statistics obtained on 31 December 2011. The statistics of male and female users shows almost equal distribution in which 53% are male users and 47% are female users (Allen, 2013).

According to Lim (2011a), Malaysia is ranked at 16th worldwide with an estimated number of 10,138,760 users. In Asia, Malaysia is ranked fourth with an estimated number of 1,407,800 new users within a period of three months from 1st October 2010 until 1st January 2011 (Lim, 2011b). According to a survey done by Malaysia Crunch, about 45% of the users come from the age group 18 to 25 followed by 37% for the age group 26 to 34. It can be clearly seen that most users are from the younger age group. These statistics clearly show Facebook plays a significant role among Malaysian youngsters.

Trend is no doubt a reason why people like to communicate via this channel. Easy accessibility is another important reason why people continue to flock onto this site. With new technology of wireless communication and other communication devices like smartphones and tablets, notifications from Facebook can be easily “pushed” to these devices and it enables users to instantly check these updates. Although the issue of privacy was initially a primary concern, Facebook continues to introduce privacy controls that help users decide what and to whom they will show their information (Debatin, et. al., 2009).

This research attempts to investigate how young Malaysians construct their preferred identity via status updates on their Facebook profiles. The researcher will take into account several factors such as the lexical choices, the language choices, the topics of interest, the usage of emoticons or symbols, the usage of punctuation markers, and the formality of language used by the participants in their status updates.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The rapid growth of participation in Facebook has raised several questions. While most researchers have focused on the issue of privacy (e.g., Acquisti & Gross, 2006 and Govani & Pashley, 2005), others studied the reasons behind the popularity of Facebook among its users to see what their purposes are as well as what and how they

communicate via this online medium (e.g., Sarachan, 2011). While these previous studies have significant implications on studying the usage of Facebook, the current study departs from the previous studies to explore how Facebook users interconnect and represent themselves in constructing their identities in social networks.

In the classical theories of social identity, for instance, Tajfel and Turner in the 1970s have suggested that individuals might have many “selves” to represent themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the case of Facebook, it can be anticipated that there are different representations between users’ online and face-to-face communication. Therefore, this research explores how and why users construct such online identities which sometimes differ from their ‘real’ selves or vice versa.

1.3 Objective of the research

As youngsters are entitled the freedom and flexibility of speech in virtual contexts, many of them continue to express themselves in an open manner within their social network (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). The purpose of this research is to examine how young Malaysians construct multiple identities via their status updates in their Facebook profiles.

The reliability of identity construction in nonymous setting is undoubtedly higher than those in the anonymous setting since the authenticity of the information posted on these social networking sites are tied to the reality as friends, coworkers, family and acquaintances from the real world can most likely access this information. However according to Crilley (2011), befriending whether on anonymous or nonymous sites can be dangerous as the person on the other side of the screen is sometimes completely unknown.

This research therefore aims to examine how Facebook users perform identity construction via their status updates, what kinds of identities they want to portray to

their audience and how identity performance is influenced by the nonymity of the environment where the performance takes place. It is hoped that the findings of this research will help to widen our general knowledge about self-representation, identity construction and identity performance in online social networking sites.

Previous studies on chatrooms, bulletin boards and even online dating sites have shown that online presentation varied according to the nature of settings (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). Some studies on Facebook in the areas of privacy issues (Cain, 2008), personality and motivations (Ross et al., 2009) and professionalism (DiMicco & Millen, 2007) have also been previously carried out. This study will extend the line of research to identity construction on Facebook among young Malaysian users.

Also, Lee, Wong and Lai (2011) mentioned that previous studies of Facebook focused on identity presentation, privacy, personality, motivation, benefits of Facebook, and college students' networking experience on Facebook. A comparison between Facebook and Orkut users among Indian and Pakistani users has also been done. However, up to date, there are still limited studies which have been carried out to examine the use of Facebook in Asia. This study hopes to provide a better understanding on the identity construction in Asia, specifically in Malaysia.

1.4 Research questions

This research wants to answer the following questions:

1. What are the linguistic, semiotic and visual features used in the Facebook profiles of young Malaysian users?
2. What are the identities constructed as reflected in the linguistics, semiotic and visual features used in the Facebook profiles of young Malaysian users?
3. Why do Facebook users present themselves with different identities in different settings?

1.5 Rationale of the research

One reason why Facebook was chosen for this research is that it provides an ideal platform for its users to display identity performance. Zhao et. al. (2008) also supported this claim by mentioning that Facebook provides an online communication context where relationships between users have already been established in offline context. Due to this fact, Facebook users may face restrictions in their identity performance but it does not prevent them from using other methods of self-representation. To a certain extent, users may use Facebook to highlight their positive traits and de-emphasise on their negative (or less-desirable) traits. With the privacy policy introduced by the Facebook administrator, Facebook users can also adjust the visibility of their profiles to their audience. For example, they can block a particular part of their profile for a particular group of people. Through this, they are limiting the information towards the people whom they do not wish to share the information. Besides this, users can also prevent people from adding them as friends or even searching for them on Facebook. Such controls enable users to control what kind of preferred self-image they would want to present to different audiences.

1.6 Significance of the research

It is interesting to find out on how young Malaysians, despite the social norms, use language as a form of expression to construct their self-representation. It is also worth looking at how multiple identities are constructed by the participants according to their preference in different contexts. Previous research has been conducted in Western contexts but this research focuses on Asian's perspectives specifically in Malaysia. This may also aid in future research in related fields.

1.7 Scope and limitation

Facebook has a wide range of global users of all ages, starting from the age of 13. This research analyses the status updates on Facebook by young Malaysian users from the age of 24 to 28. Therefore, findings are not generalizable across age groups and do not represent all young Malaysians. Only 20 subjects are used in this research. However, the qualitative analysis carried out attempted to capture as much detail as possible within the parameters of the research questions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The concept of identity

Identity plays an important part in an individual's life. It is the characteristics and qualities that an individual wants to portray to the others. Identity, which is sometimes known as personal identity, is the way individuals choose to see themselves as and the way individuals want others to see themselves as. Crilley (2011) emphasises that identity is unique for each individual. Nonetheless, identity is greatly affected by external factors such as "social perception" and "physical traits" (Hongladarom, 2011, p.30).

In the article of Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) entitled *Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships*, Markus and Nurius (1986) categorised the concept of self as "now-self" and "possible-self". The same article also mentioned how Higgins (1987) explained that "now-self" refers to the possession of characteristics and attributes that are known to people, such as physical characteristics, personality, etc., while "possible-self" could be of the "hidden true self" or "idealised self". In addition, Altheide (2000) mentioned that identity is the part of self in which the individual is known to the others. Identity performance does exist even in face-to-face communication. An individual may behave in a way to purposefully conceal their real self and present a self-preferred image to others. Nonetheless, identity performance is restricted due to various factors such as physical settings, physical attributes, education background and social background (Goffman, 1959).

However, the emergence of Internet has replaced this traditional state of identity performance. Zhao et al. (2008, p. 1817) states that it is possible for individuals to interact on the Internet "in fully disembodied text mode that reveals nothing about their

characteristics.” This means that an individual can remain anonymous by retaining their real information, thus leading to a whole new approach to identity performance. Such an approach creates an inclination for an individual to play a completely different role from their real self for the purpose of creating a more desired self-presentation for their audience. Individuals tend to play a very different role in an anonymous virtual context, but such behavior becomes “realistic and honest” when the virtual context becomes nonymous. Zhao et al. (2008) explains that anonymous occurrences enable individuals to “reinvent themselves through the production of new identities” (p. 1818). Besides creating a new identity, this online communication also aids in the discovery of one’s “hidden selves” (Suler, 2002) or “various non-conventional identities” (Rosenmann & Safir, 2006).

According to Zhao et al. (2008), identity is “an important part of the self-concept” (p. 1816). It reflects an individual’s thoughts and feelings about oneself and how one is known to the others. Identity construction requires a physical setting (e.g. decoration) and personal fronts (e.g. appearance, language and manner) to create a desired impression to others. As the emergence of Internet has changed the traditional notion of identity production and construction, people may have the tendency to hide their real self and fabricate a new self in order to be accepted by others. This commonly occurs on the virtual context where people have no real face-to-face communication. A person may represent themselves in a particular manner according to their preference of being more suitable and appropriate.

Self-representation, as many would label it as a concept of identity, is an essential part of human development. People are constantly trying to present themselves favorably in order to be accepted within their community. Zhao et al. (2008) argued that identity is constructed under constraints in face-to-face interactions. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Internet has changed the orthodox view on self-representations.

The social identity theory developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1970s mentioned that a person is said to have many “selves” as their self-representation in different contexts or settings (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). By having many “selves”, individuals could shift from one self to another according to different contexts or preferences that is deemed to be more appropriate. Ochs (1993) emphasised that “social identities evolve in the course of social interaction, transformed in response to the acts and stances of other interlocutors as well as to fluctuations in how a speaker decides to participate in the activity at hand” (p.298). Membership within a group depends on the individuals’ existing knowledge of the group and such knowledge is built overtime through the individuals’ actions. Repetitions of such actions help individuals to understand the socially accepted norms and thus strengthen their social identity.

Glatzmeier & Steinhardt (2005) highlighted the fact that “the process of developing one’s self is seen as a process of socialisation” (p.2). Individuals shape their ideal self by playing different roles and if this role-playing corresponds with the reality, it is likely that the observers will believe that this role-playing is actually real. Goffman (1959) also mentioned that in this real world, everyone is more or less playing a role. Some actors are so engrossed in this role-playing that they believe this is their real self. However, some are conscious between the created reality and the actual reality. Usually, this role-playing involves creating a self which is socially accepted by others.

Goffman (1959) suggested that identity construction is an exaggerated performance in which the presenter’s behavior is set to influence their audience. Performance, rather than being a result of the identity in reality, actually fosters identity construction. Performance is socialised and transformed by the surrounding’s expectations and understandings. Thus, individuals construct their identity based on these social standards. Kelley (2007) proposed that if identity is accepted as “something

that is performed” (p. 3) then it fits Goffman’s theory perfectly in that one behaves in a particular manner before different audiences.

Robinson (2007) stated that an individual’s sense of self is not inborn but rather achieved through the perception of their audience. The concept of self is flexible and can be constantly renegotiated in interactions. Thus, in performing identity, the performers sometimes put themselves in the position of their audience and they try to speculate how others would evaluate them. Jenkins (1996) had mentioned that although individuals can control the signs that are being given, it is almost impossible to ensure that the given signals would be interpreted in the preferred manner. As the concept of identity is social, it must be performed with the existence of the audience.

One of the most significant social theories contributed in sociology was probably the symbolic interaction approach, also known as symbolic interactionism, which was developed by Goffman in 1959 in his book entitled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. This approach analyzes human interaction in social settings. According to Gingrich (2003), such theoretical approach provides a good basis for analyzing social environments where individuals spend most of their time interacting with others. These environments do not need to be an online context but they can include offline settings such as “organised structures like jobs and schools, and unusual social situations such as accidents, weddings and funerals” (p.1). Symbolic interactionism views meanings as a result of social interactions and thus, humans interpret these events to generate meanings.

This symbolic interaction approach by Goffman is very useful as it interprets how people use symbols to interact in their everyday lives. Gingrich (2003) mentioned that this approach “studies and analyses the processes involved in all aspects of the use of symbols and communication” (p.3). Macionis and Gerber (2010) defined a symbol as “anything that carries a particular meaning that is recognised by people who share a

culture.” Facebook is the culture related to the present study. This approach also recognises that social interactions shape human thoughts. Thus, individuals adjust the way they communicate by judging from the situations they are in. As a result, people project themselves how they want to be and not who they really are.

In addition, the Brunswick lens model, developed by Professor Egon Brunswick in 1956, is also often used as a framework to analyze impression formation. According to Utz (2010), this model states that “the behavior of individuals and the artifacts produced by them reflect their personality” (p.316).

Zhao et. al. (2008) maintained that individuals consciously manipulate their behavior not only in face-to-face communication but also in online communication. Individuals who highly engage in such manipulation are known as “Machiavellian”, a term used by Christie and Geis (1970) as well as Leary, Knight and Barnes (1986). These individuals strategically plan their actions, and would resort to trickery to achieve their objectives. It is no doubt that one of these Machiavellians’ objective is to fulfill their needs to be positively accepted by others. This is a feature that is commonly found among Facebook users.

2.2 Young adult and identity

As identity has been a crucial part of growing up, it is no doubt that individuals are constantly searching for their identity even at early adolescent years. During adolescent years, teenagers of both genders choose their friends and create styles to establish their individuality. This can be easily observed through their “speech, physical presentation and interests” (Crilley, 2011, p.3). Based on common interests and perceptions, these teenagers form a social group among themselves. As these teenagers grow, their personalities grow with them and thus leading to identity changes.

Pempek et. al. (2009) remarked that many teenagers undergo identity confusion especially about their sexual identity during their early adolescent years. In later adolescent years when they supposedly have a clearer understanding of their sexual identity, they face another identity confusion between intimacy and isolation. Pempek et. al. (2009) explained further by stating that “early adolescence is marked by the conflict between identity and role confusion” while “late adolescence is characterised by the struggle between intimacy and isolation”. After this period of adolescence, an individual enters “emerging adulthood” and is assumed to have possessed “a well-formulated sense of self” (p.228). This growing up process makes them realise what they want and need, and therefore, they create a desired identity of who they want to be.

Young adults, unlike teenagers, have already experienced such struggles and they are probably more aware of what they want and who they are. Annett (2000) described these young adults as having more freedom and independence as compared to teenagers and at the same time being less responsible as compared to more mature adults. During this period, young adults can explore in depth about the issues they faced during their adolescent years and explore their identity but at a more matured level.

Pempek et al. (2009) also find that “self-disclosure with peers” help youngsters develop “personal identity and intimacy” (p.236). In social networking sites, these young adults post various kinds of information as a way to express themselves. Comments in response to these posts are ways for these young adults to explore themselves, to expand their social circles as well as to enhance their social relationships. Traditionally, youngsters do not share the same social equality with elders in expressing themselves especially in the Asian context. However, due to globalisation and the advancement of education and technology, this traditional social norm is changing. The influence of Western discourses through the mass media has also played a part in changing this norm. For example, Peluchette & Karl (2010) suggested that the exposure

to reality television shows has influenced these young people to provide private information about themselves to others.

Due to various factors, youngsters are starting to speak up, defend and express their thoughts in a bolder and more straightforward manner. According to Talbot et. al. (2003, p.205), “young people have found ways to negotiate relationships, identities and power.” Through expressing themselves on Facebook, they redefine their everyday social norm and physical space. This is not to challenge the social norm but to express who they really are. Therefore, youngsters continue to express themselves more frankly and comfortably especially in the virtual context

2.3 Online communities within computer-mediated-communication (CMC)

Computer-mediated-communication allows individuals to share information immediately across large distance. In *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated-Communication and Community*, Jones (1996) stated that Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) is a “technology, medium and engine of social relations.” The occurrence of CMC has given opportunities for individuals to create, construct and explore their identity. This virtual world allows individuals to be who they want to be without being restrained by the social and cultural boundaries.

Since the start of the Internet era, online impression formation has been a highly researched topic. Walther (1996) proposed that the online environment provides a good basis for impression formation due to its asynchrony and anonymity. Such features allow users to easily construct their idealised self-presentation as compared to the usual face-to-face communication. According to Utz (2010), earlier studies of online impression formation revolved around anonymous text-based computer mediated communications such as multi-user-dungeons (MUDs), chats and newsgroup. These computer-mediated interactions are categorised as anonymous due to the lack of non-

verbal cues between users while interacting. However, computer-mediated-communications are becoming less anonymous especially in social networking sites (SNSs) because users usually provide their pictures and information about themselves in their SNS profiles. Unlike other online communities such as chat rooms and newsgroup, SNS users can add friends by sending requests to other users. Utz (2010) noted that though it is easy to fake profiles, the process of faking profiles is more complex due to the existence of friends on these SNSs. If these friends are at least acquainted with the owner of the profile in real life, such faking of information could easily raise doubts.

Papacharissi (2002) termed online communities as online neighbourhoods and Coley (2006) categorised these online communities into three types, namely social networking sites, online chat systems and personal homepages or blogs. These online communities provide not only “task-oriented communication” but also allow “personally relevant information sharing, trust and intimacy creation and social relationships building” (Rau et al., 2008, p.2758). This shows that one does not use online communication merely for seeking information, but rather for interpersonal support such as building friendships and relationships. In fact, many people prefer to engage in online communication and not face-to-face communication because they can alter their preferred self-image, which Rau et al. (2008) described as selective self-presentation, and this leads to an idealised perception for their audience within their communities.

Although individuals are not communicating face-to-face in such virtual context, many researchers actually found that online communication somehow complements this traditional communication (Rau et al., 2008). As cited in Ross et al. (2009), McKenna et al. (2002) argued that interactions via social networking sites actually help to maintain stronger relationships. According to Tidwell and Walther (2002), also as cited in Ross et al. (2009), online interactions generate more self-disclosures than face-to-face

conversations, because people can ask questions “without offending their conversation partner” (p.578).

Online communication is not completely anonymous as “family members, neighbors, colleagues, and other offline acquaintances also communicate with each other via SNSs on the Internet” (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1818). Computer-mediated-communication encourages self-disclosure and thus may result in a more intimate communication as compared to face-to-face communication. The absence of nonverbal cues in CMC allows individuals to freely control their self-presentation (Qiu et. al., 2012). However, very little research has been done in this nonymous context. On the contrary to the anonymous context where individuals are in full control of their identity performance, nonymous context restrains the possibility of doing so. In spite of that, identity performance in nonymous context continues to exist but such performances are usually restricted.

According to Crilley (2011), computer-mediated-communication is typically divided into two types, i.e. anonymous and nonymous. Online chatroom is an example of anonymous setting in which users are usually unknown and difficult to be traced. On the other hand, social networking sites offer nonymous platforms, where users are known and can be identified to a certain extent. Such accountability can be obtained by the user’s name (not nickname) and other personal details that can be found in the *About Me* section.

Long before the creation of social networking sites, personal homepages are often used for self-presentation. Glatzmeier and Steinhardt (2005) found that these homepage owners have the tendency to show things that are significant in their lives to their audience. The types of self-presentation can be easily seen by the topics of discussion from the author of the homepage. Owners see their homepages as “a place for fulfillment of wishes” (p.4). One example of self-presentation on homepages is the

disclosure of intimate information. Public declaration of love may be regarded as a way to make clear of uncertainties, especially if it involves a new relationship. Through homepages, these owners express their thoughts and at the same time, create a desired image to influence their audience's perceptions of them.

The emergence of electronic communication has resulted in the distinctiveness between the spoken and written language to be unclear. In addition, the absence of non-verbal signs on the Internet allows individuals to have a great control on information disclosure. The anonymity nature of the virtual world provides an ideal setting for individuals to perform their desired self-presentation. Thus, people can freely create their online personas to experience a complete different personality from their real self. In most online communities, it is much easier to manipulate the expression 'given' and 'given off' to ensure the performance to be "more convincing and more satisfying" (Papacharissi, 2002, p.646). However, such manipulations are limited on SNSs as they are not completely anonymous.

2.4 Social networking sites

The arrival of information and communication technologies has resulted in a situation where information is "about to replace reality and to become reality itself" (Hongladarom, 2011, p.4). Such change in the communication systems results in the debut of social networking sites (SNSs). The usage of social networking sites seems to have blurred the boundaries between virtual information and reality. One good example provided by Hongladarom (2011) is that "a real person has multiple accounts on Facebook, each having a unique personality" (p.5). An individual may show professionalism in one account but shows a complete opposite characteristic in another account. As the reality and virtual information combine, one may no longer be able to distinguish between them and thus, leading the reality to be virtualised and vice versa.

These SNSs enable individuals to connect with other individuals with common interests. They also enable individuals to keep up with pre-existing social connections. Even though individuals are communicating via computer screens, such online communication may be more profound and personal compared to general face-to-face communication. This is because there may be restraints in real time face-to-face communication that prevent one to converse in more private discussions. Trust and comfort are usually built over time in an online communication and therefore result in a more interpersonal relationship between users (Ross et al., 2009).

According to Rau et al. (2008), while SNSs added to the many other varieties of online communication such as blogs, forums, and online chat rooms, it does distinguish itself in three attributes. Firstly, it is used for one to build their online presence and expand their social networks. Secondly, social networking users communicate in networks and not via hierarchical groups, as “SNSs are bottom-up developed, people-centric, user-controlled, context-driven, decentralised and self-organizing whereas online communities are top-down developed, place-centric, moderator-controlled, topic-driven, centralised and architected” (p.2759). Thirdly, relationships between people in social networks are more visible as “connections come before contents” (p. 2759) in SNSs. Therefore, a meaningful communication is expected to occur more than what is present in other kinds of online communication.

Most individuals use online social networking for the purpose of social-emotional support and not information seeking. This affects the individual’s “posting behavior” (Rau et al., 2008, p. 2758) within these social networking sites. Many individuals found that online interactions are more favorable than offline interactions because they can project their preferred self-presentation and result in the idealised self they want others to perceive of them. It is a more flexible way for individuals to connect with one another because social networking sites allow individuals to connect in

networks and not via hierarchical groups as most would experience in real life and other online communities. This enables relationships between users of these social networking sites to be more “visible, direct and interpersonal” (p. 2759). In addition, social networking sites are the best options to meet new people and to keep track of what other people are doing in their lives. Therefore, people with common interests often attract one another.

Impression management, as coined by Goffman (1959), emphasises on individuals who put in great effort in presenting themselves in a way they deemed appropriate. Lerner (2010) said that being known positively is innate and is an important feature in society. The existence of Facebook allows individuals to twist and craft their information in their profiles and thus control their audience’s perceptions of them. For example, the *block* feature allows individuals to control their preferred audience and therefore enables specific information to be shown only to specific audiences. Ginger (2008) found that there was an increase in people who used this *block* feature from year 2006 to 2007. This shows that users are “concerned with their digital image, yet still remain comfortable with their desired groups” (Lerner, 2010, p.6).

Goffman (1959) had also explained that people are projecting themselves differently to different audience due to the *face* factor. *Face* is a “positive social value” (p.8) that “when people meet or see others for the first time, it immediately prompts an emotional reaction” (p.8). Therefore, individuals have to maintain this *face* value in order to receive support from their audience. Negative situations on Facebook such as posting inappropriate or embarrassing comments may negatively affect an individual’s image. For this reason, individuals carefully craft their desired image in order to prevent negative impressions. This can be seen frequently on Facebook when individuals un-tag themselves in undesirable postings or pictures. Due to different society norms,

individuals are constantly projecting themselves in a way which they think will be socially accepted.

Besides contributing “a highly controlled environment for self-presentational behavior”, SNSs also provide a good basis for “shallow relationships and emotionally detached communication” and thus create “an ideal setting for impression management” (Mehdizadeh, 2010, p. 357). Individuals can display favorable profile pictures and write “self-promoting” (p. 360) descriptions about themselves to boost their image. Such increased usage in social networking sites has resulted in the emergence of new studies in the field of identity construction. This has prompted researchers to find out the role of social networking sites in relation to identity construction and how these users’ characteristics affect self-presentation (Nadkarni & Hoffmann, 2012).

Boyd (2004) has found that there are two ways of how users participate in social networking sites. Users can either participate actively via posting and commenting, or they can participate silently by actively reading other people’s posts and comments but do not personally post or comment. Similarly, Rau et al. (2008) also categorised users’ participation in two manners: public manner and non-public manner. Public manner includes frequent individuals’ posting and commenting, whereas the non-public manner involves lurking, a behavior which involves regularly reading of other people’s posts without posting or commenting their own posts (Pempek et. al., 2009). Though lurking is a normal behavior among users, there is a possibility that lurking may result in problems if this behavior becomes dominant, especially towards small communities.

Most postings in social networking sites usually have a close relationship with the writer’s personal experience. Such information may be insignificant for the outsiders but it may be emotional for those who are affected. A higher level of intimacy will lead to higher disclosure of personal information. A lower level of intimacy will result in users being reluctant to post regularly since people have the tendency to share

less with people who are less connected to them due to fear of criticism and negative responses. When individuals are connected with people whom they have a close relationship with, it is likely that they will disclose more in-depth information about themselves via different means such as blogging, article and information sharing, as well as photo sharing. Thus, the need for self-expression decreases as they know that the chance for reciprocal support is high (Rau et al., 2008).

Spending time on SNSs is considered a crucial part of young adults' lives. Most of them log in daily and they could spend hours updating their profiles as well as browsing through other users' profiles (Pempek et al., 2009). Besides Facebook, there are also many other social networking sites which are very popular among youngsters. Some other popular social networking sites include MySpace, Friendster, and Hi5. The popularity of social networking sites also depends on the region where the youngsters come from. For example, MySpace was favored by youngsters in the United States, Orkut and Hi5 were attracting users from Brazil and India and QQ was more commonly used by users in China (Boyd, 2007). Different social networking sites generally revolve around similar features – creating profiles, posting comments and posting pictures.

Song (2012) argued that online communication has increased the “narcissistic and self-critical behavior” (p.46). Such screen-based communication is highly manipulated. More often than not, the perceptions from others determine what is socially desired. Boyd (2007) also once mentioned that by browsing through other people's profiles, users get an idea of what is socially appropriate to be presented in public. The basic level of self-representation includes the choice of profile pictures and *About Me* section. In our daily lives, identity performance is done through our physical attributes such as movement, clothes, speech, and facial expressions. An individual may convey their preferred image by altering their real life behavior. However, it is

important to understand that the audience might not interpret the portrayal of their preferred image as what the individual hopes to achieve. This kind of performance is better known as impression management. Goffman (1959) discussed it as a part where people seek to define a situation through their behavior. Boyd (2007) added that interpretation of situations and impression management may be different in the online context. To a certain extent, individuals have more authority in the virtual context. They can choose particular image they want to put forward. Online profiles work like a digital body for individuals to portray their identity. Through these profiles, they do and say things they want to project their identity for their audience to see. What makes Facebook so popular among its users is that it offers a platform for individuals to publicly share their information, not only to their online acquaintances but also to “diverse offline relationships such as family, relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and career-based networks” (Song, 2012, p.17).

As SNSs have become a “basic tool and a mirror of social interaction, personal identity, and network building” among youngsters, these sites continue to become almost indispensable in the youngsters’ daily lives (Debatin et al., 2009, p.83). As users often use new communication technologies in the hope of changing social order, the online context has claimed to give “greater gender equality” and “creating opportunities for less powerful individuals” (Herring, 2001, p.202). Youngsters are no longer “defined as defiant of conventional life and social institutions” but rather as a “shift in the microstructure of power” (Talbot, Atkinson & Atkinson, 2003, p.202). Individuals who have less authority in the real world may turn to these online communities for support and recognition.

SNSs continue to prosper because it does not only allow individuals to build new friendships but it also enables individuals to strengthen the real life relationship which they have previously established. This social networking culture has created the

perception that humans can connect with one another in whichever way they want. However, it is no doubt that individuals become engrossed in this process and thus are unable to distinguish between the actual reality and the virtual reality. With SNSs, “individuals have the ability to create images of themselves for social purposes without being constrained by time or space” (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011, p.1). These individuals can invent desirable profiles for themselves and thus manipulate how they would want others to see them.

2.5 The Facebook phenomenon

Since Facebook debuted in February 2004, it has become one of the most used social networking sites. In 2010, Facebook was ranked top among other social networking sites. Facebook is often used as a medium “for building relationships, for entertainment, and as a tool to expand business opportunity” (Lee, Wong & Lai, 2011, p. 175). Facebook consists of more than 800 million users and this number continues to increase. Originally targeted at college students, now it is opened to anyone of the age of at least 13 and with a valid email address. As the number of users is gradually increasing, this site has become a commonly used computer-mediated mean for people not only to contact with their friends but also as a mean to perform identities (Kelley, 2007).

The founding principle of Facebook is straightforward. Individuals create their own profile pages and insert their personal particulars. Initially, Facebook allowed only actual names to be used since it was created only for the Harvard University students (Mehdizadeh, 2010). However, the use of nick names and alternate names are now allowed since the usage of Facebook has gone public. Although individuals can express themselves freely on Facebook, it is not an anonymous context. Therefore, it creates “a sense of ownership and responsibility” (Crilley, 2011, p.10) towards its users.

Facebook was created to cater to college students. Most college students users will continue using Facebook even though they have graduated and have joined the workforce. They continue to use this social networking site to “maintain social connections with current co-workers and past college friends” (Dimicco & Millen 2007, p.1).

Kelley (2007) argued that Facebook should be regarded as a “front stage” where people perform their identities before their audience. She added that many researchers have determined similar characteristics of identity performance between offline communication and Facebook. In Facebook, users tend to adopt meaningful “symbolic props” (p. 1) as much as they do in their face-to-face interactions. Nonetheless, it has also made identity construction more complex as users undertake the opportunity to perform different identities to different groups of audience by relying on how they think their audience would respond to given information (Goffman, 1963).

According to Kelley (2007), people may be unconscious about their identity construction under normal circumstances (e.g. face-to-face communication) but most users are actually conscious of their identity performance on Facebook. Although Facebook does constrain on the possible identities performance by limiting the type of particulars that users could include in their profile, these users continue to challenge such limitations by using “emoticons, non-standard punctuation, spelling, capitalisation, and special keyboard characters” (p.11).

Similar to dating sites where users display their preferred profile pictures to show a more desirable image to others (Gibbs et al, 2006), Facebook users are often found doing the same. Recently, Facebook has introduced a new feature called “Cover Photo”. It comes as an addition to the profile pictures, which was incorporated in the personal profiles since the beginning of Facebook usage. This cover photo is a larger image that appears on top of an individual’s Facebook profile (which is now called the

“Timeline”). This gives a greater flexibility (of having the display of two pictures – the profile picture and the cover photo) to the users to post the preferred images on their profile. In addition, there are other features that users could use to show their existence even without posting anything such as the “Poke” and “Like” features. “Poke” is a feature which allows users to show their intention of wanting to interact with another user without commenting or writing to them (Ross et al., 2009). “Like” is a similar feature that displays users’ intention to show interest in the particular topics or images without commenting on them.

Dimicco & Millen (2007) categorised Facebook users into three groups: ‘Reliving the College Days’, ‘Dressed to Impress’ and ‘Living in the Business World’. The average age of users from the first group, ‘Reliving the College Days’, is 25 years. The members of this group have the highest number of friends in their friend lists. However, most of these friends are from their school network as they had started using Facebook before they joined the workforce. They are less likely to list their job descriptions. They continue using Facebook as a mean to contact their college friends and they have not transitioned themselves into the workforce. The second group, ‘Dressed to Impress’, has an average age of 36 years. This group has a smaller number of friends in their friend lists, but they are more likely to list their job descriptions on Facebook. Most of them started using Facebook after their college years. Their purpose of using Facebook is to maintain relationship with past college friends and present colleagues. The third group, ‘Living in the Business World’, has the least number of friends in their friend lists. Most of them joined Facebook recently for the purpose of communicating with their colleagues. They usually do not provide much information about themselves.

It is clearly seen that though Facebook was originally created for college students, many individuals continue to use Facebook even when they have entered the

workforce. Based on a research by Dimicco & Millen (2007), most individuals from the first group are not managing their online presentation as they consider Facebook as a different context from their working life. On the other hand, individuals from the second group are managing their online presentation to a certain extent. Some purposefully delete the content which they do not want their colleagues to see on their profiles. Individuals from the first group have the tendency to share personal information about their lives and to post playful pictures of themselves. In contrast, individuals from the second group usually share work-related information and post less playful photos. The third group shares very limited personal and work-related information and uses Facebook only to maintain work-related relationships. This shows that different individuals have a preferred projection of self-image that they want people to have of them.

The thin line between public and private lives has recently become a concern. Continuous usage of social networking sites as means of information sharing, potentially risks the exposure of the users' personal information, in which are not intended for the world to see. Therefore, with the introduction of privacy controls on Facebook, users can now control the visibility of their information sharing to ensure a clear line between their work and personal lives. Most bloggers and web professionals often maintain different self-presentations between work and personal lives.

The reason for users to perform in different ways on Facebook is that their updates will be seen by different groups of people. Most individuals use Facebook to strengthen their social relationships among friends, but not with their parents or strangers (Pempek et al., 2009). Work-related individuals, for example, may use the shared information to make judgments of other professionals (Cain, Scott & Akers, 2009). According to Cain (2008), students believe that their posted information are meant for sharing with friends only and members of other social groups, such as faculty

members and employers should not view them and should not use them for work-related purposes, such as decision making in the recruitment process. As different people hold different beliefs of what is acceptable for information sharing (Cain, 2008), the majority of students prefer not to add their academically-related peers as friends perhaps to avoid unnecessary judgments from these academically-related peers (Cain et al., 2009).

More often than not, Facebook users converse in a manner in which they think it is accepted to the social norms. However, different audiences are accustomed by different values of what is being socially acceptable. In the research of Cain et al. (2009), they maintained that parents, faculty members, employers or even friends may not be able to accept what students see as “normal and harmless expressions” (p.2). These young users continuously risk themselves to be punished due to “unprofessional” (p.2) updates on Facebook. In addition, they also risk themselves to suffer abuses such as “being harassed and stalked” (p.3). Different people hold different views on what is acceptable and therefore, individuals should be careful and be aware of their information sharing and privacy control on Facebook.

Most individuals are likely to share information of themselves if the level of intimacy between them and their friends is high. A lower level of intimacy will result in superficial discussions. Users often know who their audiences are. Therefore, they are very careful with what they are sharing to prevent being misunderstood or misperceived by their audience. Such “fears” (Rau et al., 2008, p.2768) affect the posting behaviour of the individuals.

Ross et al. (2009) grouped the users’ behaviors in five categories: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. These five traits are often found in online communications and are generally used to predict online behaviors on Facebook. Users who show high neuroticism have the highest tendency to filter the information they share, while at the same time they comment on

other people's walls. This behavior is similar to lurking, but the main difference is that while "lurkers" do not post, "neurotics" limit their information sharing. Extraversion users usually show significant difficulty in making offline relationships. Users who are open to experience are often linked as those who are likely to try out new things and experience whereas conscientious users tend to avoid the usage of online communication tools. Agreeableness users are generally considered as pleasant and desirable to be around with.

Nadkarni and Hoffmann (2012) concluded that the usage of Facebook is determined by two key factors: the need to belong and the need for self-presentation. They stated that "members of collectivistic societies show a greater need to belong, whereas people from individualistic cultures display a greater need for self-presentation" (p.247). Youngsters are able to explore their identity via their audience's responses to their updates on Facebook. Such communication between the youngsters and their friends helps to enhance identity and relationship formations. Facebook provides a suitable ground for identity display. Youngsters argue that their media preferences and photos help them express their identity. For example, untagging of photos happen when individuals do not like how they were portrayed in these images.

In short, Facebook provides an ideal condition for research in relation to identity construction because relationships within this social network already exist in the offline context. Similarly to the offline context, individuals also customise their online presentation to specific audiences. Such customisation includes highlighting socially desirable characteristics and at the same time hiding socially undesirable traits using different modes of expressions, i.e profile pictures or status updates.

2.6 Factors that contribute to self-presentation

There are many factors that contribute to the usage of Facebook for self-presentation. Nadkarni and Hoffmann (2012) stated that Facebook users of different gender, race, ethnicity and parental educational background display differences in usage frequency. For example, Nadkarni and Hoffmann (2012) noted that there were significantly more Caucasian students using Facebook as compared to Hispanic students. The researchers also noted that there were less males and Caucasians using Facebook as compared to females and ethnic minorities. Research based on a Five-Factor Model shows high usage in Facebook among those who have high level of extraversion, neuroticism and narcissism. In addition, users with lower self-esteem and self-worth are also found to be frequent Facebook users. Pempek et al. (2009) has also mentioned that factors such as religious views, political perspectives and working experience are also indicators of identity formation process although these factors are not regarded as the primary preferences such as school, birthday and relationship status.

Culture is an important factor of identity construction. Crilley (2011) found that different aspects in culture such as customs, traditions, beliefs, likes and interests enable individuals to be particular and unique in expressing and presenting themselves. Nazir (2012) also stated that identities are formed via repetitive actions which are influenced by cultural factors.

Zhao et. al. (2009) also previously showed that different ethno-racial groups display differences in identity construction on Facebook. Such differences can clearly be seen from the visual perspectives, cultural perspectives and verbal descriptions of the self. In addition, language also determines the way people think and behave. Individuals use language to get to know themselves thus, influencing their behaviors.

Findings from Peluchette and Karl (2010) also showed the differences between users of different genders and ages. For example, males tend to post “problematic

profile content” (p.33) and older individuals are more likely to show a “hardworking and intelligent” (p.33) image.

2.7 Gender as part of identity

Though gender is not a major concern in this research, it is no doubt that gender differences do exist on Facebook. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) discovered several distinctive features between male and female users in social networking sites. Rau et al. (2008) also found significant differences between male and female users in how intimacy is being developed and perceived. For example, females tend to establish intimacy via discussion and self-disclosure whereas males achieve intimacy via shared activities. Males’ status updates are usually “lengthy, sarcastic and self-promoting” whereas females’ status updates are usually “supportive, attenuating and less opinionated” (p.2761).

Cain et al. (2009) also shared that females were less likely to share information which they did not want any work-related individuals to see on Facebook. Most users maintained the fact that their online personas reflect their actual self and their future professional self. However, the majority still preferred not to have their academic or work related colleagues to befriend them. These users stated that they have taken “necessary precautions” with their information but “did not plan to change their posting behavior” (p.4).

According to Mehdizadeh (2010), males are prone to self-promote themselves using words to emphasise their knowledge, while females are self-promoting themselves using images to show their appearance. Nazir (2012) also supported this finding by mentioning that most men do not update their status and if they do, the topics which they will discuss are mainly about “motivational stuff” or a “political scenario” (p.261). In contrast, women mostly talk about “weather, exams, studies, psychology and

fashion” (p.261). Women also use emoticons more frequently than men. In addition, women prefer to use standard language to show “social membership” while men use non-standard language to express “freedom and power”(p.262). However, women are found to be more “adaptive to the current trend of new language” (p.262).

In short, differences in behavior between men and women do exist on Facebook. Women mostly use Facebook to “maintain existing relationships, pass time and be entertained” while men use it to “develop new relationships or meet new people” (Nazir, 2012, p.262).

2.8 How do individuals portray their self-presentation?

Since the disclosure of information on Facebook is self-controlled, individuals can easily choose what information to be shown as a way to manipulate other people’s thoughts about them. Such manipulation can be easily achieved via many means such as controlling their profile images, filtering comments on their profiles from their observers and adjusting the privacy setting of their profiles.

2.8.1 Using images to show physical attractiveness

This technology era has turned digital images into a new language (Song, 2012). Individuals are increasingly using this new language to display their self-presentation. Displaying visually attractive images to project a positive self-presentation is sometimes seen as a fun process. Using images allows Facebook users to exhibit their individuality in an indirect manner i.e without describing them in words. Song (2012) argued that users prefer to show rather than tell and thus, making images their mode of expression. Glatzmeier and Steinhardt (2005) once mentioned that photos are important features for self-presentation to emphasise on one’s physical beauty. Nadkarni and Hoffmann

(2012) also mentioned that physical attractiveness is an important feature individuals use to create their desired presentation.

The significance of image posting is generally less credible than the written one, as these verbal statements may disclose the individuals' traits more implicitly. Besides this, the authors also found that "sexual double standard" (Walther et. al., 2008, p.45) exists in social networking. It is found that both males and females are judged differently by the same action. One example given by Walther et. al. (2008) is the excessive drinking behavior. Males will be viewed at a higher social attractiveness level for this behavior while females will be viewed negatively. Since physical attractiveness is an important key to promote the notion of being attractive, it is normal that individuals have the tendency to exaggeratedly publicise their physical attractiveness. Undeniably, the online context provides a good opportunity for users to choose their idealised profile picture and present themselves positively.

Besides having an attractive profile picture, Walther et. al (2008) hypothesised that the existence of physically attractive friends also helps to boost the users' own physical attractiveness. Nevertheless, this attractiveness does not have an impact on how their audience will judge them in terms of qualification and gender. Utz (2010) mentioned that though the number of friends does not affect physical attractiveness, these friends' positive comments do affect credibility, task attractiveness and social attractiveness.

The design of Facebook is direct and user-friendly. No additional designs, templates or themes are used in this site, unlike other SNSs (e.g. MySpace) which allow users to embed codes to create their own background design of their profiles. Though so, Zhao et. al. (2008) found that female Facebook users are more particular in their profiles. This can be seen not only from the image postings but also the amount of information they disclose on their profiles

2.8.2 Filtering comments in response to their status updates

Lerner (2010) found that many individuals have a higher tendency to control and filter their information on Facebook rather than to change and improve their pictures. The author argued that this may show that written information rather than images is more reflective of a person's true personality. The reason why individuals are filtering comments made by others in their profiles is because these comments may be incompatible with the image they are trying to show. Individuals continuously present themselves using various methods in order to "attract visitors and solicit feedback through their websites" (Papacharissi, 2002, p.654). Gaining positive feedback from the audience is like gaining social approval, and thus "a successful performance" (p.655).

As argued by Walther et. al. (2009), the major difference between Facebook and other social networking sites is that personal information is displayed specifically by the profile owners and not disclosed by the audience. However, third-party information is usually considered more reliable as these comments are not done in a forceful and manipulated manner and thus, it is less likely that the information presented by these friends of profile owners is forged. Nonetheless, the commenters may have been given privileges by the owners to do so, and so these comments may also have been overemphasised. The findings show that positive wall posts usually results in positive comments from peers and these positive comments from friends will then produce a higher social attractiveness level of the owner. However, this only applies for female users as findings show a complete opposite for males, i.e negative statements from friends will yield a higher social attractiveness level among males.

Comments made by the audience towards the information shown on the profiles may reveal the nature of the profiles owners who post the information. It is worth to note that during the time when this research was conducted, comments made by particular users cannot be removed by other users including the profile owners. Only the

ones who made the comments are allowed to remove or filter the comments. This may indirectly affect how others perceive of these profile owners. Comments made in response to the postings “may express sentiments or reflect common activities” or as “a desire to embarrass the profile owners” (Walther et. al., 2008, p.30). In Walther et. al. (2008), it was stated that many Facebook users realised the importance of friendship from their profiles. Therefore, the authors argued that such commenting actions put the friendship between the profile owners and their audience into a test.

2.8.3 Adjusting the privacy setting as a way of self-presentation

The younger generation at present times is less worried about the issue of privacy as compared to the older generation. Studies have shown that the younger generation is comfortable in sharing personal information about themselves with others. Debatin et. al. (2009) found that due to unfamiliarity of users towards the privacy setting of Facebook, it is likely for them not to protect their profiles. Though vaguely related, such privacy issues are also factors that contribute to self-presentation. Such privacy setting allows individuals to control the disclosure of information to only specific audience.

Facebook does provide privacy setting but many users opt not to use it as they want to “express themselves and find like-minded friends” (Peluchette & Karl, 2010, p. 31). Most of these young individuals post contents which they think can impress their peers. Debatin et. al. (2009) has also previously argued that a high usage of SNSs often results in “unintended consequences such as threats to privacy and changes in the relationship between public and private sphere” (p.83). Such threats include “inadvertent disclosure of personal information, damaged reputation due to rumors and gossip, unwanted contact and harassment or stalking, hacking and identity theft” (p. 84).

2.9 Real self vs. idealised self

Unlike previous studies which mostly argue that social networking sites users display idealised selves which do not mirror their true selves, Back et. al (2010) deduced that it is possible that these idealised selves are the actual selves that individuals find it hard to display in the real life. Social networking sites are platforms for individuals to demonstrate their actual selves and not idealised selves. Qiu et. al (2012) also supported this fact but maintained that many of the users do restrict the disclosure of negative information about themselves.

In contrast with the beliefs that users reflect true selves and personality on social networking sites (Back et. al., 2010 and Qiu et. al., 2012), Hongladarom (2011) found that many Facebook users in Thailand choose not to show their real names and pictures in their profiles. Unless these users are personally known to their audience, it is almost impossible to know their real identity. This further strengthens the fact that geographical locations do affect the preference of identity projection among users. Though Zhao et. al (2008) mentioned that social networking sites allow users to show their identities indirectly, Hongladarom (2011) argued that such identities are usually shown quite directly, especially through the users' updates and comments. However, users can also purposefully hide their real identity as well as limiting their personal information and profile pictures in the profile pages. This situation easily leads to the occurrence of "two kinds of selves and identities" (p.13), one in the virtual world and another in the reality. Usually, these individuals create an online persona with the purpose of meeting new people. After getting to know each other better, they usually get "intimate and personal" (p.14). One of the reasons why many users in Thailand are concealing their identities is because they have "limited freedom of speech" (p.16). This virtually-created identity enables them to express themselves in a way which they cannot express in real life.

2.10 Intentions for self-presentation

According to Peluchette & Karl (2010), different individuals have different intentions in creating the image they wish to project to their audience. For instance, individuals who want to show a friendly image may portray a “fun-loving image” and individuals who emphasise on academic excellence may portray “an intelligent or hardworking image” (p.32). There are four types of images that are being commonly portrayed by these young individuals on Facebook. These images include being appealing, wild, fun and friendly, and offensive. Findings show that most Facebook users want to portray a fun and friendly image and most of them disagree that their image is offensive.

In addition, many employers are scanning through potential job candidates’ information on the Internet as part of their recruitment process and hiring decision. It is no doubt that these young individuals are conscious about the image they want to portray to their audience, as a way to impress these audiences. However, most of them maintained that since they use social networking sites to meet new people and not to keep in touch with their current friends, it does not matter what kind of image is being portrayed.

2.11 Conclusion

Gentile et. al (2012) mentioned that even with the name “social networking”, most users of these sites are found to be more self-focused rather than social. They carefully display socially desirable information and restrict less desirable information about themselves on their profiles. Though such information is often purposefully chosen, they are not necessarily made up. Different social networking sites impact their users differently. For example, Gentile et. al (2012) concluded that MySpace users show high levels of narcissism, whereas Facebook users display high levels of self-esteem.

Thus, the researchers argued that MySpace provides a better environment for self-expression.

In Nadkarni and Hoffmann (2012), it is argued that Facebook does improve users' social lives but it does not impact the user's self-esteem. Yu et. al (2010) also mentioned that Facebook usage has positive impacts on students' socialisation and learning outcomes and has resulted in higher levels of self-esteem, satisfaction and performance.

What makes social networking sites different from other forms of CMC is that these sites allow their users to "control what appears in association with his- or herself" (Walther et. al., 2008, p. 29). Identities formed under virtual settings may be different from the usual face-to-face communication. There are generally lesser signs for inspection as these signs are under immense control by the profile owners. As online impressions can be easily manipulated, individuals can easily devise and revise the information to be posted by purposefully selecting information that he or she wants to project to others. It is undeniable that some parts of the posted information may be overemphasised. Nevertheless, there are general truths about this posted information since it is possible that these individuals may run into their online peers in the offline world.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research explores the kinds of identity young Malaysians portray on their Facebook profiles. This is a qualitative research, which uses the case study strategy to study a group of individuals. Various linguistic and semiotic features, adopted by these young Malaysians for self-representation, were identified to facilitate this research. A minimum number of 600 status updates from 20 Facebook users, 10 males and 10 females, were collected and analysed. The sampling methods used were convenience sampling and homogenous sampling. The data collection and analysis were done manually by the researcher as no software was available to help with the data collection and analysis. All participants' information is solely used for research purposes and is strictly private and confidential.

3.2 Research design

This research is a qualitative research which uses the case study strategy in order to study one or more individuals based on the data collected over a period of time (Creswell, 2007). A case study is relatively different from an ethnographic research. A case study is “an exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection” while an ethnographic research “searches for shared patterns that develop as a group over time” (Creswell, 2007, p. 476). The data collection for this research is not done over a long duration, but the case study strategy remains the most suitable strategy to carry out this research. Similarly, this research explores the possibilities of shared patterns (i.e the identity the participants wish to portray) based on data collection done

over a period of time (i.e status updates from the participants via their Facebook profiles in a period of one month).

The period of data collection is set at one month. Though this data collection period seems limited, these participants update their status on a daily basis. Therefore, a minimum number of 600 status updates were easily collected over this period. Moreover, some of them updated their status more than once per day. It was possible that the data collection exceeded 600 status updates. This research seeks to explore the participants' general activities and self-portrayal via their Facebook profiles. It is hoped that this research can provide an in-depth understanding on the subject matter of identity construction but overgeneralisation of the subject matter is not to be expected.

3.3 Participants

The participants of this research comprise ten males and ten females from the age group of 24 to 28. This age group was chosen as these individuals are no longer identity searching adolescents but rather socially and financially independent working young adults who want and know how to project themselves favourably online. The fact that all participants are friends of the researcher is an added advantage as they can continue to update their statuses without the feeling of restraints.

All participants are Malaysian citizens and are currently residing in Kuala Lumpur, a metropolitan city in Malaysia. Only participants who are currently living in the urban areas are chosen because there might be differences in the way communication between users who are residing in the urban and rural areas takes place. In addition, users in rural areas may not be able to access to use Facebook on a regular basis due to reasons such as the lack of Internet connection and slower technology advancement.

Although gender is not a variable for this research, an equal number of ten males and ten females were invited to participate in this research. There is a possibility that the findings may be inclined on one particular gender if majority of the participants comes from that gender group. Therefore, it is hoped that an equal number of both genders will ensure unbiasedness and accuracy in the findings of this research. A total number of twenty participants is sufficient for a qualitative research.

These participants come from various academic and professional backgrounds. Academically, all of them are graduates with a first degree and some of them are currently pursuing their postgraduate studies. Professionally, they currently hold professional positions in various industries. These professions include lecturing, teaching, management, engineering, secretarial work, administration, fashion designing, animal welfare coordinating and financial advising. In fact, a few of these participants are lecturers and teachers. They share similar academic backgrounds but in different fields and they also teach different subjects. The subjects that they are teaching include English language, English literature, Mathematics and Physics. They also teach in different institutions, ranging from primary education to tertiary education. An overview of the participants' information is available in Appendix A.

3.4 Data collection

The data was collected with consent from all participants. These data include their personal status updates and the replies made by the participants in response to their respective audience's comments. Replies from these participants in response to the comments made by their audience were taken into consideration since these comments were made directly to the status updates. The data was collected over a period of one month from 1st December 2011 to 31st December 2011. As interactions on Facebook are on-going, it is possible that comments might have been submitted after the

collection period. Therefore, to ensure the data was sufficiently collected, the researcher cross-checked the number of commentary submissions up to seven days after the status updates were posted within the data collection period. The last day of the cross-checking was 7th January 2012.

The first step of data collection involved the researcher screening through her personal Facebook profile. The researcher observed the general activities on her news feed and noted several active Facebook participants from her friend list. The researcher then shortlisted these active participants and approached them for participation in this research. 20 participants were identified and with their consents, their status updates were then collected.

All status updates were collected manually by the researcher as there was no software that could help with this data collection electronically. These status updates were manually print-screened using the *Ctrl + Prt Sc* function available on the computer keyboard. The data collection was purposefully done manually so that the researcher could cross-check these status updates from time to time easily. Such cross-checking helped to ensure the accuracy of the data analysis.

After the data collection period ended, all the status updates were cross checked for the final time to ensure all that necessary information were collected. These status updates were then tabulated in a table form by the researcher manually. Each participant and their status updates were coded. The researcher then started going through the status updates one at a time. The researcher would note down all necessary information for one participant at a time, and then moved on to another participant. This process went on for all 20 participants.

The researcher noted several significant features that were easily identified at a glance. Such features include the language, lexical items and some other semiotic strategies used for the status updates. Some additional features which were identified

along with these significant features were also noted down in case they might be needed at a later point of time. An example of a manually tabulated data collection is available in the Appendix B.

After tabulating all the data, the researcher then created a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel to tabulate these data again. Using such a spreadsheet allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the strategies used by all participants clearly. Examples of the tabulated data in the form of spreadsheets using Microsoft Excel are available in the Appendix C1 to Appendix C12.

After identifying the strategies used by the participants, the researcher created a questionnaire consisting of several closed-ended and open-ended questions using Microsoft Word. These close-ended questions required participants to provide their demographic details, and open-ended questions required participants to provide insights and opinions about their strategies used on Facebook for identity construction. Such details helped to validate the findings of this research.

There were 14 questions in the questionnaire. The close-ended questions included 5 yes/no questions and 5 multiple choices questions. These yes/no questions and multiple choices questions included simple demographic questions such as their frequency in posting a status update, the topics of their status updates and the privacy setting of their Facebook profiles. The remaining questions were 4 open-ended questions which required the participants to share their perspectives regarding the purpose of friends-tagging, using different punctuation markers and using different languages in their status updates. Finally, the participants were also asked to share the kind of identity they wish to portray via Facebook. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their viewpoints freely.

By using such a questionnaire, participants would be more willing to share their views. The actual questionnaire is available in the Appendix D1 and Appendix D2. The

results from this questionnaire were later tabulated again to enable a clear comparison between the findings and participants' views.

3.5 Sampling method

The sampling methods used in this research are convenience sampling and homogenous sampling.

Convenience sampling is a sampling method in which the researcher chooses the "participants who are willing and available to be studied" (Creswell, 2008, p. 155). Despite the fact that these participants may provide useful information, it is worthy to note that they are not representative of the general population.

Homogenous sampling is a sampling method in which the researcher specifically chooses participants "based on [their] membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics" (Creswell, 2008, p.216). The reason this sampling method was used is because these participants share common characteristics which group them under a common subgroup. All participants are frequent Facebook users and they post mainly in English, though a few of them may sometimes post in their mother tongue language. In addition, they are all young working Malaysian citizens and use Facebook daily as a way of communication on the Internet.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This research takes into consideration the ethical issues that might arise during the time when this research was on-going. As the data was collected from the participants' personal Facebook profiles, it may result in unethical invasion of privacy and restraints to the participants. Therefore, the researcher had gained all participants' permission prior to the data collection to ensure that the participants were aware of this

research activity. All participants' information is strictly private and confidential and their personal information will not be disclosed publicly.

3.7 Conclusion

Facebook offers a good foundation for the research of identity construction in a nonymous online environment. The researcher has taken measures to ensure the data collection was done in the most efficient and ethical manner possible and thus providing accurate findings. These status updates will permanently remain on the Facebook profiles of these participants unless they are purposefully deleted by the profile owners. Two limitations of the data collection were there are chances that some status updates may be purposefully deleted and the commentary submissions of particular status updates may proceed even after the data collection period ended. Therefore, the findings of this research cannot be used to represent the population in general.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter shows how these participants construct their specific self-presentation on their Facebook profiles. These participants use various strategies to show “who-they-are” via their status updates on their Facebook profiles. A total of 878 status updates contributed by 10 male participants and 10 female participants were analysed. In this research, several strategies of self-presentation adopted by the participants are found. These strategies can be divided into three major categories: linguistic features, semiotic features and visual features.

Linguistic features refer to the participants’ word and language choice in their status updates. The identified linguistic features include the usage of different languages, different lexical items and different grammatical structures within the participants’ status updates. Semiotic features refer to the symbols participants use along with the texts they write in their status updates. These features include the usage of punctuation markers, capitalisation and emoticons in addition to the words that participants use in their status updates. Visual features refer to the images participants post on their Facebook profiles. Visual features such as the profile pictures and shared photo albums are also taken into consideration as part of the self-presentation strategies adopted by the participants.

In addition to the three major categories, this research also identifies the purposes of these participants’ status updates. Besides this, the topics of these status updates are also identified. Both of these contribute equally to explore the kind of self-presentations that participants wish to portray to their audience.

The breakdown of the analysis is summarised in Figure 4.1.

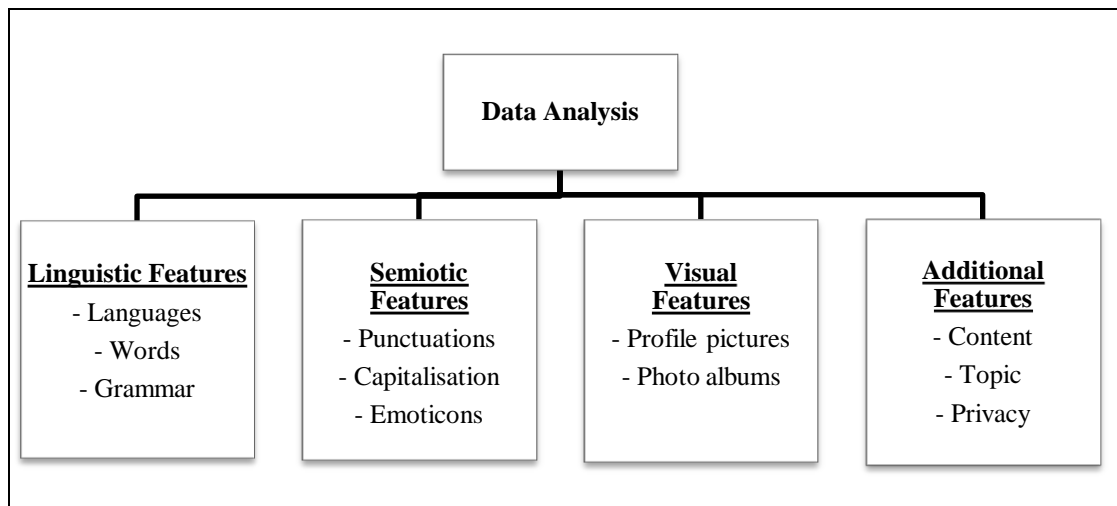


Figure 4.1: Breakdown of data analysis

In addition to the data analysis, a questionnaire consisting of a mixed series of closed-ended and open-ended questions was distributed to each participant to gain insights on the strategies they use in their status updates. The responses from these participants enable this research to provide valid explanations in regards to the strategies used by the participants in their status updates. 20 copies of the questionnaire were distributed. Only 19 questionnaires were completed by the participants. 1 participant did not complete the questionnaire.

4.2 Linguistic features

This research has identified several linguistic features used by participants in their status updates to project themselves in a favourable light. These features include the usage of different languages, different lexical items and different grammatical structures in these status updates. The participants use different linguistic features as their strategies to target or attract different categories of audience they have in their friend lists. For example, a participant may purposefully use Chinese language in their status updates to target only audience who knows this language. To give another example, a participant may purposefully highlight via capitalisation of particular lexical items (or words) in their status updates to target audience who are interested in that

particular issue. In this way, the participants are selective in their behaviours, choosing to disclose information publicly in their profiles and yet targeting only specific audience.

Some examples of these linguistics features used in their status updates are shown in Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3.



Figure 4.2: An example of a status update using Chinese language



Figure 4.3: An example of a status update highlighting particular lexical items

4.2.1 Code-mixing and code-switching in status updates

Participants frequently code-mix and code-switch their status updates with different languages. The most frequently used language is the Malay language. Malaysia is a multiracial country and the Malay language is the national language of the country. Despite the racial differences, most of these participants were educated using the Malay language as the main medium. In fact, Malay language is the mother tongue language for one of these participants. Therefore, it is no doubt that Malay language is their main choice of language when they code-mix and code-switch.

Besides this, some words or phrases are better left untranslated in the original language, especially for the name of food such as *asam sambal* and *lemak cili api* as the meaning of the food name might change or might be unsuitable if they are translated in English. However, it is found that not all of these participants use the standard Malay in their status updates. Some of them use the colloquial form which has a slight difference

in pronunciation and spelling as compared to the standard one. For example, *menanges* instead of *menangis* (which means *crying* in Malay) and *kene* instead of *kena* (which generally means *got struck by* in Malay) were used.

The second most frequently code-mixed or code-switched language is the Chinese language. However, it is not the Chinese-Mandarin which is frequently used. Instead, the Chinese dialects such as Hokkien and Cantonese are commonly found in the participants' status updates. Such examples include *huat* (which means *prosper* in Hokkien) and *fei zhai* (which means *fat boy* in Cantonese). The usage of these dialects may be influenced by the mother tongue dialects of the participants. Chinese-Mandarin in the form of Hanyu Pinyin (the pronunciation for Mandarin words) is also found in the status updates. For example, instead of the actual Chinese characters 加油 (which means *work hard* in Mandarin), the Hanyu Pinyin *jia you* (how the characters are pronounced in Mandarin) is used.

Some other languages which are used in the status updates but do not appear frequently include Portuguese, Turkish, and Japanese.

The findings of different languages used by participants in their status updates are summarised in Table 4.1. The numbers in the table signify the occurrences of the languages used by the participants in their status updates. For example, participant F2 uses English language in 18 of her total status updates and uses Chinese language in 3 of her total status updates. The bolded numbers at the bottom of the table signify the total occurrences of the languages used in the status updates.

Table 4.1: Summary of different languages used in status updates

Female Participants						Male Participants					
Languages used by participants in their status updates (the numbers signify the number of occurrences of the language used)											
	English	Malay	Chi- nese	Others	Mix		English	Malay	Chi- nese	Others	Mix
F1	105	3	6	4 - Portuguese 1-Turkish	13	M1	66	0	4	1 - Symbols	6
F2	18	0	3	0	0	M2	31	1	5	0	6
F3	18	0	0	0	0	M3	4	0	0	0	0
F4	65	0	0	0	5	M4	66	0	0	0	1
F5	9	0	0	0	0	M5	81	0	0	0	0
F6	66	0	0	0	2	M6	39	0	0	0	0
F7	30	0	0	0	2	M7	12	0	0	0	1
F8	16	0	0	0	0	M8	25	0	0	0	1
F9	35	6	0	0	24	M9	31	0	0	0	3
F10	17	0	3	1 -Japanese	1	M10	35	0	0	0	6
Occur- rence	379	9	12	6	47	Occur- rence	390	1	9	1	24

4.2.1.1 Code-mixing using different languages

All participants update their status regularly using English language. However, findings show that many participants use code-mixing in their status updates. These code-mixes do not occur in all the status updates, but it is found that 65% of the participants code-mix in some of their status updates. Commonly used code-mixes include English-Malay languages and English-Mandarin languages. One participant is also seen to code-mix in English-Tamil languages.

The following figures show the examples of code-mixes in the status updates.



Figure 4.4: An example of English-Malay code-mix in a status update



Figure 4.5: An example of English-Mandarin code-mix in a status update

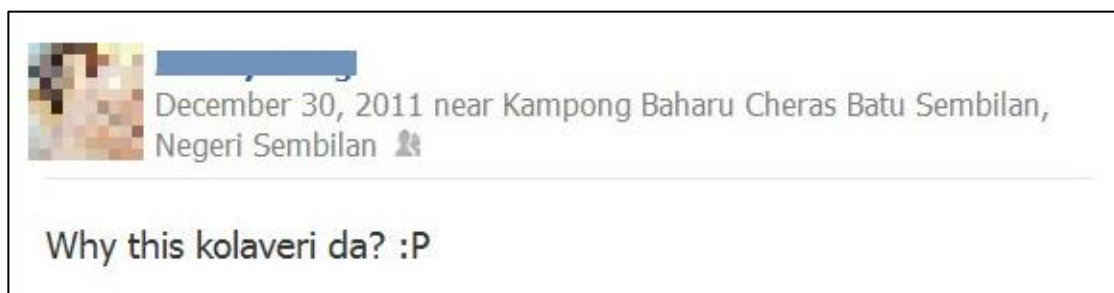


Figure 4.6: An example of English-Tamil code-mix in a status update

Some examples of different languages used by participants to code-mix in their status updates are illustrated in Table 4.2. This table provides examples of code-mixes used by the participants in their status updates.

Table 4.2: Examples of words used to code-mix in status updates

Female participants		Male participants	
Examples of words used to code-mix in status updates			
F1	mari pergi cantik cantik / inilah fb dia / baru makan semalam / tengok etc	M1	ciplak / kena / pulak
F2	-	M2	jia lat / kesian cikgu!! / sien / heng heng / huat ah
F3	-	M3	-
F4	banjir / macam aku punya / perasannya aku / ayam masak / lemak cili api	M4	lala lok lok bubur chacha / tahan galak
F5	-	M5	-
F6	jom teka teki / fei zhai	M6	-
F7	mee rebus Johor / cucur pisang / pai tee / asam sambal / chap cai	M7	-
F8	-	M8	-
F9	ombak rindu mari menanges / madu / memberontak / makan dulu baru layan etc	M9	huat ah
F10	mangkuk	M10	sienzzz / walao / kacau / kene / beh tahan

4.2.1.2 Code-switching using different languages

Only a few participants are seen to update their status in other languages besides English. 15% of the participants use Malay in their status updates, 25% of them use Mandarin and 15% of them use other languages such as Japanese, Portuguese and Turkish. Only one participant uses only symbols in a particular status update.

The following figures show the different languages used by participants to code-switch in their status updates.



Figure 4.7: An example of using Malay language in a status update



Figure 4.8: An example of using Mandarin language in a status update



Figure 4.9: An example of using Japanese language in a status update



Figure 4.10: An example of using Portuguese language in a status update

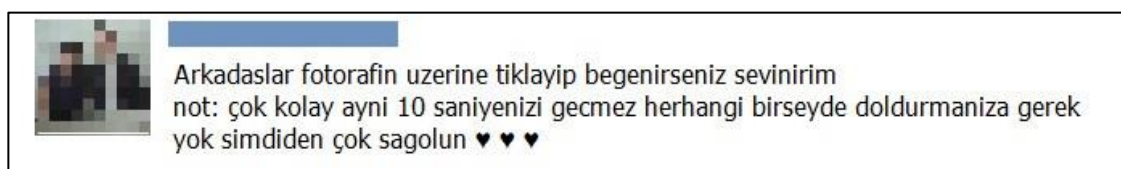


Figure 4.11: An example of using Turkish language in a status update

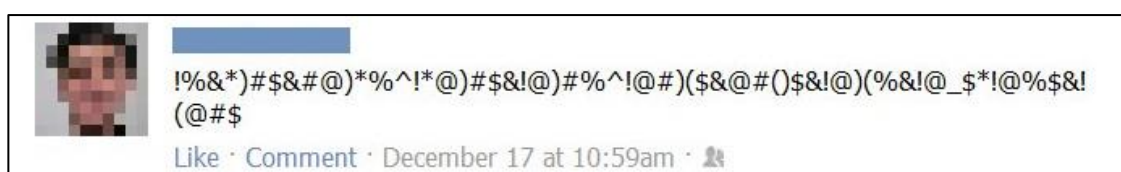


Figure 4.12: An example of using only symbols in a status update

4.2.1.3 Reasons for using different languages in status updates

Although English is the primary language for communication for these participants, it is no doubt that there are several reasons for them to update their status in other languages besides English. These reasons include the participants being bilingual or multilingual, the participants want to appeal only to specific audiences, and the participants feel some words or phrases are better left untranslated.

The first reason is that Malaysia is a multiracial country, which is made up of 3 major races of Malays, Chinese and Indians who are either bilingual or multilingual speakers with access to different languages and dialects. Therefore, many of these participants often use lexical items and syntax from their own mother tongue languages or in other languages that they know. In addition, this multiracial community has provided a platform for Malaysians to communicate in other languages besides their

own mother tongue languages thus, influencing them in their choice of languages when writing their status updates on Facebook.

Based on the results of the questionnaire that were distributed to the participants, many of them admitted that they frequently used other languages besides English to write their status updates. Most of them mentioned that they used different languages in their status updates simply because they themselves know these different languages. Using different languages is a way for them to convey their identity of diversified language background. Target audience is also an important consideration when these participants update their status. They would use languages which are regularly used by their audience so that the status updates would appeal to their target audience easily. However, on certain occasions, these participants would purposefully use languages which are unfamiliar for their general audience, so that only a very specific group of people who is familiar with the language can understand the status updates. Participants also responded that sometimes it is almost impossible to translate the words or phrases from another language to English. Some words and phrases are better left untranslated because their meanings might stray when translated. In addition, participants also suggested that they find that using different languages in different circumstances may help them express themselves more effectively.

4.2.2 Different lexical items in status updates

One major reason participants update their status is to share their feelings with their audience. For the same reason, participants are often expressive in their status update to ensure their messages are delivered to their audience effectively. For example, if the participants are feeling happy, they wish for their audience to feel and share their happiness. Similarly, if the participants are feeling sad or angry, they wish for their audience to feel and share their sadness or anger too. One way of making their status

updates to be expressive is through the usage of different forms of words in addition to the usual word-only status updates.

Different participants use different lexical items to express their individuality. The participants carefully choose these lexical items to be included in their status updates, based on the image which they wish to form in the minds of their audiences. For example, a participant may choose to use or not to use vulgar words in their status updates. If a participant wishes to portray a refined character, he / she would probably avoid using vulgar words. On the contrary, if a participant wishes to portray a tough character, he / she would probably use these vulgar words.

There are several forms of words which are frequently used by the participants to express themselves more effectively. The most frequently used word type is the use of written expressions of laughter or sound. Other frequently used word types include the usage of adjectives, fillers, vulgar languages and English language in different forms. Participants also use short forms when they are in a rush or when they are updating their status via their mobile devices. Two participants are seen to use English language in different forms in their status updates. From these two participants, one of them uses the Old English in which words like *misseth* and *thy* are used. Another participant uses English in an erratic manner to form a sentence like this *i haz got teh Monday blooz*.

In short, this research has identified several lexical items which are frequently used by participants in their status updates. These lexical items include the usage of pronouns, expressions of laughter or sound in the written form, fillers, adjectives, short forms or contractions and vulgar words.

The use of different lexical items is illustrated in the following tables. The bolded numbers at the bottom of each table signify the total number of participants who has used the respective lexical items.

Table 4.3: Different lexical items used by female participants

Different lexical items used by female participants							
	adjectives	fillers	laughter / sounds	vulgar	short forms / contractions	other languages	other forms
F1	adorable	yor / o / aye / oi / oh no!	ahhaha / nyek nyek nyek / hooh haah / bluek / huhuhu / hehehe	big-ass	thankiu / ppl / gf / bf / u / u're	mari pergi cantik cantik / inilah fb dia / baru makan semalam / tengok etc	-
F2	cute~	ahhh~	bahaha / woohoo...	damn / f-up / damn it	ppl / ur / nid / lil bro	-	-
F3	-	ohhhh ... / aaa	hehe / hohoho	-	ad / nex / d / evyl / x'mas / M	-	-
F4	cranky / annoyed / absurd / stupid	ahhh~	yawns / grrrr / pffffffttt / urghh / lalalalalalal a / *wiggle* / *sniffs*	gross fat cow / fool stupid / morons	OMG / dowanna / wanna / 'nuff / outta / gotta	banjir / macam aku punya / perasannya aku / ayam masak / lemak cili api	i haz got the Monday blooz / ai haz the sadz
F5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
F6	excited!	-	yayyy!! / xoxo / FUHHHHH	motherfucki ng / screw you haters /	y / u / pressie / lovin' / LOL	jom teka teki / fei zhai	-
F7	yummy	WOOO O!!	*sigh* / laaaaaaaa... / yum /	-	-	mee rebus Johor / cucur pisang / pai tee / asam sambal / chap cai	-
F8	hazy hazy	hmm.. / erm /	hehehe / huhuhu	-	hv / y / u / mms / 1 2 / c / ur / nex / frv / lovin'	-	-
F9	-	hmmm mm... / hurmm m / yeayyy	hikhik / weeeee / zzzzzzzzzz / uuurrrhhh / fuuhhhh	-	y'all / wf / wut / x (no) / b4 / bz	ombak rindu mari menanges / madu / memberontak / makan dulu baru layan etc	-
F10	yummy	-	haha / urghh / woot woot!	dammit	-	mangkuk	-
Total no. partici-pants	7	7	9	5	7	6	1

Table 4.4: Different lexical items used by male participants

Different lexical items used by male participants							
	adjectives	fillers	laughter / sounds	vulgar	short forms / contractions	other languages	other forms
M1	amazing / sweet / nice / meaningful / sleepy /	hmm / oh / WEEEEEE / Wah / Yeah / Whoa! / Ah... / Ga!!	muahahaha	DIU / F U	oso / wanna / u / gonna / ffk / y / CNY / LOL!	ciplak / kena / pulak	missed / thy
M2	-	r!!! / fuyoh	haha	WTF	pls / u / shld / dun / r / lol	jia lat / kesian cikgu!! / sien / heng heng / huat ah	-
M3	-	ooooh / wow	hehehe	-	-	-	-
M4	awesome	hmmm / meh / yeah	om nom nom / yay! / haha / ngek ngek ngek /	no shit / FUCK / WTF	xmas / x (no)	lala lok lok bubuk chacha / tahan galak	-
M5	inspiring!	-	hehe! / HAHAHAH A!	-	lol!	-	-
M6	-	yeah	bang!	-	gotta / Q4 / gonna / x'mas	-	-
M7	-	hmm	haha	-	-	-	-
M8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
M9	-	-	wahahahaha ha....	FML	u / tv / ive / wanna / dun / u / k? / bday / ur / xmas / wan / pls / n / pics	huat ah	-
M10	cool / boring	sigh	lolz / wahahahaha / muackssss	damn / WTF / fucking / bloody	e / wif / dun / ppl / skool / hav / hav / izzit / n / sec / d / gonna / oso	sienzzz / walao / kacau / kene / beh tahan	-
Total no. participants	4	7	9	5	7	5	1

4.2.2.1 Pronouns in the status updates

Writing status updates is a way for participants to publicly express their personal opinions, feelings and experience, since it is done via social networking sites. All participants use different personal pronouns to indicate if the status updates are related to themselves or if the status updates involve other parties. Based on the findings, it is found that the first person pronouns (for example, *I* and *we*) are the most frequently pronouns used throughout the status updates. Out of 878 status updates, first person pronouns are found in 40% of the status updates. The second person pronouns (for

example, *you*) and third person pronouns (for example, *he*, *she*, and *it*) are also used throughout the status updates. However, the use of second and third person pronouns is not as frequent as the first person pronouns. Second person pronouns are found in 9.9% of the total status updates while third person pronouns are found in 4.5% of the status updates. Occasionally, the content of the status updates are related to the participants' audience. In this case, participants may tag their friends within the posted status updates and second person pronouns are usually used to refer to these tagged friends. On the contrary, third person pronouns are used when participants refer to an anonymous person (see Figure 4.15).

Interestingly, it is also found that participants also frequently exclude the usage of pronouns in their status updates, i.e. no pronoun is used in the entire status update. Non-usage of pronouns is found in 45.6% of the total of status updates. Non-usage of pronouns are often seen when a neutral status update is posted. However, it is also sometimes used to convey negative or positive message. The negativity or positivity of the message can be easily determined by the words and punctuation markers used within that status update. For example, Figure 4.16 shows no usage of pronouns but it reflects a positive status update. Such positivity is reflected with the use of repetitive exclamation marks (!!!) to indicate excitement towards the activity *count down*, as mentioned in the status update. On the contrary in Figure 4.14, the last line of the status update also shows no usage of pronouns. However in this case, the last line reflects a negative message as the first line of the status update has already explained the frustration of the participant towards an irresponsible driver with the usage of phrases like *You stupid man!! What's wrong with you?!!* This participant may be feeling negative towards this particular situation or person but do not want to make their updates too obvious or when the person involved is anonymous. The bad driver as stated in Figure 4.14 is a stranger to the participant.

The following figures are some examples of different personal pronouns used in the participants' status updates. Figure 4.16 is an example of non-usage of personal pronouns in a status update.



Figure 4.13: An example of first person pronoun usage in a status update

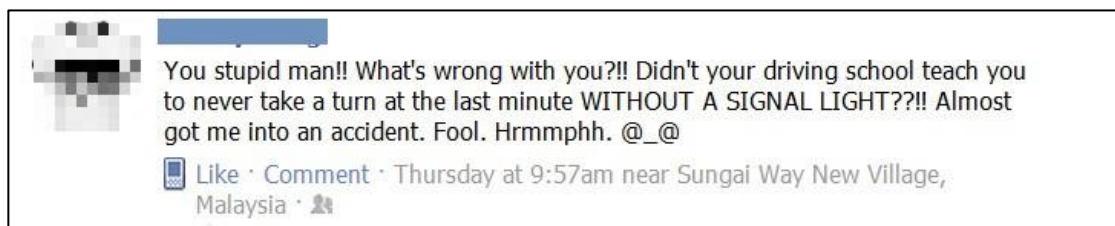


Figure 4.14: An example of second person pronoun usage in a status update

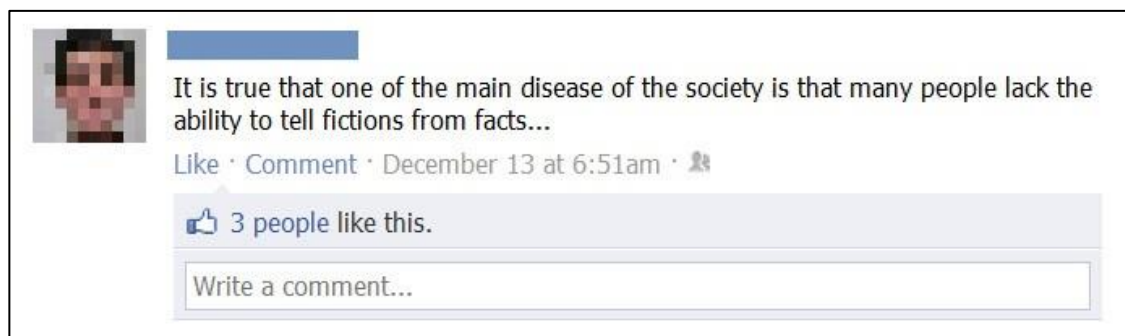


Figure 4.15: An example of third person pronoun usage in a status update



Figure 4.16: An example of non-usage of personal pronouns in a status update

The use of personal pronouns is summarised in the following table. The numbers in the table tabulates the occurrences of different personal pronouns used in the participants' status updates. For example, participant F2 uses the first, second and third

person pronouns 8 times, 2 times and 1 time respectively throughout all her status updates. No pronoun is used in 10 of her total status updates.

Table 4.5: Summary of the usage of personal pronouns in status updates

Female Participants					Male Participants				
Usage of personal pronouns in status updates									
	1 st person	2 nd person	3 rd person	Not specified		1 st person	2 nd person	3 rd person	Not specified
F1	42	14	6	70	M1	27	6	6	38
F2	8	2	1	10	M2	15	4	6	18
F3	7	0	0	11	M3	3	0	0	1
F4	44	0	2	24	M4	23	7	0	37
F5	8	0	0	1	M5	21	4	1	55
F6	20	5	2	41	M6	23	3	3	10
F7	7	5	2	18	M7	9	1	0	3
F8	12	1	0	3	M8	0	26	0	0
F9	42	2	1	20	M9	17	2	4	11
F10	16	1	1	4	M10	7	4	5	25
Occur- rence	206	30	15	202	Occur- rence	145	57	25	198
Percent- age	23.5%	3.4%	1.7%	23.0%	Percent- age	16.5%	6.5%	2.8%	22.6%

4.2.2.2 Expressions of laughter or sounds in the written form

Expressions of laughter or sounds in the written form frequently occur in the participants' status updates. These expressions resemble sounds made in real life but are transformed in the written form. 70% of the participants use these expressions of laughter such as *hahaha*, *hehehe*, or *huhuhu* in their status updates. 50% of the participants use the expressions of sounds such as *om nom nom* (to replicate the sound of eating), *muacks* (to replicate the sound of kissing) and *grrrrrr* (to express annoyance) in their status updates. Most of these expressions are used together with a verb in the participants' status updates to enable the users to verbalise and share their actions or emotions with the participants. Such expressions somehow enhance their emotions or actions in the status updates. Instead of a usual status update consisting of only words, participants can use these expressions additionally to enable the audience to empathise their feelings or emotions, whether positively or negatively, more effectively. For

example, note the differences between these status updates in the following tables. By using different expressions of laughter and sounds, the negativity or positivity of the status updates is enhanced.

Table 4.6: A comparison between usage and non-usage of written expressions of laughter

Without written expressions of laughter	With written expressions of laughter
I am happy today.	I am happy today. Hahaha!

Table 4.7: A comparison between usage and non-usage of written expressions of sound

Without written expressions of sounds	With written expressions of sounds
I am so happy.	Woohoo, I am so happy.
I am so angry.	Grrrrrrr, I am so angry.

90% of the participants use these written expressions of laughter and sounds in their status updates. Only 10% of the participants do not use any of these expressions as their status updates are mainly about religious issues. The reason why such expressions are not used is perhaps because they want to appear serious in these religion-related status updates. An example of using expressions of laughter or sound in the written form is available in Figure 4.17.



Figure 4.17: An example of using expressions of laughter in the written form in a status update

The expressions of laughter and sounds in written form used are illustrated in Table 4.8. The table provides examples of expressions of laughter or sounds used in written form used by the participants in their status updates.

Table 4.8: Examples of the expressions of laughter and sounds in the written form used in status updates

Female participants		Male participants	
Examples of the expressions of laughter and sounds used in the written form			
F1	ahhaha / nyek nyek nyek / hooh haah / bluek / huhuhu / hehehe	M1	muahahaha
F2	bahaha / woohoo...	M2	haha
F3	hehe / hohoho	M3	hehehe
F4	yawns / grrrrr / pffftttt / urghh / lalalalalalala / *wiggle* / *sniffs*	M4	om nom nom / yay! / haha / ngek ngek ngek /
F5	-	M5	hehe! / HAHAHAHA!
F6	yayyy!! / xoxo / FUHHHHHH	M6	bang!
F7	*sigh* / laaaaaaa... / yum	M7	haha
F8	hehehe / huhuhu	M8	-
F9	hikhik / weeeee / zzzzzzzzzz / uuurrrhhh/ fuuhhhh	M9	wahahahaha....
F10	haha / urghh	M10	wahahahaha / muackssss

4.2.2.3 Fillers in status updates

Another way to enhance audience's understanding and empathy is through the use of fillers in the status updates. Similar to the expressions of sounds in the written form as mentioned in section 4.2.2.2, fillers are also representations of sounds in the written form. However, fillers are usually used to indicate pauses within a sentence or sentences and not to replicate sounds. 70% of the participants use fillers in their status updates. The most commonly used filler by the participants is *hmmmm*. Out of this 70%, 35% of them use *hmmmm* in their status updates. One participant specifically use the word *sigh* to indicate worry or anxiety. An example of using fillers in status updates is in Figure 4.18. Other examples of fillers used in the participants' status updates are illustrated in Table 4.9.

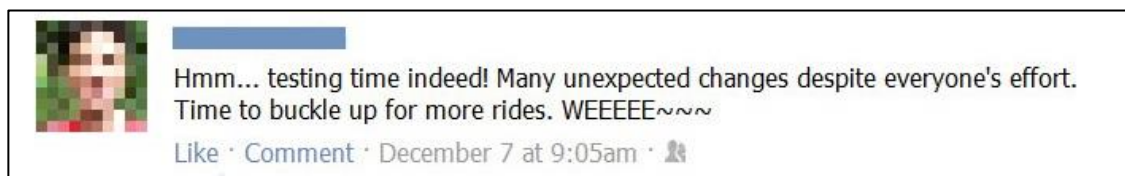


Figure 4.18: An example of using fillers in a status update

Table 4.9: Examples of fillers used in status updates

Female participants		Male participants	
Examples of fillers used in status updates			
F1	yor / o / aye / oi / oh no!	M1	hmm / oh / WEEEEEE / Wah / Yeah / Ah... / Ga!! / Whoa!
F2	ahhh~	M2	r!!! / fuyoh
F3	ohhhh... / aaa	M3	ooooh / wow
F4	ahhh~	M4	hmmm / meh / yeah
F5	-	M5	-
F6	-	M6	yeah
F7	WOOOO!!	M7	hmm
F8	hmm.. / erm /	M8	-
F9	hmmmm... / hurmmm / yeayyy	M9	-
F10	-	M10	sigh

4.2.2.4 Adjectives in status updates

Participants also favour the usage of adjectives in their status updates. In addition to the expressions of laughter and sounds in the written form and fillers, participants use adjectives to describe their emotions or their feelings towards a particular issue at the time of updating their status. These adjectives are usually used in a concise manner. 55% of the participants are found to use one word adjectives like *cute* and *awesome* in their status updates. 100% of these one word adjectives are accompanied by a link to a video or a photo as direct descriptions to these attached links. An example of using a one word adjective with a photo attachment is provided in Figure 4.19.

Participants generally use more positive adjectives than negative adjectives, especially when they are describing their experience. From these 55% of the participants who use one word adjectives, 63% of them use only positive ones, 18.5% uses negative ones only and 18.5% uses both negative and positive adjectives in their status updates. Table 4.10 provides all examples of one word adjectives used by participants in their status updates. The symbol (+) next to the adjectives indicates a positive usage and the symbol (-) next to the adjectives indicates a negative usage.



Figure 4.19: An example of using a one word adjective with a photo attachment in a status update

Table 4.10: Examples of one word adjectives used in status updates

Female participants		Male participants	
Examples of one word adjectives used in status updates			
F1	adorable (+)	M1	amazing (+) / sweet (+) / nice (+) / meaningful (+) / sleepy (-)
F2	cute~ (+)	M2	-
F3	-	M3	-
F4	cranky (-) / annoyed (-) / absurd (-) / stupid (-)	M4	awesome (+)
F5	-	M5	inspiring! (+)
F6	excited! (+)	M6	-
F7	yummy (+)	M7	-
F8	hazy hazy (-)	M8	-
F9	-	M9	-
F10	yummy (+)	M10	cool (+) / boring (-)

4.2.2.5 Short forms or contractions in status updates

75% of the participants use short forms in their status updates. Although 88% of the total status updates are written in the full forms, there are several circumstances which made the participants write using short forms or contractions. The major reason participants use short forms is that short forms are spelt with less alphabets since they are shorter than the usual words. It is faster to type in short forms especially when the status update itself is a long one. This is especially so when several of the participants update their status using their mobile devices. The exact locations of these participants are unknown, but it is likely that the participants are on the move and that is probably why short forms are used as they are faster and easier to be typed via the participants' mobile devices. This may also apply to Facebook users who just want to use short forms in their status updates via their computers. Some examples of short forms used include *u* (which means *you*), *y* (which means *why*) and *ppl* or *ppl* (which means *people*).

An example of using short forms in a status update via a mobile device is shown in the following figure. The mobile device icon, marked in a box, can be clearly seen in the figure.



Figure 4.20: An example of using short forms via a mobile device in a status update

Another type of shorter forms of words, known as contractions, is also frequently used by the participants. Words like *gonna* (which means *going to*), *gotta* (which means *got to*) and *wanna* (which means *want to* or *want a*). An example of such is as follows.

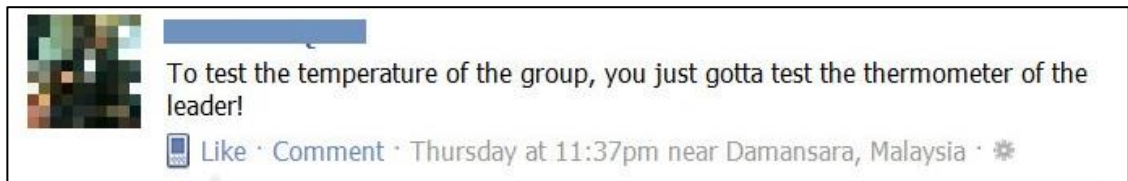


Figure 4.21: An example of using contractions via a mobile device in a status update

Examples of short forms and contractions used in the participants' status updates are illustrated in Table 4.11. This table provides examples of short forms and contractions used by participants in their status updates.

Table 4.11: Examples of short forms or contractions used in status updates

Female participants		Male participants	
Examples of short forms or contractions used in status updates			
F1	thankiu / ppl / gf / bf / u / u're	M1	oso / wanna / u / gonna / ffk / y / CNY
F2	ppl / ur / nid / lil bro	M2	pls / u / shld / dun / r / lol
F3	ad / nex / d / evy1 / x'mas / M	M3	-
F4	OMG / dowanna / wanna / 'nuff / outta / gotta	M4	xmas / x (no)
F5	-	M5	lol
F6	y / u / pressie / lovin' / LOL	M6	gotta / Q4 / gonna / x'mas
F7	-	M7	-
F8	hv / y / u / mms / 1 2 / c / ur / nex / frv / lovin'	M8	-
F9	y'all / wf / wut / x (no) / b4 / bz	M9	u / tv / ive / wanna / dun / u / k? / bday / ur / xmas / wan / pls / n / pics
F10	woot woot!	M10	e / wif / dun / ppl / skool / hav / hav / izzit / n / sec / d / gonna / oso / lolz

4.2.2.6 Vulgar words in status updates

In addition to using common adjectives or written expressions of sounds to express negative emotions, participants sometimes use vulgar words to express extreme negative emotions especially extreme anger and extreme frustration. These vulgar words are usually not targeted to anyone but rather to express what the participants feel about their own situation at that time of writing. If the vulgar word is targeted at a particular person, the pronoun *you* is usually used together with the vulgar words.

50% of the participants use vulgar words in their status updates. Most frequently used vulgar word is *fuck*. Out of these 50%, 70% of them use the vulgar word *fuck* in

their status updates. However, participants usually avoid the full form as it may be seen as too vulgar for their audience. Instead, they use the abbreviated version because it seems much more civilised but at the same time, allows the participants to vent their anger or frustration. Some abbreviated forms consisting the word *fuck* include *FML* (the abbreviation of the phrase *Fuck My Life*), *eff u* (which means *Fuck You*) and *f-up* (which means *fucked-up*). This clearly shows that although participants have the freedom to write their status in whatever way they want to, they still take into consideration how they will be viewed by their audience. Though they want to express their extreme emotion to their audience, they do not want to be seen as a vulgar and uncivilised person.

Based on the findings, it can clearly be seen that the male participants used vulgar words or phrases that include the word *fuck*. However, the female participants used mostly vulgar words or phrases that include the word *damn*. Although these two words are considered vulgar, it is no doubt that the word *fuck* is a harsher or rougher form and the word *damn* is a milder form. From this point, we can clearly see that the male participants have the “couldn’t-care-less” kind of attitude when they are using such words to express their negative emotions while female participants are usually more reserved and choose to use the milder form when expressing their negative emotions. Again, this shows that the participants are conscious of the kind of self-presentation they want to project to their audience.

Examples of participants using vulgar words in their status updates are available in the following figures. Examples of vulgar words used in participants’ status updates are illustrated in Table 4.12.



Figure 4.22: An example of using vulgar words in an abbreviated form in a status update



Figure 4.23: An example of using vulgar word in a status update

Table 4.12: Examples of vulgar words used in status updates

Female participants		Male participants	
Examples of vulgar words used in status updates			
F1	big-ass	M1	DIU / eff u
F2	damn / f-up / damn it	M2	WTF
F3	-	M3	-
F4	gross fat cow / fool stupid / morons	M4	no shit / FUCK / WTF
F5	-	M5	-
F6	motherfucking / screw you haters /	M6	-
F7	-	M7	-
F8	-	M8	-
F9	-	M9	FML
F10	dammit	M10	damn / WTF / fucking / bloody

4.2.2.7 Different forms of English language

There are two participants who use different forms of English language to express their emotions. Out of the 878 status updates, only 2 (i.e 0.2%) status updates are with different forms of English language. The findings show one participant uses the Old English with words like *misseth* (which means *misses*) and *thy* (which means *you*) in one of his status updates. Another participant uses erratic form of English, which is a form of English that is frequently used by Internet users, in one of her status updates. The following sentence is an example of a sentence which is written with improper spelling and grammar structure. *ai haz the sadz* (which means *I has the sads* when

translated literally) is a sentence which has obvious spelling and structural errors. When translated properly, this sentence says *I am sad*. Such usage is similar to the usage of code-mixing and code-switching, which have been discussed in the section 4.2.1. Examples of such occurrences are available in the following figures. Examples of different forms of English language used in status updates are illustrated in Table 4.13.



Figure 4.24: An example of using Old English in a status update



Figure 4.25: An example of using erratic English in a status update

Table 4.13: Examples of different forms of English language used in status updates

Female participants		Male participants	
Examples of different forms of English language used in status updates			
F1	-	M1	missed / thy
F2	-	M2	-
F3	-	M3	-
F4	i haz got the Monday blooz / ai haz the sadz	M4	-
F5	-	M5	-
F6	-	M6	-
F7	-	M7	-
F8	-	M8	-
F9	-	M9	-
F10	-	M10	-

4.2.3 Grammatical structures

Though participants use different lexical items in their status updates, the grammatical constructions of these status updates are generally well constructed. There

are several occasions where they do not follow proper grammatical constructions. However, this is very minimal. Based on the lexical items as discussed above, participants generally use pronouns correctly in their status updates. However, they may sometimes omit the usage of pronouns too. Usually, the meaning of the status updates is still comprehensible even without the usage of any pronouns, whether as the subject or the object of the sentence, as there are other lexical items which can help the audience to generate the meaning. An example of the pronoun purposefully omitted can be seen in the following figure. Even the first person pronoun is omitted from the sentence, it is still clear that the person who is doing the action as mentioned in the status update is none other than the participant.



Figure 4.26: An example of omitting personal pronouns in a status update

Similarly, participants sometimes write a one word adjective in their status updates. These adjectives are usually accompanied by a link to a video, a photo or an article. Though it cannot be considered as a proper sentence, the audience can easily relate the adjectives to the link that is shared by the participants. In this way, no proper sentence is constructed and yet the meaning of the status update is still easily understood by the audience. An example of such an occurrence is in the following figure (also shown on page 65 as Figure 4.19). This status update only has a one word adjective. Though there is no proper sentence construction, it is clear that the adjective *cute* refers to the two babies in the attached picture.



Figure 4.19: An example of using one word adjective in a status update (as shown on page 65)

Thus, it is fair to say that participants generally observe good grammatical structures in their status updates. Though some lexical items are purposefully omitted in these status updates, the meanings of these status updates are generally still easily comprehensible by their audience. This shows that all participants are conscious about the content of status updates and they usually write their status updates clearly to ensure their intended message is clearly delivered to their audience.

4.3 Semiotic features

Similar to linguistic features, semiotic features are also important strategies used by the participants to express their emotions or feelings. While linguistic features focus on words or languages, semiotic features focus on the symbols that participants use in

their status updates. This research identifies several semiotic features which are frequently used by the participants.

4.3.1 Punctuation markers

Punctuation markers are used together with words, phrases or sentences to signal the intonation and pauses for the readers. Instead of using the proper way of punctuating the sentences, which usually involve different punctuation markers to be used only once at the end of a sentence, participants are seen to repeat the same punctuation markers repetitively. A comparison of such is in the following table.

Table 4.14: A comparison between using proper punctuation markers and using multiple punctuation markers in status updates

With proper punctuation markers	With repetitive punctuation markers
How are you feeling today? I am so happy today!	How are you feeling today??? I am so happy today!!!!

The usage of different punctuation markers in status updates is in the following tables. The numbers in the table signify the occurrences of punctuation markers in the participants' status updates. For example, participant F2 uses ellipsis, repetitive exclamation marks and repetitive question marks, 6 times, 1 time and 1 time respectively. 4 of her status updates use proper punctuation markers i.e. no repetitive markers are used and 6 of her status updates show no punctuation markers are used. 0 signifies no occurrence. It is important to note that there may be either none or more than one punctuation marker used in each status update.

Table 4.15: Punctuation markers used by female participants in their status updates

Punctuation markers used by female participants							
	Proper	...	!!!	???	?!?!?	Others	None
F1	42	40	5	9	1	~~~ (2)	33
F2	4	6	1	1	0	~ (4)	6
F3	0	5	5	0	0	~ (2)	9
F4	43	0	5	0	3	~~~ (1)/ "" (1) / * * (3)	14
F5	0	5	3	0	0	0	1

Table 4.15, continued

Punctuation markers used by female participants							
	Proper	...	!!!	???	?!?!?!	Others	None
F6	41	1	1	0	2	"" (1)	22
F7	11	3	12	0	0	@	7
F8	4	7	2	0	0	0	3
F9	35	1	13	1	1	~ (1)	13
F10	8	4	2	0	1	~ (1) / "" (1)	5

Table 4.16: Punctuation markers used by male participants in their status updates

Punctuation markers used by male participants							
	Proper	...	!!!	???	?!?!?!	Others	None
M1	15	43	6	1	1	~~~ (3) "" (6)	0
M2	19	15	9	0	0	0	0
M3	0	6	2	0	1	0	0
M4	25	18	6	0	4	"" (2) / ** (1) /~! (1)	12
M5	48	6	3	1	0	~ (1) / @ (1)	21
M6	33	2	3	0	0	0	1
M7	11	1	0	0	0	0	1
M8	9	3	14	15	0	0	0
M9	1	77	12	1	0	~~~ (1)	4
M10	0	20	24	4	0	0	0

Most participants generally use proper punctuation markers in their status updates. In fact, by using these punctuation markers appropriately, only once is already enough to express the intended tone or feeling. However, participants may overuse these punctuation markers because they have deep emotions for the particular topics which they are writing about. Therefore, repetitive punctuation markers are used to stress or highlight the content of the status updates. Based on the comparison in Table 4.14, it is clear that using repetitive punctuation markers does create a very different kind of tone within that particular sentence for readers. Though most participants use punctuation markers properly, more often than expected, participants also do not use any

punctuation markers at all. An example of non-usage of punctuation marker is in the following figure.



Figure 4.27: An example of non-usage of any punctuation marker in a status update

4.3.1.1 Ellipsis in status updates

The most frequently used repetitive punctuation markers is the repetitive period (...). It is also known as the ellipsis. Ellipsis is usually used when the participants have an unfinished thought. Ellipsis is used either as a way to elicit thoughts from the audience or as a way to signal that participants are in deep thought about a particular issue. Sometimes, it is also used to signal a dragging tone. That means, instead of putting a full stop at the end of the sentence, it seems as if the participants are dragging the pronunciation of the last word of the sentence.

Based on the responses in the questionnaire, many participants said that ellipsis is used to create suspense in their speech. Such suspense is created when the participants have negative emotions. They may be speechless, be in doubt, feel emotional, or have an unfinished thought over a particular issue that they are discussing via their status updates. Such suspense may lead their audience to believe that there would be a continued thought in the future. A few participants also mentioned that ellipsis is used as a dragging tone, which basically does not mean anything. An example of using ellipsis in status updates is as follows.



Figure 4.28: An example of using ellipses in a status update

4.3.1.2 Repetitive exclamation marks in status updates

The second most frequently used repetitive punctuation markers are repetitive exclamation marks (!!!). These repetitive exclamation markers are usually used to signal extreme emotions, in both positive and negative manners. Positive emotions include extreme surprise, extreme excitement and extreme happiness. Negative emotions include extreme shock, extreme annoyance, extreme anger and extreme frustration.

Most participants responded that they use repetitive exclamation marks to show extreme emotions especially the negative ones. They feel that these emotions are greatly emphasised with the help of these repetitive exclamation marks. Examples of negative emotions as suggested by the participants include anger, frustration, shock and yelling. However, a few participants also suggested that they use these repetitive exclamation marks to show excitement and surprise.

The following examples show how repetitive exclamation marks are used to show extreme emotion, either positively or negatively.



Figure 4.29: An example of using repetitive exclamation marks to show extreme negative emotion in a status update



Figure 4.30: An example of using repetitive exclamation marks to show extreme positive emotion in a status update

4.3.1.3 Repetitive question marks in status updates

Occasionally, participants also use repetitive question marks (???) in their status updates. Similar to repetitive exclamation marks, these repetitive question marks

are usually used to express extreme emotion. However, they are usually used to signify negative emotion such as extreme confusion, extreme annoyance and extreme dissatisfaction.

Participants responded that they usually use repetitive question marks when they are very much in doubt. They usually feel lost, confused, distressed, puzzled and troubled over a particular matter. Such punctuations are usually used just to express their negative emotion. They usually do not require answers or feedback from their audience. The following figure shows an example of using repetitive question marks to show negative emotion in a status update.



Figure 4.31: An example of using repetitive questions marks to show extreme negative emotion in a status update

4.3.1.4 Mixed-repetitive exclamation and question marks in status updates

A mixed-repetitive exclamation and question markers (!?!?!? or !!!???) are used by the participants too. Similarly to repetitive question markers, it is also used to express extreme emotion in negative manner such as extreme confusion and extreme disbelief.

Most participants responded that such punctuation markers are used when they are in extreme frustration and confusion. They also use it when they are overwhelmed with both negative and positive emotions at the same time. For example, they may be excited but indecisive at the same time or they may be questioning a particular issue in a

shocked yet surprised manner. The following figure shows an example of such a usage in a status update.



Figure 4.32: An example of using mixed-repetitive exclamation and questions marks to show an overwhelmed reaction in a status update

4.3.1.5 Tilde or repetitive tilde in status updates

Another frequent occurrence of punctuation marker is the usage of tilde (~) or repetitive tildes (~~~). Linguistically, tilde is used to indicate change of tone or pronunciation of words. However, in the status updates, most participants use it as a way to drag the pronunciation of a particular word, similar to the usage of ellipsis as mentioned in section 4.3.1.1.

Some participants suggested that the use of tilde or repetitive tildes is similar to the usage of ellipsis, to show an unfinished thought to be continued at a later time. Interestingly, many participants also suggested that there is no specific reason of using this punctuation mark. However, many participants see the usage of this punctuation as an indication of being cheerful and playful. Many participants mentioned that they use it because it makes their status updates to “look” better and cuter. The following figure shows an example of repetitive tildes in a status update.



Figure 4.33: An example of using repetitive tildes in a status update

4.3.1.6 Other punctuation markers in status updates

Other less frequently used punctuation markers include quotation marks (“ ”) to indicate quoted words, phrases or sentence by another person in the participants’ status updates, the *at* sign (@) to show location and asterisk (*) to emphasise the adjectives or phrases that appear together with it. Some examples are shown in the following figures.



Figure 4.34: An example of using quotation marks in a status update

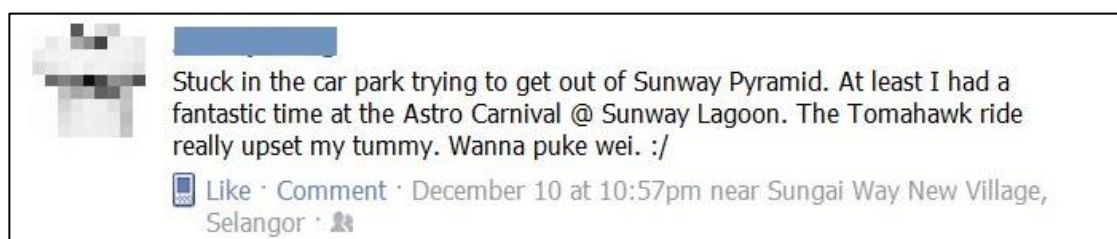


Figure 4.35: An example of using the *at* sign in a status update



Figure 4.36: An example of using asterisk in a status update

4.3.2 Capitalisation in status updates

90% of the participants use proper capitalisation with occasional occurrences of only small (or non-capitalised) alphabets or mixed capitalisation, with 28% of them using all proper capitalisation in their status updates. The remaining 10% of the participants are found to use only small alphabets throughout their status updates. However, it is found that there is almost no occurrence that participants use the

all-capitalised form. Examples of the usage of different forms of capitalisation is summarised in the Table 4.17.

Table 4.17: Examples of different forms of capitalisation used in status updates

Examples of different forms of capitalisation	
Proper capitalisation	Jenny and I went to the shopping mall today. We bought many things.
Small alphabets (Non-capitalised alphabets)	jenny and i went to the shopping mall today. we bought many things.
Mixed capitalisation	Jenny and I went to The shopping Mall today. We Bought many Things.
All-capitalised alphabets	JENNY AND I WENT TO THE SHOPPNIG MALL TODAY. WE BOUGHT MANY THINGS.

Participants are found to capitalise common nouns but sometimes, they fail to use proper capitalisation for proper nouns. It is found that several names for places such as *Singapore*, *Malaysia* and *UPM* (short for *Universiti Putra Malaysia*) are used in non-capitalised manner like *singapore*, *malaysia* and *upm*. Common words such as *like*, *high heels* and *epic* are found to be used in all-capitalised manner like *LIKE*, *HIGH HEELS*, and *EPIC*. The findings show that 79.1% of the status updates are written with proper capitalisation. 17% of the status updates are written in only small (non-capitalised) words, 3.8% of them are written using mixed-capitalisation and only 0.1% is in all-capitalised form. Using proper capitalisation may be a way for participants to show their professionalism via Facebook since they are all working adults.

Examples of the different forms of capitalisation used in the participants' status updates are illustrated in the following tables. The numbers in the tables signify the occurrences of capitalisation in the participants' status updates. For example, participant F2 uses proper capitalisation 16 times in her status updates and 5 times small (or non-capitalised) alphabets in her status updates. Examples of words used in either all-capitalised form or non-capitalised form within a proper capitalised sentence in a status update are listed under "words". For example, participant F2 uses an all-

capitalised phrase *FEVER AGAIN* in a properly capitalised status update. 0 signifies no occurrence.

Table 4.18: Different forms of capitalisation used by female participants in their status updates

Different forms of capitalisation used in status updates used by female participants					
	Proper	Small	Mix	All-capitalised	Examples of words used in status updates
F1	117	15	0	0	pavilion / fahrenheit / NOW / LIKE / SIMPLE / QUICK / VOTE / SO CHEAP / RMK / LANEIGE
F2	16	5	0	0	FEVER AGAIN
F3	14	0	4	0	F-I-L
F4	67	3	0	0	REALLY / THAT / SUCCESS!!
F5	8	1	0	0	CHRISTMAS / HE
F6	47	21	0	0	HOVA FOREVER / YUMS / HAHAHA / EPIC / EXCITES / OMGGG
F7	27	5	0	0	TURKEYS AND PIGS / MERRY CHRISTMAS
F8	1	14	0	1	penang / gsc / i'm
F9	37	11	17	0	richard marx / HIGH HEELS / STUBBORN / MONKEYS / NOW SEKARANGGGG / NOT MOVING AT ALL / SLEEP /
F10	22	0	0	0	CNY
Occurrence	356	75	21	1	
Percentage	40.6%	8.5%	2.4%	0.1%	

Table 4.19: Different forms of capitalisation used by male participants in their status updates

Different forms of capitalisation used in status updates used by male participants					
	Proper	Small	Mix	All-capitalised	Examples of words used in status updates
M1	66	9	2	0	CHARACTER BUILDING / ROCKS / HELLO! / SURVIVED!
M2	1	38	4	0	kuantan / singapore / malaysia / uthm / upm
M3	4	0	0	0	NOT
M4	62	3	2	0	TRY / PROXY / OMG MY EYES!!! / SO WTF / thursday / tropicana / nando's / ghost protocol
M5	80	1	0	0	KL / BKK / DIVINE!! / OMG / NOW! / LOVEEEEEEEEE / LOL
M6	39	0	0	0	SOLD / AWESOME / CURRENCY
M7	13	0	0	0	ASEAN
M8	26	0	0	0	AMEN
M9	23	10	1	0	hong kong / yahya awal / gucci / AND / CJH / CHINA PRESS

Table 4.19, continued.

Different forms of capitalisation used in status updates used by male participants					
	Proper	Small	Mix	All-capitalised	Examples of words used in status updates
M10	24	14	3	0	NO LAG / JAM / MUDAH
Occurrence	338	75	12	0	
Percentage	38.5%	8.5%	1.4%	0%	

4.3.2.1 All-capitalised words in status updates

Participants use different forms of capitalisation for several reasons. The main reason they capitalised certain words is that they want to highlight certain words, phrases or even that particular sentence itself. This somehow resembles the action of “shouting”.

The participants mentioned that they sometimes use all-capitalised words in their status updates to draw their audience’s attention on a particular topic. They also said that they use these capitalised words to express anger or frustration. In addition, the participants supported the claim that all-capitalised words resemble the action of “shouting” or “yelling”, which is an easy way for them to draw the audience’s attention. Although the participants mentioned that they sometimes use all-capitalised words in their status updates, the findings show that there was only one status update (i.e 0.1% of the total status updates) which was written entirely in all-capitalised forms. In other status updates, all-capitalised forms are only used for certain words within a status update with the purpose of highlighting a particular issue or situation.

Figure 4.37 shows the only status update which was written entirely in all-capitalised form. Figure 4.38 and Figure 4.39 are examples to show how all-capitalised words are used to either show frustration or draw audience’s attention on a particular topic. Only certain parts (i.e. words, phrases or sentences) of the updates are all-capitalised. The remaining parts of the status updates are properly capitalised.



Figure 4.37: An example of the only status update that was written entirely in all-capitalised form

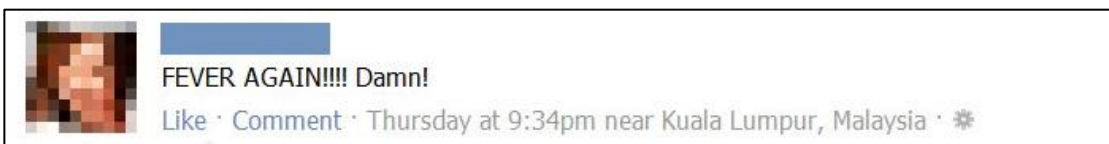


Figure 4.38: An example of all-capitalised words to show frustration in a status update



Figure 4.39: An example of all-capitalised sentence to draw audience's attention in a particular topic in a status update

4.3.2.2 Small letter (or non-capitalised) words in status updates

Sometimes, the participants use only small letter (or non-capitalised) words. This is mainly due to the device they use at the time of writing their status updates. 17% of the status updates are found to be written in only non-capitalised manner. Similarly to the usage of short-forms or contractions as mentioned in section 4.2.2.5, these participants may be on the move, i.e. away from a fixed location like home or office, therefore, it is likely that they are writing the status updates via their mobile devices. If the autocorrect function on their mobile devices is turned off, it is likely that the status will appear as it is typed, thus resulting in only non-capitalised words in their status updates.

The participants responded that they usually update their status in non-capitalised manner when nothing major is going on. The status updates may contain very casual and common information. Some participants also suggested that they may be updating their status using their mobile devices. It would require more effort to capitalise properly with their mobile devices. An example of using non-capitalised alphabets in a status update is available in the following figure.



Figure 4.40: An example of using non-capitalised alphabets in a status update

4.3.2.3 Mixed-capitalisation in status updates

Mixed-capitalisations are found in participants' status updates. The status updates are usually not capitalised properly as the first letters of some words within a sentence are being capitalised randomly. However, only 3.4% of the status updates are written in the forms of mixed-capitalisation. Based on the participants' responses, they claimed that such a style is normally used to emphasise on the particular word within a sentence. It is also possible that sarcasm is attempted when such a style is used. It may

also be resulted from the autocorrect options in their mobile devices. As this is not a usual writing style among the participants, and these occurrences usually happen without the knowledge of the participants, most of them responded that they are also unsure why such a style is used. An example of mixed-capitalisation is available in the following figure.



Figure 4.41: An example of mixed-capitalisation in a status update

4.3.3 Emoticons in status updates

Symbols which resemble the facial expression or shape of things, known as emoticons, are sometimes used by participants in their status updates. This research divides the usage of emoticons in two parts: positive emoticons and negative emoticons. Positive emoticons refer the use of combined symbols to represent positive emotions or actions such as happiness, love, laughing and winking. Examples of such emoticons include :) (to replicate a smiling face), <3 (to replicate the shape of love), =D (to replicate the laughing action) and ;) (to replicate the winking action). Negative emoticons refer the use of combined symbols to represent negative emotions or actions such as shock, confused, crying and frustrated. Examples of such emoticons include :O (to express shock), X((to express confusion), :'((to replicate the crying action) and >.< (to express frustration).

Using emoticons is also a way to enhance the emotions in addition to the words used in the participants' status updates. 85% of the participants use emoticons in their status updates. Although 74.4% of the participants' status updates do not consist of

emoticons, the results show that participants generally use positive emoticons more frequently as compared to the negative emoticons. From the remaining 25.6% status updates with emoticons, positive emoticons are found in 19.7% of the status updates whereas negative emoticons are found in only 5.9% of the status updates. Again, this shows that participants want to project themselves positively in front of their audience. The occurrences of emoticons used in status updates are listed in Table 4.20.

Though gender is not a major concern for this research, the results clearly show a significant difference between genders in the usage of emoticons in their status updates. Female participants clearly show a higher usage of emoticons, in which 100% of them use emoticons at least once in their status updates. On the contrary, there are only 70% of male participants who use emoticons in their status updates. Though both genders use positive emoticons more frequently, the female participants have a higher usage in negative emoticons as compared to the male participants. The percentage of data is available in Table 4.20.

Almost all participants responded that they use emoticons to express their emotions in addition to the words they use in their status updates. These emotions are usually evoked during the time when they are writing their status updates so they feel that it is essential to include these emoticons in their status updates. Additionally, some participants feel it is “cuter” if they include these emoticons in their status updates. They also use emoticons to avoid sounding stern or serious. The following figures show some examples of positive and negative emoticons used by the participants in their status updates.



Figure 4.42: An example of using positive emoticon that replicates laughter in a status update



Figure 4.43: An example of using negative emoticon that replicates a crying face in a status update

The usage of emoticons in the status updates is in Table 4.20. The numbers in table signify the occurrence of emoticons in the participants' status update. 0 signifies no occurrence. For example, there are 3 occurrences of positive emoticons and 1 occurrence of negative emoticons throughout participant F2's status updates. No emoticon is used for 17 of participant F2's status updates. To give another example, participant M3 does not use any emoticons in all his status updates.

Table 4.20: Occurrences of emoticons in status updates

Female participants				Male participants			
Occurrences emoticons in status updates							
	Positive	Negative	None		Positive	Negative	None
F1	14	2	116	M1	11	7	59
F2	3	1	17	M2	0	0	43
F3	2	0	16	M3	0	0	4
F4	31	16	23	M4	1	0	66
F5	0	1	8	M5	8	0	73
F6	28	7	33	M6	9	0	30
F7	5	0	27	M7	0	1	12
F8	2	0	14	M8	26	0	0
F9	27	14	24	M9	1	0	33

Table 4.20, continued.

Female participants				Male participants			
Occurrences emoticons in status updates							
	Positive	Negative	None		Positive	Negative	None
F10	5	3	14	M10	0	0	41
Occurrences	117	44	292	Occurrences	56	8	361
Percentage	13.3%	5.0%	33.3%	Percentage	6.4%	0.9%	41.1%

4.4 Visual Features

According to Kelley (2007), a Facebook profile usually includes a main picture of the user which the public can see. Facebook users can also create photo albums, which usually can only be seen by people who are befriended by the users. It is undeniable that profile pictures and photo albums are important features for Facebook users to perform their identity.

4.4.1 Profile pictures

The findings show that 90% of the participants have at least 10 profile pictures in their Facebook profiles. 55% of the participants have between 10 and 50 profiles pictures, 20% of them have between 51 and 100 profile pictures, 15% of them have more than 100 profile pictures and only 10% of them have less than 10 profile pictures in their profiles.

90% of the participants show real pictures of themselves. These profile pictures generally consist of individual pictures of the participants. Some profile pictures also show pictures of participants with their family and friends. Only 10% of the participants do not show real pictures of themselves. One participant showed animated figures and another showed religious figures as their profiles pictures. They stated privacy as the main reason why they did not use their pictures of themselves.

Most participants said that they use their real pictures so that people can recognise their Facebook profiles easily. Some participants are very particular with their

profile pictures. They argued that since it is their personal profiles, therefore only their individual pictures should be shown as their profile pictures. Several other participants do not mind if they use their individual pictures or pictures that include their family and friends as long as their faces are clearly shown in the profile picture. All profile pictures show participants smiling happily or having a good time. This shows that participants want to project a positive image in front of their audience by displaying only favourable pictures of themselves as their profile pictures.

The following table shows the number of profile pictures that each participant has in their Facebook profile. The numbers in the table signify the total number of profile pictures that the participants have in their Facebook profiles. A “yes” or a “no” is indicated whether or not they use photos to show picture of themselves. For example, participant F2 has 34 profile pictures that show herself in her Facebook profile.

Table 4.21: Summary of the number of profiles pictures each participant has

Female participants			Male participants		
Profile Pictures					
	Number of profile pictures	Use photos that show real self		Number of profile pictures	Use photos that show real self
F1	45	Yes	M1	12	Yes
F2	34	Yes	M2	10	Yes
F3	73	Yes	M3	10	No
F4	180	Yes	M4	1	Yes
F5	73	Yes	M5	203	Yes
F6	31	Yes	M6	33	Yes
F7	97	Yes	M7	2	No
F8	55	Yes	M8	30	Yes
F9	137	Yes	M9	27	Yes
F10	25	Yes	M10	10	Yes

4.4.2 Photo albums

The findings show that 85% of participants have at least 10 photo albums in their Facebook profiles. 65% of the participants have between 10 and 50 photo albums,

20% of them have more than 50 photo albums, 20% of them have less than 10 photo albums, and 5% does not have any albums at all.

Most photo albums show pictures of trips and outings which the participants recently experienced. Work-related events, hobbies and pets are among other categories of photo album which are commonly found among photo albums of the participants. Pictures from these albums usually show the participants enjoying themselves at these events. None of the pictures show negative emotions. In addition, these photo albums also show how these participants gathered with their friends and family at different events.

Similarly to the reason why only favourable pictures are displayed as the participants' profile pictures, it is almost certain that these participants want to project themselves positively by displaying celebratory pictures of themselves. Since these photo albums usually consist of pictures of large groups of people, this can be seen as a way for these participants to "boast" about their social circles to their audience.

The following table shows the number of photo albums that each participant has in their Facebook profiles. The numbers in the table signify the total number of photo albums the participants have on their Facebook profiles. The table also categorises the kinds of photos participants share on their Facebook profiles. 0 signifies no photo album is available. For example, participant F2 has 40 photo albums that show pictures of her going on trips and having celebrations with her friends or family members. Participant F7 does not have any photo albums at that time of data collection.

Table 4.22: Summary of the number of photo albums each participant has

Female participants			Male participants		
Photo Albums					
	Number of photo albums	Category of photo albums		Number of photo albums	Category of photo albums
F1	24	outings + trips	M1	12	celebration + outings
F2	40	trips + celebration	M2	11	trips + work
F3	57	trips + outings + celebration	M3	10	trips + convocation + celebration

Table 4.22, continued

Female participants			Male participants		
Photo Albums					
	Number of photo albums	Category of photo albums		Number of photo albums	Category of photo albums
F4	93	outings + schools, pets, random , work	M4	33	celebration + hobbies + pets
F5	9	events + celebrations	M5	75	trips + food + self
F6	14	random - no specific category	M6	49	work + conference + trips
F7	0	-	M7	2	religious figure
F8	16	outings + trips	M8	22	church + religions + pets
F9	120	outings + trips + weddings	M9	10	dragon dance
F10	32	outings + food + crafts + family + trips	M10	15	car-related

4.5 Additional features to reflect self-representation in status updates

There are also other additional features that are used as strategies to perform their self-presentation. Though these additional features are non-linguistics, they are undeniably important to reflect the individuality of these participants. Some of these features that are found along with other linguistic features which are discussed in the previous sections include the general content, the discussed topics, the location sharing and friends tagging in status updates. Equally important is whether or not the participants responded to the comments which their audience left for them in regards with their status updates. Responding to comments made to the participants' status updates is also an important strategy to depict their self-presentation.

4.5.1 The general content of the status updates

In addition to the linguistic and semiotic features that help to identify the positive or negative self-presentation that the participants are trying to portray, the general content of the status updates is also being taken into consideration for such identification. The general content of the status updates can easily be divided into 4

main categories: positive updates, negative updates, neutral updates and link sharing. Positive status updates usually include updates that express excitement, happiness and satisfaction over a particular situation. Negative status updates usually include updates that express sarcasm, anger and disappointment. Neutral status updates are usually conversational posts in which these participants share information with or seek opinions from their audience. Link sharing is also commonly used by the participants to share information with their audience. In fact, some neutral updates from the participants are also inclusive of links of websites, videos or photos. However, there is a difference between neutral status updates and link sharing. Link sharing usually only involves direct link sharing without any descriptions whereas neutral status updates usually include certain amount of information in addition the link provided in the status.

The findings show that these participants write both positive and negative status updates in a rather equal ratio, with only a slight different in numbers. From the total of 878 status updates, 22.4% of the status updates are positive and 21.9% of the status updates are negative, with only 0.5% in difference. The findings also show that participants generally write neutral status updates as compared to both positive and negative status updates. 35.3% of them are neutral status updates. The remaining 20.4% are link-sharing updates. This clearly shows that eventhough these participants have the freedom to express themselves, they are still concerned about how they will be viewed by their audience and thus, prefer to maintain their opinion in a rather neutral manner.

The findings of the contents are summarised in Table 4.22. The numbers in the table signify the occurrences of different content in the participants' status updates. For example, participant F2 has 2 positive status updates, 4 negative status updates, 5 neutral status updates and 10 link-sharing status updates.

Table 4.23: Summary of nature of content in status updates

Female Participants					Male Participants				
Nature of content									
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Link		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Link
F1	13	24	47	48	M1	2	25	38	12
F2	2	4	5	10	M2	5	11	9	18
F3	4	0	12	2	M3	0	0	1	3
F4	20	25	25	0	M4	9	22	30	6
F5	2	4	3	0	M5	19	3	41	18
F6	29	16	9	14	M6	18	0	13	8
F7	15	1	11	5	M7	3	6	3	1
F8	6	6	4	0	M8	0	1	25	0
F9	28	28	9	0	M9	16	2	16	0
F10	6	10	5	1	M10	0	4	4	33
Total	125	118	130	80	Total	72	74	180	99
Percentage	14.2%	13.5%	14.8%	9.1%	Percentage	8.2%	8.4%	20.5%	11.3%

4.5.2 Topics discussed in status updates

The topics discussed by the participants in their status updates can be also regarded as strategies used by participants to build their image. In addition to the usual positive or negative image, participants discussed specific topics to enable their audience to understand their interests and expertise. For example, a participant who is interested in cars will usually discuss about topics related to cars in order to establish an image of being a car-lover. To give another example, a participant may write mainly about religious issues in order to create an image of being religious.

It is found that the topics discussed in the status updates for all the participants are generally similar to one and another. As data collection was done in the month of December 2011, almost all participants updated their status with regards to Christmas and/or the New Year celebrations. The second most frequently posted topic was food, followed by the topic on outings and/or travels at the third position. Topics related to work, family, friendships/relationships, health/fitness, interest/hobbies and traffic

conditions are also popular topic among these participants. The following tables show the topics discussed by the participants in their status updates.

Table 4.24: Topics discussed by female participants in their status updates

Topics discussed by female participants										
F1	prizes / freebies / contest	online deals / shopping	traffic condition	outing	relations hip	Christmas / New Year	finance	work-related	social issues	food
F2	health - sick	food	Christmas	music						
F3	outings	travel	weddings	food	Christmas					
F4	health - diet	outing	concert	relation-ship / friendship	work-related / students	food - cooking	traffic condition	pet	Christmas / New Year	mood / sleep
F5	religion	friendship	Christmas	homesick						
F6	travel	outing	family	work-related	drama / movies	online shopping	food	Christmas / New Year	leave / holidays	sleep
F7	work-related	family	Christmas / CNY	pet	health - fitness	online shopping	food			
F8	work-related	travel	food	Christmas	traffic condition	weather				
F9	social issues	spouse / marriage	outing	travel	fashion	health	movie	shopping	sleep	food
F10	Christmas / CNY / New Year	friend-ship	relation-ship	Traffic condition	Work-related	food / drinks	IT-related			

Table 4.25: Topics discussed by male participants in their status updates

Topics discussed by male participants										
M1	friend-ship	social issues	work-related	computer	language	relation-ship				
M2	moving house	celebra-tion	work-related	food	health	relation-ship	politics	crimes	flood	
M3	movie	games								
M4	movie	pets	work-related	food	health	outings / trips	phone apps	Christ-mas	Car	
M5	church	family	finance	food / drinks	health - fitness	play / theatre	social issues	travel	Christmas / New Year	book
M6	invest-ment	health - weight	work-related	food	speaker at conference	family	Christ-mas	finance	company trips	motiva-tional quotes
M7	religion	language	celebra-tion	travel	New Year					
M8	religion	Christ-mas	relation-ship							
M9	dragon dance	birthday	dragon dance competition	outings	Christ-mas					
M10	car	road accidents	food	traffic condition	friend-ship	Christ-mas	car racing			

There are in total 17 frequently discussed topics. There are 8 other random topics which are group under the category *miscellaneous* as they are not frequently discussed topics and are mostly mentioned only once. This category is highlighted in black with white texts in both Table 4.24 and Table 4.25. It can be seen that only male

participants engage in topics related to *car* and *language*. In addition, only female participants engage in topics related to *shopping* and *sleeping*. Table 4.26 shows a comparison of the different topics discussed by both male and female participants in their status updates.

Table 4.26: A comparison of different topics discussed by male and female participants in their status updates

Topics (in alphabetical order)	Number of participants engaging in the particular topics	
	Female participants	Male participants
Car-related	0	2
Celebration (Christmas / New Year etc)	10	8
Computer / Games / IT-related	1	3
Family	3	2
Finance / Investment	1	2
Food	9	5
Friendships / Relationships	5	4
Health / Fitness / Diet	4	4
Interests / Hobbies	5	5
Language	0	2
Miscellaneous	3	2
Outings / Travels	6	5
Religion-related	1	3
Shopping	4	0
Sleeping routine	3	0
Social issues / Human behaviours	2	2
Traffic conditions	4	1
Work-related	6	4

4.5.3 Sharing locations and tagging friends in status updates

Sharing locations and tagging friends are also ways for participants to show their audience where they are and who they are with at that particular time of updating a status. Participants may choose to share or not to share such information. If these participants choose to share such information, there must be a reason of them in doing so. Though sharing of such information are not frequently used strategies in status

updates, participants do share their locations and tag their friends occasionally. Out of the 878 status updates, only 7.8% of these status updates contain information of location and only 11.3% of these status updates include tagging of friends. Clearly, most participants prefer to maintain their privacy but this also clearly shows that there are participants who purposefully share such private information with particular audiences via their tags for different reasons.

Participants argued that they only share their location and tag their friends when necessary. Participants usually share their locations when they are physically present at that location with their friends, who are usually tagged in those status updates. This is a way for them to inform their audience where they are and who they are with. Tagging friends is also a way for participants to get these tagged friends to engage in a conversation which directly involves them. Sometimes, participants tag their friends merely to share some information which might interest them.

The summary of participants sharing their locations and tagging their friends in their status updates is in Table 4.27. The numbers in the table signify the occurrences of participants sharing their locations and tagging their friends in their status updates. 0 signifies no occurrence. For example, participant F2 tags her friends in 4 of her status updates but she does not share her location with her audience in her status updates.

Table 4.27: Summary of participants sharing their locations and tagging their friends in their status updates

Female Participants				Male Participants			
	Sharing locations	Tagging friends	Without sharing location or tagging friends		Sharing locations	Tagging friends	Without sharing location or tagging friends
F1	7	15	110	M1	0	4	73
F2	0	4	17	M2	0	4	39
F3	5	10	3	M3	0	0	4
F4	2	4	64	M4	9	8	50
F5	0	0	9	M5	17	15	49
F6	7	16	45	M6	1	1	37
F7	10	7	15	M7	0	0	13

Table 4.27, continued

Female Participants				Male Participants			
	Sharing locations	Tagging friends	Without sharing location or tagging friends		Sharing locations	Tagging friends	Without sharing location or tagging friends
F8	0	2	14	M8	0	0	26
F9	8	1	56	M9	3	0	31
F10	0	3	19	M10	0	5	36
Total	39	62	352	Total	30	37	358
Percentage	4.4%	7.1%	40.1%	Percentage	3.4%	4.2%	40.8%

4.5.4 Participants' replies in response to their audience's comments to the status updates

More often than not, participants post their status updates with the sole purpose of expressing their emotions unless they specifically mention that they are seeking information or opinions from their audience. In this case, we can see that many participants actually have higher tendency of not responding to their audience's comments. For some participants, they feel obliged to respond whenever a comment comes in, and these participants usually make it a point to respond to everyone who comments on their status updates.

Out of the 878 status updates, 41.2% of the status updates were responded to and 58.8% of the status updates were not responded to. However, the participants' replies from the questionnaires show an opposite result. From the results of the questionnaire, all participants argued that they do respond to their audience's comments to their status updates. They argued that it would be rude and would show a lack of respect to their audience's comments if they do not respond. Based on this argument, these participants are concerned of being viewed negatively if they do not reply to their audience's comments. They also mentioned that their replies act as an acknowledgment to their audience's comments. The replies may not give responding answers, but they are indications to show that the participants have already read the comments left by their

audience. The participants said that there are times they do not respond to their audience's comments because they feel it is unnecessary. Unless the comments require them to give an answer, they prefer not to respond at all. Again, whether the participants choose to reply their audience's comments or not, there is some kind of self-presentation that the participants are projecting. For participants who wish to show a polite and respectful behaviour, they choose to reply to these comments. On the other hand, for of the participants who are not concerned about how they will be viewed (also a kind of self-presentation), they choose to ignore these comments.

Table 4.28 shows the frequency of participants replying to their audience's comments. Although the table shows a high number of "no-replies" which is in contrast to what the participants argued in the questionnaire and explained in the previous paragraph, it is important for the researcher to point out that "no-replies" occurred more often because many of these status updates are generally not commented by any audience.

The numbers in the table show the number of participants' replies to their audience's comments in response to their status updates. "Yes" signifies that participants respond to the comments and "No" signifies that participants do not respond to the comments. For example, participant F2 replies 7 times to the comments made by her audience but there was no reply made for 14 status updates.

Table 4.28: Participants' replies to their audience's comments

Female participants			Male participants		
Participants' replies to their audience's comments					
	Yes	No		Yes	No
F1	39	93	M1	31	46
F2	7	14	M2	26	17
F3	8	10	M3	2	2
F4	49	21	M4	14	53
F5	2	7	M5	17	64
F6	26	42	M6	6	33
F7	14	18	M7	3	10

Table 4.28, continued

Female participants			Male participants		
Participants' replies to their audience's comments					
	Yes	No		Yes	No
F8	13	3	M8	6	20
F9	38	27	M9	21	13
F10	13	9	M10	27	14
Total	209	244	Total	153	272
Percentage	23.8%	27.8%	Percentage	17.4%	31.0%

4.6 Participants' identity construction

When asked about the identity that participants wish to project on their Facebook, 55% of the participants responded that there was nothing in particular that they wished to portray. The exact responses from these participants stating that they do not have any particular identity that they want to portray on Facebook are bolded in the following tables. These participants firmly said that they just wish to be themselves. They just wanted to be known as someone who is true and genuine and not someone who creates a fake front for others to see. If this is indeed true, this shows that they do have a kind of identity that they wish to portray, i.e. they want to be viewed as a genuine person and not otherwise. Interestingly, these participants continued their argument by saying that although they do not care about how people view them, they are cautious about the things that they write on their status updates and they will make sure that the shared information is “politically and factually” correct, a phrase used by participant F6. Such political correctness is to ensure accuracy and to prevent misunderstanding. Again, such arguments show that they are after all concerned about how their audience will react and judge them based on their shared information. In another words, they neither want to discriminate others nor to be discriminated by others. This again, is another kind of identity which the participants are unconsciously portraying on their Facebook profiles. Although these participants clearly mentioned that there was no particular identity they wished to portray, they continued to provide

various explanations in order to justify their status update activities in the questionnaires.

Apart from the one participant who did not respond to the questionnaire, the remaining participants admitted that there are some kinds of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles. These participants are specific in the things they write on their Facebook profiles. The identity that these participants want to portray can easily be seen from the topics they discussed on their status updates. They usually have very limited topics which they would discuss, but they frequently write their status updates based on these topics. To give an example, one of the participants is a financial advisor. This participant updates his status frequently on a daily basis. Understandably, most of his status updates are related to financial management or investment. In his status updates, he shares a lot of information, news articles and his personal experiences with regards to financial management and investment. The things he discusses on his status updates generally reflect the identity he wants to portray which is “a reputable and experienced financial advisor”.

The following tables show the responses from the participants when asked about the kind of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles. All information as stated in the tables is directly taken from participants’ replied questionnaires. No amendments have been made to any of these responses.

Table 4.29: Female participants’ responses when asked about the kinds of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles.

Female participants’ responses when asked about the kinds of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles.	
F1	<p>I tend to playfully portray my mischievous and promiscuous side of my behaviour and characteristics in FB. I have no idea how much people believe if I’ve done all those things I wrote in FB. Somehow, I don’t worry much about the image in FB because most people don’t even believe I do anything naughty because of my family background in education fields and being a Christian in christianized family. My FB profile is locked from public, so I guess I don’t have to worry too much if strangers get too much information about my daily life.</p> <p>Sometimes, I write things fictionally in FB as well. I would modify some funny or memorable conversations I had with people in my life, and wrote it like an archive in fb. I am aware that posting statuses with too much info about personal affairs might annoy people, but I do it because I do my fb statuses like a blog archive.</p>

Table 4.29, continued

Female participants' responses when asked about the kinds of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles.	
F1 (cont.)	I don't really care much about how I have to hide things from my friends or family in FB. Even my dad and elder family members could see my statuses about men and everything in my life. I only hide work-related status from my colleagues, and if I have too much inspiration for fb statuses during work hours, i would hide it from my colleagues too. Though I love expressing my thoughts in fb, I dont like to have debate form of conversation with people. I am concerned about how much it might affect another person's feelings and my own image when I argue with people over some serious and sensitive topics.
F2	There is no identity to portray , but I tend to be careful of what I write as to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to myself.
F3	No particular identity that I want to portray in fb except of my own personality. Well, I do read twice what I wrote to prevent misspelling and misunderstanding from my post. In this era, anything that you write is a black and white proof of how you feel and even in a second that post can be print screen and be on other people's wall just to show how indecisive, sensitive, emo, greedy, selfish and etc. of what a person you are. Therefore, I would definitely prevent that. Anyway, FB is a great way to contact back a person or family members that you know but not close at. So, when I add these people in my friend list, anything that I post may be a gossip or things for table talk in the whole family. So other than portraying my ownself, I would not try to portray a negative image (whatever you can think of) in FB.
F4	I don't want to portray anyone – only myself. I want people to be comfortable with me because I'm on open book, and feel at ease talking to me about anything under the sun. Basically, I just want to be a friend.
F5	I am my naked self on Facebook. I may look nice and polite, but, I too have the rude part in me. I don't try to please anyone on Facebook. I believe I have the liberty of writing about whatever I want under the sun. I can't deny the fact that sometimes, I choose not to write anything because it will hurt people directly. I believe I must still be very tactful. But, because language is of my advantage, I use very vague sentences. For example, " You are cordially invited to get lost. Please leave..." I actually wrote that for no one. I woke up with that sentence in my head. You must think that I am a weird person. Well, suit yourself :). And, my latest post " In the midst of a very noisy crowd, he shouted countless times" was a sentence I put up because the boyfriend called me very late last night, shouting "I love you" many times. I could not include those three words on my post because prying eyes do not only exist in reality but also virtually. I really hate being the talk of the town. However, Jenny, I think Facebook has created a new identity of myself that sounds like, "Do not mess with her. You'll be burnt in the fire of rage". No one questions or says anything. And, I like that...very much!
F6	Personally, I find it hard to specify if we or I am trying to portray a particular identity on Facebook. I believe it very much depends on how one uses his/her own profile, current issues and trends, your specific thoughts at any one time. Identity is fluid, in my opinion, and hence the profile which I portray on Facebook may change from time to time, perhaps even in the span of hours. The above said, I try my best to share posts which are politically correct that does not affect my profession in any way. In terms of judgment from the network, well – everyone's entitled to their own opinion. I guess in more ways than one, I do avoid sharing posts that are insensitive, politically and factually incorrect – because, why attract unnecessary attention?

Table 4.29, continued

Female participants' responses when asked about the kinds of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles.	
F7	I am careful with the words I put into my posts as I do not want to offend anyone.
F8	I'm quite cautious in a sense that I do not want to create racist statements or hurt others with my comments or status.
F9	<i>Note: This participant did not complete the questionnaire.</i>
F10	Not exactly a "particular kind of identity" , but I try to make sure that my posts are at least sensible and not offensive to others. Facebook is a platform for us to share our personal views, thoughts, feelings; it's a place we make our voices heard. To a certain extent, I think it's bad because it has somehow turned us all into children screaming for attention, but looking at it from a different perspective, it could, if used wisely, be a learning platform for us to express ourselves effectively and accept criticisms from various types of people. For me, personally, Facebook has helped broaden my horizons. I've read so many inspirational posts shared by others and have learnt a lot from the positive minded ones (I tend to filter negative and cynical people so I don't get influenced by their negativity. I also don't add people I don't know well), that I aim to do the same i.e. spread more positivity to others. Well, at least I try lah :p Hope my 2 cents helps!

Table 4.30: Male participants' responses when asked about the kinds of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles.

Male participants' responses when asked about the kinds of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles.	
M1	Nothing in particular. Just be myself. It's just funny how people say you should not judge a book by its cover and then go on to create nice covers for themselves. I'd appreciate more of people who are true and sincere. What you see should be what you get.
M2	Nope, my facebook portrays me directly
M3	I wish to portray myself of someone who writes something with a purpose. I have the ambition to change the perception of how people view the world. I am very cautious with my words and I wouldn't touch the topic on religion or anything related to hurting others' feelings. Usually, I will read my postings two to three times before I post it to make sure the grammar and spelling are correct. It's very crucial for me to write the postings in an accurate manner to present myself as a competent knowledgeable person. Some may tend to challenge me on some topics, but I'll take it open-mindedly and thank them for the comment. After all, in my opinion, the main purpose of Facebook is to keep in touch with the world in an exciting way.
M4	simple as possible, to avoid misunderstanding, I post more photos as my status, that way people will interpret my visuals and hopefully they will appreciate my hobby as well.
M5	There is no identity which I wish to particularly portray on Facebook , as it is meant to be a collection of my real life, the portrayal should be me

Table 4.30, continued

Male participants' responses when asked about the kinds of identity they wish to portray on their Facebook profiles.	
M6	Personally, I strongly believe that Facebook is a CV or resume for people to see you. I manage my posts and pictures on Facebook very carefully. I'm very selective especially when people tag me on Facebook. I use Facebook as a place to build a strong identity in the social media atmosphere. And the identity that I build is relating to the purpose and passion that I've - Financial Intelligence and Personal Excellence. As for Financial Intelligence, it's a place for me to share my thoughts and learnings through out the years in the area of investments and personal finance. As for Personal Excellence, I see Facebook as a platform for me to inspire others through the results in the work that I do. As I motivate others, I motivate myself by celebrating minor and major greatness in life.
M7	No particular identify. My Facebook is mostly empty. If I want to talk, I'll talk in message with friends. But in general identity that I portray is serious, interested in world issues.
M8	Nothing special, I just prefer to share Christian motivational quote to inspire and encourage my friends via Facebook
M9	I usually write / post comments to give encouragements to my students, on their success in their performance (dragon dance).
M10	I am who I am, I do not want to portray any particular kind of identity in facebook. People in my friend list should know me for who I am, and if they thinks that they cant accept any of my posting or my personal character then they can either skip my post or just simple delete me from their friend list. I want to be known as a genuine person and have genuine friends.

4.7 Conclusion

The analysis shows that there are various strategies adopted by the participants to express themselves through their status updates on their Facebook profiles. This research categorises these strategies into 3 major sections which are linguistic features, semiotic features and visual features. Several additional strategies are also identified along with these 3 major sections.

The findings show that participants use different strategies or writing styles to express their individuality. They may share several similarities especially in their choice of language, but none of them shares exactly the same writing style as the others. They have adopted different strategies to express both positive and negative emotions. Though some participants maintained that they do not care about how their audiences

perceive them, they are still cautious in their status updates in order to prevent misunderstandings. Such justifications lead the researcher to believe that there is indeed a particular kind of identity that Facebook participants want to portray.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

This study aims to identify how users perform identity construction via their status updates, what kinds of identity they want to portray to their audience and how identity is influenced by the nonymity of the environment in which the performance takes place.

This research has identified several strategies used by the participants in their status updates to perform identity construction. These strategies include the usage of different linguistic features, semiotic features and visual features in their status updates. These linguistic features include the usage of different languages, lexical items and grammatical structures in the collected status updates from the participants. Semiotic features include the usage of different punctuation markers, capitalisation of words and emoticons in the status updates. Visual features refer to the images posted by the participants on their Facebook profiles, such as their profile pictures and photo albums. Several additional features are also observed as strategies used by participants to show their self-presentation. These additional features include the general content, the topics discussed, sharing of locations and tagging of friends in the participants' status updates.

Findings from the collected data and responses from the participants reveal that identity construction does occur among these participants. Findings show that participants in general prefer to remain neutral, showing neither positivity nor negativity, in their status updates. However, if a comparison were to be made between positive status updates and negative status updates, participants are likely to express positive emotions or present positive information over negative ones. At the same time, participants also reveal that they are cautious when writing their status updates to avoid

insensitivity and misunderstanding from occurring. Such behaviour can be observed by the choice of different strategies used by the participants in their status updates. This clearly shows that participants want to project a positive image in front of their audience.

It is true that participants want to reflect a positive image but no exact identity is identified. However, the topics the participants discussed in their status updates clearly reflect their interests and personality, which eventually reflect their identity. For example, a participant who posts mainly about car-related topics is reflected as a car-enthusiast. As another example, a participant who posts mainly about their financial-related profession and financial-related issues is reflected as perhaps not only as a financial-enthusiast but also a reliable financial advisor. Therefore, the different topics discussed by the participants clearly define their identity.

Although Facebook is considered a virtual context, it provides a nonymous context for its users. Participants have responded that they usually write their status updates according to their feelings at the time of writing, but they are cautious in how the status updates are being written to avoid misunderstanding. This shows that participants have the freedom to express their feelings and yet restrain themselves when writing to avoid any negative or unnecessary judgements. Thus, the nonymity of the environment does play an important role in determining how the participants behave or should behave.

The participants also argue that they do not present themselves differently with different audience as they openly write what they want to in their status updates. However, they would use different strategies such as capitalisation or friends-tagging as ways to attract attention from possible audience.

In short, no exact identity is identified, but self-presentation is clearly reflected by the topics discussed and writing strategies used by the participants. It can be

concluded that most participants want to portray a positive self-image but they usually remain neutral to avoid unnecessary judgement from their audience.

5.2 Possible future research

It is hoped that the findings of this research can aid in any possible future research. However, the findings from this research are based solely on data collected from 20 young Malaysian Facebook users from the age group 24 to 28. Therefore, findings from this research are not generalizable across age groups and do not represent all young Malaysians. This research can be expanded by having,

- i. a bigger sample size
- ii. a specific age group
- iii. a specific ethnic group
- iv. a specific professional / academic background
- v. a specific gender

A more specific sample can ensure more accurate, detailed and precise findings.