Saudi PhD Sojourners' Construction of Identities on Twitter: An Exploratory Study in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This thesis provides insights into international students' online discursive construction of their identities on social media. Social media platforms have become part of the daily lives of many people. For international students, they are perhaps even more so as they are used for educational and social purposes, as well as staying in contact with family and friends at home. They are also an important way of portraying identity. Increasing numbers of students pursue university studies abroad, but little attention has been paid to how they construct and develop their international identities on social platforms, as existing research has focused primarily on pedagogical uses of technology or intercultural competence. This study explored how a group of Saudi international PhD students constructed their identities online on one of the most popular social media platforms, Twitter, while studying in the United Kingdom. It employed online ethnographic observation of Saudi PhD sojourners' profiles and tweets on Twitter from May 2019 to January 2020, followed by interviews. The data were analysed thematically, informed by the grounded theory approach. The findings showed that the participants developed multiple identities on Twitter – PhD, global, religious and national – reflecting complex perceptions of capital, power and social identity. Their construction entailed idioms of practice, the use of linguistic and non-linguistic cues, forming communities of practice through audience design and demonstrating affiliation with various groups using hashtags. The participants illustrated how identities can be constructed online and highlighted the importance of undertaking a PhD both socially and professionally. Their interactions on Twitter also showed that the study abroad experience can be enriching in terms of intercultural communication and developing a global perspective. The study concludes that social media can be used as an effective resource for communication by students in making personal and academic representations.

Dedication

To my father, Khaled Almesfer, the first man I loved, my hero and my mentor. It has been 19 years since I got up that morning to find that you had passed away. Since then, I knew that my life would never be the same as it was with you. My view of the whole world changed and I grew up that day after 16 years of being your child, who always bragged about her daddy. From that day and forever I miss you. I wish you were here with me to see how far I have gone, to draw a big smile on your face and to make you proud of me. I wish you were here to see that when I am at my best, I am my father's daughter.

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From my first day as PhD student, when I was recommended to read former PhD theses, I always stopped first parts at the dedication and acknowledgments and told myself that when the day came for me to write mine, I would know that I am done. Now that I am writing it, I have mixed feelings. I will always be thankful to Almighty God for this moment in which I am now writing the last piece of this work.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work which has not been previously submitted for any other award or qualification.

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List of Abbreviations

KSA Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

KSAP King Abdullah Scholarship Programme

MoE Ministry of Education

MoHE Ministry of Higher Education

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

UK United Kingdom

US United States

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Preface

This thesis explores the online construction of identities by a group of eight Saudi PhD students, four males and four females, living in different cities in the UK. It illustrates how the students constructed and represented their identities over an eight-month period through two main aspects of Twitter: their Twitter profiles and tweets. In this study, identity is viewed as a complex construct that is influenced by social, cultural and educational factors and individuals' backgrounds and living experiences. Moreover, the formation and representations of identities change over time.

1.2 Background to the Study

Studying identity is important to understand ourselves and others. The view of identity in this research is that it is a complex concept, a perspective aligned with many scholars such as Lemke (2008), Riley (2007) and Kershen (1998). In addition, this research adopts Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) conception of identity as a discursive construct that emerges in interaction. This challenges the static view of identity and emphasises that identity is broad and open-ended. It is also socially positioned (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 586). By navigating the complexities of identity, we can create a more inclusive environment in which people of all backgrounds can express their unique sense of who they are.

This study concerns online identity construction and representation. Social media platforms have become an integral part of people's lives and thus studying identities in the online environment is important to understand how people portray who they are and enrich our understanding of how these platforms can be used to build relationships and communities.

My experience on one of these social media platforms prompted me to explore it in my research. I have been a Twitter user since 2010, but my use of it changed after I arrived in the United Kingdom (UK). I became more active, mostly tweeting and venting about my PhD life. I was intrigued to see what others (PhD students) tweeted about in PhD hashtags. I was very relieved to see that I was not alone in finding the process of working towards a PhD difficult. This triggered me to focus on PhD students in my research to see

how they constructed and represented their identities on Twitter as they undertook their doctoral studies overseas.

In recent years, there has been a surge in the number of international students studying abroad around the world (Shartner and Young, 2020). There are over six million international students studying in different countries and the UK hosts a considerable number of international students from different countries. According to the Universities UK website, there were 679,970 international students studying in the UK in 2021–2022, the majority of whom were from non-European countries.[1]

There are reciprocal benefits for the students and host countries: those who study abroad benefit from having a rich, global and diverse cultural experience, while having international students is economically rewarding for the host countries. There are many reasons for pursuing studies overseas. Cummings (1993) describes these as falling under three main categories: an educational motivation based on the lack of facilities in a specific subject in the home country, the economic capital gained from the value of an overseas degree and the enriching cultural experience of studying abroad. This has led to the formation of vibrant and diverse communities around the world.

Many scholars have focused on the third category identified by Cummings (1993), addressing the intercultural experience of international students and their adaption and integration in the host country (see, e.g., Kim (2001); Fabricius, Klitgård and Preisler (2011) Shartner and Young (2020) Other studies have taken a different perspective, aiming to provide insights into international students' pedagogical and learning experience (see, e.g., Gang, Wei and Duanmu (2010). However, little attention has been paid to how international students construct their identities while abroad, let alone online, two exceptions being Zhu and Procter (2015) and Alhejely (2020).

For many international students, social media platforms have become an important space for them to express and share their experiences of being sojourners and stay in contact with home, family and friends (Gomes et al., 2014). The portrayal of international students' identities on Twitter is an interesting phenomenon that can reveal myriad aspects of

international student life, from cultural experiences to aspects of language acquisition, to other issues such as religion, origin, education and so forth (Harrison, 2019).

When looking at a particular group or a community, it is worth considering how identity can be constructed through certain behaviours and noting significant patterns in terms of similarities or differences. In this vein, Tajfel (1978) suggested that identity can be expressed as social identity, as in:

> …that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership. (p. 255)

This highlights that identity can be manifested through a sense of membership and belonging and that this can be presented through many forms, such as language and behaviour. Taking these perspectives into account is necessary when exploring identity on social media platforms such as Twitter.

Twitter is widely known as a social media platform for sharing experiences and views. According to the Twitter website, *"Twitter is what's happening and what people are talking about right now"* (https://about.twitter.com/en). Twitter offers a microblogging service that allows users to post short messages, called tweets. According to Dean (2022), most people use Twitter to keep up to date with what is happening worldwide and of its 396.5 million users, 48% use it to get news. This is consistent with Twitter's description of itself, but it is important to acknowledge that Twitter has also played a significant role in political events, such as the Arab Spring in 2011 and the United States (US) elections in 2020 and 2022, as well as in events involving celebrities, such as the Johnny Depp and Amber Heard court case in June 2022, which Twitter livestreamed. Indeed, as noted by Puschmann et al. (2014), Twitter has evolved and become part of dialogue:

> Beginning as a side project to a now-forgotten podcasting platform, rising to popularity as a social network service focused around mundane communication and therefore widely lambasted as a cesspool of vanity and triviality by incredulous journalists (including technology journalists), it was later embraced by those same journalists, governments, and businesses as a crucial source of real-time information on everything from natural disasters to celebrity gossip, and from debates over sexual violence to Vatican politics. (p. 425)

Twitter has been the site for different studies in many fields. Most have tended to focus on political subjects, such as Al-Jenaibi (2016) and Rogers and Jones (2021). However, some have addressed other topics. For example, Li et al. (2020) examined the use of emojis in tweets.

International students are among the many groups who use Twitter to express their views and portray their sense of identity. International students can find it difficult to establish their own identity in their new home country and Twitter is a platform through which they might establish their sense of self. Moreover, exploring how international students construct and represent their identities during their sojourn can provide rich insights into their intercultural experience.

1.3 Rationale and Significance

This research explores the construction of identity by a particular group of international PhD students in the UK. This is an emerging field of study and more research still needs to be conducted to shed light on the sociolinguistic aspects of identity construction in social media discourse by international students.

Alhejely (2020) examined four cases of Arab students in the UK and their online and linguistic practices on Twitter. However, the study's main focus was the impact of mobility on language choices and attitudes. Zhu and Procter (2015) explored the use of Twitter and Facebook among PhD students in the UK. Their study found a PhD community on Twitter and the students used Twitter to promote their professional identity and employed PhD hashtags to expand their PhD networks. This is linked to the work of Tajfel (1978) and Harrison (2019), as the study identified the group's use of Twitter to reflect the professional and PhD research identity enacted through certain practices in which language played a part. In this regard, the concept of social identity is potentially valuable in explaining certain groups' behaviours and practices.

This thesis makes a theoretical contribution to research in sociolinguistics as it adds to other work on the sociolinguistic aspects of identity construction in social media by approaching identity as a discursive construct. Moreover, by showing how identity is constructed and represented by the participants along the observation period (eight months), the study can enrich our understanding of how identity can be indexed through

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language, where language is considered broadly to encompass texts, images, and multimodal resources. Furthermore, the study contributes to the conceptualisation of identity as a social construct that is neither fixed nor innate; rather, identity shifts and is constructed dynamically or (semi-)statically over time. The study addresses what might influence these representations, what they involve and how identity is culturally and socially constructed on social media platforms. In addition, this study contributes to the exploration of online identity by depicting authentic examples of how students use Twitter to represent who they are, treating Twitter as a potential site for identity representation that encompasses their cultural, social and educational backgrounds rather than using it solely a forum for conversation (Tajfel, 1978; Riley, 2007; Harrison, 2019).

From a contextual perspective, this study contributes to research on international students and their intercultural experience in the UK by looking at a particular group (Saudi PhD sojourners) and how they depict their experience of studying and living in the UK on Twitter.

Methodologically, this study makes several significant contributions in terms of the approach and method adopted. The study is grounded in online-ethnographic approach. As such, it incorporates various insider perspectives, i.e. the participants' and my own as the researcher. I was a participant observer of the participants' interactions on Twitter and I shared with the participants the characteristics of being Saudi and a PhD student in the UK. While this has advantages in terms of enhancing the insider perspective, through the shared language and cultural background, it does have the potential to lead to greater subjectivity and the potential for bias. Hence, a reflexive approach was implemented to mitigate any issues. Methodologically, from the participants' perspective as insiders, the study employed interviews conducted on Twitter, consistent with the online-ethnographic approach.

The study can also provide empirical evidence illustrating how online ethnography can be implemented to explore identity construction on social media. The approach is aligned with Marwick's (2014) view that qualitative and ethnographic research could have advantages in studying Twitter, given its vast reach. Such research provides rich data and in-depth perspectives, particularly if insider perspectives are considered.

1.4 Setting and Context

Having explained the rationale for and the significance of this study, this section outlines the setting. The setting of this study can be explained in terms of three main aspects: where it was undertaken (place), when (time) and with whom (participants). Section 1.4.1 provides an overview of the first aspect, which is Twitter – the place or site of the study – focusing on the two main elements of Twitter that are significant in this study: the profile pages and tweets. Section 1.4.2 details the time (duration) of the study. Section 1.4.3 introduces the group of Twitter users in this study, i.e. Saudi PhD students in the UK. Finally, section 1.4.4 discusses study abroad with respect specifically to Saudi faculty staff members.

1.4.1 Twitter

Twitter is one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide. Although it has fewer overall users than Facebook or Instagram, at 396.5 million, it has about 200 million users daily (Shepherd, 2022; Statista, 2022). On Twitter, users can post a short tweet, limited to 280 characters. The number of characters per tweet was increased from 140 in 2017. Twitter is a microblogging service, described as follows:

> Microblogging" is the general term for the concept of posting very short status updates as popularized by services like Tumblr (http://www.tumblr.com) and Twitter (http://www.twitter.com). Twitter was originally conceived of by its creators as a broadcast medium: a way to share quickly where one is; and what one is doing, thinking, or feeling. It is still used that way, but like any human communication channel, it has become conversational. (Fiander, 2012, p. 4)

This study aims to examine two aspects of Twitter that make a substantial contribution in revealing how identity can be constructed and represented on Twitter: (i) Twitter profiles and (ii) tweets. It shows that the construction of Twitter identities can be presented on a continuum from semi-static to dynamic, which is a focus in terms of dynamics that differs from Marwick and Boyd's (2011) work on the affordances of Twitter, but is tangentially related. Twitter profiles tend to be a semi-static gateway to introduce the self to others (Marwick and Boyd, 2011), with elements that are changed infrequently, whereas tweets are dynamic, changing constantly. Examining the tweets enabled me to see how identity could be constructed (i.e. built and represented) and how it changed over the observation period.

Twitter profiles

A Twitter profile is a space that provides information about the user, giving a short description and other information the user wishes to disclose, such as location and additional links. Figure 1.1 gives an example of what Twitter profiles look like.
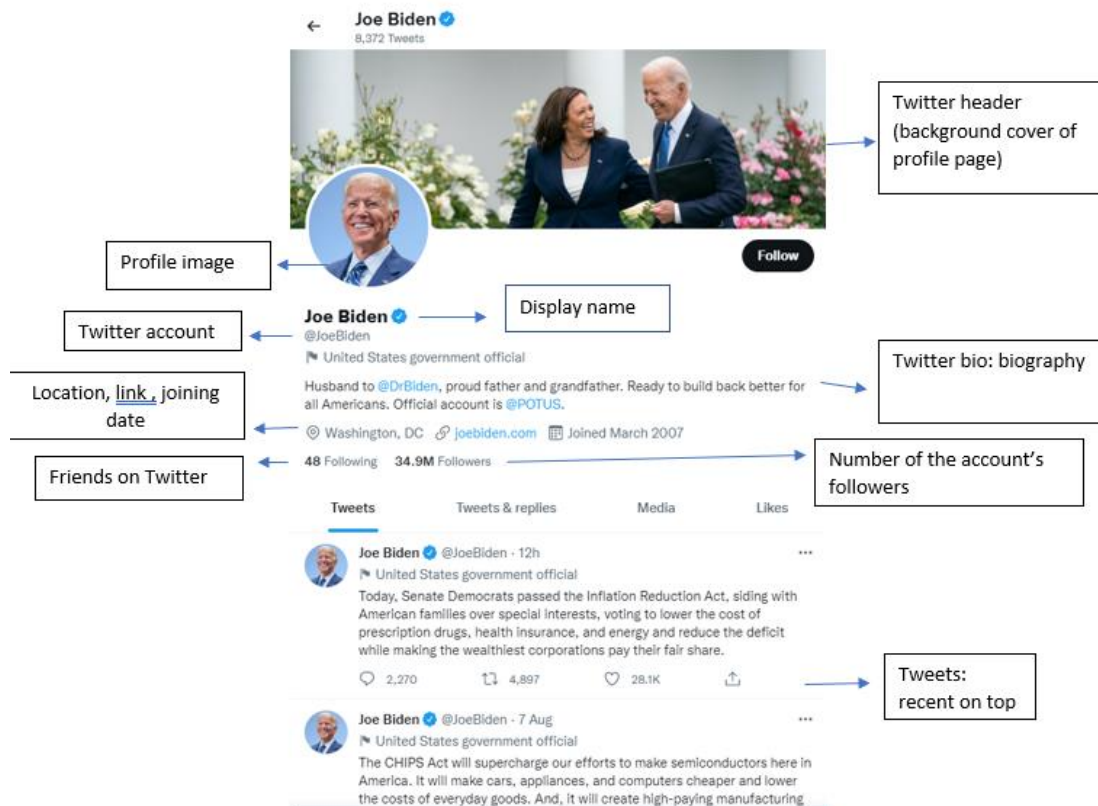
Figure 1.1 Twitter profile of US president, Joe Biden

Within a Twitter profile, two spaces can be filled with images: the profile image generally comprises pictures of the person's face (for identified accounts). President Biden's profile image in Figure 1.1 is an example.[2] Twitter users can also add pictures to the header; there is no standard practice in terms of what this usually looks like. Twitter profiles and bios have been considered significant aspects of identity representation by many (Pathak, Madani and Joseph, 2021; Rogers and Jones, 2021).

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[2] https://twitter.com/JoeBiden?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

A Twitter profile is like any social networking profile that enables self-articulation (Cover, 2012) and includes a segment for the bio in which the user gives a synopsis about the self to others. On Twitter and other social networking sites, profiles tend to be semi-static, meaning that users do not change them every day (Marwick and Boyd, 2011, p. 116). The profile is one way of identifying the self and being identified or located by others. Therefore, this study considers the Twitter profile to be a semi-static construction of the identity, unlike tweets.

Tweets

Tweets tend to be more dynamic than the Twitter profile. Twitter prompts engagement by asking "What's happening?" (see Figure 1.2) and thus tweets are situated in the here and now.
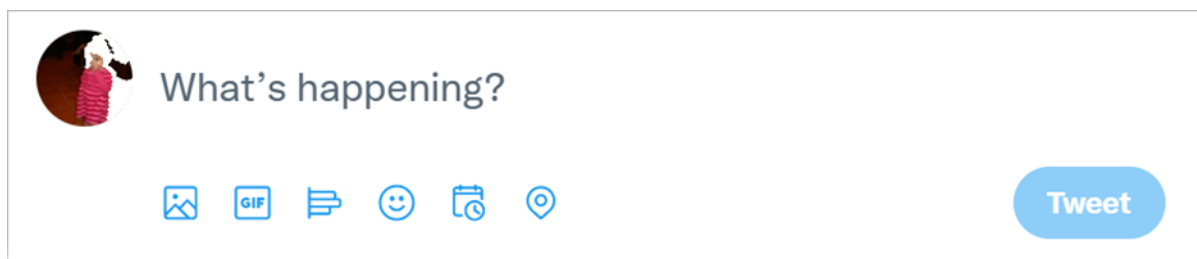
Figure 1.2 Tweet space

In this study, tweets are considered another element of self-presentation. They reflect what is going on at that moment and thus time plays a significant role in their construction and context. The representation of the self in tweets undergoes change and development over time. Hence, tweets can reflect the user's identity on Twitter dynamically.

Within a tweet, a Twitter user (Twitterer) can incorporate different resources and media, including images, videos, GIFs and emojis. Users can also create a poll and share their location. However, there are limitations in terms of length. As a microblogging service, Twitter launched its offering with a limit of 140 characters. This increased to 280 characters per tweet in 2017. In addition, users can create a "thread" (chain) of tweets in case the 280-character limit is insufficient to convey meaning:

> Sometimes we need more than one Tweet to express ourselves. A thread on Twitter is a series of connected Tweets from one person. With a thread you can provide additional context, an update, or an extended point by connecting multiple Tweets together. (https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/create-a-thread)

It is interesting that Twitter articulates the use of tweets as a space to express the self. To support this, the user can expand beyond 280 words by creating a thread. This is also linked to the perspective that views tweets as dynamic, since Twitter users can tweet something about themselves at one moment and then add to it depicting something else later.

Having explained the setting in which this study took place, the next sub-section provides a background to the time when this study was conducted.

1.4.2 Time

The study began in 2018, but the observation of Twitter started in May 2019 and lasted for eight months until January 2020. This was then followed by interviews and follow-up interviews, which took place from 2020 to 2022.

During the eight-month observation period, I spent three hours daily observing Twitter and what the subjects posted. In addition, I made use of the affordances of Twitter to aid in the observation, enabling alerts to keep up to date with the participants' posts and taking notes. Spending this amount of time on observation was deemed necessary to gain an understanding of the identities the participants constructed and how they represented their various identities dynamically over time, developing and extending Marwick and Boyd's (2011) continuum to address how identity can be constructed discursively on Twitter.

1.4.3 Saudi international students

This study considered a particular group of Saudi PhD students in the UK. This sub-section provides a general overview of the history of study abroad in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It starts with an overview of the background of the participants involved in this study to help establish a general understanding of how this might contribute to the ways in which they construct and represent their identities on Twitter. Studying abroad is not an option for many. Being sponsored and granted a scholarship to study abroad indicates that these students have educational potential.

Educational background has a major bearing on identity presentation. It shapes life experiences and enhances perspectives about the world. It can also dictate the values individuals hold and the ways in which they interact with others. Indeed, people's social,

educational and professional backgrounds can all be aspects substantively involved in the construction and representation of identity (Riley, 2007). Moreover, studying abroad has always been perceived as a privilege, given the valuable experience of globalisation it offers (Lewin, 2009). The perception of social privilege and the funding support from the Saudi government are both significant factors that could influence how Saudi international students construct and represent their identities on Twitter.

At this point, it is useful to provide an overview of the history of study abroad in the KSA. According to Bukhari and Denman (2013), the historical background of scholarship in the KSA can be related to three periods, each of which is outlined in turn.

The Foundation Period: 1927–1953

The study abroad phenomenon started in December 1927, when a group of Saudi students were sponsored to undertake undergraduate degrees in Egypt. Following the success of this experience, the government provided a second scholarship for two years of study in the UK. The third group went to Italy to study aviation; only 10 students were in this third group. The last group studied law, political science and engineering in Switzerland and Turkey. The Ministry of Education (MoE) then established the Scholarship Preparation School in 1963 to help prepare sponsored students to study overseas. This school aims to provide basic knowledge in general studies, language and sciences.

The Growing Period: 1954–2004

In the Foundation Period, the sponsored students were undergraduates. As Bukhari and Denman (2013, p. 152) pointed out, "The first Saudi university (King Saud University) was not established until 1957, so until that time, the major focus for scholarships had been undergraduate degrees". However, during the growth period, the scholarship programme was expanded and focused more on postgraduate students since Saudi students had increasing opportunities to undertake undergraduate programmes in the KSA. The number of universities grew from one in 1957 to 24 universities in 2011 and universities further expanded to have branches of campuses.

The Expansion Period: 2005 to the present

This period began with the launch of the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme (KASP) in May 2005. KASP is supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and includes 50 countries. Candidates must meet specific academic requirements set by the MoHE to be considered for a scholarship.

Once accepted, the candidate can choose the desired country from the approved list. KASP encourages specialisation in specific fields, such as medicine, dentistry, pharmaceutics, mathematics, general science, engineering, business and accounting, marketing and computer sciences. Since the launch of KASP in 2005, a considerable number of Saudis have studied abroad. Among the benefits, Hilal (2011) contends that the programme has broadened the worldview of Saudis and expanded their global background.

1.4.4 Overseas studies for Saudi faculty staff members

This study explores identity construction and representation among a particular group of Saudi students in the UK: they all worked as academic faculty staff members in Saudi universities and were on scholarship programmes sponsored and supervised by their home (Saudi) universities, which might have affected how they presented themselves on social media in terms of self-censorship over their four- to eight-year sojourn.

In Saudi Arabia, studying abroad is also socially valuable and appealing. Not only do Saudi scholarship students benefit from government funding while overseas, they also attain a number of other advantages, such as an academic background that is highly regarded in Saudi Arabia (Bukhari and Denman, 2013). Having this background indicates a high level of education and is the key to socially and financially significant careers; many members of the Saudi Council of Ministers run by the King previously worked as faculty staff and most also obtained their educational qualifications abroad in countries such as the UK or US. For faculty staff, studying abroad is obligatory. They are required to attain a postgraduate degree to continue working in their universities. According to the official records of the Saudi MoE, 92,997 Saudi students were undertaking study programmes overseas in 2019 (Argaam, 2019).

The UK had the second highest number of Saudi students at 14,614 in 2019. According to Almuarik (2019), the UK is favoured by Saudi students as it is closer to home than the US and other English-speaking countries on the approved list. It also has fewer visa restrictions, especially since 9/11. Indeed, Saudi Arabia is listed among the top 10 non-EU countries which send students to the UK (studying-in-uk.org, 2022).

Having briefly described the background and outlined the setting and context of the study, the following section sets out the research questions.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions of this thesis were designed as exploratory in nature to explore how things are done, i.e. how international students express themselves on Twitter and how identity from a sociolinguistic perspective is constructed discursively. These questions focus on the process of construction, that is, how this happens, which is influenced by the sociolinguistic approach of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) rather than only looking at what is the end product or which categories of identities these individuals or groups construct, which is mostly taken the perspective of identity in applied linguistics.

In qualitative research such as this, Creswell (2013) advocates open-ended questions (e.g. "what" and "how") to reflect the study's main objectives. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2018, p. 163) stated, "The research questions… mirror the research purpose". This thesis formulated three questions to guide the research based on the gap identified in the literature and the rationale discussed above.

RQ1. Which identities do Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK tend to construct on Twitter?

RQ2. How are these identities constructed through the language of their tweets and Twitter profiles (e.g. images, text and display of membership in specific communities)?

RQ3: When and how are these identities constructed over the observation timeline?

As can be seen, the first research question is open-ended, demonstrating that this study explored a phenomenon rather than testing hypotheses or confirming predetermined answers. Identity is the central topic in this study, and this question reflects the understanding of identity as a complex, potentially multiplex, concept. The second and the third research questions aim to fill the gap in the existing sociolinguistics of identity

construction in social media by seeking to identify how people construct their identities in social media discourse and, more importantly, how these practices change or evolve in this case eight months of observation (Fetterman, 1998). While RQ2 and RQ3 might appear similar, the latter concerns how these identities are represented differently over the timeline.

These research questions are proposed to navigate the complex (multiplex) identities and their construction on Twitter (Kershen, 1998; Riley, 2007; Lemke, 2008). These research questions are sociolinguistic in nature, looking more closely to gain in-depth insights into the discursive construction of identity and how identity can be indexed through social media (Twitter) language. The view of language in this study is inclusive. Language in its broadest sense, language covers different semiotics of text, images, emoticons and so on.

Therefore, these research questions are sociolinguistic in nature, looking at the discursive construction of identity and how identity can be indexed through language influenced by Bucholtz and Hall (2005). These questions aim to shed light on the social and cultural backgrounds and how they are involved in the construction of identity (Harrison, 2019). Moreover, the study addresses identity construction and representation as dynamic and fluid over time and across individuals, drawing on the work of Marwick and Boyd (2011) but with a different focus.

1.6 Thesis Organisation and Chapter Summary

This study explored how international students in the UK construct and represent their identities on Twitter. The study focused on a group of eight Saudi PhD students through a grounded, online-ethnographic approach and participant observation lasting eight months. The study aimed to contribute new insights as an online-ethnographic study looking at international students and their identities online.

The thesis is organised in eight chapters. This introductory chapter has set out the study aims, background, significance and setting. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on theories of identity and empirical studies of identity, international students and social media. Chapter 3 addresses the methodology, presenting the philosophical stance, study design, approach and methods used in data collection and analysis. It also highlights the ethical considerations and articulates my position as the researcher and participant

observer in the study. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 each outline the findings of the study. Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature and highlighting the key theoretical arguments. Finally, the thesis concludes with Chapter 8, which presents a summary, the limitations of the research, its implications and recommendations for future research, followed by concluding remarks.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter reviews prior and recent works that address the main concept explored in this study: identity from a sociolinguistic perspective. It is organised in three main parts. The first outlines the key theories concerning identity, such as social identity, and considers related concepts, as well as language, culture, religion and audience. In the second part of this chapter, there is then a review of studies conducted on identity, mainly those in similar fields (identity in social media). The third and last part of the chapter focuses on research concerning international students, the participants in this study.

There were over six million international students worldwide in 2019 according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).[3] In the UK, the Higher Education statistics agency reported there were 556,625 international students in the academic year 2018–2019. These students are significant not only by dint of their numbers but also the economic contribution they make to wherever they reside or travel. International students also enhance diversity and cultural awareness within society. Therefore, towards the end of this chapter, I review studies that have addressed different themes of international students' identities online. Before closing the chapter, I provide a summary, restating what this study adds to the existing body of knowledge.

2.2 Identity Theory

As established in Chapter 1 (see 1.2), this study examines the construction of identity from a sociolinguistic perspective in line with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) approach, which is based on five principles: emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality and partialness. These principles are considered crucial in dealing with identity, which the authors view as complex, constantly shifting, socially and culturally situated and discursively emergent. In developing their conceptualisation, they drew on different approaches that dealt with identity, such as those of Hymes (1973) and Bell (1984). Their approach is open-ended to encompass the complexity of identity.

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[3] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5a49e448-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5a49e448-en

Language is a part of Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) conceptualisation, which highlights how language can index and constitute an identity in a multitude of ways, in some cases through implications or styles. They also consider identity to be fundamentally socially and culturally emergent (p. 588). This is in line with Harrison's (2019) view that:

> Identity is generated through culture – especially language – and can invest itself in various meanings: an individual can have an identity as a woman, a Briton, a Black, a Muslim. Herein lies the facility of identity politics: it is dynamic, contested and complex. (p. 248)

Harrison (2019) points to the complexities entailed in studying identity. While highlighting the prevailing view in sociolinguistics that language is the primary means by which identity can be constructed, many other aspects can influence the construction of identity, such as the person's origins, religion and so forth. This gives rise to challenges in defining a single representative theory of identity. Hence, the optimal approach is to accept the complexity of identity and deal with it as a manifold and dynamic construct.

Over time, different philosophies and ideologies have provided insights into how identity is formed and what it means. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) have argued that theoretical trends related to identity fall into two main categories: the essentialist view and the constructivist view. The first prominent line of thinking is the essentialist view of identity as a product of mind, a knowable object, which was a stance typical of the Renaissance period. This line of thought assumes the existence of an essential core of identity that is unchanging, namely that it is something innate that is fixed and permanent. This view also suggests that abilities, values and feelings are part of who we are and are shaped by our biological life and our ancestors. For example, someone's identity may be shaped by their ethnicity, gender and race, limiting the potential for experiences to change and add to the identity.

Broido (2000) also contends that essentialist approaches to identity. On the one hand, essentialist views of identity allow individuals to categorise themselves and others easily according to certain characteristics, such as race, gender, religion, or nationality. This gives individuals a sense of belonging to a group and being to communicate effectively with those of similar backgrounds. On the other hand, essentialist approaches can lead to the development of negative stereotypes and discrimination, as well as a lack of

acceptance of diversity. This can create a sense of exclusion and marginalisation, particularly amongst minority groups. It is important to recognise the impact of essentialist theories on modern identities to ensure that individuals are not judged or treated differently based on their perceived characteristics.

Second, and in contrast to the essentialist perspective, is the constructivist view of identity as a non-fixed, socially constructed object, a view that has influenced social interaction scholars such as Goffman (1990) and others. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) adopted the constructivist perspective, viewing identity as constructed and maintained through cultural and social experiences, as well as the memories and interpretations of those experiences. Thus, identity is not fixed, but changeable. A constructivist view of identity allows exploration of how identity is continuously being re-created. This perspective is consistent with the point made by Harrison (2019), Lemke (2008) and Omoniyi and White (2006) that identity is more complex than the general understanding of it as "who you are"; rather, it is multiple and unstable.

Moreover, the ways in which identity is viewed depend on the theoretical perspectives adopted (Georgalou, 2017). Omoniyi and White (2006, p. 2) highlighted six aspects that should be considered when dealing with identity. First is its constantly changing nature, in which context plays a significant role. The authors elaborated on this, giving empirical examples to demonstrate how identity can be performed differently according to who the interlocutors are or what the setting is. For example, a doctor will enact a certain identity when performing his/her job, but this will not be the same as the identity when talking to a friend. Here, the setting is the main factor that determines which identity the doctor performs. Lemke (2008) also emphasised the diversity of identity and noted that time and setting can be significant influencing factors:

> Identities develop and change, they are at least multi-faceted if not in fact plural. Their consistency and continuity are our constructions, mandated by our cultural notions of the kinds of selves that are normal and abnormal in our community. (p.18)

Goffman (1990), in contrast, highlighted performance as a key component of identity. According to this view, the world is a "stage", metaphorically, upon which individuals perform their identity. The stage can be divided into front and back, with the performance

differing in each: at the front, identity is performed with awareness of others (audience) or the interactant; at the back, it is more about the performer (individual awareness). This is a significant theory that has influenced scholars in different fields, including conversation analysts and ethnographers, in demonstrating how identity is performed and influenced by the audience and setting. It provides a starting point and while there is agreement among different studies concerning the view that identity is complex, contrary to the essentialist view, there is disagreement in terms of how and what makes identity complex. Kershen (1998) proposed a theoretical view of identity that perhaps sheds some light, contending that identity has two aspects that should be considered:

> Firstly, that identity is in a constant state of flux and can never, nor will ever, be static and secondly that identity is multifaceted and variable. (p. 2)

Thus, it is not only complex but also dynamic and can be multiple. There are other perspectives on identity. For example, Elliott (2008) proposed making a distinction between two concepts, the self and identity, given that "The self is often portrayed as primarily a private domain, an inner realm of personal thoughts, values, strivings, emotions and desires" (p. 39). In contrast, identity is a public representation. Consistent with this, Altheide (2000, p. 3) argued that identity is a social product constructed based on others' agreement on certain features, while the self is more about how people view themselves.

Another significant work by Riley (2007) combatted this issue of distinguishing between self and identity by developing a triangular model that demonstrates how self and identity can come together but also how different they can be (see Figure 2.1).
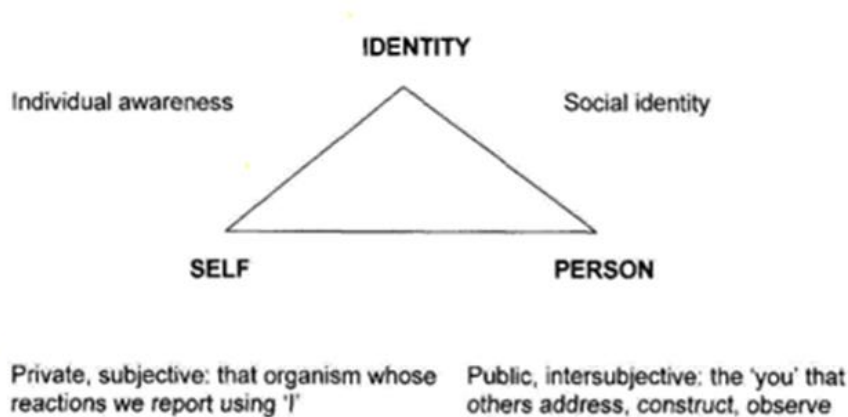
Figure 2.1. Riley's (2007, p.87) model of identity

According to this model, identity encompasses two distinct concepts: the person and the self. The person is a social identity that others construct about the being ("you"), whereas the self involves a subjective awareness of the being (as "me" and "I"). Here, the self and individual awareness are private and subjective, while social identity is a public quality that is attributed by others. Riley's (2007) model demonstrates that identity can be represented as both a private, self-produced self and a social product.

According to Ominyi (2006) sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and sociology of language are different fields that established the association between language and identity however, most of these studies have not yet examined identity process and focused on the end product categorization identity rather than understanding the construction process and the sense of identification.

On the other hand, Block (2006) thinks that Applied linguistics theoretical interest of identity grew from the fact that it enables them to see the link between macro and micro level of identities. The above scholar takes a shift to view identity as a more complex social construct phenomenon as a result of the rise of mobility, globalisation and the physical and digital diversity.

In a recent sociolinguistic study of identity in social media Alhejely (2020) examined four cases of Arab students in the UK and their online and linguistic practices on Twitter.

However, the study's main focus was the impact of mobility on language choices and attitudes.

Media research such as ; Zhu and Procter (2015) explored the use of Twitter and Facebook among PhD students in the UK. Their study found a PhD community on Twitter and the students used Twitter to promote their professional identity and employed PhD hashtags to expand their PhD networks. This is linked to the work of Tajfel (1978) and Harrison (2019), as the study identified the group's use of Twitter to reflect the professional and PhD research identity enacted through certain practices in which language played a part. In this regard, the concept of social identity is potentially valuable in explaining certain groups' behaviours and practices.

Building on the above and for the purposes of this study, I define identity as a plural construct that is not fixed, in line with the theoretical framework of Bucholtz and Hall (2005), according to which identity is viewed as a discursively produced, social and cultural phenomenon. Through language, identity can be indexed in a multitude of ways. This perspective is also influenced by Kershen (1998) and Lemke (2008), such that identity is conceptualised as encompassing a plurality of identities that can be influenced by time and setting, i.e. multiple and complex.

This study draws on the above frameworks as they are compatible and complementary in their approach to identity. Many scholars have approached identity as a complex concept, yet Riley's approach is very clear in explaining just how complex this concept is, encompassing a discussion of linguistic, cultural, social and contextual factors. Moreover, Riley (2007) demonstrates the ways in which the identity and the self can be both compatible and different. Thus, this study drew conceptually on the work of Kershen (1998), Lemke (2008) and Riley (2007) in dealing with identity, the self and the social identity. The latter is addressed more fully in the following sub-section.

2.2.1 Social identity, cultural identity and membership

Having highlighted the complexity of identity, it is necessary to consider various aspects of identity discussed by scholars in this field. Lustig and Koester (2010, p. 142) posited a

concept of the self that was based on three dimensions of identity: cultural, social and personal. According to Riley's (2007) model (see Figure 2.1. Riley's (2007, p.87), social identity is a public quality given to you by others; in other words, it is what others know and construct of the person (you).

In this respect, Riley (2007) invoked "the Durkheimian notions of the social representation and the process of exteriorization… [encompassing] other factors that can make up the so-called social identity". Durkheim's view argues that for something to be manifested, or "exteriorised", there must be some institutional forms or constraints. Riley (2007) considered that these constraints could be "the social parameters" of social identities. For example, the social identity of a doctor might be exteriorised and manifested in many ways, such as through the language (medical terms) used. Thus:

> Individuals demonstrate their membership and knowledge of trades, professions, gangs, political movements and the like by their use of technical terms and jargon. (Riley, 2007, p. 91)

In discussing social identity, it is necessary to reference the work of Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1982). Tajfel (1978) viewed social identity as a practice of self-categorisation, one through which individuals categorise themselves and express their membership in certain categories through their behaviours. For example, a person might define him/herself as a supporter of a football team and then wear the team's kit. Equally, a member of the clergy would wear clerical clothing to communicate the associated identity. While Tajfel (1978) emphasised the portrayal of social identity through membership practices or behaviours, Tajfel and Turner (1982) developed the theory further to explain intergroup behaviours and discrimination in psychology.

Groebner (2004) pointed out that identity can be manifested via membership of groups and the belonging markers that individuals use to express themselves. This is in accordance with Tajfel's (1978) theoretical framework of social identity, which explains how a sense of membership can influence behaviours and make up the social identity. Tajfel (1978) elaborated on this, adding that there is a self-categorisation process in which people tend to define themselves based on certain categories; for example, one might categorise oneself as belonging to a highly educated group. Once this happens, people's behaviours will begin to correspond to this categorisation, sharing certain behaviours or

characteristics such as using sophisticated language. This would be one marker of the social identity they wish to portray.

Culture and cultural identity are other contested terms that arise when discussing social identity. One's cultural identity lies in the sense of membership and belonging to a particular ethnic group and culture, as well as getting to know more about this group by learning the language, heritage, religion and traditions. Cultural identity helps differentiate one group from other groups (De Vos and Suárez-Orozco, 1990a; De Vos, 1993) and breeds a sense of fellowship, or "we-feeling". According to Kim (2001), cultural identity is the self-image as represented by others. It is what is ascribed rather than acquired. Identity theories acknowledge cultural and communicative practices and how these influence identity. Culture also encompasses the beliefs and norms of the group. Being Saudi Arabian, for example, can be described as a national cultural identity ascribed as having certain characteristics: being Arabian, Muslim, and sharing beliefs, traditions and social values. Indeed, Jenks (2005) described culture as "a whole of life of a people" (p. 12).

While social identity and cultural identity can be interchangeable in some instances, this is not always the case. Both identities tend to be attributed by others rather than acquired. However, the cultural identity tends to be more related to heritage, religion, language and learning about such attributes that define the identity. Social identity concerns demonstrating membership of a group through behaviours and other signals of belonging, for example through language and other aspects, such as outlook, profession and so forth.

Drawing on the above, and specifically Riley (2007), a discussion of social and cultural identity and membership entails addressing language, as this is one of the leading resources used to express themes surrounding identity. The following sub-section thus reviews some of the theoretical works that have discussed language in relation to identity to highlight its significant role in representing identity.

2.2.2 Identity and language

According to Norton (2013, p. 45):

> …it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person

gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak.

The above quotation resonates with Riley's (2007) argument that language plays a critical role in expressing identity, specifically a sense of belonging or "social identity". Language is the medium used to establish communication and interact with one's surroundings. Such communication can express how we view ourselves and articulate our thoughts, feelings and needs to others. In addition, our sense of identity can also be constructed through our sense of affiliation to wider groups and communities. For example, constructing an identity as a physical scientist would involve using the scientific terms employed by this group but not necessarily by a microbiologist. Thus, language can be a fundamental aspect in enabling others to interpret who you are but also for you to determine who you belong to. As argued by Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 594), identity can be indexed through language and thus we can see how identity emerges in discourse through a sociolinguistic approach.

Joseph (2004) pointed out that while identity and language are two different broad terms, one cannot be discussed without referring to the other. Language and identity are inseparable. Edwards (2009) took the same view. Similarly, Deng (2011) stated that identity can be described by the self and others in terms of how we define ourselves. This can be expressed with reference to different aspects, including language, religion, ethnicity and culture.

Language can convey various dimensions of our identity. For this reason, it is impossible to study identity without considering language. The expression of identity through language is nuanced and diverse. For instance, Labov (1966) provided strong evidence that language can be a powerful tool in signalling the speaker's social class. He found that /r/ was pronounced differently by speakers in front of different stores in New York and concluded that class strongly influenced how it was articulated. Thus, language can signal certain aspects of identity, such as social class and education. Many other scholars have highlighted this point. Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 593) demonstrate how this can be evidenced through certain linguistic markers from an interview conducted with two middle-class European-American girls.

This implies that ethnicity, nationality and cultural background are all significant factors that should be considered when tackling a complex subject such as identity. The above works suggest that social background and capital or power can be manifested through language. Bourdieu (2011) explains how capital can be manifested symbolically and how within that symbolic manifestation, language can frame identity. Many scholars support this view, for instance Wood (2016), who argues that English has become a form of global capital, exerting an immense influence on global culture due to its prevalence in media, communication and business. In contexts similar to this study (examining Arabic speakers), Al-Khatib and Sabbah (2008) and Warschauer, Said and Zohry (2002) have pointed to the common view throughout most of the Arabic world that English is associated with a highly educated background and thus symbolically indicates capital, as discussed by Bourdieu (2011). Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 598), using an example of a conversation between a Tongan seller and a customer, described how English was used as a marker to construct the modern, cosmopolitan identity and also to distance the Tongan seller from a lower-class identity. Thus, language can connote symbolic capital related to class and education, as well as indexing a dimension of identity.

Language, however, is not unidimensional. There are many forms of English and there are many who can speak multiple languages. Thus, in considering the association between language and identity, it is necessary to address bilingualism and multilingualism as umbrella terms for those who speak more than one language or variety, as well as recent theories that have emerged in the field of linguistics, such as translanguaging.

Bilingualism and multilingualism

Bloomfield (1933) defined a bilingual as an individual with equivalent mastery of two languages. More specifically, Haugen (1953) defined bilingualism as the ability to produce meaningful, complete sentences in more than one language. Whereas Weinreich and Martinet (1979) used the term "bilingualism" to describe the ability to switch between two languages or more, Gal (2006) subsumed bilingualism within multilingualism, viewing both as referring to the ability of an individual or society to use more than one language.

Despite these differences in definition, bilingualism and multilingualism both refer to how different languages function in their use by an individual. A bilingual or monolingual individual can switch between languages or varieties of a language. According to (Appel

and Muysken, 2005, p. 80), it is the norm for a bilingual to switch between languages. Bilingualism has been studied with reference to various practices, including code-switching, mode-mixing and translanguaging.

The term "code-switching" (MacSwan, 2014) is generally employed in the context of both bilingualism and multilingualism to refer to the practice of switching between languages. As with Appel and Muysken (2005), Edward (1994) and Leung (2005) have argued that code-switching is "a natural strategy of language production for bilinguals". Moreover, (Ferguson, 1959) viewed the choice of language as related to the function of the language or linguistic variety in certain situations.

Translanguaging offers a rather more comprehensive and inclusive perspective on language choice, viewing languages as repertoires rather than different entities or linguistic systems. Garcia and Wei (2013) summarised this view:

> Language is not a simple system of structures that is independent of human actions with others, of our being with others. The term languaging is needed to refer to the simultaneous process of continuous becoming of ourselves and of our language practices, as we interact and make meaning in the world.

This approach aligns with the complex view of identity in many ways, but mostly in considering language as a holistic system that individuals use to express themselves in a complex process. This can sometimes take the form of drawing upon different, linguistic resources to convey who we are. Canagarajah (2012) also argued that linguistic resources can be used as identity labels in certain contexts, stating:

> …labelled languages and language varieties have a reality for social groups. More significantly, they are an important form of identity for these groups.

In this study, translanguaging provides a valuable theoretical perspective explaining the use of language or languages on Twitter by a particular bilingual or multilingual group of PhD students in the UK, specifically to express the self.

2.2.3 Intersection between ethnicity, religion, culture, nation and identity

According to Harrison (2019, p. 1), ethnicity, religion, nation and nationalism are four distinct aspects but are linked in complex ways. It is impossible to write about one without

discussing the other three. Identity construction involves these elements and in the following paragraphs, I review the terms in turn.

Religion and identity

According to (Davis, 2013, p. 377), "the relationship between language and religion goes beyond intimacy to identity". Indeed, it is fair to say that religion has played a forceful role in shaping societies and identities and in many areas continues to do so. While it is by no means the case that religion is an important aspect of all people's lives – and may not feature at all for many – it does play a vital role in the lives of many people (Rodrigues and Harding, 2009, p. 1), as in this study. Oppong (2013) argued that the link between identity and religion can be seen in three forms:

1. Religion an institutional (agency) factor and a social aspect that people use to show affiliation with religious categories. This has been described by Oppong (2013) as the Durkiemian view. Identity is enacted according to the norms of membership and thus can be related to social identity.

2. Religion as an ethnicity marker. In this case, participation in religious membership is related to a particular ethnicity.

3. Religion as a search for identity. This deals with showing certain beliefs, morals, and values, and developing an understanding of the world and the self.

Language is a key part of expressing all these identities. Most religious practices are performed orally in a specific language or form of language. For example, most Islamic religious practices, such as daily prayers, are carried out in Arabic. Such practices are thus enacted through language, showing a link between identity, language and religion.

Riley (2007) pointed to the complexity of identity as a concept influenced by culture, education, and society. While social and cultural identity can be referred to interchangeably in some instances, this is not always the case. Both identities tend to be attributed by others rather than acquired. Social identity is what others attribute to one (you) based on other social parameters, such as language, with a membership of that group demonstrated through behaviours and other signals of belonging. In contrast, cultural identity tends to be related more to heritage, religion, and language as shared

aspects that define ownership of that identity. In this vein, Spolsky (2003) argues that religion plays significant roles in how identity can be constructed through language. As Spolsky (2003, p. 84) put it, "Islam is basically and strictly associated with Classical Arabic". In this regard, for example, Alsaawi (2017) examined Imams' sermons in different cities in the UK and concluded that Arabic had a forceful function and was regarded as having spiritual value as the language of the holy Quran language, even by non-Arabic speakers. Enacting the Muslim identity, therefore, necessarily involves Arabic.

Therefore, through language the identity can be expressed, implied and constructed in various ways and across a range of dimensions. A person's language or languages can reflect certain aspects of identity, such as social background, ethnicity, religion, culture, education and a sense of belonging.

Ethnicity, culture and identity

Wan and Vanderwerf (2009, p. 4) pointed out that some scholars have treated race, tribe, nation and minority group as terms that are interchangeable with ethnicity. In contrast, others have treated them as different concepts, including most American and British scholars, who agree to some extent that ethnicity can be used to describe minority groups. For Glazer, Moynihan and Schelling (1975) ethnicity is about belonging to an ethnic group. However, Brubaker (2002) viewed this as being about how one sees oneself and the social world, and then how one categorises the self. The latter aligns with the theoretical perspective adopted in this study as it suggests that identity and ethnicity can be constructed and are not fixed.

Deng (2011) considered identity an umbrella term used by individuals and groups to define themselves and others based on race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture. Thus, these four elements are worth examining to understand identity in this study. Spencer (2002) suggested a modern term for ethnicity could be "collective cultural identity", expressing a distinction between race and ethnicity where the former predominantly concerns the external physical categorisation, while the latter concerns shared values and how individuals see themselves as "us".

This then implies that culture should be considered when discussing identity and ethnicity. Culture is another contestable concept in terms of its definition in the literature and

differing perceptions. There seems to be some agreement that culture is acquired or learned rather than innate (Anderson-Levitt, 2012). The term culture could also be applied to shared values and beliefs in describing social identity. In this vein, Anderson-Levitt (2012) and Spradley (2016) agree that culture describes an acquired knowledge of how people interpret experience and generate social behaviours. Although there are arguments regarding the distinction between the cultural and social, the view expressed by Jenks (2005) and Anderson-Levitt (2012) that culture is something learned and socially constructed through behaviours is aligned with the approach taken in this study.

Identity and nationality

According to Smith (1991), the term "nation" describes a population with a shared history, culture and economy, as well as common rights and duties. Moreover, (Connor, 1978) pointed to the sense of belonging to a national identity as important. Triandafyllidou (1998) considered it critical to consider this emotional aspect since it creates a bond between individuals and thus forms the collective sense of national identity. He argued further that the sense of belonging implies knowing who we are and who the others in the collective are. This goes beyond the point made by Connor (1978). Furthermore, he added that culture, religion and language are all influential because they are used to distinguish one group from another and thus reinforce the collective national identity. Therefore, when discussing national identity, culture, language and religion might wholly or partly be involved.

National identity has been a debated concept in the literature. Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) argued that it is essential to differentiate between being national and being patriotic. The former, according to them, has negative connotations as it implies a sense of superiority. The latter is considered positive, representing a sense of belonging to the nation without being superior or better than others. Hence, this perspective considers nationalism to be an ethnic value while patriotism is more civilised.

Parekh's (1995) view of national identity is different since it comprises values and feelings that are not fixed or presumed. They are constantly changing and are influenced by historical background, and future and present needs. Parekh (1995) argued further that:

> The term nation … has a long history and carries heavy ideological baggage. It refers to a homogeneous and collectively self-conscious ethnocultural unit, a spiritual whole that shapes the substance and identity of its members. Not every polity is or wishes to be organised in this way… To talk of national identity is to convey the wrong impression that every polity is or should be constituted as a nation and even that it cannot have an identity unless it is so constituted. (p. 655)

He therefore proposed using the term "collective identity of a polity" or something similar instead of "national identity". In this regard, his argument can be considered to account for differences and recognise that national identity is not fixed.

Komisarof and Leong (2020) take the view that national identity can be explained and rooted in the concept of social identity proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) based on certain membership criteria encompassed within the notion of national identity, such that "National identity and its corresponding citizenship representations can be conceived as ascribed or achieved" (2020 p. 7). They also suggested that there are different types of national identity. The ethnically ascribed national identity is "immutable", with a predominance of fixed aspects defining it, such as biological, birthplace and so forth. The second type is the civic national identity, which they describe as achieved rather than ascribed, and includes embracing values and ideas (Komisarof and Leong, 2020, p. 7). Thus, national identity can be viewed as concept rooted in social identity, which incorporates different components depending on the context. Broadly speaking, however, there is a clear distinction in that one is ascribed while the other is achieved.

The origin or ethnicity of a group, as well as social characteristics, can all be different dimensions of identity. Language is used to express these aspects, but can also be an aspect of constructing identity. Suleiman (2003) reviewed the historical contexts that played a role in leading to language (Arabic) being used to distinct Arabs from other non-Arabic groups, elaborating on how Arabic as a language is by virtue associated with being an Arab and is used as a means of construing national identity.

Identity and audience design
According to Omoniyi and White (2006) "an interlocutor may influence the structure of the hierarchy of identities that a speaker constructs in an encounter". In other words, the addressee or "audience" can influence the structuring of identities. This is consistent with Bell's (1984) theory of audience design, which illustrated how language can be shaped

according to the audience. Furthermore, Omoniyi and White (2006) contend that not only does the audience influence language use but also the construction of identity through language. Thus, they show the correlation between language and audience. Since language is a key means of people expressing the self, the implication is that identity at the intersection between language and audience. Nonetheless, according to Bell (1984), audience has primacy:

> But the basic tenet should be confirmed - that at all levels of language variability, people are responding primarily to other people. Speakers are designing their style for their audience. (p.179)

Hence, identity can be expressed through language, but the audience will likely influence this expression. Goffman's (1990) theory also suggests that identity or identities can be shaped by interaction and those involved. He introduced the notions of alignment and footing to explain that self-presentation can be shaped by the perceptions we have (as speakers) of the audience and the sense of affiliation the speaker intends to convey. Likewise, Bakhtin (1986) argued that self-presentations can be articulated and shaped by the audience. To explain this, Omoniyi and White (2006) give bilinguals code-switching between languages as an example of showing alignment with one group or another based on the language:

> Bilinguals may simply by an act of codeswitching reposition or align themselves with another group different from the one they had seemed to claim leading up to the moment of switching.

This implies that audience and a sense of affiliation can be manifested through language and may be significant factors in the construction of the identity. Bell (1984) argued that language design is a basic aspect that speakers consider when interacting with their audience. Language design is a stylistic, linguistic concept developed by Bakhtin (1986), who used "addressivity" as a term to describe directing speech to someone.

Combining the different perspectives, Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan (2012) explained how an imagined audience online can also be shaped by language choices. The online audience can be described as imagined since it is not always visible. The work of Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan (2012) is critical since it illustrates how language choices can be influenced by the addressee online empirically by giving an example of a

Thai-speaking student in the UK and her Facebook posts over three months. The study found that the participant, given the pseudonym "Dream", adopted language choices to design the audience in her Facebook posts. Moreover, the authors argued that addressivity can be used to express a "coherent sense of community identity" (p.528) through particular language practices, denoting a shared cultural space. In their study, the main participant used short names for places in London that only a specific audience (those living in the UK) would be familiar with. Addressivity is thus a term that describes how the imagined audience shapes audience design.

Another significant study conducted on Twitter by Marwick and Boyd (2011) revealed interesting findings, showing that Twitter users employ different techniques to design their audience, even though sometimes the audience is not explicitly mentioned in their tweets. Marwick and Boyd (2011) thus argued that Twitter users do not tweet in the void and that their imagined audience can have influence on how they present themselves in their tweets. One type of influence is self-censorship, which their participants considered useful as it enabled them to be conscious of tweeting about things that they did not wish certain audiences (parents, professors or employers) to see. In a rather different vein, Litt and Hargittai (2016) found that social network users on Facebook, Linkedin and Twitter interacting with large and mostly invisible audiences, dealt with this by thinking about a "general abstract audience" or a "more targeted audience" when posting (p. 9).

Therefore, the concept of the "imagined audience" captures how the audience influences language use and self-presentation discursive strategies online. The studies mentioned above demonstrated that the audience is a fundamental element in expressing the self and constructing the hierarchy of identities, whether online or in person. In addition to these studies, other scholars, such as Georgalou (2017) and Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008), have provided empirical data from different contexts indicating that the audience's perceptions can influence self-presentation.

To sum up, this section has reviewed studies that have addressed audience construction and identity presentation in different contexts. The studies point to the critical issue of how an audience, whether known or imagined, can influence self-presentation. However, the online audience challenges our understanding of the audience as embodied, implicit and

complex. Consequently, this may make the presentation of identity on social media sites more complex.

So far, this chapter has discussed theories of identity and the factors that might be involved in the construction of identity, such as the language, the culture, the audience and so forth. The review has illustrated a need for more studies to evidence how identity can be constructed when the audience is imagined and more precisely, how the sense of alignment of identities can be expressed in such contexts. To this end, this thesis considers how identity can be constructed on Twitter, where the audience is imagined, at least to some extent. The next part of this chapter reviews studies concerning identity in relation to social media.

2.3 Identity in Social Media

With the expansion of online communication, identity studies have also extended their scope to cover how identity is enacted online and on social media platforms. Before reviewing these, it is necessary to define social media. According to Dewing (2010):

> The term "social media" refers to the wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute to users-centered content, or join online communities. The kind of internet service commonly associated with social media (sometimes referred to as "Web 2.0").

This clearly describes social media services, the types of technological devices and what can be done on these sites. Furthermore, it gives different categories of social media depending on their features or affordances, one of which is a status update service, which includes the microblogging service Twitter. This category is different from other social media platforms in its affordances of short posts and sharing or checking the updates of others and many scholars in that field are in agreement about this classification. As Marwick and Boyd (2011, p. 116) point out:

> The microblogging site Twitter affords dynamic, interactive identity presentation to unknown audiences. Self-presentation on Twitter occurs through ongoing 'tweets' and conversations with others, rather than static profiles.

Pavelko and Myrick (2015) found that individuals often use their Twitter profiles to present a certain identity to the public. This can be done through the selection of profile images but also the content of tweets and the language used. This research is particularly

interesting because it highlights the importance of self-presentation on social media by providing insights into how social media influences our understanding of identity. Identity on Twitter can be shaped by the content that people post (tweets). What the users choose to add in their posts reflects their interests, values and beliefs and thus their identities.

Barton and Lee (2013) claimed that identity online is not only about who we are but also how we want to be seen by others; therefore, the management of identities and the audience (as imagined) are all central issues that need to be considered when approaching identity online. In this vein, Leppänen et al. (2014) posited that identities on social media are acts of identification and disidentification. Identities in such contexts cannot be assumed and need to be scrutinised as a series of performances, including aspects such as identification, self-awareness and showing affiliation or disaffiliation. Consistent with this, Pavelko and Myrick's (2015) research demonstrates that individuals often use social media profiles to create an identity that is distinct from who they are in everyday life. Moreover, a recent study by Marcella-Hood (2021) revealed how Scottish people curate their national identity on Instagram, using their biographies to identify themselves explicitly as Scottish. This suggests that identity construction on these platforms can be constructed in rather obvious ways.

In this vein, Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 243) pointed out that "identity on the internet is playful, creative, impressive and limitless, and (so popular discourse would have it) an entirely different proposition from identity in the 'real world'". The authors argue that online identity and the social media identity can be "unstable", particularly that it can be "more fluid". This is a point worth noting. This study aimed to address this issue by targeting the authentic Twitter accounts of the eight participants who were using their real names on Twitter. Considering identity as fluid, this study adopted ethnographic observation of the enactment of their identities through their tweets over eight months.

Likewise, Darvin (2016, p. 524) argued the following:

> As the digital provides multiple spaces where language is used in different ways, learners are able to move across online and offline realities with greater fluidity and perform multiple identities.

The above quote draws attention to an important aspect, namely that social media can offer spaces for people to construct various identities discursively through language.

There are many other studies that have addressed identity on different social media platforms, for example Georgalou (2017), Androutsopoulos (2008) and Han (2018, 2020). Identities in these studies are viewed as complex and dynamic, which is why a considerable length of time is needed for observation to reveal the various aspects of identity construction. Han's (2020) study looked at Chinese visiting scholars and clearly showed the significance of being overseas in how they constructed their identities on WeChat, mainly as global citizens. Han (2020) argued that these represented enactments of identity, ethnicity and an implicit power struggle in their transient experience.

Tagg and Lyons (2021) introduced the *polymedia repertoire* concept to explore the complex interplay between communicative, social, and ideological perceptions and how these can index social meaning in digital and social media spaces. The study showed that identity performance can be a vital aspect that structures the online discourse of interaction and relationships. This can be relevant to this study, mainly in providing in-depth insights into how social and ideological perceptions can integrate in the process of identity construction on Twitter.

Taking the above into account, this study explored the construction of identity in both tweets and profiles due to their potential for providing different insights related to the user (Twitterer). The view adopted in this study was that Twitter identities are essentially multiple, dynamic and complex. This is aligned with the theoretical approach taken in this study and identified previously in this chapter (see section 2.2). Examining authentic Twitter accounts in this study can be seen as way of addressing the issues highlighted in the previous paragraphs. The following sub-sections examine how the literature in this field views social identity, the sense of affiliation and online communities, and most importantly how these are related to the thesis.

2.3.1 Social identity and communities as online concepts

Based on the review, this study contends that identity is a contested, complex construct and this is also true of the ways in which it is constructed and represented. As highlighted in 2.2.1, social identity is part of how people construct their sense of identity and who they

belong to. In the online context, on social media, social identity can be constructed through pinning the communities with which the user wishes to express his/her sense of affiliation.

In this vein, Rheingold (2000, p. 6) was one of the popular works that provided definition of virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace". Thus, the "virtual community" is a social practice in which many people have established shared bonds and interests.

With the expansion of social media, there were many studies that examined community practices on social media. Among these is Zappavigna (2011) which examined this subject on Twitter. Zappavigna (2011, p. 800) used ''ambient affiliation'' as a concept that refers to building a co-present and temporary community through connecting around shared interests.

This is the core aspect of the community of practice theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1996). According to this theory, the term "community" can be used to describe people with shared interests and practices that they share.

This challenges the traditional understanding of a community based on location and other abstract attributes. According to this view, international students in different cities in the UK would be considered as one large community of practice, as in the case of this study. This perception is highly relevant to this study and the understanding of how social identity can be constituted.

As already noted (see2.2.1), Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1982) authored key theoretical works on social identity. However, it is important to recall that their theory treats social identity as a cognitive process related to identification and disidentification with what they describe as the "in group" and the "out group". This is an essentialist view of social identity, which is not aligned with the approach adopted in this study. Here, the theory of the community of practice defines communities based on social engagement and ambient affiliation (Zappavigna, 2011), where the in-group and out-group can still be present but not influenced by the state of mind (cognition). Rather, it is produced discursively and interactively (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005).

To take this further, on social media, according to Pathak, Madani and Joseph (2021), identity can be expressed implicitly and explicitly in many ways, such as using personal descriptors, disclosing preferences, or showing affiliation with particular social groups or institutions. This can also take the form of using action words, such as cycling, reading, walking and so forth. Their study suggests a method for identifying social identities in users' Twitter "bios" using specific phrases called "personal identifiers". However, this might not capture how social identity is implicitly expressed. For example, a Newcastle United supporter can simply put "Howay the lads!"[4] in his/her bio, indicating support for the team or that he/she comes from Newcastle upon Tyne. Crucially, this is distinct from "Ha'way the lads!", which is the shout of Sunderland supporters. This apparently tiny difference is what differentiates the two social groups and it is how they express their social identity. In addition, social identity can be expressed in many ways, not necessarily through the bio or the social media profile; it can also be implicitly or explicitly expressed in different forms, such as posts, tweets, participation in hashtags and so forth.

Nevertheless, Pathak, Madani and Joseph's (2021) method can be useful for identifying the explicit aspects of identity from a Twitter bio, such as adding a description about oneself, for example the one used by Joe Biden (US President):

> Husband to @DrBiden, proud father and grandfather. Ready to build back better for all Americans. Official account is @POTUS.[5]

Another way of identifying the social practice of identity is through what McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 8) called a "sense of community". As articulated by Bell and Newby (2012) "Community is, first, a place, and second, a configuration as a way of life, both as to how people do things and what they want, to say, their institutions and goals".

The notion of community has roots in many disciplines, such as sociology and psychology. Thus, it has a long history, as well as different meanings. As pointed out by Diaz (2000)

> Community is a historic product and, accordingly, it comes in many shapes and flavors. In this way, community could exists [sic] in a range that goes from the idea of "community as communion" (a place characterized by trust, friendship,

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[4] A popular chant used by Newcastle United fans and supporters.
[5]

reciprocity, and loyalty) to the idea of "community as commodity" (a place where exchange, calculation, and competition are predominant).

Diaz (2000) considers that there is no single fixed definition of community and that it is an abstract notion, in agreement with Lave (1991) and Wenger (1998). This also reflects Gusfield (1975, p. xvi) view of the two ways in which the term "community" is employed, the first being a territorial usage of the word and the second concerning relational aspects, that is to say, the quality of relationships between humans. This is also similar to what Zappavigna (2011) termed an "ambient affiliation" on Twitter, developed through bonding around shared interests. All these definitions denote that the word "community" can be used to describe an aspect which is shared, whether to do with place or the relationship (bond) between people.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed a theory of a sense of community that illustrates its dynamic nature and is characterised by four main elements: membership, influence, integration and the sharing of emotional connections. In a more abstract sense, Anderson (2006) contended that the community can be imagined if the members never meet their fellows. What constitutes this imagined community is that these members all have a mental image of it. Thus, a PhD candidate can convey being part of a wider community, whether as a student in common with those at the same and other universities, or as a member of the academic community more broadly. This identification and sense of affiliation with certain communities or groups is related to social identity and the expression of identities.

The participants in this study can be described as a community that shares many elements or bonds: their geographical setting (the UK), their nationality (Saudi Arabian) and their social status (Saudi academics working at Saudi universities, currently on scholarships to complete their higher education at UK universities). However, it is worth mentioning that their participation or affiliation based on these bonds could vary. As these participants were being observed on Twitter, it is necessary to consider the nature of online communities and understand what constitutes a Twitter community. In this regard, Lave's (1991), Wenger's (1998) and Zappavigna's (2011) perspectives are of value in focusing on the abstract meaning of community on Twitter. This resonates with the nature of the

community, in this study as the participants are not necessarily part of or forming a physical community.

2.3.2 Identity construction through displays of membership on Twitter

The construction of identities on social media takes a range of forms. On Twitter, for example, it can be through showing a sense of affiliation developed using resources such as Twitter hashtags, as shown by Zappavigna (2011). In this vein, Groebner (2004) pointed out that identity can manifest via the membership and belonging markers that individuals use to express themselves. This accords with Tajfel's (1978) theoretical framework of social identity, which explains how a sense of membership can influence behaviours and make up the social identity. Tajfel (1978) elaborated on this, adding that there is a self-categorisation process in which people tend to define themselves based on certain categories; for example, one might categorise oneself as belonging to a highly educated group. Once this happens, the person's behaviours will begin to shift to correspond to this categorisation, sharing certain behaviours or characteristics of highly educated people, such as using sophisticated language. This would be one marker of the social identity they wish to portray.

Tagg and Seargeant (2014) conducted a study that examined various exchanges taken from three participants' Facebook walls. The study concluded that the poster designs the audience through the style, language and topic and other cues. However, within that, there is a social organisation in line with how the poster constitutes the community and designs the audience. This happens "by drawing on shared practices which are part of the dynamics which constitute community relations, and at the same time enacting and elaborating upon these practices" (Tagg and Seargeant, 2014, p.181). The above can be linked to Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory, primarily in terms of how the construction of the social identity entails designing the audience through employing shared practices. This also resonates with Riley (2007) view that social identity can be reflected through language practices.

Studies conducted online, such as that of Papacharissi (2002), contend that personal homepages can be used to signal identity by showing affiliation to certain communities through banners or other statements. Zhu and Procter (2015) highlighted interesting facets of the ways in which PhD students use the hashtag #PhDchat, explaining how PhD

hashtags can be useful in many ways for students in the UK, helping them promote their professional profiles, expand their professional networks and gain support from others. Although the participants in their study used hashtags to represent their PhD identities in various ways, they did not examine how this might be a representation of their social identity. Nonetheless, such hashtags can be used as a marker for social identity as PhD students in the UK. In other words, participation in tweets using PhD hashtags can be considered a demonstration of membership in the PhD community and show their social identity. Concerning Twitter, Marwick and Boyd (2011, pp. 121-122) posited that hashtags and the @ symbol can be used "to direct tweets to interested followers". They can also be used to signal a social identity, showing affiliation with a specific group. Zappavigna (2011) further illustrated how hashtags can be used to show ambient affiliation by tweeting and using trending keywords or hashtags. In this study, for example, this can be seen in #PhDchat, where many of the related tweets concerned ways of overcoming challenges or offering tips and pointers to aid fellow students.

Tweeting within these hashtags could therefore be a marker of the "social identity" of a PhD student that has perhaps been overlooked in previous studies. Examining this aspect is of potential value given that it could reveal many aspects of the ways in which different groups enact their individual identities online in social media. Twitter hashtags offer a means of identity construction in various ways. Twitter hashtags can be used in tweets to index them and organise thoughts but can also be used to express different views and diverse identities through showing solidarity with others and being part of a larger online community.

Having discussed what constitutes an online community and how this might be relevant to the understanding of social identity, the following sub-section addresses another important concept, idioms of practice, of relevance in establishing how different online communities use the medium of the Internet.

2.3.3 Idioms of practice as a community of practice

This study takes the view that the sense of membership of a community can be enacted through a range of forms. Gershon (2010) used the term "idioms of practice" to refer to how different groups of people develop, mostly "unconsciously", their own ways of using communicative media with each other. These unique practices might be observed by other

groups. Idioms of practice comprise a potentially interesting yet overlooked subject; studying how these work for different groups or online communities might be fruitful in many ways as they could help researchers gain an overall holistic perception of specific groups and their practices online, what they typically do and how they use these technologies. Most importantly for this study, they can assist in providing insights into how a specific group of participants construct their social identities online.

Some online and social media studies, such as that of Zhu and Procter (2015), have suggested that groups of PhD students in the UK share certain practices when it comes to using Twitter, employing it to construct their professional identity. However, the same group developed other shared practices when they used Facebook, described as "for personal use rather than research related purposes" (Zhu and Procter, 2015, p. 37). Other online studies, such as Alhejely (2020) ethno-case study of Arab students in the UK using Twitter, have revealed a significant pattern in terms of how standard Arabic is associated with religious practices, related to enacting the Muslim identity. This is in line with studies such as those of Albirini (2011) and Alsaawi (2017), which highlighted the strong connection between the use of standard Arabic and religious discourse in Islamic contexts. However, such studies have not considered this convention as an idiom of practice representing social identity.

Idioms of practice can provide a constructive and relevant lens for examining particular groups in online ethnographic research such as this. Idioms of practice can be integrated in our understanding of the community of practice as articulated by Wenger (1999), defined based on three criteria concerning interaction between its members. First, there is mutual engagement in which meaning is negotiated. Second, there is also a joint enterprise and goal that drives the community to engage and devote their time to developing the third aspect, which is the shared repertoire, comprising words, routines and so forth.

One idiom of practice found in many online studies looking at international students is the use of English to signal the identity of global citizen (Tagg and Seargeant, 2012; Schreiber, 2015). This linguistic practice can be considered one idiom of the online practices adopted by international students on different social media platforms, especially when presenting their identities. Idioms of practice thus seem worth considering when

conducting online-ethnographic studies exploring certain cultures or online communities, such as international students.

Online communities can be described as bodies of people bounded by technology and common interests rather than geographical location (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p. 248). Taking this into account, it is possible that social identity in this study could appear in the form of a community of practice, as found by Zhu and Procter (2015), who described PhD hashtags as significant markers for PhD students to enact their professional identity and engage on Twitter. Social identity can potentially be marked on Twitter in many ways, including affiliation with particular communities and participation in hashtags, such as #PhDchat.

Twitter is a vast social network and adopting Gershon's (2010) notion of idioms of practices could help provide an understanding of how different groups adopt different practices in constructing their identities on Twitter. With respect to Twitter profiles and social identities, Rogers and Jones (2021) found Twitter profiles were a key element employed by Americans to present their political "social" identity. Therefore, the existing body of knowledge shows the significance of social identity. It is thus of interest to see how this can be constructed through Twitter profiles and tweets by a particular group of international PhD students in the UK. The next sub-section turns to how audience and the construction of identity work online.

2.3.4 Audience and identity construction online

This sub-section extends the review of audience and audience design theories in 2.2.4 to focus specifically on how audience construction can be linked to identity and the social identity on social media in particular. In this regard, Marwick and Boyd (2011) stated that the concept of an imagined audience can be more significant on social media platforms, giving Twitter as an example of a site where an audience can be imagined:

> Given the various ways people can consume and spread tweets, it is virtually impossible for Twitter users to account for their potential audience, let alone actual readers. (p.117)

It is not possible to be sure of the audience on Twitter as tweets might be spread and reach accounts outside the follower circle, for example if the tweet contains one or more

hashtags or if is retweeted. However, an audience might be constructed and shaped in the mind of the tweeter in this online setting, particularly if using certain hashtags. As noted by Marwick and Boyd (2011), "Although these individuals may not direct tweets to others, they are not tweeting into a void". Even without direct knowledge of who might be the audience of a tweet, Twitter users can imagine who would be interested in their posts. Here, imagination plays a part, as illustrated by *Litt (2012)* point that "The less an actual audience is visible or known, the more individuals become dependent on their imagination".

In this vein, Goffman's (1991) theoretical framework shows a strong relationship between identity performance and audience, referring to it as "impression management" to explain how people wish others to respond to their presentation of themselves (p. 235). Thus, in this study conducted on Twitter, it is important to consider how the imagined audience could be linked to identity construction.

On Twitter, the audience can be both known and unknown. For example, when addressing another Twitter user using the @ symbol, the user is tagged and thus the audience is known, rather than imagined, to a certain extent. However, the user might think he/she is addressing a limited audience only to find that the tweet goes viral. It only takes one random user to retweet and it is out in a far bigger multiverse. Conversely, when tweeting using a hashtag, there might be an imagined audience that the users have in mind: that is tweeting to like-minded individuals in the hashtag community, or possibly trying to bring others outside the community to agree with their way of thinking.

Furthermore, Marwick and Boyd (2011) addressed the imagined audience concept on Twitter and concluded that tweets could target different and multiple audiences; this is a unique feature in terms of audience diversity and identity construction. In this study, I consider the imagined audience concept and I agree with Marwick and Boyd (2011) and many other scholars who viewed the audience as a strong factor that influences self-presentation. In studies conducted online and on social media platforms, for example, Alsaggaf (2015) found that the audience played a significant role in how Saudi females expressed their identities on Facebook. The study discussed the participants' awareness, caution and practice of self-censorship to meet the expectations of their imagined

audience, including their friends, family members and colleagues. In this scenario, the audience can be considered a constraint when it comes to identity construction.

In another study of Twitter conducted by Zhu and Procter (2015), the representation of professional identity was found to be more dominant on Twitter than Facebook among the PhD students they examined. Their explanation for this was that the audience the participants wanted to reach on these two platforms differed. On Twitter, they were interested in addressing research networks, while on Facebook, they want to chat with friends. Consequently, this changed how they presented themselves, reflecting self-management and a strategic design strategy.

From the above, we can glean that Alsaggaf (2015) highlighted the potential constraints the audience might impose on how identity is expressed, while identity performance is the main aspect that shapes the audience on social media platforms. This poses an interesting question of whether the audience or identity prevails. On social media, audience design can be performed in various forms, such as through posts or profiles. Studies such as Papacharissi (2002) and Robinson (2007) provided empirical examples of how identity can be performed through profiles.

In 2.3.3 Idioms of practice as a community of practice, I reviewed a significant study by Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan (2012), which examined Thai speakers' language choices in the UK. The main participant in their study used English and Thai to address her imagined audience. The study is significant because it drew a line between language and audience. Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan (2012) used the term "addressivity" to refer to these language practices and suggested that the participant's language choices (Thai or English) were resources used to express her sense of belonging in different communities. I consider that audience design is a significant concept related to the shaping of identity in this study and the authors drew a thin line between identity, language and audience. Another notable study was conducted by Schreiber (2015). This was a case study of a Serbian university student who constructed his hip-hop identity on Facebook, partly through multilingual practices but also by designing his Facebook profile to attract a specific audience. The study managed to draw a clear line in identity construction via different resources.

Both the studies outlined above engaged in participant observation and conducted interviews. As pointed out by Schreiber (2015, p. 73), images, profile photographs and homepages can be crucial aspects of constructing identity. This is a noteworthy point and one I considered in this study by observing every aspect of the participants' Twitter profiles and tweets to see which identities were being constructed and how.

Tagg and Seargeant (2012) and Zhu and Procter (2015) addressed international students in the UK. For such students, social media has become essential, especially since COVID-19. Social media is no longer the province of leisure; instead, social media platforms have become important means used by people for their professional advancement, business and marketing and in education, keeping up to date with what is happening in their field and in politics, as well as staying in touch with people around the globe. Some people use these platforms as a source of information. This study examined one platform, Twitter, and a specific group of international students who might shed light on how these social media platforms can be used for identity construction and representation.

The study's primary focus was to explore the identities these international students constructed and how they expressed them over time (during their PhD studies). In the third and final part of the chapter, I review studies concerning the main subject of this thesis – international students – drawing on research that has addressed their identities on social media to build the rationale for conducting this study.

2.4 International Students and Online Identities

This is the third and last part in this chapter, in which I address the subjects involved in the research – international students – to consider how they have been approached in the literature and what this study can add to the existing body of work. First, it is important to highlight the significance of this group worldwide in terms of their numbers (see 1.2); the OECD reported that there were over six million international students in 2019.[6] Thus, they are a significant population in terms of studies in higher education globally.

This group has attracted the attention of academics in interdisciplinary fields. One is intercultural communication, which sheds light on how people from different cultures

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[6] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5a49e448-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5a49e448-en

communicate and create shared meanings (Lustig and Koester, 2010, p. 46). Many scholars in this field have addressed how intercultural competence can enhance communication in internationalised educational contexts (Schartner, 2020; Liang and Schartner, 2022). Moreover, Lewin (2009) described how studying abroad can be a rich experience in terms of expanding globalisation. Bearing in mind that this experience can enhance the global or cosmopolitan background, it is considered a significant aspect that might be explored in intercultural communication studies.

It can be challenging to determine what it means to be cosmopolitan or global. In this vein, Delanty's (2006) view regarding cosmopolitanism is that it entails having sense of openness and willingness to transform, being able to embrace or tolerate what is different. More specifically:

> Cosmopolitanism concerns processes of self-transformation in which new cultural forms take shape and where new spaces of discourse open up leading to a transformation in the social world. (p. 44)

According to this view, cosmopolitanism is not only about adaptation to other cultures but also a self-transformation that paves the way to new cultural forms. Globalisation in the sense of being global and cosmopolitanism can be used to mean the same thing and are often used interchangeably. However, within the context of this study, I shall use "global" in line with Lewin's (2009) use of this term to describe the experience of international students studying abroad.

Many studies have examined integration and intercultural competence in learning and pedagogical contexts. However, little is known about how students present their online identities via social media, despite social media platforms becoming an integral part of people's lives; this group uses social media for a variety of reasons, including to stay in contact with family and friends at home (Gomes et al., 2014). In addition, international students use social media to enhance their academic networks and their learning (Zhu and Procter, 2015).

International students' use of social media platforms provides an invaluable context for exploring their perceptions of their identities and how they express and manifest these online. Thus, Liu (2012) advocated researching online spaces as an arena for intercultural

communication. Most existing studies that have examined international students' online presence have been conducted in the sphere of education and online learning, while the topic of international students' online identities has remained an emerging field. Hence, the following sub-sections review several studies that have considered how international students enact their identities online and how being international students studying overseas is expressed in this context.

2.4.1 International students: Online language practices

Many studies have explored the language practices of international students online, for instance Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan (2012), as discussed in sub-section 2.2.3 (Identity and audience design, p. 29). Another study by Androutsopoulos (2015) offered a new approach to examining language practices online. The study examined the language practices employed on Facebook by Greek students in Germany and employed the term "networked multilingualism" to describe the different linguistic resources employed on the mediated constrained web. Androutsopoulos (2015, p. 158) stated that:

> Networked multilingualism is a cover term for multilingual practices that are shaped by two interrelated processes: being networked, i.e. digitally connected to other individuals and groups, and being in the network, i.e. embedded in the global mediascape of the web.

The study above offered a precise definition of language practices online and also suggested that networked multilingual practices are diverse. Crucially, Androutsopoulos (2015) advocated allowing considerable time for observation when looking at language practices online to derive the advantages and in-depth insights it provides.

In a relatively recent study, Alhejely (2020) examined the online identities and language practices of Arab students in the UK in the context of Twitter. The researcher adopted the concept of translanguaging as the main theoretical framework in explaining the linguistic resources employed on Twitter by four Arab students in the UK. The study employed an ethno-case approach to provide a detailed description of how languages were utilised to see if mobility (i.e. living in the UK as a student) would have any impact. The study found no significant impact. Overall, the students' language practices revolved around presenting macro and micro identities and Classical Arabic was a significant repertoire they employed to portray their Arabic and Muslim identities. In contrast, English appeared

rarely and this was used to support the main argument of the slight impact of mobility on their language practices. The findings indicated similarities between the participants. However, identity on Twitter can also have a strong presence in profiles (Rogers and Jones, 2021), an aspect not considered by Alhejely (2020).

This research is distinct from the above studies in many ways, but mostly in its focus on the sociolinguistic aspects of identity in Twitter discourse, it looks at a small group of international students and provides in-depth insights primarily informed by their perspectives. This study analyses Twitter profiles, tweets and interview data, as well as using notes taken during the observation period, adopting an online-ethnographic approach and identifying significant patterns across the data.

2.4.2 International students' online identities under conditions of transience

In a recent study, Seyri and Rezaee (2022) examined PhD students in Tehran, the capital city of Iran, and the construction of their online identities amid the shift of educational provision to an online setting in the context of COVID-19. The study findings indicated that the construction of the PhD identity happened through building a "rapport" with particular communities of practice, mostly related to their PhD studies and providing the opportunity to position themselves within that circle. However, the study focused on a relatively small group of students and recommended that further studies examine the experience of PhD students in different fields since it considered only those undertaking studies in applied linguistics.

There is a clear gap in studies considering international students and their identity construction on social media platforms, particularly in terms of how they construct their identities during their transitional period. According to statistics published by Erudera (2022) there were 246,535 non-EU international students out of 605,130 students in the UK enrolled in postgraduate courses only, making this a worthy population for study. Few studies have examined this particular group thus far, an exception being Alhejely (2020), who found that transience or mobility had no impact on language practices or online identity construction. However, Zhu and Procter (2015) found that PhD students used Twitter in the professional realm, aiming to enhance their profiles through participation in PhD hashtags. Gomes et al. (2014) compiled seven focus groups of different international students in Australia to examine how social networking sites enabled them to express

their identity while away from home. The study concluded that international students have multiple social identities developed from encountering others while in the transient state of being an international student. They articulated their social identities based on factors such as academia, hobbies, interests, religion, etc. Social networking sites can keep international students in touch with home whilst also expanding their networks with other students in the same situation.

Zhu and Procter (2015) examined the use of Facebook and Twitter among a group of PhD students in the UK and found Twitter to be of use "academically"; that is to say, it enabled the students to promote their professional identities, expand their academic networks, and find information related to their fields of study. Conversely, Facebook appeared to be used as a personal rather than an intellectual space. As noted by Gilpin (2010), several scholars, such as Luders (2008) and Papacharissi (2002), have pointed to the distinction between personal and professional identities. In their study of Thai speakers living in the UK (mainly students), Tagg and Seargeant (2012) considered that "playfulness" in language alternation should be noted as a positive way of flagging social identity and membership, based on observation of an online community of Thai-English speakers on Facebook and MSN.

The studies discussed above highlight significant issues, including language, mobility and how the online bilingual and multilingual practices of different international students can enhance understanding of social and cultural identities and online communities (Tagg and Seargeant, 2012; Gomes et al., 2014; Alhejely, 2020). However, there is more to know about the identities these students seem keen to portray.

As discussed earlier in different parts of this thesis (see sections 1.4.4 and 2.2.2), the opportunity to study abroad is viewed as a privilege (Lewin, 2009). For international students in higher education abroad, the forms of capital defined by Bourdieu (2011) might be entwined with and impact the ways they construct their identities on Twitter during their sojourn . An interesting aspect that has not received much attention in previous research is whether being an overseas student might be something visible in their online presence and if so, how it is constructed. If this is not the case, then which identities are these international students keen to show, how and when?

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the existing literature related to the subject of this study. The first part discussed the main concept and theories of identity. The second part reviewed studies on identity with reference to social media. Finally, the third part addressed studies involving international students and the construction of their identities online.

Based on this extensive review, the study aimed to fill the gap in existing research by targeting international students (Saudi PhD students) in the UK to explore how they constructed their identities through language in its broadest sense, exploring the discursive construction of identity on the popular social media platform, Twitter. The literature on this subject has focused primarily on intercultural competence, pedagogical integration and development, and the language issues associated with being bilingual or multilingual, rather than on how identities are enacted and developed online. The reasons for looking at this particular group derived from my interest as an insider, a Saudi PhD student. Although this might pose a challenge, I tried to address this by taking a reflexive approach (addressed in Chapter 3). Another reason was convenience as I had access to a ready sample.

Previous studies that have examined online identities, reviewed in this chapter, have focused on either personal homepages or posts; in contrast, this study examined both, looking at how identities can be constructed in two forms on Twitter: (i) the semi-static form of Twitter profiles, which are not changed every day or even very often, and (ii) the dynamic form of tweets, which unlike Twitter profiles are constantly revealing new things that are happening and reflect change (Marwick and Boyd, 2011, p. 116). The participants were observed over a period of eight months. My aim in approaching the matter of identity with regard to profiles and tweets was to enhance our understanding of identity discursive representation on social media from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Furthermore, this study takes into account the sociolinguistic perspective of Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 606), mainly in terms of how identity shifts constantly over time and how different identities are related and indexed through language. In addition, it explored the phenomenon of the construction of identity through various perspectives methodologically: participant observation, interviews and notes taken during the observation period.

The works reviewed in this chapter were helpful in shaping and informing my understanding of identity as a complex construct and revealing how language can be a salient aspect of expressing identity, as well as appreciating the critical role that the audience can play in influencing the specific language used. Given that little is known about how international students express their identities online, this thesis aimed to fill a gap in the literature by examining a group of international students – Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK – over a period of eight months, to explore the identities they constructed, and how and when over the observation in which I took a participant role. The following chapter details the methodology employed.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

After reviewing the relevant literature and related theoretical frameworks, this chapter discusses in detail how the study was designed, what procedures were undertaken, what methods were used and why these methodological choices were made.

The chapter begins with the research questions and then moves on to discuss the research design and paradigm, with sub-sections detailing the philosophical stance, approach, ontology and epistemology. These are all informed by the research questions. Following this, the chapter reviews the methods and procedures, describing the nuts and bolts of the project in terms of the setting(s), population, the pilot study and the main study. There is then a section on data analysis, which provides details of the whole procedure, how the analysis was undertaken and why. Moreover, the chapter addresses the quality of the study in terms of trustworthiness and credibility, as well as the main ethical considerations. The final section discusses my role as the researcher in this study and the practice of reflexivity, consistent with the ethnographic approach. The conclusion summarises the whole chapter.

3.2 Research Questions

The research questions are the driving force in any study, providing the grounding for the investigation. In this study, there are three main research questions, as follows:

RQ1. Which identities do Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK tend to construct on Twitter?

RQ2. How are these identities constructed through the language of their tweets and Twitter profiles (e.g. images, text and display of membership in specific communities)?

RQ3: When and how are these identities constructed over the observation timeline?

Before delving into the procedural steps taken to find the answers to these questions, it is necessary to understand the philosophical background and the design of this study.

3.3 Research Design and Philosophical Stance

In this section, I explain the framework of the study. It is divided into two parts; the first discusses the framework, which covers the paradigm, approach and design; the second outlines the philosophical stance.

3.3.1 Research paradigm and design

This section outlines the framework of this study. Articulating this clearly will establish a robust grounding for the philosophical stance, addressed in the following section. As explained in Chapter 2, this study fills a gap in research by exploring a subject that is rarely covered. This is a data-driven and exploratory study, an approach that can be valuable in providing in-depth insights.

The paradigm is based on the researcher's underlying beliefs and informs and directs the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). The underlying paradigm in this study is interpretive, regarded as useful by Bryman (2012, p. 72) for research aiming to understand a context-bound topic, in this case, the discursive construction of identity on Twitter by a group of Saudi PhD students in the UK through language in its broadest sense on Twitter. The interpretive paradigm views reality as contested and socially constructed. Interpretive studies such as this tend to be qualitative, data-driven and inductive in reasoning, since, according to Bryman (2012, p. 36), interpretive researchers consider reality to be socially constructed and multi-faceted.

As noted above, the methodological framework in this study is exploratory and the reasoning that drives it is inductive, consistent with the belief that reality has multiple facets (Creswell, 2013, p. 60). Hence, this study is data-driven rather than theory-driven. Within the interpretive paradigm, the methodological approach entails the researcher spending considerable time on observation and data collection (see section 3.4). In this case, online ethnography was implemented, employing observation that lasted eight months, from May 2019 to January 2020. Following this, I conducted interviews in June 2020 and some follow-up interviews in 2021 and 2022.

 Bryman (2012) notes that the research design encompasses the methods. The study design shows the outline, while the study methods refer to the techniques used for data collection and analysis. This study is designed as qualitative, exploratory and interpretive

in nature. The approach taken is in line with the online ethnographic approach, which entails spending considerable time on observation to unearth valuable insights.

Thus, in this study, I spent nearly a year observing the participants on Twitter to see how they constructed their identities in response to their experience of living abroad and other events, taking notes and interviewing them to gain insiders' insights into how they discursively built their identities on Twitter. Having provided an overview of the framework, the following sub-section discusses the philosophical stance, addressing the ontological and epistemological considerations.

3.3.2 Philosophical stance: Ontology and epistemology

According to Grix (2002, p. 177), "Ontology is the starting point of all research, after which one's epistemological and methodological positions logically follow". Ontology concerns the researcher's answer to the question of what constitutes reality (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 11). The ontological position of this study is aligned with constructivism, which "asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors" (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). In this thesis, the phenomenon under study was the discursive identity construction, which I sought to understand through observation of the social actors (Saudi PhD students) on Twitter. The study considered identity multiple, complex, socially, culturally rooted and discursively (language) indexed. The study took the insiders' perspective, their views of who they are differently and how they construct their identities on Twitter. Their perceptions can all be considered multiple facets of reality.

While ontology is concerned with what reality is, epistemology is concerned with how we know that it is reality (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 21). This study explored reality (or multiple realities) through the interpretation of data derived from multiple sources and voices, predominantly insiders (i.e. the Saudi PhD students). Therefore, the epistemological stance in this study is consistent with the interpretive paradigm.

To conclude, this study is ontologically constructive and epistemologically interpretive, thus presenting consistency in relation to the two philosophical assumptions. The participants' depictions of their identities through the language of Twitter and what they revealed in the interviews were all accounted for as perceptions and considered in the construction and representation of their multiple realities. I turn now to a discussion of

ethnography and what it entails and then move to set out the online-ethnographic approach taken in the study.

3.4 Ethnography and Digital Ethnography

Ethnography – referred to variously as a method or methodology – has a long history. According to Gobo (2008, p. 2), ethnography originated in the West and derived from the desire to understand other (non-Western) cultures, meaning it was a colonial method. Gobo (2008) called on researchers worldwide to de-colonise it by adopting it as an approach in current research.

According to Hammersley (2017), there are four main reasons for undertaking ethnography. First, there is the desire to know and understand what people believe and do and what they say about what they do, which entails considering the insiders' perspectives in research. Second, ethnographers are interested in seeing how actions change over time. Third, they consider how situations influence people's lives and their perceptions of themselves and the world. Fourth and finally, they are interested in gaining insights into how contextual meanings can inform behaviours.

Observation, therefore, is part and parcel of ethnography. Duranti and Goodwin (1992) recommend systematic observation of the "extrasituational context" or the research setting. They explain how useful this can be in providing the ethnographer with a means of addressing how and why things happen in one way or another. Thus, online ethnography, employing systematic observation, was applied in this study (see section 3.6).

The role of the observer varies according to the purposes of the observation and the perspective the researcher seeks to elicit based on the research context and aims (Sercombe, 2016). For example, the researcher can be a participant observer, take a non-participant role, or combine the two. Non-participant observation helps in gaining an outsider, "etic" perspective. An illustrative example is the doctor–patient relationship, in which the observer cannot take any part. Participant observation tends to be more useful when the researcher is looking for an insider, "emic" perspective. An example of this would be taking part in a second language classroom, where the researcher might be involved

in the learning process, observing and asking students about their perceptions of their learning progress.

In ethnography, the researcher undertakes observation with an "open mind" to acknowledge multiple interpretations and realities (Fetterman, 1998, p. 2). Thus, the researcher is an observation tool, which could give rise to bias. A degree of subjectivity is unavoidable in most settings that involve human beings. However, potential bias and subjectivity can be mitigated in ethnography – and also in online ethnography – by adopting a reflexive approach (Gobo, 2008; Mann, 2016; Sercombe, 2016). This was a significant aspect of this study. In this thesis, I provide a clear picture of my role (as a participant and insider researcher), dedicating an entire section to explaining my approach (see section 3.11).

With the expansion of technology, a new type of ethnography has emerged, known as "online ethnography" (Skågeby, 2011), "virtual ethnography" (Hine, 2000), "netethnography" (Kozinets, 2015), or "digital ethnography" (Varis, 2015). These terms can be seen as different labels describing how ethnography is taken behind the screen (Garcia et al., 2009, p. 58), whereas in traditional ethnography observation is mainly done in person. The following sub-section discusses online ethnography in more detail and explains how it was adopted in this study.

This study collected data through an online-ethnographic approach aligned with the interpretive paradigm and the exploratory nature of the research, seeking to explore the phenomenon of identity construction in its setting (i.e. on Twitter). There has been debate about whether online observation or "online ethnography" can be classified as a sub-type of ethnography or virtual ethnography. This is due to differences in the nature of the observation and interactions between the researchers and researched subjects in traditional and online ethnography (Bryman, 2012, p. 659).

Bryman (2012) highlights the successful attempts of Hine (2000) and Kendall (1999) to position this type of online observation within the ethnographic approach described as online ethnography, although according to Bryman (2012, p. 659), Kendal's (1999) perspective was closer to traditional ethnography since it covered an extended period (three years) and comprised comprehensive participant observation combined with face-

to-face interviews. Skågeby (2011) argues that there are no significant differences between online ethnography and traditional ethnography, except that the former is conducted online rather than in person. Based on this, it can be argued that online ethnography is a dimension or sub-type of ethnography.

Pink et al. (2016) articulated the main principles and practices that researchers need to consider when doing digital ethnography. They highlighted five main principles that digital ethnographers need to be aware of, as follows:

- First, there is the multiplicity of the setting. For example, when studying the online conversational context, the participants need to have access to Wi-Fi, their devices need to be powered and so on. In this study, the participants needed to have Twitter accounts and Wi-Fi.

- The second principle is what they call "de-centred digital ethnography". This means that researchers need to understand that digital, online spaces are part of the whole configuration; they are part of people's world and digital media or online spaces are entangled with people's lives and other activities. Therefore, when doing digital ethnography, it should not focus only on one aspect and ignore others. In this study, for example, this was considered at the beginning, acknowledging that the participants' PhD and social lives might not necessarily be reflected on Twitter.

- The third principle in doing online ethnography is being open, specifically recognising that online ethnography is not bounded and constantly evolving. In this study, for example, I started observing the participants on Twitter in 2019 when users did not have a recorded voice tweet option; this was announced later in 2020. Amid multiple changes, since this study was undertaken, Twitter has changed to "X". These point to the need to being open to changes in digital research.

- The fourth principle that Pink et al. (2016) highlighted, along with other scholars in ethnography, such as Gobo (2008), is reflexivity, i.e. the researcher being aware of his/her role, position and relation with the researched subjects. Online ethnography and ethnography have been criticised for their subjectivity and reflexivity is an ethical practice that online ethnographers need to integrate in their

research to counter this. In this study, a reflexive approach was diligently adopted. I took notes alongside the observation and provided a thick description of what I observed, what this meant and why. This is addressed comprehensively in 3.10.2.

- Finally, the fifth principle, according to Pink et al. (2016) is being unorthodox. Online ethnography enables researchers to go beyond conventional research, engaging in interdisciplinary studies in line with the constantly changing nature of online spaces. In this study, for example, I used direct messages on Twitter to interview the participants instead of face-to-face or telephone video interviews. This allowed me to see the various potentials that Twitter can offer researchers. During the observation period I engaged in systematic observation to keep an eye on what the participants were doing and be aware of what was happening. I also had a folder of observation notes for each participant and would typically record notes as soon as I received any alerts from Twitter about the participants (see Appendix D).

In designing online-ethnographic studies and analysing the data, researchers are informed by social and cultural theoretical concepts since such research looks at what people do, feel and think. Online ethnographers also look at relationships, events and actions and how people engage socially with groups online. Pink et al. (2016) argued that these are valuable concepts for online ethnographers to apply in their research.

To conclude, online ethnography can be considered one way of conducting ethnography. Both online and traditional ethnography draw on observation as the primary data collection method. However, they differ in terms of the observational setting. This approach has its risks, which I aimed to address through reflexivity, i.e. being aware of my position in this research and in producing the knowledge (Pink et al., 2016) (see section 3.11). In this regard, Hine (2000) and Garcia et al. (2009) have stated that it is necessary to explain in detail how the observation is conducted and what role the researcher takes, participant or non-participant. Before describing how the observation was undertaken in this study, I now detail the setting and population.

3.5 Setting and Population

The main "site" and setting of this study was Twitter, a Web 2.0 social media platform. The "population" in research generally refers to the group from which the participants are

drawn. I introduced social media and Twitter in 1.4. Twitter is a microblogging service, as defined by Schmid (2014, p. 3), used to blog about daily life and people typically employ it to communicate with the world and engage socially with other people. For anyone using Twitter, the home page contains a box (Home) that asks "What's happening?" (see Figure 3.1). The Twitterer[7] can then create and post a tweet in the box. Therefore, a tweet can be seen as a reflection of the present moment or what is happening at the time.
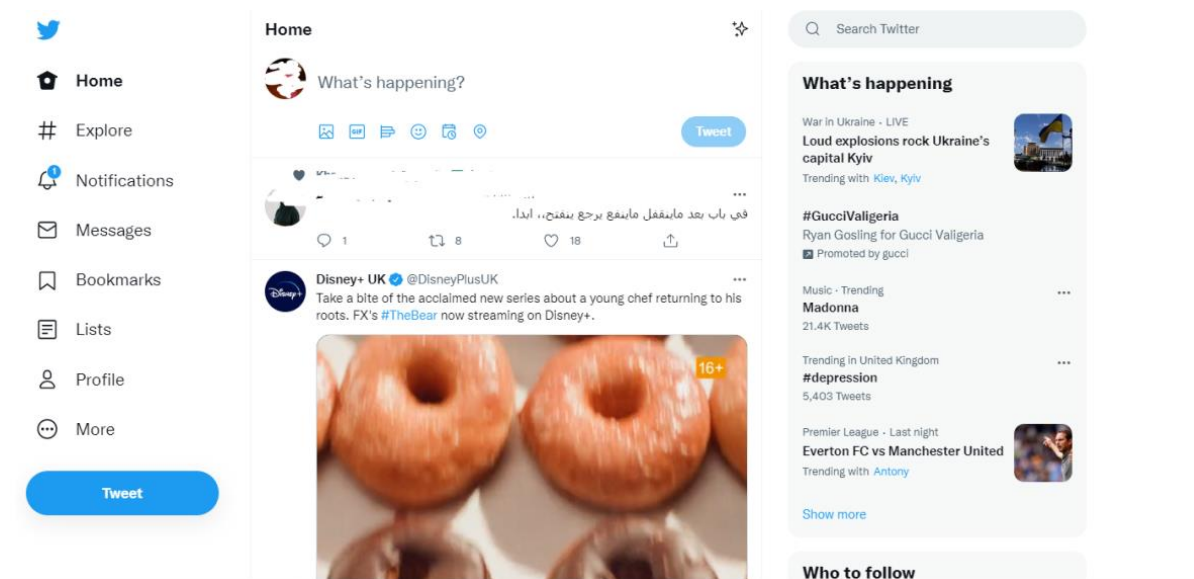
Figure 3.1. Twitter home page

The choice of Twitter, among other social media and microblogging platforms, emanated from my curiosity and my avid use of it prior to this study, in addition to its popularity around the world. According to Statista (2018), Saudi Arabia has among the highest percentage of Twitter users, at over 11 million. This was another significant reason for considering Twitter in this study. The popularity of Twitter among Saudis, specifically those in this study, reflects Ilbury's (2022) finding that socio-demographic and living experiences can influence the choice of social media. For example, the younger generation in Hackney (a culturally diverse neighbourhood in East London) tends to prefer Snapchat and Instagram over Facebook and Twitter.

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[7] A person using Twitter is sometimes called a "Twitterer" according to the Macmillan Dictionary (2022), this being a noun for "a person who uses the microblogging service Twitter".

After deciding to explore Twitter in this study, I needed to identify participants who were using it. I used Google Forms to identify and recruit the sample of participants. I distributed the forms through Saudi communities in WhatsApp groups and through colleagues among their networks, explaining the research aims (prior to the shift in topic, this was about language choices). The inclusion criteria were stated clearly in these forms as follows:

1. Being a Twitter user
2. Having a public Twitter account
3. Being a Saudi PhD student in the UK

Thus, I employed "snowball sampling", a convenience approach, identifying a number of participants who would then help recruit others. I obtained 50 responses on Google Forms from Saudi academics in the UK who were willing to take part in the pilot study and gave me access to their public Twitter accounts. After surveying the 50 accounts, I identified 8 participants for the main study who were initially active on Twitter, some of whom I knew and others with whom I shared a mutual friend. Criteria number one above can be ambiguous as people use Twitter to brows and keep up to date with what is happening rather than tweeting. For example, the participants did not tweet daily during the observation period. Still, I was aware that they used Twitter through their replies to other tweets or engagements, such as giving likes to other tweets. However, these were beyond the scope of data analysis. I also conducted short interviews with some of the 50 who provided their information via Google Forms to see how Twitter interviews worked.

The participants in this study shared sociodemographic characteristics and living experiences. As can be seen from Table 3.1, there were eight participants, four females and four males. They were all from Saudi Arabia and were undertaking their postgraduate studies in the UK. They held posts as lecturers in Saudi universities and were in the UK on scholarship programmes funded by their home universities.

Pseudonym	Gender	City/Country	Discipline
Bushra	Female	Brighton /England	Science
Noura	Female	Warwick/England	Science
Duaa	Female	Newcastle-upon-Tyne/England	Humanities
Rose	Male	Belfast/ Northern Ireland	Science
Faisal	Male	St. Andrews/Scotland	Media
Ghasssan	Male	Newcastle/England	Humanities
Mohammad	Male	Newcastle/England	Science
Tariq	Male	Newcastle/England	Science

Table 3.1. Demographic characteristics of the study participants

All eight participants recruited for this study provided their consent in the pilot study to have their Twitter accounts made public (see section 3.7.1). Twitter policy highlights that if an account is made public, it can be searched and viewed by anyone. In undertaking the research, I adhered to Newcastle University's ethical guidelines, one of these being to ensure confidentiality and anonymity by giving the participants pseudonyms (see Table 3.1). The following section provides details of the methods used for the collection of Twitter data.

3.6 Data Collection

Various methods were used to collect data in this study. In terms of the Twitter data (mainly the profiles and tweets), I used a snipping tool application to screenshot messages. Snipping tool is an included window application that allows its users to capture screenshots of the screen and crop it.

For the interviews that took place on Twitter, I employed direct messaging, so the messages were already transcribed and simply had to be copied and pasted into a separate Microsoft Word document for each informant. For the observation notes, I used Microsoft Word and added notes to any screenshotted tweet. Further details are provided in the following sub-sections.

Data collection should address a set of questions. The main aim of this study was to explore how Saudi PhD sojourners discursively constructed their identities on Twitter. To this end, I gathered the profiles of the participants and their tweets, as well as conducting interviews and compiling observation notes. Twitter profiles and tweets were

screenshotted and saved in a folder (secure and password-protected on the Newcastle University Drive). I followed all the participants on Twitter and enabled Twitter notifications to keep up to date with what they were posting and doing on the site. I also made notes on their posts nearly every day (see 3.6.2). This was part of being reflexive and aware of my role as a researcher.

When I decided on Twitter as the research site and recruited the sample, the focus on the research was on the language choices that Saudi PhD students in the UK made when interacting on Twitter. For that purpose, I only intended to consider Twitter profiles and tweets, not other types of engagement, such as likes and replies. When the focus shifted later in 2020, there was no time to collect and analyse other types of data.

To explore identity constructions and offer in-depth insights, I needed to adopt a clear sampling strategy that would enable me to analyse a considerable amount of data. The participants in this study did not make changes in their Twitter profiles during the observation period. In terms of the tweets, there were over 300, which constituted a vast amount of data for a qualitative study, I employed what Skågeby (2011, p. 415) describes as targeted or selective data collection. This entails selecting specific data based on their relevance in answering the research questions, for example data that are demographically or topically relevant. In other contexts, this type of data collection is called purposeful sampling, used in qualitative research to select individuals and data that inform on and are related to the researched phenomenon.

This section reviews the methods used in data collection for this study. Reviewing these methods will highlight the advantages and disadvantages of their implementation and provide the justification for employing them. As previously stated, the research questions influenced the methods used.

3.6.1 Participant observation

As stated by Sercombe (2016):

> [The] ethnographic method is generally associated with grounded theory, i.e. inferences based on observed data, rather than a priori assumptions. Observation alone (i.e. without directly participating in the observed community) is based more on an etic or outsider's view of reality.

Sercombe explains that "observation" is the main method of ethnographic research and the researcher is an instrument of this procedure. Observation is an essential source of information for any ethnographic study and as such, it is a task that all ethnographers engage in (Gobo, 2008,p.5).

Therefore, participant observation requires the immersion of the observer in the culture and lives of the researched subjects; it is important to maintain a close but professional relation with the subjects involved in the research to obtain an adequate, reliable and unbiased picture (Frettman, 1998, pp. 34–35). Taking a participant role and engaging in overt ethnography involves dealing with many issues, among them ethical issues, but Gobo (2008) highlights another:

> In overt research, the ethnographer's presence is almost always obtrusive because it produces embarrassment, unease, stress and alarm in the community of participants. This happens at the beginning of the research, but it may persist until its completion.

To combat this second issue in this study, in which I took a participant role and conducted overt research, I conducted a pilot study (see section 3.7.1). This was useful in gaining access to the participants. Concerning the ethical issues, I adopted a reflexive approach (see section 0).

The setting of the observation in this study differed from that in traditional ethnography, which is usually conducted in person. As noted by Garcia et al. (2009, p. 58), observation in online research involves different strategies as the observer is taking part through a computer screen. Nonetheless, in such settings the observer can still have direct access to the participants. A technologically mediated environment such as Twitter provides direct contact with the social world that the ethnographer is studying. There are many websites, including Twitter, that allow non-participant observation. Thus, participant observation can be conducted overtly or covertly. The latter is what Pink et al. (2016) term "lurking", i.e. not interacting with the subjects. In covert observation, the observer conceals his/her identity or the nature of the research from those being observed, but this type of observation can give rise to ethical issues (Sveningsson, 2004). In contrast, in overt online observation, the participant observer explains the nature of the research and what he/she is observing. This could impact the natural behaviours of the observed subjects.

In either role, the observer needs to consider first what they are looking at and which perspective will enable them to find answers to their research questions. In this regard, Skågeby (2011,p.416) notes that the choice of whether to act as participant or non-participant observer in online ethnography should depend on the community under observation and whether the observation is being used as a primary method – as in this study – or as a supplementary method. Participant and non-participant observation both have advantages and disadvantages and the choice of one over the other needs to take account of the nature of the research and the perspective sought. In online studies the context and setting is delicate and thus many scholars advocate participant observation (e.g. Hine (2000); Garcia *et al.* (2009); Lee (2016, p. 34) as it has the potential to provide in-depth understanding of the observed subjects' experience in that world.

The nature of where and how the observation is undertaken is another matter to consider. For example, Gobo (2008, p.10) argues against carrying out an ethnographic study within one's own culture on the grounds that this could threaten the quality of the observation. An outsider ethnographer could observe things that an insider might see as a "natural attitude". Gobo (2008) discusses this in detail, highlighting three main differences between being an outsider and insider: natural attitude, language and being a native. In this study, however, I consider that being an insider did not necessarily weaken the quality of the observation. I was an insider as a member of the community being studied, but this could be deemed a strength rather than a weakness. The ethnographer normally looks broadly and then narrowly at a particular set of behaviours or phenomena. In this study, I started observing a particular group of Saudi PhD students in the UK, with whom I share a similar socio-cultural background (to a certain extent), predominantly in that we were all academic staff in our Saudi (home) universities and being funded by these universities to complete our postgraduate education at UK universities. These are aspects that can be used to define a community of practice, as explained in Chapter 2 (see section 2.3.1).

Therefore, this small group could be described as a community, sharing many characteristics. The foremost of these was language. As an insider, this could be seen as another strength as it saved time and aided understanding. There are different varieties (dialects) of Arabic and Saudi Arabic. Al Alaslaa (2018) examined Twitter use by Saudis and found that they typically employed dialectal Arabic as well as standard Arabic, which

is also a dialect but has a special status. This further reinforces the point that being an insider provided an advantage that an outsider might not have, due to being able to understand the dialectal or the standard Arabic language used by Saudis. However, while it is the case that being a participant and insider had advantages in this study, it is also important to acknowledge that being an insider could have increased the chance of biases arising in the research. In this regard, maintaining a reflexive attitude throughout the observation stage was key (see section 0). Reflexivity and reflexive practices require the ethnographer to be aware of any possible bias.

In this study, my participant role on Twitter was enacted as follows:

- First, I distributed Google forms in which I explained the main purpose of the research (at that time it was the use of English on Twitter) and asked Saudi PhD students in the UK, mainly those holding scholarships from their home universities, to provide me with their Twitter accounts if they were public.

- Second, I started to follow the accounts that met the requirements and were provided by their owners in the pilot study form (see 3.7.1).

- Third, I was followed by some of the participants and gained and maintained close contact with them (living and studying in the same city).

Following all the participants and being identifiable as an active user of Twitter was a strength in facilitating the participant observer role. However, the notion of what it is to be a "participant" is somewhat complex in the case of Twitter. At the time of the research, I was followed by some of the participants (six out of eight), which meant that they could read my tweets. The other two participants did not follow me, but my account was public so it could be searched for and viewed by anyone with a Twitter account (see Appendix A). Figure 3.2 illustrates the relationships between the participants and me in this study.
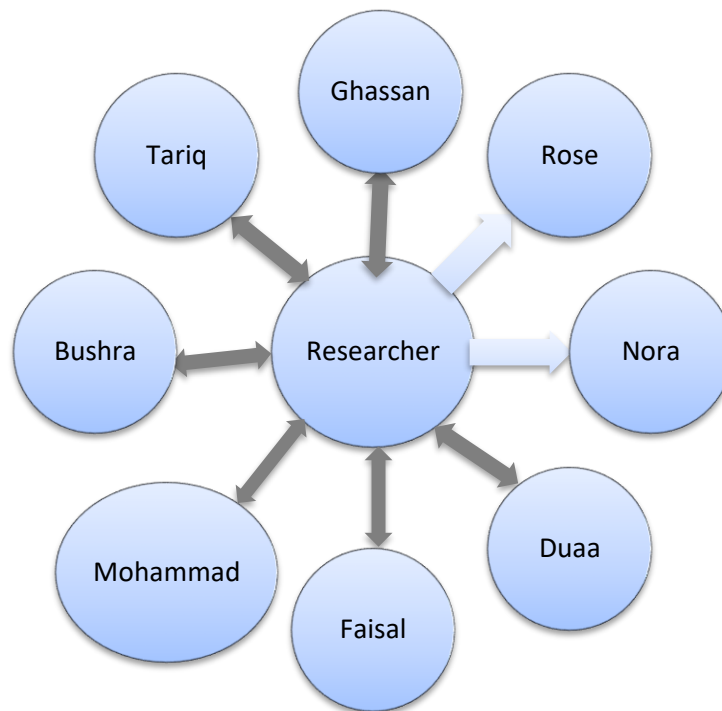
Figure 3.2. The relationship between the researcher and the participants on Twitter

The mutual relationship between the six participants and me on Twitter – following and being followed – is indicated by the dark grey arrows, while the one-way relationship with the two participants (Nora and Rose) who did not follow me is illustrated by the light arrows. Those who followed me could observe and see what I tweeted and could like and retweet. The same thing applied to those who were not following me, but only if they searched for me or accessed my account by looking at their followers. I could observe all of them and see their tweets, retweets and likes and could also mention them or direct message them (they all enabled direct messaging).

I kept my interaction with all the participants to the minimum to lessen any potential for bias and I also avoided tweeting a lot during the observation period, trying not influence them. However, I was not "silent" as this might have alarmed them, suggesting that there was something wrong. The interaction between those of us following each other comprised viewing posts. There was rarely any direct discussion or commenting on posts from either side.

During the eight months of observation, I enabled Twitter to send me notifications whenever the participants did anything on Twitter. I also undertook systematic observation, checking Twitter and the participants' accounts three times a day: morning, afternoon and evening. I kept observation notes in a separate folder for each participant, in which I would save screenshots of their tweets, as well as their Twitter profiles (see section 3.6.2).

To summarise, in any ethnographic study, the researcher takes on a specific role while observing, either as a participant observer interacting with the subjects or as a non-participant observer viewing the bigger picture from a distance. Interaction on Twitter can be performed in different ways, such as being an active user and tweeting on a regular basis, tweeting in trending hashtags, replying to or mentioning other accounts or tweets, and retweeting or liking others' tweets. I turn now to the notes I took.

3.6.2 Observation notes

When conducting online ethnography, Kozinets (2002,p.63) considers that there are two important forms of data collected:

> (1) the data the researchers directly copy from the computer-mediated communications of online community members and (2) the data the researchers inscribe regarding their observations of the community and its members, interactions, and meanings.

According to Skågeby (2011p.414), the three common methods used in online data collection are document collection from online sources and online observation and interviews. Document collection can be done through taking screenshots, a common method used in online ethnography (see, e.g., Alfaifi (2013); Albawardi (2018) Han (2018). Other ethnographic studies recommend retaining printed copies of small amounts of data, since these enable researchers to add notes in the analysis. Sebba, Mahootian and Jonsson (2012) and Hine (2000), for example, used printouts of websites combined with their observation notes, whereas Lexander (2012) took pictures of MSM texts. Such methods can be used to maintain the originality of the data. In this study, I used the snipping tool in the Microsoft Windows screenshot application to take still screenshots of Twitter data (profiles and tweets).

I also specified a notes folder in the OneDrive cloud software program on the university server and used Microsoft Word to enter log data of the screenshots, then added my observation notes. Using these tools in this study enabled me to keep the data secure. The notes would normally be recorded every day, except at the weekend, together with the dates and times of when the notes were logged, as shown in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3. Screenshot of observation note

In traditional ethnography, researchers collect data through observation and field notes, and may also record audio or video. In online ethnographic studies, observation is

considered the main facet in data collection and can be combined with screenshots, document collection and field notes. In this study, the datasets consisted of screenshots of the Twitter profiles, tweets and Microsoft Word logs combined with screenshots. I also used printouts of the screenshots in the initial stage of analysis.

Marwick (2014) points out that field notes are an important source of information and they become even more valuable after completing data collection as they help in re-calling what was happening at the time. Field notes were useful in this study in many ways but were especially significant in reminding me to be reflexive and transparent during the observation period. For instance, I recorded my communications with one of the participants who was a close friend before this study started, writing down what we talked about and being aware of and acknowledging the potential implications for what she tweeted and my interpretations (see Extract 6.1).

The screenshots were both secure and non-intrusive as a data collection method as they could be taken without any intervention. The notes were also effective as a means of recording thoughts and experiences, as well as being a rich source during analysis. After the observation period, I conducted interviews to enrich the insiders' (emic) perspectives in this study.

3.6.3 Interviews

According to Mann (2016,p.6) interviews often play a significant role in qualitative research. Four interviews were conducted with four participants via Twitter direct messages.

There are four common types of interviews: structured, unstructured, semi-structured and focus group. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study. This type is useful in qualitative studies, according to Bryman (2012) giving the interviewee a stronger voice than in the structured approach, which is one of the most important aspects of ethnographic research. According to Creswell (2013,p.226), qualitative interviews can be of significant benefit in ethnographic studies due to their flexibility and capacity to reveal the interviewee's (insider) perspective. Thus, interviews tend to play a powerful role in ethnographies. Indeed, Gobo (2008, p. 191) contends that while observation is the main

source of data collection in ethnography, interviews can play a pivotal role in clarifying the ambiguous findings that observation might bring.

In this regard, Weiss (1994,p.1) pointed out that through interviews researchers can see how people think, understand and interpret their perceptions. By the same token, Kvale (1996,p.1) considered that qualitative interviews are attempts to see the world from the interviewee's perspective. KYTÖLÄ (2012,p.121) and Kozinets (2002,p.65) also expressed the view that interviews can be a potential source of triangulation for qualitative data, as in this study, being deployed after collection of the tweets, profiles and having the observation notes. Such interviews could also be a powerful resource in revealing different insights from the participants, as in this study in which the participants were asked to reflect on their tweets, albeit the interview data were analysed together with the other data following the change in focus from language to identity (see 3.7).

Androutsopoulos (2008) recommends using different kinds of interaction with participants in online studies, such as online contacts or interviews, believing that this can provide the researcher with the benefit of experiencing the interviewee's world. The nature of the online interview is different from that of a face-to face interview due to the medium used. Synchronous interviews are those in which communication occurs at the same time, for example when both parties physically meet and respond to each other. Asynchronous interviews are characterised by non-immediate, delayed communication. Interviewing the participants through direct messaging on Twitter could be viewed as a mixture of the two, as the interviewer and interviewee can set a specific time and date for the interview, allowing synchronous interaction, or the interviewee may choose not to respond to the messages (questions) at the same time but later, interacting asynchronously.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the validity of online interviews. One such is the work of Davis et al. (2004), who concluded that synchronous (real time) interviews could be ambiguous and suggested that this could be overcome by employing asynchronous interviews. However, Crichton and Kinash (2003) conducted three case studies examining e-mail interviews, an asynchronous type, and also found some limitations, such as the lack of elaboration and empathic communication which may encourage responses in the synchronous mode. They also noted that this type of interview tends to make the interviewees more cautious and selective in their responses, since they

are typing rather than producing responses naturally, as in face-to-face interviews. Similarly, Leung (2005) found that online interviews might hinder communication and thus diminish the quality of the interview, whereas an offline face-to-face version could help participants elaborate and explain. Garcia et al. (2009) also suggest that offline interviews might be more advantageous.

Using Twitter direct messages in interviews, as in any online (written) interview, lacked the emphatic, immediate response that face-to-face interviews offer. However, it was a convenient method for both the interviewees and me, particularly if they lived in different cities, and also given our busy schedules. To mitigate the potential limitations of online interviews, I asked the participants to choose a date and time convenient to them and I explained that the interview would take 30–45 minutes. In this study, the Twitter interviews went smoothly and I did not face any technical problems. As previously noted, the interviews were semi-structured and followed a guide based on the questions I had in mind about particular aspects of their tweets. Before the interviews, all the participants were contacted and asked about their language preferences, and all chose to be interviewed in English. This was advantageous as conducting interviews via Twitter direct messages in English would make transcription a simple task of copying and pasting the text to a Word file. This would also reduce the chances of any bias during the translation of interviews from Arabic to English.

I conducted the interviews in June 2020, amid the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions, adding a further advantage to conducting online interviews. I also undertook some follow-up interviews with several of the participants due to the change in focus (from language choice to identity), although the first round of interviews (on language choice) also revealed interesting findings about identity, indicating that the two are intertwined. The following section illustrates the procedures of implementing these methods in this study.

3.7 Procedures

This section sets how this study proceeded step by step during data collection. It starts by setting out the pilot study and then addresses the main study, providing an overview of the research context, i.e. how and when I collected data, in addition to providing the rationale for each step.

3.7.1 Pilot study

A pilot study is considered essential in most studies. The aim of doing a pilot study is usually to establish the feasibility of implementing specific methods and tools, as well as identifying their limitations (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002). According to Bryman (2012,p.92), conducting a pilot study is a way of seeing how the proposed instruments work.

I conducted two pilot studies at different stages: the first was in the first quarter of the first year, 2019, aiming to test the research questions and methods, as well as to identify a sampling strategy, as recommended by Bryman (2012,p.95). In the third quarter of the same year, I undertook another pilot study to check the feasibility of the process after amending as necessary. Therefore, in the first pilot study, the aim was to find examples of English language practices of Saudis on Twitter, as at that time language was the main focus. Later on, towards end of the second year, the focus shifted to identity.

In the first pilot study, I was also seeking to reach potential participants. I initially had to search for accounts manually by identifying the followers of an account called "Saudi Academics", then accessing their profiles to check if they matched the criteria. Finally, I needed to examine each account to identify instances of English language use. Through this long process, I learned that I needed a clear and feasible sampling strategy and I should define specific criteria to allocate a purposive sample.

In the second pilot study, I defined the sampling criteria to be used. For this, I used Google Forms and distributed them through Saudi communities in WhatsApp groups and through colleagues among their networks. This type of sampling is called "snowball sampling", in which the researcher identifies a number of participants who then help in recruiting others. This was more convenient than the approach in the first pilot.

I learned a great deal from the pilot studies. First, it is important to have defined criteria of who to recruit and how in the study. Second, I learned how to use technology to help save time. For example, I learned that there is filter search option on Twitter that makes it possible for a researcher to refine a search of Twitter users. For example, an option in an advanced search of Twitter is to select specific data, such as searching for tweets by

certain accounts posted over a certain time, such as tweets posted by Twitter user A from May 2019 to January 2020.

Finally, conducting a pilot study is necessary for researchers to ensure that their research is feasible and to anticipate and prepare for any possible issues ahead of time. On Twitter, for example, a pilot study might lead the researcher to consider using a software package, such as NVivo, to save and analyse data, or to recruit a translator to translate Arabic tweets to English.

3.7.2 Main study

Having conducted the two pilot studies, I started data collection of Twitter profiles and tweets for the main study in May 2019 and completed the process in January 2020. During that time, I was systematically observing the participants on Twitter and taking notes (see section 3.6.1).

When I completed data collection, I noticed that the participants' profiles had not changed over the observation period, but some did change slightly after that, when they had gone through their viva. For example, one of the participants added the title Dr before her name in her profile. This indicates that Twitter profiles can be a semi-static presentation of the self. The tweets, on the other hand, were more complex and constantly showing changes in how these participants viewed the world and themselves in that world. Therefore, this observation was noted earlier during the main study.

I had to remind myself at this stage that the purpose of this study was to gain in-depth insights and identify patterns. Twitter is a mutil-modal data platforms where users can utilize different semiotics in making meaning. In this study there are multimodal resources used. The language in this study, was defined in its broadest sense that cover all semiotics. Some participants also deployed multilingualism, for example a little Spanish. I did not have any issue with the Spanish as it comprised only simple greetings.[8] For the Arabic content, however, I recruited a translator[9] (bilingual in English and Arabic) to translate all texts containing Arabic. Although I could have undertaken the translation

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[8] "Hola amigo" and "hola" were used by one of the participants during observation. As these are widely known, I did not need to recruit a translator.

[9] The translator had an academic background, had worked as a translator for many official organizations in Saudi Arabia, had lived in Canada for 10 years and was a fluent speaker of both Arabic and English.

myself as I speak both languages, I considered that seeking an external resource would lessen the potential for subjectivity and bias.

Undertaking qualitative analysis of the entire dataset was not feasible given the limited time available for the PhD. Therefore, I needed to consider a purposive sampling strategy to select tweets and enable me to address the research questions:

> This type of sampling is essentially to do with the selection of units (which may be people, organizations, documents, departments, and so on), with direct reference to the research questions being asked. The idea is that the research questions should give an indication of what units need to be sampled. (Bryman, 2012, p. 416)

Initially, when I started data collection, my focus was on language and the use of English. I sampled the tweets following the above recommendation, based on the research questions, besides other recommendations in some online studies. I thus focused on (i) tweets relevant to the research questions (at that time use of English in tweets) and (ii) tweets with hashtags.

When the focus of the study shifted towards identity, I had to refine my sampling method. Looking back at the research questions, I found it challenging to decide which tweets would relate more to the research questions as identity can be constructed and represented in many ways. Looking at Twitter research about identity, I found studies had addressed tweets in which there were hashtags. Therefore, the first sampling criterion I considered was tweets with hashtags. However, there were other tweets with no hashtag, but in which the participant shared something about themselves, such as tweeting about their views or self. Most of these tweets contained pronouns (I, we, me, my, us) as a way of indicating identification; some did not, but instead reflected a sense of engagement with the world and this also implied a sense of identity. Therefore, I surveyed the tweets and sampled them according to the purposive sampling approach, selecting units (tweets) related to the research questions on identity construction and representation. The challenge in dealing with tweets following the switch in research focus did not apply to the profiles.

Following that, I started to conduct interviews via direct messages (for sample transcript, see Appendix B). The four I undertook went smoothly but took longer than I anticipated. When my focus changed, there was no time left to conduct the interviews again. Also, I

found the interviews tended to reveal the participants' identities. I decided to conduct further follow-up interviews with some of the participants and did so in November 2022.

Dealing with Twitter and identity data required consideration of ethical issues, discussed in further detail in 3.9 and 3.10.2. Having explained the methods of data collection used in this study, I now turn to how the data were analysed. The following section explains the methods used and why.

3.8 Data Analysis

The dataset in this study comprised the Twitter profiles of the eight participants, their tweets during the observation period (from May 2019 to January 2020), my notes from Twitter observation and transcripts of the four interviews conducted on Twitter in June 2020 and follow-up interviews in October 2022.

Twitter is a multimodal social media platform on which users can employ different semiotics to make meaning. Thus, multimodal analysis can be one of the potential methods used to understand meaning making on Twitter. However, in this study I used thematic analysis to analyse the multimodal Twitter data alongside other datasets, including interviews and notes. Dealing with different data can be daunting but is also useful in obtaining in-depth insights and perceptions through social media and Twitter.

Choosing thematic analysis rather than other methods, such as multimodal analysis, can be justified on two grounds. First, the aim was to identify patterns in how Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK discursively constructed their identities. Thematic analysis is one of the methods most used to identify patterns and gain in-depth insights into data, which aligns with this study's exploratory purpose. Second, as stated earlier, when I started this study in 2018, it aimed to focus on the language choices that Saudi PhD students made in their interactions on Twitter, in particular code-switching into English. I sought to employ thematic analysis to identify the main reasons for participants' language choices. Having already started in that direction and established enough knowledge of how to implement it, with the change in topic later in 2020, there was insufficient time to go back and combine another method to analyse the multimodal resources. Using two different analytic methods can also be risky.

However, it transpired that thematic analysis as an approach was robust even after the change in topic given that I considered language in its broadest sense, analysing the multimodal data comprising tweets and profiles as parts of language (discourse) that the participants used to index their identities on Twitter, as well as my own notes. I also considered the data as parts of a whole rather than separating them during the analysis (in the second round after the change). The aim was to cultivate and enhance the ethnographic dimension, encompassing multiple realities (Hammersley, 2002). The research questions determined the methods used in both data collection and analysis. I found Braun and Clarke (2006) approach using thematic analysis to be among the common methods used in other qualitative research relevant to this study, primarily seeking to find patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is independent of theoretical frameworks, which means that it can be a flexible method. They provide detailed steps to generate themes in a rather lengthy process, starting with getting familiarising oneself with the data, reading and re-reading, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and finally writing a detailed report. Indeed, the analysis of the data took up the greatest part of the time available for this PhD thesis, from 2019 to 2023, particularly as it was a back-and-forth process.

During the first round of analysis, when the study focus was on language choices, mainly English code-switching, I followed these steps, but when the focus changed to how identities are discursively constructed on Twitter through language, I combined it with the grounded approach advocated by Charmaz (2006) in the coding process. Charmaz (2006) stresses the need for a comparative method and engaging with the data. While both Charmaz (2006) and Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise originality, the former uses "category" rather than "theme" to describe the result of coding.

Generating themes is a complicated process. A number of papers discuss this issue, such as Ryan and Bernard (2003,p.89) and Bryman (2012,p.580), who recommend different techniques to help researchers undertake thematic analysis. They highlight that researchers should pay attention to and look for repetition and repetitive patterns, since the repetition of certain concepts can generate a theme or set of themes. Moreover, Ryan and Bernard (2003) advocate the application of various criteria, such as metaphors and

analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors and theory-related materials.

For the analysis, I compiled all the data and started looking at how the participants constructed and represented their identities in their profiles, tweets and interviews, drawing also on my observation notes. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 summarise the data collected in this study.

Twitter profiles	Tweets	Observation notes	Interviews
8	60	60	4

Table 3.2. Volume of data in terms of data sources

Participant	Number of tweets
Bushra	6
Nora	10
Duaa	11
Rose	8
Faisal	5
Ghassan	6
Mohammad	9
Tariq	5

Table 3.3. Volume of data in terms of participants

In this study the process of generating themes in the datasets (Twitter profiles, tweets, observation notes and interview transcripts) was based on four main criteria:

1. Repetition: across the data, I found some prevalent themes that kept occurring and appearing in different words.

2. Relevance to the research questions and theories.

3. Use of linguistic connectors: other themes might emerge through the linguistic connectors used by the interviewees, mainly using specific words, such as "because" or "in order to".

4. Similarities and differences: some themes were identified through similarities and differences across datasets pertaining to the sample, for example, when tweeting about the PhD or about cultural religious events such as Ramadan and Eid.

There are many software packages used in qualitative analysis, such as NVivo, MAXQDA and CASDAS, which can help save time when managing large quantities of data. However, I had different datasets, not only tweets but also profiles, notes and interviews. Thus, I adopted manual analysis and coded the printed data using pens and highlighters. For example, during this manual stage, I noticed significant patterns of similarities, mainly around the participants' presentation of their identities as "PhD students in the UK" during the observation period. Manual analysis has its pros, which I consider outweigh the cons in ethnographic studies. Hine (2000) was among those who used this technique in her online ethnography. I found this method enriched my immersion in and engagement with the data.

Profiles are considered a significant element of data that show how participants construct their identities on the platform in this study (1.4.1). Participants' profiles can be viewed as a gateway to seeing how the Twitter user introduces the self, showing "who I am" in a semi-static way (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). This is illustrated in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.4. Faisal's Twitter profile

Faisal's Twitter profile shows how I undertook the analysis of profiles in this study. For the sake of confidentiality, I blurred the personal information given. I then numbered all the

parts that appeared on the participant's profile and wrote notes of what this part was used for and how it contributed to their construction and representation of their identities.

In Faisal's profile, No. 1 is the header or the background. Twitter users have the option of inserting a picture here or leaving it blank. No. 2 is the space for the profile image, where Twitter users tend to use images of themselves, but it might be pictures of anything else denoting their identity or something about their identity. No. 3 is the bio, where the user can insert information about himself/herself, up to 140 characters in length. Faisal introduced himself as a PhD candidate, giving details about his PhD subject, then tagged his UK university. He also described himself as a member of his Saudi university, where he works as academic faculty member. No. 5 provides a space where Twitter users can add links to other social media or websites if they which. All this information is important when looking at how the participants construct and represent their identities. Therefore, this step was done in the analysis of all the participants' Twitter profiles. In the profiles, I found patterns, with similarities in how they constructed certain identities, for example by using certain linguistic resources and hashtags.

I also collected the participants' Tweets over the eight months of observation. I analysed these in a similar way, looking at what I could see, moving from codes to themes, comparing the tweets with the profiles, and looking at my notes and tweets by other participants to see if they had anything in common, such as using PhD hashtags. I also integrated the interview transcripts in the process of searching for significant patterns in matters raised by the participants. Figure 3.6 provides an example of a tweet.

8 Things to remember when going through times.
#ThursdayMotivation #phdlife

8 Things To Remember
When Going Through
Tough Times:

1. Everything can - and will - change.
2. You've overcome challenges before.
3. It's a learning experience.
4. Not getting what you want can be a blessing.
5. Allow yourself to have some fun.
6. Being kind to yourself is the best medicine.
7. Other people's negativity isn't worth worrying about.
8. And there is always, always, always something to be thankful for.

11:46 AM · Jul 18, 2019 from Kensington, London

Figure 3.5. Tweet posted by Bushra

I analysed this tweet posted by Bushra in a linear process, starting by looking at what the participant posted from the first word to the end, where Bushra here opted to show the location (London). All elements were numbered and considered in the analysis. No. 1 introduces the tweet with the text "8 Things to remember when going through times", followed by two hashtags, #ThursdayMotivation and #phdlife. Below this, marked No. 2, she added an image of written text, the title of which almost replicated her text, with eight points. Finally, No. 3 shows that the participant opted to display the location of where this tweet was posted.

The analysis of tweets is complex as they incorporate different elements and a single tweet may relate to the construction and/or representation of more than one identity, indicating the complexity of the construct. Moreover, it was necessary not only to see what this tweet might tell us about Bushra's identity and how she constructs herself but also

how this might relate to the identities constructed in her other Tweets and those constructed by other participants.

In the first round of analysis, when the focus was on language, the themes were less complex and the interviews were supplementary. I started by analysing the Tweets and profiles and then moved on to the interview transcripts to search for the coded elements. Figures 3.7 and 3.8 illustrate the initial process of analysis and the change as the focus shifted from language to identity.
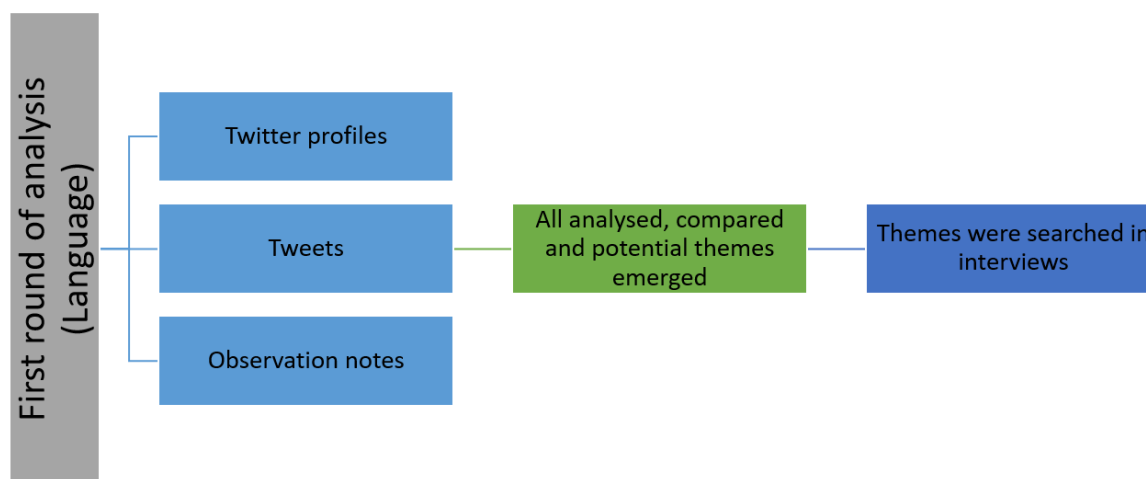
Figure 3.6. First round of data analysis focused on language

Figure 3.7 shows that in the first round of analysis I started by analysing the profiles, Tweets and my notes before the interviews, which I conducted later in June 2020. Before the interviews, I decided to stop and take a break from analysis to avoid the codes and themes found in the data influencing the interviews by narrowing the focus. Thus, when I started to write the interview guide, I came up with relatively broad questions. Figure 3.8 shows how the analysis changed to be more holistic in the second round, when the focus shifted towards identity.
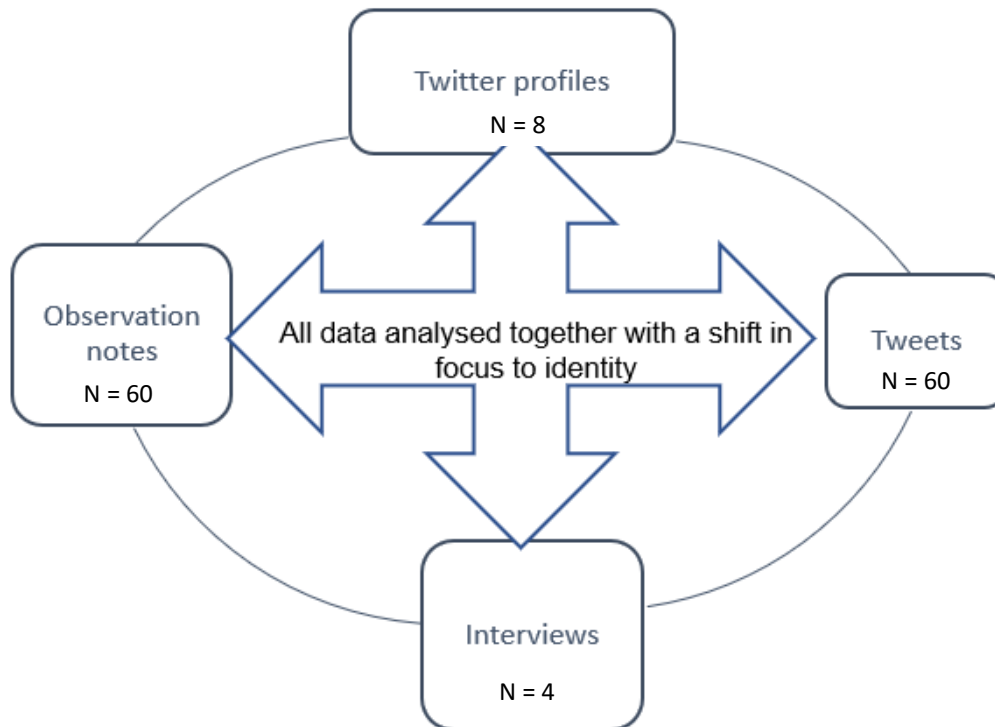
Figure 3.7. Second round of analysis focused on identity

The second round of analysis differed (see Figure 3.8) after shifting the focus of the study towards identity. Given that I already had all the data, including the interview transcripts, ready for analysis, I was able to look at all the data at the same time. This made it easier to employ the comparative method recommended by Charmaz (2006), which enhanced the development of in-depth insights and added to the online ethnographic dimension of this study.

Hence, I regard the change in focus and the long time spent on analysis to be a blessing in disguise as I was able to consider multiple realties at the same time instead of building theoretical assumptions based on each separate set of data. This has enriched the ethnographic dimension and the originality of the findings. Moreover, it enhanced the comparative scope as I was able to view the data as a whole and notice any significant patterns in terms of similarities and differences. Figure 3.9 shows an image of the printouts of data which I analysed manually. This was rather messy, but it was also rewarding.
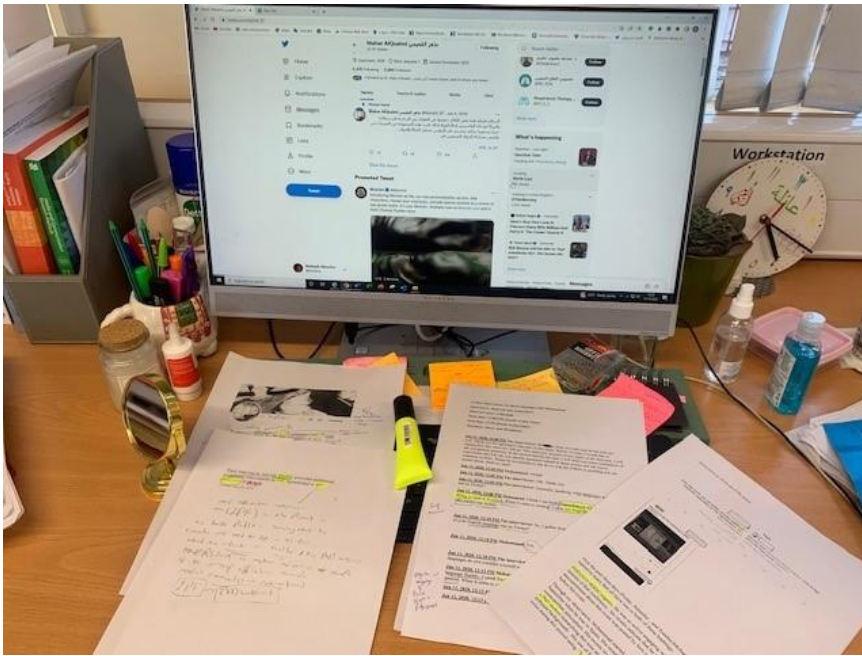
Figure 3.8. Printouts of data for manual analysis

The data in Figure 3.9 comprise the Twitter profile of one participant, a tweet with my observation notes and the transcript of the interview with the participant. These are pictured at the computer I used in the PhD cluster. To the right, just visible, are the piles of data to be gone through for the other participants in the second focused stage.

I followed Charmaz's (2006) grounded approach, coding in two cycles. In the initial coding cycle, I examined the segments of the data. For example, in a Twitter profile the segments include the bio, the profile image, the header (background) and the Twitter information (see, e.g., Figure 1.1 Twitter profile of US president, Joe Biden).

Thus, the analysis was open to what arose in the data. The process of generating the codes throughout the datasets was spontaneous and speedy to stimulate thinking. The coding of the Twitter profiles, tweets, interviews and my observation notes mostly reflected actions, as recommended by Charmaz (2006). This is essential to keep an open mind at this stage. As an example of analysing a profile, the initial codes that arose from analysis of Mohammad's bio were studying for a PhD overseas, a sense of belonging to Saudi Arabia and what he liked doing and tweeting about, as well as some other information, such as being a cyclist, a diver and a father. His bio reflected his sense of membership in the medical field. These codes were assigned as they appeared to be significant aspects

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of his Twitter identity in his profile. Moreover, some of these re-appeared notably in his tweets during the observation period, such as being a PhD student abroad and a member of the medical community (see Figure 3.10).
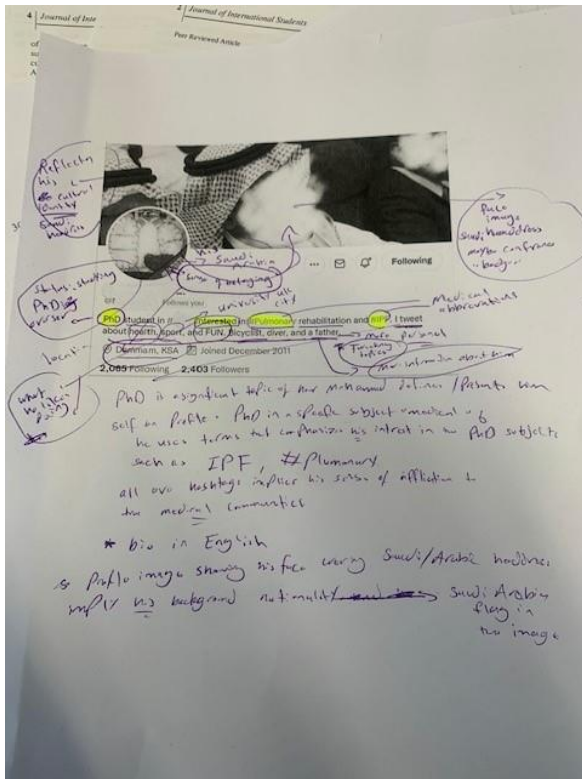
Figure 3.9. Initial coding of a Twitter profile

The same process was applied throughout the data with a comparative lens, as described by Charmaz (2006, p.54):

> Compare data in earlier and later interviews of the same individual(s) or compare observations of events at different times and places…[w]hen you conduct observations of a routine activity.

Thus, I would go back and forth to see which identities the various participants constructed and how in an iterative process of examining the profiles, tweets, interviews and observation notes.

The second stage is focused coding, which entails deciding which of the initially coded data are the most significant. Significance here is based on the criteria set out previously, namely frequency and forceful presence, repetitions, use of connectors and most importantly relevance to the research questions. This stage therefore differed from the

first stage as it required taking decisions and being focused, looking the big picture and trying to identify which initial codes were the most significant and synthesising significant patterns in terms of similarities and differences into selective codes that would make it possible to see potential themes.

This stage was non-linear and required me to move back and forth within and between different data for the same person and others, comparing the extent of similarity or difference in the most significant initial codes and asking questions such as "What does this indicate?" and "What does it mean?". At this stage, the surface of the desk was no longer large enough. I lay all the documents on the floor and used sticky notes to highlight the most significant initial codes (see Figure 3.11). This was the stage in which the potential themes started to emerge.

Figure 3.10. Focused coding stage

For example, one of the significant patterns I noticed in this stage was the frequency of the PhD in the profiles, tweets, my observation notes and the interviews. This indicated that being a PhD student was highly significant in terms of how they saw themselves and how they wanted others to see them. More importantly, this was also coded in ways that

reflected different actional attitudes towards the PhD, such as being a hard worker or motivated. These will all become clear in Chapter 4 (Theme 1).

Figure 3.11 illustrates the messy, non-linear and complex process which resulted in the four main themes presented and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Spending the time needed in the online-ethnographic approach enabled me to see the significance of the themes as they re-occurred over time and how the participants' identities and representations evolved and changed, highlighting above all that identities are multiplex (see Chapter 6).

To conclude, in this section I have explained the methods and procedures adopted in this study to analyse the various datasets. In the thematic analysis, the coding was informed by a grounded theory approach.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Newcastle University requires all researchers to obtain project approval as a first step before starting the actual study. Ethical approval for this study was obtained in May 2019. It is necessary to consider ethical issues when planning research since:

> Ethics are important because they help prevent abuses and serve to delineate responsibilities. (Diener, 1978,p.1)

Working with online data is especially sensitive and requires attention to ethical considerations and preparation in the early stages of planning the research project (Creswell, 2013). Ethics in research aims to avoid any possible harm to the participants.

One step in achieving this is by gaining consent. Thus, after gaining ethical approval, I also sought consent from the participants at different stages of the study: consent was obtained for the pilot study and pre-analysis and again from the interviewed informants. Another consent form was provided for the main study. The consent form is provided in Appendix C.

In addition, I checked the Twitter privacy policy as I was analysing public Twitter accounts at the time this study was conducted:

> Twitter is public and Tweets are immediately viewable and searchable by anyone around the world. We give you non-public ways to communicate on Twitter too,

through protected Tweets and Direct Messages. You can also use Twitter under a pseudonym if you prefer not to use your name. (https://twitter.com/en/privacy/previous/version_16)

Twitter makes it clear to anyone opening up a Twitter account that public accounts can be searched and viewed (see Appendix A). There is another option that allows Twitter users to protect their privacy. They can opt for a non-public account, which enables the holder to accept or reject followers when they send a request to follow. As this study targeted public accounts, the ethical issue of accessing and viewing tweets was covered by approval from the service itself, in addition to having ethical approval from Newcastle University.

In the first pilot study, I aimed to address the four principles of ethical research: avoiding any possible harm to participants, gaining informed consent, respecting privacy and avoiding deception. This I did by distributing Google Forms to explain the study's aims to the participants. I also explained that I was looking only for public Twitter accounts. Those with private accounts could not take part in the study. The other requirements were stated clearly, namely that participants needed to be employed as an academic at one of the Saudi universities and be studying at a UK university on a scholarship programme. If they met these requirements and were willing to participate, they could provide me with their Twitter accounts, which would be kept confidential.

I received a total of 50 responses from willing participants. I started surveying their content to locate a purposive sample for the main study. Nine participants were chosen from those willing to participate and they provided their consent through Google Forms.

In the second stage, which was prior to the analysis, another consent form was given to the chosen sample. This form explained that I would analyse some Tweets and I might seek to interview them in the future. The participants were also provided with details regarding data collection procedures, as well as being assured of the confidentiality and privacy of their information.

Eight participants out of nine (four females and four males) gave their consent and the data for the one who did not were excluded. Any information that could show the identity

of the participants (name, image, Twitter accounts) has been concealed in the data presented in this thesis.

To sum up, ethics are essential and were given priority in this study. The four principles proposed by Diener (1978) were addressed through seeking approval and gaining informed consent in two stages, in addition to dealing with deception and privacy by explaining what the study would entail and how it would be conducted, and how data and personal information would be kept secure and confidential. I turn now to another critical issue, namely the ensuring the quality of the study.

3.10 Quality of the Study

In ethnographic studies, reflexivity is critical to ensure the researcher's trustworthiness, authenticity, self-awareness and integrity. Reflexivity is an ethical practice in which researchers engage by being aware of their position, biases and role in producing knowledge (Creswell, 2013; Pink et al., 2016). It is through reflexivity that researchers can show the relationship between them and the participants in the research, as well as how they address possible biases. Reflexivity is addressed in depth in 3.10.2. First, I consider the issue of the quality of the research in terms of two criteria applied in qualitative studies: trustworthiness and credibility.

3.10.1 Trustworthiness and credibility

In qualitative research, some scholars argue against using the terms validity and reliability in discussing the quality of studies since they carry specific meanings that are not applicable to qualitative studies. In this vein, Lincoln and Guba (2007) point out that in qualitative research reality is viewed differently than in quantitative research, namely as being multiple and socially constructed. However, Long and Johnson (2000) represent a different viewpoint and claim that "there is nothing to be gained from the use of alternative terms".

The ontological basis of this study is consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (2007) perspective. Moreover, this view aligns with theoretical frameworks related to the main focus of this study: identity. To address the validity and reliability of findings in qualitative research, many scholars, including Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) and Lincoln and Guba (2007), suggest using other terms that fit the underpinnings of qualitative work.

"Trustworthiness" is an umbrella term that can be used to refer to criteria such as transferability, credibility and dependability.

In terms of credibility, Lincoln and Guba (2007) advocate "prolonged engagement" with the phenomenon under study. I have been engaged in Twitter since November 2010 and a decade spent in this setting can be considered prolonged engagement. In addition, I am engaged with the phenomenon examined in this study, being myself an international PhD student in the UK and from Saudi Arabia (as were the participants). I also spent considerable time interacting with the participants, both through observation as a participant observer and note-taking (see section 3.6) and having contact with some of them directly or through interviews.

Furthermore, I used methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility of the findings. I conducted interviews, took observation notes and observed the Twitter profiles and Tweets, cross-checking all of these to establish the findings. I addressed the issues of transferability and transparency by providing a thick description of what I observed and what the participants said and did and supporting the discussion of findings with illustrations from the data. For the interviews and any texts containing Arabic, I sought an external auditor to translate and check the interpretation.

Moreover, to ensure the credibility of the findings I also conducted a mini-post study, in which I observed the Twitter profiles and tweets a year after my original observation, targeting specific months to see if certain themes would again arise. These times were found to be significant in terms of how the participants construed their identities, for example at Eid or during Ramadan. I also checked their Twitter profiles after their graduation. These checks mostly confirmed the credibility of certain themes.

I should note that I agree with Lecompte and Goetz (1982, p. 55), who stated that "Attaining absolute validity and reliability is an impossible goal for any research model". This may be even more the case in online ethnography. Ethnography has commonly been criticised for being highly subjective, although this can be an issue in any research (Scott, Williams and Letherby, 2015, p. 5). However, in this study, I took all possible steps to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. In the following section, I explain the reflexive approach I adopted.

3.10.2 Reflexivity

According to Gobo (2008, p.50) reflexivity is a practice of being self aware of the position the researcher has and the impacts that this position might have on research. I concur with this view of reflexivity in ethnography and believe it is vital. Sercombe (2016) argues that being reflexive is a critical component of any ethnographic study. It requires researchers to know their position and relation with respect to the participants. Thus, reflexivity in this study is considered part of conducting ethical and principled research.

Davies (1999) believes that there is a relationship between reflexivity and objectivity since being reflexive entails some degree of objectivity in that it makes researchers more aware of their position in the field and their role in producing knowledge. However, the notions of objectivity and subjectivity in the social sciences and natural sciences are contested. Scott, Williams and Letherby (2015) discuss the intertwined and complex relations between the two and argue that reality cannot be detached from objectivity or subjectivity.

In discussing reflexivity, another matter that needs to be addressed is the relation between reflexivity and reflectivity and the extent to which these might be interchangeable. Mann (2016) is strongly against conflating the two, emphasising the importance of understanding the differences. Being reflective is about being critical and considering the steps researchers take. Thus, being reflective is a practice that occurs both during and after the study. Being reflexive involves different aspects, such as being self-aware, having an "internal dialogue", being self-critical and considering one's own positions and how they might affect the research outcomes.

Given the inherent subjectivity in qualitative research in general and ethnography in particular, the ethnographer should approach subjects using "reflexive" practice to minimise bias. Typically, in ethnography, this manifests as a rich, descriptive account of the ethnographer's relationships, experiences and roles throughout the study, with some examples to illustrate how their position might have impacted the researched subjects. In this study, I can explain my reflexive approach using various examples.

First, I illustrated my relationship with the participants in Figure 3.2, but it should be highlighted here that some of the participants are close friends and some are postgraduate research students at Newcastle University. Indeed, two were completing PhD studies in

the same field, which made them colleagues sharing the same office; thus, we occasionally met and discussed academic subjects and shared the space allocated for PhD students in the school building. Other participants included students I had yet to meet in person but were also completing PhDs at Newcastle University. I came to know them and the rest of the participants due to their willingness to participate in the study and provide me with their Twitter accounts when I was piloting the study. All the participants were living in the UK when this study took place.

Second, during the months allotted for data collection and observation, I tried my best not to affect the participants' Twitter practices; at this time, I continued to use Twitter and to tweet as usual but was more cautious. I was an active Twitter user prior to undertaking this study and when I asked the community to provide me with their accounts, I followed them to make it easier to observe and capture their Tweets. The feature of "following" someone on Twitter allows the user to see their activities, for example replies to their Tweets and retweets. When I followed the participants, some of them followed me back and would thus have been able to see my own Twitter activities (see Figure 3.2). In addition to the "follow" feature, Twitter has a notification feature allowing users to set up notifications for their preferred accounts. I turned on notifications for the study sample; thus, whenever any of the participants tweeted, I received a notification. This was of significant help in the observation phase.

In terms of potential biases, the risk would have been greater in relation to those participants who followed me than those who did not. However, this was unavoidable and it is not possible to determine whether it was detrimental or not. In addition, having a public account meant that even those who did not follow me could check and see my Tweets and Twitter profile if they browsed their following list or searched my name.

To address the issue of my Twitter presence and influence, the participants were observed based on the permission they gave in the pilot study in November 2018. This occurred six months before the actual data collection, which started in May 2019. Then, after data collection, the participants were given another consent form to sign to indicate that they consented to the analysis. The aim of having this gap was to minimise the impact on them of being aware that they were observed.

Fourth, I implemented a diligent reflexive practice in my interpretations, especially given that my emic perspectives could potentially influence these as a member of the community under study. Being reflexive entailed reminding myself of my position as a researcher and most importantly, being integral in producing knowledge about this subject. Therefore, during the observation, I tried to minimise my activity on Twitter to avoid influencing or prompting the participants to tweet about particular things, for example tweeting about PhDs, since this was one thing we were all undergoing.

My relationship with some of the participants was another factor that I was always aware of when it came to interpreting what they tweeted. For those participants I had contact with, I kept taking notes of what we talked about and referred to our interaction in the notes I took whenever they tweeted. An illustration of that can be seen in Extract 6.1 (Observation note: Duaa, June 2019).

Lichterman (2017, p. 36) points out that reflexivity is about more than researchers being self-aware regarding their position and is not only a practice of asking how their social role might impact the subjects; rather, it should also ask how the whole experience could influence their claims and interpretations in the analysis. In this study, I followed Gobo's (2008) recommendation, describing my role and my experience working with the research subjects (see 3.6.1 and 3.6.2). As part of being reflexive and transparent, I would note that my familiarity with the setting was not based on recent experience established for the purposes of the study. I set up my own Twitter account in November 2009 and my decade of experience on the platform supports the positioning of this study in the field of ethnography. Indeed, having spent this time on Twitter made me a habitual "Twitterer".

When I embarked on my research, I had an understanding of how Twitter is used, for example what people use hashtags for, how people mention and address each other, how they enable the location and design their Twitter profiles and so forth. This knowledge could have influenced my view of what the participants did and how they interacted, but it is something that all Twitter users come to know after spending some time learning about the platform and its setting.

Being a long-time user of Twitter also enabled me to be aware of changing features, which could be considered a strength in this type of ethnographic research. Just like any other

social media platform, Twitter is constantly changing and developing its service. For example, Twitter increased the character limit for each post in 2017 from a maximum of 140 characters to 280 characters, excluding any multimodal resources such as videos, images and GIFs.[10] It might be challenging for a recent or inactive Twitter user to notice these features and become familiar with the setting.

To sum up, being reflexive is undoubtedly an integral element of any ethnographic study. The rationale for reflexivity is to ensure self-awareness and how the researcher's position as an ethnographer can affect the participants and the interpretations.

3.11 Chapter Summary

To conclude, this chapter has reviewed the methodological framework of this study. It began with a discussion of the research design and the philosophical stance taken. The study would best be described as data-driven and purely qualitative. The approach to data collection was online-ethnographic and within that approach three main methods were used: participant observation of Twitter for eight months, accompanied with observation notes recorded electronically and interviews. Regarding the latter, I conducted four Twitter interviews to enhance the insiders' perspectives and represent their multiple realities.

The chapter has provided an in-depth description of the procedures undertaken in data collection, data analysis, in the pilot and main studies. Having justified the methods, I also provided illustrative figures to show how the thematic analysis and grounded theory approach were implemented in this study.

Moreover, the chapter has addressed the important issue of ethical considerations and the quality of the study, specifically concerning the trustworthiness of process and results. The chapter concluded with a discussion of reflexivity, aiming to show my diligent approach towards the participants involved and address the nature of any influence I, as the researcher, could have had in this ethnographic study. Having provided this detailed description of the methodology, the following chapters outline the findings obtained.

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[10] A GIF is an image or video stored in compressed file format. In Tweets, these are often humorous or mocking images, which are frequently animated.

Chapter 4. Findings: The PhD and Global Identities

4.1 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter outlined the methodology employed in this study. This included the approach and the methods used to collect the data over a period of eight months (2019 to 2020). The data analysis took a great deal of time, starting in September 2019 and continuing until December 2022. The data comprised Twitter profiles, tweets, interviews and observation journals.

The findings in both this and the following chapter are discussed in relation to the four main themes that emerged from analysis of the data. This chapter outlines the findings related to the first two themes: the PhD identity and the global identity. The selection of which themes to include in each chapter and the divisions between them was made based on the relationship between the themes, as discussed at the end of each of the chapters.

The first theme concerns the PhD identity. Section 4.2 discusses the meaning of this theme and how it emerged, responding to RQ1 and RQ2. The discussion is supported by a review of the data to establish the identities constructed by Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK in their Twitter profiles and through their tweets. The second theme is the global identity, which is discussed in section 4.3 following the same structure.

The final two themes related to RQ1 and RQ2 are covered in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 subsequently addresses RQ3, examining when and how these identities were constructed over time. This is illustrated with a timeline of the development of the themes together with a discussion of the significant patterns that emerged during my observation and the similarities and differences between the themes.

Prior to discussing the first theme, it is perhaps beneficial to re-state the research questions, as follows:

RQ1. Which identities do Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK tend to construct on Twitter?

RQ2. How are these identities constructed through the language of their tweets and Twitter profiles (e.g. images, text and display of membership in specific communities)?

RQ3: When and how are these identities constructed over the observation timeline?

4.2 Theme 1: The PhD Identity

For most Saudi PhD sojourners, the academic process of studying for a doctorate takes four years on average. Thus, these students are away from home and family for a considerable time. Many students go overseas to study for their doctorates, including (as in this study) to the UK. Apart from specific cases, sojourning in the host country is one of the requirements of the Saudi scholarship programme, which is administered by the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London. Students are normally expected to complete their studies in the UK and need to obtain permission (and funding) from the bureau to return to Saudi Arabia for holidays, which can be for a period of up to three months each year. In addition, any violation of these conditions (being outside the UK for a greater length of time or returning to Saudi Arabia without permission) can incur various consequences, including having an impact on their monthly allowance.

The experience of living in a different country and spending many years away from their home environment is an important factor in these students' ability to fulfil their main purpose, i.e. complete their PhD. This study found that being a PhD student was highly significant for the participants, forming both a lifestyle and an aspect of identity. I found this to be the most significant of the themes I examined in terms of its frequency and re-occurrence throughout the observation period. This theme illustrates that the identity of those studying for a PhD can be depicted online through certain practices reflecting professionalism. Moreover, the data demonstrate that the construction of the PhD identity is dynamic and in a constant state of flux. Consistent with the theoretical framework (see section 2.2), the findings suggest that identity is a multifaceted and complex concept that contributes to our sense of self. It encompasses various elements which determine the identity. These in this study are outlined as components. In the following section, I will present these through data collected from all sources: (i) Twitter profiles; (ii) tweets; (iii) notes from my observation; (iv) Twitter interviews.

4.2.1 The components of the PhD identity

This section considers the components of the PhD identity constructed by the participants. I first examine the construction of the PhD identity by examining the Twitter profiles of several participants, beginning with Ghassan.

Figure 4.1. Ghassan's Twitter profile

Figure 4.1 shows a screenshot of Ghassan's profile. This illustrates the many ways in which Ghassan constructs his PhD identity as researcher. In the profile, No. 1 is the header picture, which shows various objects on a wooden table: a notebook, pen, laptop and mobile phone. On the laptop there is a sticker (blurred to protect anonymity) showing his name in Arabic and English and giving his personal website link. No. 2 is the profile image, which shows him seated at a desk, perhaps in an office, with pen and paper, posed as if about to write. He is wearing the national dress and headdress, which indicates his background (Arab Saudi). Taking the header and profile image together and the similarities in the components they contain (notebook, pen, work context), they present his research and academic background with the suggestion of the activities of writing, researching and taking notes. These combined to construct his identity as a researcher.

His name is given in the section marked No. 3. He provides this in English and Arabic script. This is an interesting way of identifying the self in two repertoires: English and Arabic. What is even more interesting is that Ghassan gives only his first name in English but both his first and family names in Arabic. This implies that language plays a significant part in constructing his personal and social identity, consistent with (Riley, 2007): the inclusion of his family name in Arabic reflects his association of his family identity with his home culture, while it does not seem to be of relevance in English.

In Ghassan's bio (No. 4), he articulates his PhD identity explicitly. This links back to his header and profile image, which show objects used by researchers. The bio can therefore be read as related to his identity as a "PhD candidate". Placing this information first indicates that it is an important aspect that Ghassan wants others to know about him. This can therefore be seen as further emphasising his "researcher" identity, which is a component of the PhD identity. This is followed by further information concerning his interests, education, second language teaching and learning, which also seem to be related to his PhD academic identity and are linked to the topic of the PhD Ghassan is undertaking. He then moves to another area, describing himself as an "occasional Twitter-er", implying that he makes only intermittent use of the platform. This does not seem to be related to his PhD identity and it is more about telling the Twitter audience that he is neither an avid nor passive user of Twitter.

Further information is given about his location, the city of Newcastle upon Tyne in the North East of England, marked No. 5. There is also a link to his page on LinkedIn, a popular website for people to present themselves professionally and connect with others (Skeels and Grudin, 2009). This aspect again shows his professional identity in terms of what he does and where.

Thus, the most significant aspects of Ghassan's Twitter profile relate to his PhD researcher identity, which is constructed and represented through various resources, including his bio, the header and the link to his LinkedIn profile, the latter primarily representing his professional background working in a Saudi university. He articulates his PhD researcher identity both directly, for example stating that he is a PhD candidate, and less directly and in a more nuanced way, for example referencing his university affiliations both in the UK and Saudi Arabia, being a faculty staff member at a Saudi university and researcher in the UK and showing objects that depict a research background.

It should be highlighted that this construction of the professional PhD identity was present in the profiles of all eight participants in this study, as illustrated by the two further examples in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, which indicate that being a researcher and being professional (i.e. working at a Saudi university as an academic staff member) are part and parcel of the PhD identity they construct and represent on Twitter. In other words, this construction reflects a multiplex of identities: the PhD identity is the one that links the other

components together, as is evident from Ghassan's profile, in which he represented this identity explicitly and first in his bio; the researcher component then appears in both the header and profile; the professional Saudi academic component is portrayed through the reference to LinkedIn. This construction is in line with Lemke (2008) theory concerning the multiplex nature of identity that includes various components.

An interesting point is the coherence in Ghassan's presentation of his identity. This is in stark contrast to Duaa's and Faisal's profiles (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3, respectively), which reference the PhD identity, but do not carry it through consistently throughout, for example in their header images or profile pictures. Thus, it is much less marked than in Ghassan's profile. This is illustrates how identity can be constructed explicitly through linguistic and also-non-linguistic cues (Robinson, 2007); (Schreiber, 2015).

Figure 4.2. Duaa's Twitter profile

Figure 4.3. Faisal's Twitter profile

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 are similar to Ghassan's profile in terms of the bios, which clearly state the member is a PhD student and also tag their affiliations (UK universities), implying their sense of membership of academic institutions as PhD research students in the UK. Duaa also tags her home (Saudi) university, where she works (see Figure 4.2). In both cases, the PhD identity is constructed with components such as being a researcher and being a professional (working at a Saudi university as a lecturer). For the participants' there was a particular relation between being a PhD overseas student and their role as university faculty staff (their profession) since they were all on scholarship programmes funded by their Saudi home universities to complete their doctoral degrees overseas.

During the interviews, I found that being an overseas PhD student was highly regarded in Saudi Arabia. This was reflected in a follow-up interview I conducted with Faisal in April 2022, in which I asked him why most PhD students, like Ghassan and him, tended to disclose that they were studying for a PhD in their profiles. The exchange was as follows:

> *Interviewer: Okay. Do you think Saudis PhD student overseas feel that it is important to others on Twitter to know that about them?*
>
> *Faisal: Yes*
>
> *Interviewer: Why is it important to know that?*
>
> *Faisal: They believe that most Saudi are active on Twitter and thus help establish direct link and relationship with other Saudi at home about their PhD journey and specialty.*
>
> *Interviewer: Is it something important socially speaking in Saudi Arabia to be a PhD student overseas? What is the importance of that in society?*
>
> *Faisal: It is not important but appreciated.*
>
> *Interviewer: What do you mean by appreciated?*
>
> *Faisal: I mean that it (PhD overseas) has its certain appeal in terms of personality and quality of the person among many Saudis.*
>
> *Faisal: In many positive ways.*
>
> *Interviewer: So, you are saying that people in Saudi Arabia see PhD students overseas in a good way and it is attributed as being a good person?*
>
> *Faisal: A good person and future leader.*

Extract 4.1. Transcript of interview with Faisal (April 2022)

This exchange reveals the importance of undertaking a PhD and the associated identity, including its social significance in Saudi society and the fact that the students are happy to declare this as an aspect of their identities. Moreover, they emphasise it in their Twitter profiles. When I asked Faisal why it was important to share and raise awareness of being a PhD student, he noted that Twitter is a highly significant social media platform for Saudis as it helps them stay in touch with their friends at home, as well as keeping them informed of their "PhD journey". The students found Twitter a convenient tool to remain in contact with home and expand their PhD network. When I then asked Faisal about the benefits of publicising being an overseas PhD student, he identified this as being socially important, awarding privilege and being socially regarded as a "good person and future leader". This indicates that these PhD students are aware of the social privilege they gain through this title and also suggests that the PhD identity constructed through their Twitter profiles can be regarded as a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 2011). Undertaking a PhD is both socially and professionally important. It lends social status but is also part of their professional life as the Saudi PhD sojourners are employed as faculty in Saudi universities. Hence, this is another component attached to the construction of the PhD identity. Society views overseas doctoral studies favourably, considering the students to be highly educated. However, the social capital goes further, offering opportunities for career advancement and suggesting their potential as "future leaders". This is linked to

the theoretical framework, illustrating that expressing membership of certain groups is a manifestation of identity (Riley, 2007).

The construction of the PhD identity is a significant theme. It is one that is in a process of constant change and development and thus can be described as dynamic, appearing clearly in the tweets posted every now and then throughout the observation timeline. Marwick and Boyd (2011) discussed how Twitter profiles and tweets can be seen as two diffrient aspects given how they are used. While twitter profile tend to be infrequently changing, tweets are more dynamic. Developing this further, the participants constructed their PhD identity in tweets in a dynamic sense that reflected the constantly changing aspect of this identity while undergoing the postgraduate experience. In one of his tweets, Ghassan drew attention to this aspect when addressing other PhD students, as shown in Figure 4.4.
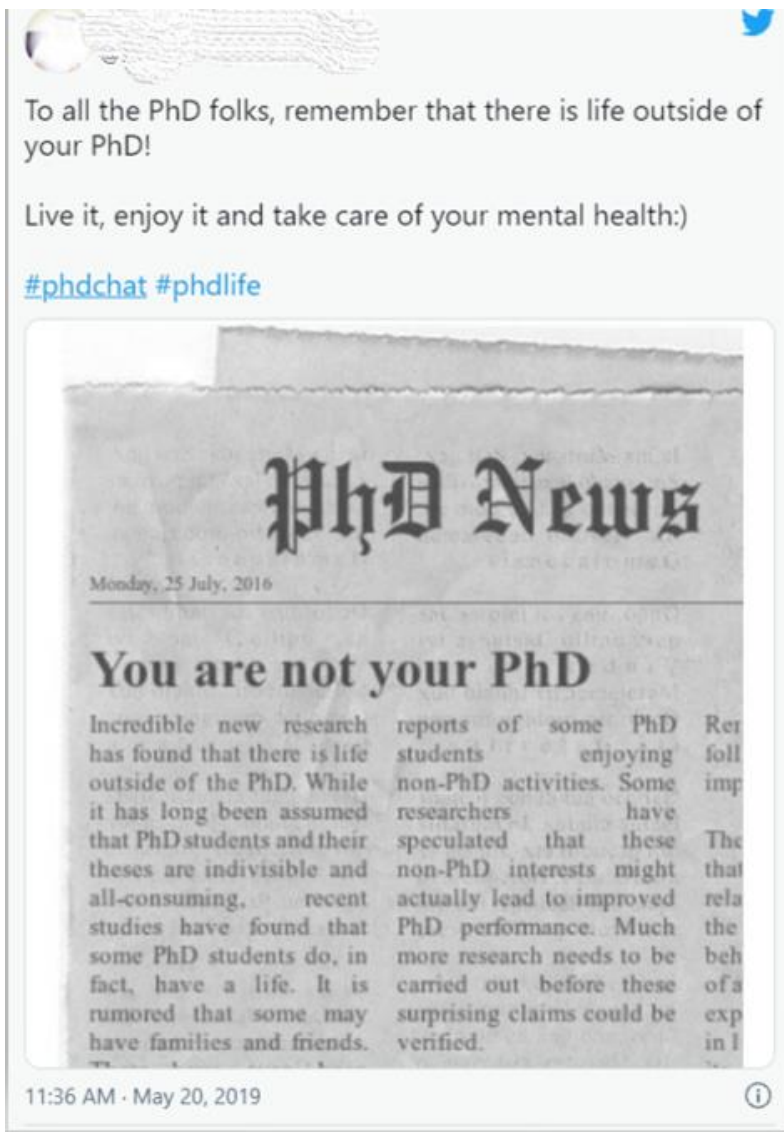
Figure 4.4. Tweet posted by Ghassan

Looking at the tweet, it is clearly addressed to a specific audience. Ghassan explicitly indicates this in "To all the PhD folks". He then advises his followers to take care of their mental health and wellbeing, remembering that there is a life outside their studies. This is an interesting tweet that implies the difficulties and stress experienced by PhD students. Ghassan demonstrates self-awareness and offers relevant advice to his audience of fellow PhD students. The tweet acknowledges that students can become overwhelmed, find themselves feeling isolated and forget that there are other activities they can engage in. Emphasising the need to enjoy life, Ghassan's tweet is a reminder to PhD students to overcome their stress by addressing it constructively and taking care of their wellbeing. In the tweet, Ghassan draws a picture of the PhD identity that shifts from being an aspect of

who he is (see Figure 4.1) to what PhD "folks" go through, as in a common experience. This shift in conceptualisation illustrates the dynamic nature of the PhD identity.

Ghassan addresses his PhD audience in two ways: first, the tweet is clearly directed to "PhD folks", which can be seen as an explicit form of addressivity (Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan, 2012) and a strategy of designing the imagined audience (Bell, 1984). "Folks" can be seen as an informal and friendly way of addressing people, here the PhD audience. By addressing his fellow PhD students in this way, he identifies with them, being himself a PhD student and one of them. Second, Ghassan adds two hashtags – #PhDchat and #PhDlife. These occurred in many of the tweets posted by the research participants during the observation period (see Figure 4.4). This again emphasises his sense of affiliation with the PhD community (Zappavigna , 2011), which he addressed informally as "folks", as well as being another way of designating an audience in a form of addressivity. Many PhD students use these hashtags to post about their PhD lives – the challenges, their achievements, complaints, tips and so forth – to others with similar experiences, as illustrated in Ghassan's tweet. Therefore, this tweet is an example of how the participants constructed their PhD identities in their tweets, showing a sense of affiliation with the PhD community and relating to other students as "one of you" through an explicit instance of addressivity.

A further aspect of interest is the headline of the article, "You are not your PhD". The title provokes interest and the article is presented as if it could be a scientific study. It conveys a message to PhD students that acknowledges their difficulties, which can sometimes lead to them forgetting to enjoy their lives. Here, Ghassan uses the article as a vehicle to construct part of his PhD identity as kinship and awareness of what other PhD students might encounter in their studies. He goes further to offer a tip to the PhD community with which he identifies (see Figure 4.4).

The PhD identity appears to be constructed dynamically and in a multiplex manner in these tweets, reflecting the components of PhD identity, and the changes that a PhD student goes through in the #PhDlife. Moreover, the PhD identity is shown to be an important theme, denoting how the participants see themselves and want to be seen by others. It also demonstrates an awareness of the significance of this phase in the students' lives.

A further example that illustrates the significance of this theme for the participants in this study can be seen in a tweet posted by Duaa when she was on a data collection trip in her home city of Riyadh, illustrated in Figure 4.5 and discussed in my observation note in Extract 4.2.
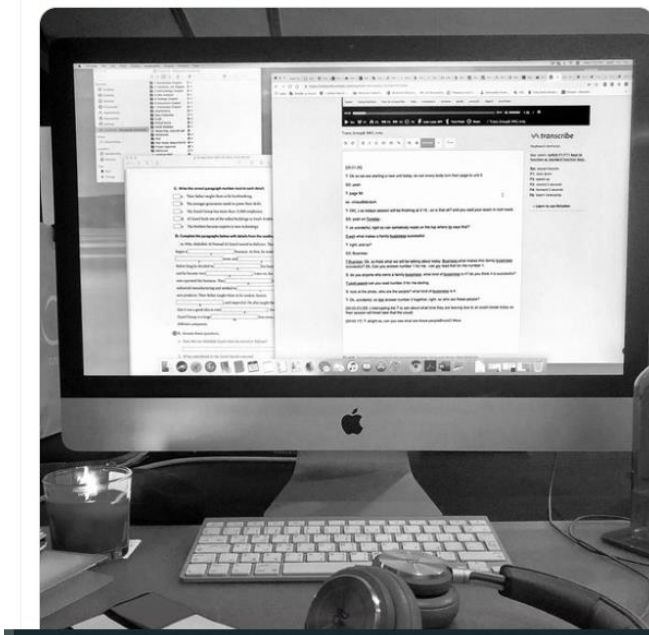
Figure 4.5. Tweet posted by Duaa

Duaa posted one tweet today when she was on a study leave for her PhD for three months to collect data in Saudi Arabia. During that time there was a big entertainment event organised by the General Entertainment Authority, a governmental sector established in 2016 to develop the entertainment sector in Saudi Arabia in compliance with the Saudi Vision 2030 launched by the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. At that time, it was announced as the biggest season in the Middle East.

At that time, Duaa was busy with her PhD work as she explained in the tweet; she spent many hours working on transcripts of classroom observation and only came up with 5 minutes. She sought help, asking for "tips and tricks" to help her make this task a bit easier and faster. She ended this tweet with two hashtags which do not seem to be related to each other: the first is #PhDchat, which seems to be related to the aim of her tweet seeking tips from the audience (other PhD students) who might have had similar experiences. The second hashtag is for the major seasonal event in Riyadh (the capital city), organised by the General Entertainment Authority. The best translation for this would be #Riyadh season events.

The presence of this hashtag in this tweet about the PhD implies to me that Duaa is so immersed in her PhD work, even when she is back home and in the middle of this season that she cannot enjoy herself and take a break. PhD life and work has made it hard for Duaa to enjoy this time. In the replies she

received to this tweet, her friend was very worried that she might face the same. But Duaa explained that interview transcription might be less problematic than classroom observation.

The whole tweet is constructed in a way to present the challenges of working on a PhD. Duaa positions herself as having a PhD identity and seeking help from this community. There are many resources that she draws upon to enact this identity, including English, Twitter hashtags, and images.

The image she adds shows the work she is doing and this is a way of emphasising the main theme: being a hard-working PhD student.

Extract 4.2. Observation note: Duaa (October 2019)

The tweet in Figure 4.5 and the observation note in Extract 4.2 relate to each other as both pertain to Duaa, a female participant. The notes I made of Duaa during the observation period demonstrate that her PhD identity is entwined with her PhD work and challenges in undertaking her research. This reflects a rather different aspect from that addressed by Marwick and Boyd (2011, p.116), mainly showing how Twitter can be used discursively to construct dynamic identities. This tweet about transcription issues reveals the effort and time it takes for PhD students to undertake their research. In this process, the PhD students face challenges but also expand their research horizons. In her tweet, Duaa stated that she explored many websites to help her with transcription but was still not happy and thus was seeking help from fellow PhD researchers who might have useful experience. Thus, in this tweet the PhD is constructed as working cooperative and collegiate identity. In relation to a process of trying to solve a problem concerning the research, seeking aid from the wider community of PhD students rather than depending solely on the self. She does so by adding the hashtag #PhDchat to reach an audience beyond her immediate followers and possibly find a way of making her task easier.

Both the tweet and the note, which reflects my participant observer understanding of her identity construction in this instance, lead to similar conclusions. Essentially, she attempted a task independently and when this did not work, she used her PhD researcher identity to seek ways and sources that would help her overcome the issue she faced, drawing on her identity as a student situated in a wider PhD community. Addressing the PhD community in this tweet is a way of Duaa constructing her social identity as a PhD student. She identifies herself as a PhD researcher dealing with a research issue and seeking help from PhD students with expertise using the hashtag #PhDchat. Here, she demonstrates her affiliation with the wider group, which aligns with the social identity perspective of Riley (2007, pp. 38–39), manifesting this through linguistic cues that show

her recognition of the research dilemma. She then emphasises this through designing her audience (Bell, 1984) and showing ambient affiliation (Zappavigna, 2011) with the PhD community by adding the hashtag #PhDchat .

This tweet also indicates that studying for a PhD becomes an integral part of a student's life, both within and outside the UK. The tweet in Figure 4.6 is another example that highlights part of the challenges that PhD students might face in their studies.

Figure 4.6. Tweet posted by Mohammad

Mohammad's tweet reveals another challenging situation, one he thinks is common as his use of present tense suggests it is something that happens frequently. PhD students might find themselves in a loop, reading many articles and struggling to write a sentence that they could be sure conveyed what they had read. This tweet received 12 likes (at the time of screen capture), all from other PhD students, which implies agreement and similar experiences. One of the replies from another PhD student also confirmed agreement, adding that the PhD student might then forget the source and have to go back and check

all 10 articles again. This reflects ambient affiliation (Zappavigna, 2011) in that both Mohammad and his followers engaged in this discourse, showing their affiliation with the PhD community. Mohammad's tweet implies personal experience – that he has "been there, done that" to put it informally. His tweet recognises such difficulties and seems to be reassuring other students that this might happen, so not to panic.

The tweet contributes to Mohammad's construction of his PhD researcher identity in showing part of what PhD students do in the research process, i.e. reading and building an argument based on what they have read. Importantly, the tweet suggests that PhD students can encounter a time loop – reading, writing, reading and so on – which is costly in terms of the time spent on this task.

There is another tool Mohammad uses to construct his PhD identity in this tweet, that is through showing a sense of association with PhD communities in #PhD_life. The use of the hashtag #PhD_life indicates that Mohammad is aware of which sections of society will relate to this tweet, as well as demonstrating his identification with that community and acknowledging that students may face this scenario in their PhD studies; hence, this tweet is designed to address particular audience. Mohammad also incorporates other hashtags: #Welcome_to_reality and #Coffee. While the former seems to support the interpretation that Mohammad views the situation described as normal and part of PhD life reality, the latter is open to different interpretations. It can be linked to the time the tweet was posted, associated with the widespread custom of drinking coffee in the morning. It could also reference giving energy throughout the day. Therefore, it is a drink to think about when completing the researcher's tasks of reading and writing. The tweet conveys that part of the PhD identity is the daily morning routine of drinking coffee and working.

These examples all relate to the ways in which the participants constructed the PhD researcher identity as important, one that played a significant role in their lives. Figure 4.7 illustrates a further example of how the participants constructed this identity through tweets.

Figure 4.7. Tweet posted by Rose

Figure 4.8. Quote tweet by Rose's friend

The tweet in Figure 4.7 was posted by Rose, a female participant. As can be seen, it contrasts with Mohammad's tweet about challenges in PhD life (Figure 4.4). This tweet is

about a happy moment of achievement, rather than challenge. Rose expresses her appreciation on being shortlisted for an international Expo award related to the subject of her PhD in the UK. Rose describes this recognition as an "overarching aim of my PhD project", implying that she has worked hard for it. Her friend confirms this, congratulating her and saying that she has earned this accolade (see Figure 4.8). In this tweet, Rose constructs her PhD identity in terms of achieving one goal of her PhD project. The tweet also depicts Rose's interests in terms of her PhD. The recognition she has received and her friend's response reflect her effort (see Figure 4.8).

The examples given demonstrate the identities the PhD sojourners constructed and the different components they used to do so. The PhD identity has various components and this identity is constructed in a multiplex manner. It is represented through a sense of affiliation with the PhD community and the participants' work and studies at their respective universities. The participants in the examples analysed reflected that sense in relating to the PhD community by tweeting about common experiences (see Figures 4.4 and 4.6). Thus, the researcher aspect is shown to play a vital role in constructing the PhD identity, mainly presented using PhD hashtags. The PhD life and PhD chat hashtags in the examples reviewed are a powerful means of constructing the PhD identity as a member of the PhD community through ambient affiliation (Zappavigna, 2011).

The participants constructed their PhD identities in many forms, for example as undergoing challenges, being overwhelmed, or being happy about achievements. Moreover, they revealed an awareness of what they needed to confront in their studies. I now move on to address the second research question, outlining how the participants constructed this identity, the resources they used and how.

4.2.2 How the PhD identity is constructed

In this sub-section, I examine how the participants constructed the identity represented by this theme, examining the resources used and then discussing how they formed their identities in terms of the extent to which they were static, dynamic, implicit or explicit (Kershen (1998); (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). For this discussion, I also refer to the data employed above.

First, in Ghassan's Twitter profile (see Figure 4.1), he combines several different resources to present himself as a PhD researcher and as a professional. This includes his profile image and the header, as well as his bio in which he exclusively uses English to construct the PhD identity. This was also found to be the case for all the other participants in this study. In addition, Ghassan employs several non-linguistic resources to emphasise his PhD researcher identity: his profile image of himself located in an office and his header depicting a notepad, pen and laptop. In addition, Ghassan constructs his PhD identity by referencing his profession, working at a Saudi university, represented by the link to his LinkedIn page in his bio.

Moving to his tweets, Ghassan constructs his PhD identity in various ways, such as addressing PhD students directly as "folks" (see Figure 4.4). The informal tone indicates that he is one of them and thus he constructs his PhD identity as being within that community. Ghassan draws on English particularly to address a serious issue and remind his fellow PhD students to focus on their well-being. In this tweet, Ghassan exploits multiple resources, including two hashtags (#PhDlife and #PhDchat) that illustrate his ambient affiliation (Zappavigna, 2011). These hashtags are used widely by many PhD students around the world and most importantly in many tweets by all the participants in this study. In Ghassan's tweet, the use of hashtags is strongly linked to and emphasises his identity as a PhD student who knows that undertaking a doctorate can be overwhelming. In haring his thoughts about it, he reflects his sense of affiliation with the PhD community, at the same time pointing to an implicit construction of his PhD identity (i.e. I am one of you).

The tweet text addresses two objects: the first is an explicit form of addressivity to "PhD folks" and the second is directly more broadly through two hashtags, #PhDchat and #PhDlife. The tweet is meant to provide advice to the PhD "folks" from one of their own, reminding them that there is more to life than the PhD and they should enjoy it. Both the "PhD folks" and use of the PhD hashtags designate the PhD audience (Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan, 2012; Bell, 1984) and contribute to the construction of Ghassan's PhD identity as one of them.

The hashtags in this tweet and others in which the PhD identity theme emerged are not used solely to categorise the tweets as related to a particular topic (i.e. the PhD). Instead,

they are repeatedly used to show that these participants are undertaking doctoral studies and discuss their experiences, which contributes to their PhD identity construction on Twitter. Besides, showing their ambient affiliation engaging in PhD discourse on Twitter. They present different aspects of the PhD identity: encountering challenges, seeking help, or sharing good news about their undertakings.

There is another important aspect that should be highlighted concerning how the PhD identity can be constructed. Nora, in her interview, explained that being highly educated entailed some constraints:

Interviewer: Do you think that the education level can impact the language choices people make on Twitter?

Nora: Umm I would say the education level could be one of the constraints that could limit your freedom to choose the language you want. It is not appropriate for a professor to tweet about funny topics. I rarely see that in our culture, although it is common in Western culture.

Interviewer: What about English in Saudi? Is it regarded as a choice of highly educated people?

Nora: Yes, especially among science academics who studies abroad. You will find them speak in English most of the time during the day.

Extract 4.3. Interview with Nora

This exchange conveys interesting insights from Nora about how those who are highly educated (a categorisation that can be applied to PhD holders) might be expected to tweet, that is in ways that reflect certain manners. However, Nora explains that this view is only in "our culture", meaning in Saudi Arabia. This suggests that the participants are aware that they should tweet in certain ways to meet society's expectations in constructing their highly educated PhD identity. Within these expectations, English is perceived to be a powerful resource that enables PhD students to construct their PhD identity. This relates to notion of a social identity constructed through language, in line with (Riley, 2007).

The construction of PhD identities appeared in diverse ways in this research. In some cases, this was done dynamically, as in the examples above using PhD hashtags, in which the participants tweeted about PhD life in general and situated themselves as a member of the PhD community (see Figures 4.5 and 4.6). In their tweets, both Duaa and Mohammad constructed their PhD identities by reflecting on an experience that might be familiar to other PhD students, using hashtags to show their relationship with these PhD communities and their status as one of their members. These examples show that the

PhD identity is in flux, changing as the participants learn about themselves and undergo different experiences in the process of studying for their PhD. This is aligned with Marwick and Boyd (2011) claim that dynamic identity can be portrayed through tweets and also participation in hashtags, as the examples show.

In other examples, the PhD identity was constructed rather statically, as represented by personal identifiers. This was primarily the case in Twitter bios and profiles, which stated the identity clearly as "a PhD student" (see Figures 4.2, 4.3 and 4.5). This representation did not change but remained the same throughout the observation, which implies that it is something the participants considered to some extent a fixed part of their identity during their PhD studies, which take four years on average. It was also articulated rather explicitly in their bios (Pathak, Madani and Joseph, 2021). This is also in line with Marwick and Boyd (2011) as the profiles did not demonstrate the dynamicity of the identity in the same way as the tweets.

Thus, the construction and portrayal of the PhD identity was complex, being either semi-static or dynamic (see Figures 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8 and Extract 4.2). This could be linked to the technological affordances of social media since bios and profiles generally do not reveal dynamic aspects concerning the self. In these parts of Twitter, the users are constrained in terms of the amount and type of data they can input. For example, the profile image generally contains a photograph or other picture, although it can contain an illustration of text; in all cases, it is an item of identification of some sort, although it can be left blank. The bio is limited to 160 characters used for brief descriptors (mostly text) to introduce the self to others. In this study, they were both used to construct a static identity as they did not change throughout the observation period for any of the participants, indicating that they represent fixed aspects of how the students portray themselves to others (PhD student in the UK, lecturer at a Saudi university).

In their tweets, the participants constructed the PhD identity by addressing different scenarios, including the challenges they encountered during their research undertaking. In the notes I made during the observation I identified significant patterns in the ways in which the participants constructed their PhD identities when managing various dilemmas. One example of these notes relates to Duaa (see Extract 4.2), in which I highlighted her use of PhD hashtags and English when seeking advice from PhD communities concerning

an issue with her research. My notes reveal significantly similar linguistic patterns in terms of how the participants tend to construct their PhD identity on Twitter drawing upon English and PhD hashtags. This suggests that the participants, despite having no relationship with each other and being in different disciplines, share idioms of practice when it comes to their PhD identity (Gershon, 2010), such as the sense of membership of the PhD community, implemented through PhD hashtags such as #PhDlife and #PhDchat, and the extensive use of English.

I found the social identity of PhD students in the UK was constructed through specific behaviours, both linguistic and non-linguistic. As illustrated above, these include (i) the use of "PhD" as a personal identifier, (ii) extensive use of English for tweets relating to various aspects of their PhD studies, (iii) the use of Twitter hashtags showing affiliation with the wider community. Being a PhD researcher can therefore denote a form of social identity practised by these participants (Riley, 2007).

In addition, the construction of the PhD identity included the participants designing their tweets for a particular audience (Bell, 1984). A clear example of this is Ghassan's tweet in Figure 4.4, which explicitly reveals his intended audience. Various other tweets were implicitly directed to a designated audience, either through discussing a certain topic or indexing the tweet using specific PhD hashtags. These all indicate that the participants were focused on a specific audience and that the construction of both their identities and their tweets tended to match their expectations of their audience and the social perception of how this identity should be constructed, in line with (Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan, 2012), (Riley, 2007) and (Gershon, 2010).

4.3 Theme 2: The Global Identity

As noted in the introduction (see section 1.2), the participants in this study had the advantage of being able to study abroad, which enabled them to broaden their horizons and learn about diverse cultures (Lewin, 2009). A number of studies have targeted different groups of international students to show how the study abroad experience enhances intercultural communication and perceptions of globalisation (see, e.g. Kim (2001); Schartner and Young (2020).

In this study, I found the global identity to be another significant theme relating to how the participants constructed themselves on Twitter.

4.3.1 The components of the global identity

The global identity was illustrated through the participants showing how they perceived and interacted with and within different cultures due to living in the UK during their PhD studies. Being global entails continuous development, meaning that being global citizen is a process and its changing nature is a component of the theme. This theme emerged in the study in several ways, as illustrated by the following discussion and examples from the data. The example given in Figure 4.9 pertains to Mohammad, a male PhD student.

See you soon #ERS2019 #ERSCongress hola amigo
) that's the limit of my #Spanish !

12:09 pm · 27 Sep 2019 · Twitter Web App

Figure 4.9. Tweet posted by Mohammad

The screenshot in Figure 4.9 shows a tweet posted by Mohammad to announce his participation in a conference. He starts in the first line of the tweet by using two formulaic fixed expressions, one in English and the other in Spanish: "see you soon" and "hola amigo". Between these, Mohammad adds two hashtags, indicating where he can be seen and later uses for the conference he is shortly to attend (see note in Extract 4.4).

The fact that the conference is being held in Spain explains his use of the Spanish greeting "hola amigo" (meaning "hi my friend"). Mohammad then explains that this is all he knows of Spanish. However, even knowing so little does not prevent him from making the attempt, which can be seen as a gesture showing a sense of affiliation with the country he will visit and the language spoken there. This linguistic use can be described as a multilingual practice, demonstrating his ability to draw upon different languages (English and Spanish), in addition to his first language (Arabic) if taking into account Gal's approach (2006). I argue that such tweets allow Mohammad to construct his global identity by

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referencing his physical mobility and using different languages (Aronin and Singleton, 2008).

In this tweet, Mohammad constructs his identity as a global citizen, being an international Saudi PhD student studying in the UK, who is also a participating in an international congress in Spain. Tweeting about his participation can be seen as way of showing his sense of affiliation to international organisations. I identified "ERS" as standing for the European Respiratory Society, which, according to its website, is:

> An international membership organization that brings together physicians, healthcare professionals, scientists and other experts working in respiratory medicine. We are one of the leading medical organizations in the respiratory field, with a growing membership representing over 160 countries. Our mission is to promote lung health to alleviate suffering from disease and drive standards for respiratory medicine globally. (www.ersnet.org)

Mohammad appears to be excited about this event and shows his openness to practising a small amount of Spanish on Twitter. The conference was organised by an international, mainly European-based, body, whereas Mohammad originates from a different, non-European background. However, this does not hinder him from being an active member of the international constituency related to the conference, which indicates his global background.

Mohammad was enthusiastic about attending the conference (which appeared in his activities on Twitter in September) and he posted many tweets from the event. My observation notes reflect this, as shown in Extract 4.4.

Over the past three days (Friday, Saturday and Sunday), Mohammad posted many tweets and replied to many that all have one or both of these hashtags: #ERS2019 and #ERSCongress. He was so active, engaging with other who shared the same interest of that conference. His tweets indicate that he is thrilled about participating. The first announcement about this event was posted by him on the 23rd of June, nearly three months before this event.

Through my observation, Mohammad started to post about this same event from the end of September when he was in Spain. His tweets demonstrated how involved he was in that global atmosphere. His tweets reveal how passionate he is about his job as ER and as a PhD student researching this area and excited to share his views with other people from different backgrounds. His use of Spanish is worth noting, and it appeared to be repeated twice during this period using "hola amigo'' and "Hola''.

Extract 4.4. Observation note: Mohammad (September 2019)

At the time he was attending the conference, Mohammad was active on Twitter posting about the workshops and the sessions he was attending, as shown in the thread of tweets

in Figure 4.10. In these tweets, Mohammad shares information on some of the workshops he was attending. The speaker (name and picture blurred for confidentiality) was a professor at one of the large US universities, indicating that the conference attracted international speakers from different countries around the world.

Figure 4.10. Thread of tweets by Mohammad

Looking at the tweets, in the first Mohammad asks an intriguing question: "What is in E-cig? Not everything is listed". This followed by the conference hashtag, #ERS2019. Mohammad then attaches an image of the lecture or workshop with the picture of the slides and the main speaker. Under this, Mohammad adds another tweet that contains a medical term (Pathogens), an emoji of a virus in green and then the term E-cig, an abbreviation for electronic cigarette. Throughout, Mohammad uses the hashtag and thus these tweets will be indexed under the content of the hashtag. Inserting this hashtag in his tweets can be considered a way in which Mohammad constructs his global identity through ambient affiliation (Zappavigna, 2011), engaging in a co-present discourse of the event with a community sharing the same interest. The first tweet (see Figure 4.9), together with the notes and subsequent tweets in Figure 4.10 indicate an open attitude towards being a member of the international community. His use of Spanish in the first tweet intrigued me and led me to question him further, resulting in the exchange shown in Extract 4.5.

Interviewer: Can you talk about this tweet? Why did you mix languages here and use English and then Spanish?
Mohammad: That's funny. I was going to a conference in Spain and wanted to joke about my limited Spanish. Even after coming back from the conference, my Spanish didn't change.
Interviewer: I noticed that most of your tweets about this conference were in English, was English assigned as the language for communication or delivering talks or seminars at that conference?
Mohammad: There were many languages used at the conference, but English was the main one.

Extract 4.5. Interview with Mohammad

In this extract from the interview, Mohammad describes his use of Spanish as "funny" and he mentions "wanted to joke". Hence, he was trying to be funny and humorous. This could also carry several other meanings, such as being happy funny, rude funny, or polite funny. However, in this context, I have the sense he means being friendly, showing an outgoing and funny person stepping out of his comfortable linguistic and physical zone (travelling to Spain) to participate in the event. I further interpreted his use of Spanish as denoting his multilingual ability, however slight. As part of his outgoing persona, Mohammad tries a little bit of a language that he does not know, showing that he can feel comfortable and belong anywhere. These all signal his identity, which resonates with the Fine's (2007) view concerning the cosmopolitan's ability to belong and blend in everywhere.

Moreover, in a follow-up interview with Mohammad, he explained how the experience of studying abroad made him more open, or as he put it "easy going" (Extract 4.6).

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about how you see the PhD experience (abroad in the UK)?
Mohammad: I have received my Master's from the US and getting a PhD from the UK allowed me to live a different experience specifically with differences in education and health care systems. For example, in the US, higher education requires students to attend regular courses and submit assignments, while in the UK it is more of self-paced and self learning. I was able to attend any training session I want. I am in health care but I have attended sessions related to phone applications for example. The health care system in the UK is very cost-effective and it is based on equal care for everyone, which fits very nicely with the governmental health care system in Saudi Arabia.
In addition to the mentioned above, my supervisor taught me many lessons in attitude and respect to others. He is very kind and always keen to help. I had extreme difficulties and he was always supportive and kind and help. This reflected on me deeply and now I am trying to be as good as he was with my students. Showing passion and love to my students and support them and help them learn better. Allowing open and easy communication with them.
I hope that wasn't too long. Happy to rewrite shorter answer.
Interviewer: Not at all! Do you think this experience has changed you?
Mohammad: It did! Not only in knowledge and experience but more toward being easy going with others and try to be simple and humble.

Extract 4.6. Follow-up interview with Mohammad

The exchange reveals interesting things about how the whole experience of studying abroad can expand both the global and knowledge horizons of sojourners like Mohammad. Mohammad gave me a detailed answer about studying in the US and the UK. He was able to see and experience different educational systems and find out more about the health systems (his field).

Mohammad reported finding the UK health system to be a better fit with the system in Saudi Arabia than the US system. He then moved on to talk about how his supervisor (in the UK) taught him many lessons. Mohammad shows great appreciation towards his supervisor and implies that the support provided might be one of the factors that enhances the sojourners' experience and is influencing his interactions with his own students. This shows how Mohammad's experience has changed him, making him more open and better able to communicate. Further, when I asked him if he thought that the experience had changed him, he answered with an exclamation "It did!", which implies his wonder at being asked the question.

Mohammad noted that the whole experience had changed him not only in terms of expanding his knowledge and learning but also how he engaged with others. This sense

of openness – being easy-going – recurred in the transcript, strongly indicating the change he underwent and the global identity that grew out of the study abroad experience. What he constructed and said in the interview can be linked to and aligned with the construction in his tweets about his global identity, travelling, participating and being an active member in international organisations (Fine, 2007). This not only concerns the identity Mohammad constructs but also how he does so, through showing affiliation with an international organisation and using a new language (Spanish).

This global identity aligns with Delanty (2006) in terms of the openness of the world view and is also in line with Lemke (2008) concerning the constantly changing nature of identity. Mohammad's global citizenship is enhanced by his experience as PhD student abroad as he explained to me in the interview.

A further example of how the participants constructed their global identity through showing a sense of openness can be seen in the tweet in Figure 4.11 posted by Duaa, relating to the New Year.

Wishing you all a happy new decade 🎉

8:14 PM - Dec 31, 2019 from London, England

Figure 4.11. Tweet posted by Duaa

I see many note-worthy aspects in this tweet, which Duaa posted on the last day of 2019, apparently from central London, as revealed by the video and the location given. The short video presented celebrations in various locations. This is a date celebrated all over the world with wishes for a happy New Year. However, until recently, such celebrations were of little significance in Saudi Arabia.[11] Unlike many other countries around the world, including the UK, it is not normally considered an official holiday. Due to my personal knowledge of Duaa, I was aware that she was planning to spend this time in London with her family and enjoy the New Year celebrations.

In this tweet, Duaa reflects her adaptation to another culture "wishing all a happy new decade". Duaa is one of the participants I know to have lived in the UK for a length of time and at different stages of her life. She attended a UK school (middle school) while her father was completing his PhD, subsequently returning to study for her Master's degree and finally her PhD. Duaa has a wide global background due to having lived in both Saudi Arabia and the UK. She embraces this through the location in her Twitter profile, which reflects both countries (see Figure 4.2).

Duaa was not the only participant who demonstrated her global background; most of the participants' profiles stated that they had lived overseas and tagged universities in the UK (or other overseas locations) where they had studied. An example is Tariq's Twitter profile in Figure 4.12.

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[11] Saudi Arabia uses the Hijri calendar as its official calendar. In 2021, the country counted down for the new year in an event organised by the Entertainment authority, an indication of the new global approach towards such events in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 4.12. Tariq's Twitter profile

This profile contains several interesting aspects that show how Tariq constructs his global identity. First, the header or background shows a picture of the Newcastle bridges, which are among the main attractions of the city. His bio also highlights his background, stating the degrees he has taken and tagging the UK universities. Tariq then highlights his transient state, living between Newcastle and Hail (a city in the northern region of Saudi Arabia). This is similar to Duaa, who also shows her location in her Twitter profile as being between SA (Saudi Arabia) and the UK (see Figure 4.2), as well as showing her academic qualifications from UK universities. All these examples show that being in the UK is part of how they construct themselves on Twitter. This also suggests that their educational background is part of their global identity, a point discussed further in section 4.3. The travelling aspect is also perceived to be one component that can enhance the global sense of identity according to Urry (2012).

However, it should be noted that globalisation is not limited to attending PhD conferences or cultural global events, or even studying or travelling abroad; it is also constructed by the participants in this study through reflecting an open attitude towards adapting new ways of living and thinking. This is illustrated by Nora's tweet in Figure 4.13.

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صايره انسحب من اي نقاش ممكن يعكر مزاجي ويستهلك طاقتي واقلل من الخوض
فيها ،، أسلوب minimalism جديد في حياتي .. أهدرت ساعات كثيرة في نقاشات
مأضافت لي أي (جودة) .. الهدوء الهدوء الهدوء ،، النعمة التي أتمنى أن تغشاني

Translation: I have started withdrawing from any discussion that can upset my mood and use my energy and avoid them. This style of minimalism is new in my life. I wasted many hours in discussions that did not add any (quality) to me. Calmness, calmness, calmness, the blessing I wish I could be enveloped by.

Figure 4.13. Tweet posted by Nora

This tweet reveals an approach recently adopted by Nora as a way of dealing with several issues, including spending time on fruitless arguments. The term "minimalism" is distinctive in several ways, including that it is the only English word employed and represents an approach not evident in Arabic culture until recently. The concept has a different name in Arabic, "Zohd", which implies simplicity and humbleness.Minimalism ("less is more") first appeared during the 1950s, primarily in relation to sculpture, being subsequently developed and adapted by many other fields. This tweet attracted my interest and I wanted to know more from Nora about her perceptions and how she came to be familiar with the concept. An extract from the interview is shown in Extract 4.7.

Interviewer: One more question for you: I'm just curious to know when you learnt about and started practising minimalism?   *Nora: I would say maybe after one year of my PhD journey. I was in a workshop on time management and the presenter mentioned about quality time and how to minimise any kind of distraction that can impact on your productivity or cause more stress. I started to minimise any discussion I considered irrelevant. It was the right decision. I also cleaned my house and removed any extra things that I didn't need. Kind of a minimalism house.*   *Interviewer: Was this the first time you had learnt about it?*   *Nora: Not really. I was familiar with the term, as I had watched a documentary on Netflix. There it was explained in contexts such as home decor and clothes style. However, I learned about applying minimalism in other contexts, such as time management, after the first year of my PhD, as I said before. I started practising the concept during my PhD journey as well.*   *Interviewer: Do you think it is a common or well-known concept in Saudi Arabia?*   *Nora: I don't think it is a common concept in Saudi Arabia. It is somehow known among the new generation, since they are more open to new Western concepts and have the ability to adopt new lifestyles.*

Extract 4.7. Interview with Nora

This extract is from a follow-up interview in May 2022, in which I asked Nora about her tweet. Nora found that this concept could be applied to her PhD studies in the first year, having previously only been aware of it in relation to home décor. Nora then started to practise this in her daily life. However, the concept remains comparatively unknown in

Saudi Arabia, as noted by Nora, except to the younger generation. This is significant, as it implies that Nora is a member of this new generation, with the ability to absorb Western concepts. Thus, her adoption of minimalism as a lifestyle demonstrates an openness towards differing ideas and views, as well as the ability to tolerate change and embrace new ideas. In the interview, she describes the shift she underwent in adopting a new lifestyle, being open to change and having the ability to undergo self-transformation, through which she constructed the identity represented in the tweet. These are all considered to be the main aspects of the global identity (Delanty, 2006). Thus, my examination of how the participants constructed their global identity reveals that it is related to a process of change and the ability to undergo transformation.

4.3.2 How is the global identity constructed?

Language is another integral part of how the participants constructed the global identity in their tweets. In this theme, English has a forceful presence, but so do other languages, including Spanish and Arabic. The cultivation of resources, both linguistic and non-linguistic, aligns with being a global citizen, as in Duaa's video of New Year's Eve, which can be seen as employing translanguaging, shifting between different repertoires and media (linguistic and multimodal resources, such as the video) to convey and express the self. Duaa constructed her global identity as a Saudi PhD student celebrating an occasion in London that is not widely celebrated back home in Saudi Arabia by employing these different resources in a single tweet (Garcia and Wei, 2013).

The global identities constructed in this study were dynamic in the sense highlighted by Darvin (2016, p. 523). They reflected the participants' interactions with the world, enhanced by the experience of living abroad. Their ideas underwent continuous change and their identities encompassed these shifts dynamically. The global identity is dynamic through its ability to adapt, transform and belong anywhere. The global identity found in these examples is often implied through the participants' construction of themselves as international members of society, participating in global events (e.g. conferences and celebrations) and adopting "Western concepts" (e.g. minimalism).

4.4 The Link Between Globalisation and PhDism

Following the above discussion of the first two significant themes emerging from this study, I wish to draw attention to an important correlation I found between the two, as

illustrated by Figure 4.9 (the Spanish greeting) and Figure 4.13 (minimalism). First, it is necessary to recall that these tweets were posted by two separate participants, which adds to the credibility and significance of this theme. The analysis of the tweets suggests that these participants demonstrate a global identity and open attitude towards difference. For example, Mohammad showed that he was a member of an international (mainly European) health organisation and emphasised his openness towards others in the interview. Nora reflected her global identity by demonstrating an open-minded approach and adapting to concepts she described as "Western" (see Extract 4.7).

A closer examination of these examples reveals that being a PhD student played a central role in developing this global identity. Nora herself highlighted this explicitly when I asked her when she had learned about minimalism (see Extract 4.7).This clearly indicates that undertaking a PhD and living as a researcher overseas (in the UK) played a role in building global and open attitudes towards differing perspectives on living. Thus, the experience of being an overseas PhD student expanded Nora's cultural horizons, allowing her to give me further examples of how she started to apply minimalism in different aspects of her life. It is also clear that she was content with this transformation, saying *"I know it was the right thing to do".*

A further example of how it is possible to engage and become an active member in different cultures is Mohammad's tweet, in which he constructed his identity as a global participant at an international conference. In interviews, Mohammad explained that he felt lucky to have the chance to spend time with native speakers, but he also commented that not all Saudi students feel the same:

> *"Most of us (Saudis) spend time with each other and only use English when we meet our supervisors. I was lucky to teach undergraduates and had some time to talk to native speakers."*

This conveys that his PhD and working in his field as a medical student enabled him to improve his English. However, not all Saudi PhD students are like Mohammad, particularly in terms of the ability to engage with others. I asked whether he considered himself bilingual or multilingual, but this quotation can also be interpreted as representing Mohammad's unique identity in being able to step outside his comfort zone and build relationships with native speakers in his temporary home. His tweets also resonate with

this observation, as they clearly show his openness towards different cultures. His tweet from the conference in Spain reflects Fine's (2007) perspective of the cosmopolitan's unique quality to belong anywhere (see Figure 4.9).

Being a PhD researcher can play a significant role in shaping the global identity. However, I have to agree with Mohammad that not all PhD students have the attitude characteristic of this identity; some lack an openness towards friendship or spending time with local students. This aspect is beyond the scope of the current study but may prove of interest to intercultural studies. Mohammad's tweet shows how he constructs his global identity through being an active member of an international team, even if he does not necessarily belong in terms of his origin (being Arabian rather than European). His remarks in the interview can be linked to this as he explained his global friendship circle.

The examples drawn from the data in this chapter indicate that both identities – PhD and global – can be held by the same people at the same time; that is, they are not mutually exclusive. The participants clearly indicated in the interviews that undertaking a PhD transformed their way of seeing and accepting (see Extracts 4.2 and 4.3). Moreover, they attempted to show and construct this in their tweets (see Figures 4.9, 4.11 and 4.13). This is a significant element of the global identity, showing the ability to demonstrate openness and engage in self-transformation (Delanty, 2006). It also aligns with the theoretical perspective concerning the constantly changing nature of identities (Lemke, 2008). This shapes what I describe as the "global PhD". Figure 4.14 illustrates the intersection between these two themes and their components, resulting in a new dimension of identity that combines both aspects.
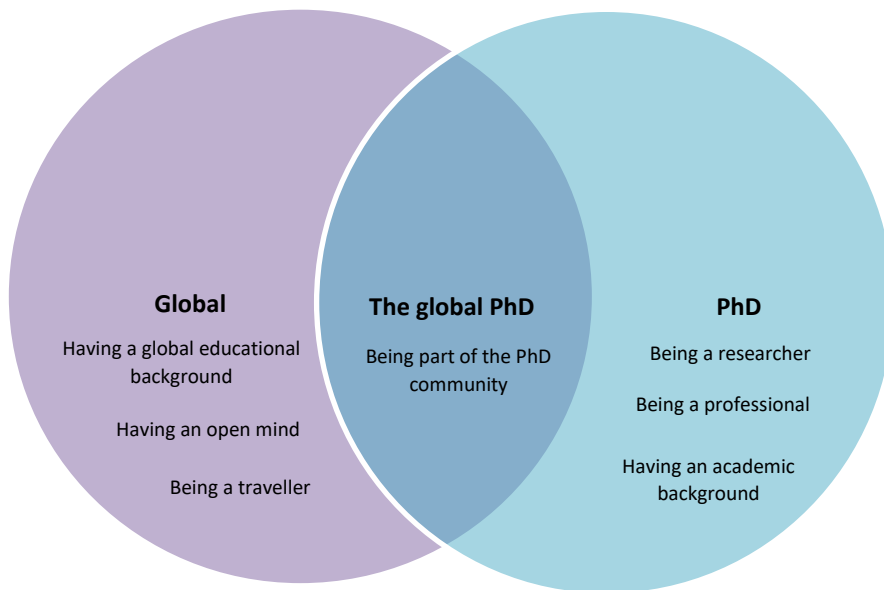
Figure 4.14. The global PhD identity and components

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented two themes that emerged from the analysis of different datasets: Twitter profiles, tweets, observation notes and interviews. The themes concern how the eight Saudi PhD students constructed their identities on Twitter while undertaking their PhDs in the UK.

First, I discussed the PhD identity theme, which was significant in terms of its frequency and importance to the participants. I examined the different ways in which these participants constructed their identities showing examples from the data. Second, I reviewed several examples reflecting the different realities incorporated in this study, drawing on my observations and interpretations, as well as what the participants said about what they do. Here, I cultivated the insiders' voices of the participants – a primary aspect of any ethnographic study.

Third, I established that these themes are based on their significance and presence in the data, notably in terms of the emphasis the participants placed on them in their portrayal on Twitter. In addition, I discussed the complexity of these identities, which appeared both

dynamic and semi-static, an aspect aligned with the theoretical background provided by Lemke (2008).

Fourth, I discussed the diversity of resources used by the participants in shaping their identities and how the construction of the PhD identity employs such resources to form the social identity. Among these main recurring resources were the use of English and Twitter hashtags, which can be linked to how identities are shaped through certain tools on Twitter, extending the works of Marwick and Boyd (2011) and Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan (2012) and Tagg and Lyons (2021) to cover the discursive construction of identity on Twitter by these PhD students in the UK. At the same time, I found that the semi-static PhD identity also appeared to be a form of social capital, as revealed in the interviews and the Twitter profiles (see section 4.2, Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and Extract 4.1).

Fifth, I established the global identity as the second most significant theme constructed by these participants. I found that this tended to be constructed through showing a sense of openness and acceptance of difference, along with self-transformation and adaption to different cultures (see section 4.3).

Finally, I discussed how both themes interact in a manner that allows the development of a theme at the intersection of the two. This also justifies discussing these themes within one chapter. The interrelation will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 6. Chapter 5 follows an identical structure to this to discuss the remaining two themes.

Chapter 5. Findings: The Saudi Arabian and Muslim Identities

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter is the second to present themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected in this study. The previous chapter reviewed two themes, the PhD identity and the global identity, both of which emerged significantly during the observation period. It ended with a section that demonstrated how these themes relate to each other. This chapter follows the same structure with regard to the other two themes, the Saudi Arabian identity and the Muslim identity. Each of these is discussed in a separate section with reference to relevant data. The final section shows the link between these two themes. Chapter 4 and this chapter address the first two research questions:

RQ1. Which identities do Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK tend to construct on Twitter?

RQ2. How are these identities constructed through the language of their tweets and Twitter profiles (e.g. images, text and display of membership in specific communities)?

Chapter 4 presented two themes that emerged from the analysis and this chapter follows the same structure in reviewing the other two themes, addressing the identities constructed by the participants on Twitter and how they constructed them.

5.2 Theme 3: The Saudi Arabian National Identity

Being a sojourner in a different country is a key aspect that defines this group, as is the fact that they share the same nationality. The participants in this study, while abroad, constructed this identity on Twitter during national occasions. The following sections review the components of the national identity and how the Saudi PhD students in this study constructed the various components.

5.2.1 The components of the national identity

In this section, I first examine the construction of the national identity by examining the Twitter profiles of several participants.
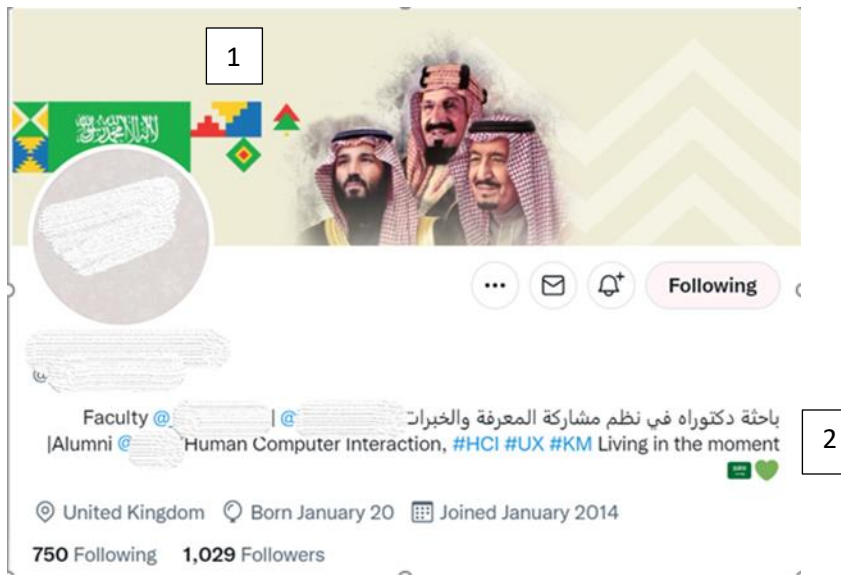
Figure 5.1. Nora's Twitter profile

The national identity is strongly presented in Nora's Twitter profile. The header image shows three members of the Saudi royal family (see No. 1), with the former king, Abdulaziz Al Saud (in the middle and higher than the other royal figures), King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, known by initials (MBS).This can be seen as part of constructing her national background since Twitter profiles are used to introduce the self to others (Robinson, 2007). It is therefore part of how the participants construct their identities on Twitter.

In Nora's case (see Figure 5.1), she gives an implicit indication of her feelings towards the Saudi royal family and her sense of attribution, which is placed in the heart of her Twitter header. The header also shows the Saudi flag as a further indication of her national identity. Nora also inserts the green heart and national flag in her bio (No. 2). These resources, both linguistic and non-linguistic, are all part of how Nora constructs her Saudi identity on Twitter.

In Mohammad's Twitter profile (see Figure 5.2), he signals his national identity through various non-linguistic resources, such as the way he is dressed in the header image (No. 1) and the inclusion of the Saudi flag (No. 2). Indeed, an interesting point about these profiles is that both participants constructed them using non-linguistic cues, implying the

complexity and playfulness of identity construction on social media (Seargeant and Tagg, 2014).

Figure 5.2. Mohammad's Twitter profile

In the header image, Mohammad appears wearing the Saudi male headdress, which is a signal that he uses to curate the national identity in his Twitter profile, in line with Marcella-Hood's (2021) findings concerning how the Scots represent their national identity in their Instagram profiles and posts through fashion and textiles. The flag is also a powerful symbol of nationhood and national identity.

During my observation of interaction on Twitter – and particularly in the week commencing Monday 23 September – I noticed that several participants posted tweets about Saudi National Day. My observation notes at that time revealed that most of the tweets in this week, especially those posted on 23 and 24 September, were about Saudi Arabia (see Extract 5.1 and observation note for Faisal, September 2019). As an insider (Saudi), I was aware that this is a public holiday, memorialising the country's unification and the royal decree proclaimed by the former king, Abdulaziz Al Saud, which changed the name of the country from the Kingdoms of Hijaz and Najad to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is known in Arabic as "alyoom alwatani", meaning "National Day". A key example of the tweets observed at this time is one posted by Nora (see Figure 5.3).

روحي وما ملكت يداي فداه 💚 وطني الحبيب وهل أحب سواه

6:15 PM · Sep 24, 2019 from Coventry, England
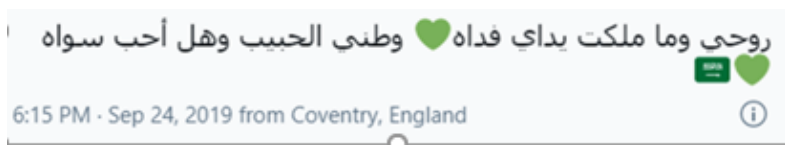
Translation: I would give my soul and everything I own for it (green heart emoticon). Who else would I love other than my beloved country (green heart and Saudi Arabian flag).

Figure 5.3. Tweet posted by Nora

Nora's tweet in Figure 5.3 concerning the Saudi National Day contains part of a national (Arabic) song filled with emotions of love and devotion towards Saudi Arabia (see translation), adding a green heart and the Saudi flag. Indeed, the green heart appears twice (in the middle and at the end before the Saudi flag). These non-linguistic resources (the green heart emoticons and the Saudi flag) are part of Nora's construction of her identity as a loving Saudi national (Alshenqeeti, 2016, p. 56) and reflect the identity constructed in her Twitter profile, which also portrays the green heart and the flag (see Figure 5.1). Nora also employs linguistic resources, for example using part of a national song to show attachment and love for her country. Moreover, the tweet is in Arabic (classic Fusha), which could be seen as a typical way of constructing the national identity, as noted by Suleiman (2019).

Another instance of a post concerning National Day is shown in Figure 5.4. This illustrates a tweet posted by Rose.

Happy Saudi National Day from Belfast 🇸🇦
#همة_حتى_القمة89 @drsamia as one of the best Saudi women example 🌿❤️ so proud of you.

11:00 PM · Sep 23, 2019 from Belfast, Northern Ireland

Figure 5.4. Tweet posted by Rose

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Rose posted this tweet on 23 September (Saudi National Day), when she was in Belfast (Ireland), as is apparent both from the location given and the first line of her tweet, in which she starts by wishing a happy National Day and then highlights where she is. Rose then adds a hashtag in Arabic (Himma hata alqima), which translates as "non-stop to the top", a phrase used by the Crown Prince in an interview in which he complemented Saudi youth.[12] This hashtag was trending on that day and was used by other participants in the study, for example Faisal (see Figure 5.4). Using this hashtag to echo what the Crown Prince said about Saudi youth can be seen as another significant element in constructing the Saudi national identity, specifically one that is aligned with "Saudi youth".

Rose also references another Twitter account that belongs to a popular Saudi doctor, Dr Samia Almoudi, who has been interviewed many times and is considered a renowned public figure. Dr Samia, as she is known, is an active influencer on social media in her medical field. Rose, also studying in the medical field, after wishing a happy Saudi National Day, expresses her admiration for this doctor, saying that she is "one of the best Saudi women example". This is consistent with Rose's professional PhD identity, discussed in Chapter 4 (see Figure 4.7), and can be given as an example showing the multiplicity of identities in that Rose constructed her Saudi identity building on her professional identity. Moreover, in combining two messages in the same tweet, started by wishing a happy Saudi National Day and ending by recognising Dr Samia as a great example of Saudi women and one in her field, Rose draws a line that connects her national identity and professional identity.

Rose's tweet differs from the one posted by Nora, mainly in terms of how she constructs her Saudi national identity in combination with her professional identity through the explicit reference to Dr Samia, whereas Nora constructs and conveys her national identity through emotional appeals, tweeting part of a national song and using emoticons (the green heart and the national flag).

Rose's tweet was posted from a Saudi community celebration event in Belfast. Such celebrations typically take place in many cities in the UK, mainly organised by the local

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[12] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fVtY11654w.

Saudi community. Faisal also posted tweets on that occasion (see Figure 5.5 and Extract 5.1).

To London ..celebrating our #SaudiNationalDay2019
#همه_حتى_القمه89
@SaudiEmbassyUK

6:02 AM - Sep 23, 2019 from Edinburgh, Scotland

Translation of Arabic hashtag: #non-stop to the top

Figure 5.5. Tweet posted by Faisal

In the tweet, Faisal shares what is happening as he is about to take a flight to London to celebrate Saudi National Day at the Saudi Embassy in London. Travelling to London from Edinburgh shows how important this day is to Faisal. In the interview, I asked Faisal about this visit to London and he confirmed its purpose was to celebrate the Saudi National Day.

Interviewer: Can you talk about this visit to London (referencing the tweet in Figure 5.6). What was it for? *Faisal: It was part of the Saudi Embassy celebration on the occasion of the National Day.*

Extract 5.1. Faisal's visit to London (Saudi National Day)

The tweet shown in Figure 5.5 bears out Faisal's construction of his Saudi national identity through his language choice in "our Saudi National Day". In the tweet, Faisal employs various resources, including English and Twitter hashtags, one of which appears particularly salient as it was observed in tweets posted by other participants (see Rose's tweet in Figure 5.4). This Arabic hashtag was trending on Twitter that day and shows how hashtags can be part of constructing the Saudi national identity and as already noted, referenced an interview with the Crown Prince. Its inclusion in Faisal's and Rose's tweets

likely indicates their alignment with the Crown Prince's view of the upward trajectory of the country based on the promise of youth.

Besides the hashtag, Faisal constructs his national identity through his word choice ("our"), which highlights that the national identity is part of the social identity by showing group membership of Saudi society.

Faisal's second tweet after arriving in London to attend the big event at the embassy is shown in Figure 5.6.

Tweet translation: *My homeland, the homeland of pride and lasting glory. May your joys last long my country (two Saudi flags). #HappySaudiNationalDay #SaudiNationalDay2019*

Figure 5.6. Tweet posted by Faisal

In the tweet, Faisal employs various resources. Linguistically, he uses classical Arabic, while the hashtags appear in English. Moreover, there are non-linguistic resources, such as the Saudi flag, which appears twice and adds a national tone to both this tweet and other instances (see, e.g. Nora's and Mohammad's profiles in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 respectively). These resources are all employed to construct his Saudi identity. First, the linguistic resources include Arabic lyrics taken from a national song, attributing the country as a homeland of pride and glory. Faisal adds two Saudi flags, which reinforce the national identity constructed through the use of the lyrics. Finally, he inserts two hashtags in

English about the Saudi National Day, one of which he also posted previously, *##SaudiNationalDay2019* (see Figure 5.6). The hashtags mark the occasion and the year. Faisal ends the tweet with four images taken from the celebration at the embassy.

The first one, to the left, is a picture of the Saudi Ambassador, Prince Khalid Bin Bandar (the Saudi King's nephew). He is wearing the traditional Saudi male dress and headdress and appears to be shaking hands with another man. There are some people behind the ambassador, who may be diplomatic officials and other professionals attending the ceremony. Clockwise, the picture to the right is of a hall in which many people are standing and beneath is another of a dining hall. Finally, there is a picture of Faisal standing outside the embassy.

The resources in this tweet together contribute to the way in which Faisal constructs his national identity as a social identity, celebrating National Day as a member of a group, i.e. Saudi nationals (Riley, 2007). The dominance of such tweets celebrating National Day more broadly during the participants' study abroad experience demonstrates their close association with home.

In the following section, I move on to address how the national identity was constructed by these participants and through which resources.

5.2.2 How the national Saudi identity is constructed

In the examples presented in 5.2, the participants employed various resources to construct their national Saudi identity, both linguistic and non-linguistic. Among the non-linguistic cues were the Saudi country flag and the green heart. The linguistic resources included the lyrics to national songs and language choice. The participants also incorporated hashtags, mainly the "non-stop to the top" motif, inspired by a phrase uttered by the Saudi Crown Prince in appreciation of the contribution of Saudi youth to the development of the nation.

The examples show the national identity is portrayed as social and complex or multiplex. For example, the tweets posted by Nora and Faisal (see Figures 5.3 and 5.6) construct the national identity linguistically using lyrics to national songs. This makes an emotional appeal and conveys the participants' social identity (Riley, 2007). In contrast, Rose's tweet

(see Figure 5.4) constructed her national identity differently, showing that the identity can be multiplex in nature, in line with Lemke (2008) notion of multiplying meaning. She started the tweet wishing a happy day and then explained what constitutes a good example of Saudi national women. For Rose the Saudi national identity can be constructed through being good professional, giving the Saudi female doctor as an example (see Figure 5.4).

The participants in this study constructed their identity in both Arabic and English. While the use of Arabic might be expected as it is the first language spoken in Saudi Arabia, English also appears to play a major part in their tweets (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5). This is striking as English is not the national (official) language and it is unlike the tweets of other people (not participants in this study) using the same hashtags. I find this to be a remarkable element that makes this group distinctive in how they construct their national identity. The presence of English in these tweets can be attributed to various factors, such as being in the UK. This was explained to me by Faisal in his interview.

> *Interviewer: (sent the screenshot of the tweet in Figure 5.6). The hashtags in this tweet were in English. Why do you think these were in English taking into account that they were about a special day for Saudis and Saudi Arabia?*
>
> *Faisal: Yes, the second line, it was my composition.*
>
> *Faisal: I think it has to do with the location of the celebration.*
>
> *Interviewer: In the UK?*
>
> *Faisal: Yes*

Extract 5.2. Interview with Faisal

English played a part in how these participants, studying abroad, constructed their national identity. This contributes to the complexity of identity construction linguistically, specifically the examples in Figures 5.3 and 5.4, which contrast with the "one language, one nation" precept promulgated in Saudi Arabia (see Suleiman (2019). The examples presented above illustrate that the national identity can be portrayed through different linguistic resources, not a sole linguistic resource. This practice resonates with translanguaging theory in that the participants depicted their identities through multiple repertoires regardless of political ideology concerning language and nation (see section 2.2.3).

To conclude, the theme of national identity was manifested by the participants through various resources but was particularly noticeable around the Saudi National Day, meaning

that this theme was time marked. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. The following section addresses the last theme that emerged from the analysis in this study.

5.3 Theme 4: The Religious (Muslim) Identity

This section presents and discusses the participants' construction of the religious Muslim identity. The construction of this identity is further evidence of the complex – or indeed multiplex – nature of identity, which sometimes appears to be intrinsically related to the national identity of the participants. It is worth noting that all the data related to religious identity concerned religious festivals such as Ramadan, Eid and so on, which is perhaps unsurprising and explains the significant pattern of similarity and consistency in how this theme of identity was constructed.

5.3.1 The components of the religious (Muslim) identity

This section considers the components of the religious identity constructed by the participants in the different datasets. The tweet in Figure 5.7 was posted by Ghassan in the first week of May 2019, two days before the month of fasting, Ramadan, started.

Figure 5.7. Tweet posted by Ghassan before Ramadan

First, it is necessary to explain that Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic or Hijri calendar, a lunar calendar consisting of 12 months. The Hijri calendar entered use after the Prophet Muhammad and his Muslim followers moved from Makkah to Medina, an event described as the "Hijra", which means "migration". The calendar is used to determine the dates of Islamic rituals and holidays, such as Eid, the month of Ramadan and the month of pilgrimage (Hajj). The month of Ramadan is a religiously significant time, during which Muslims practise fasting and engage in other Islamic and social practices that can be seen only in this month. In this section, I will review the tweets in chronological order to illustrate how the participants constructed their identities during this religious festival. This is important to show the importance of the religious festival and its progression in how the participants construct their religious identity. As an insider, I know that before the start of the month, or during the first week, Saudis and many Muslims will

repeat certain phrases or expressions that convey wishes for a good month or to greet each other. For example, they might say "Ramadan Mubarak" ("blessed Ramadan") or "Ramadan Kareem" ("generous Ramadan").

The first thing I noticed was the repetition of formulaic phrases and expressions, "Ramadan Kareem" and "Ramadan Mubarak", which appear in the hashtags (see no.1), as well as the image below the tweet (no.2). In that image, which looks like a card, Ghassan repeats his good wishes for this holy month, starting with "Ramadan Kareem" at the top of the message, which he adds in the format of a prayer asking that Allah be pleased and help them (Muslims) complete their fasting and prayers (see translation).

Ghassan uses what can be described as formulaic, fixed phrases, widely circulated on different social media platforms in Saudi Arabia before Ramadan. This is a social practice that I observe every year when my Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp posts become more or less similar to each other and are all about wishing a good fasting month, as is also observed on other social media platforms (see Figure 5.8).

رمضان كريم 🌙 ❤️

9:34 PM · Apr 23, 2020 from London, England

Tweet translation: Ramadan Kareem (crescent emoji) (red heart)

Figure 5.8. Tweet posted by Bushra

Although the tweet was posted after the observation period, it is a strong demonstration of how linguistic practices, such as the fixed phrase "Ramadan Kareem", and non-linguistic resources or symbols, such as the crescent moon, which also appeared in Ghassan's tweet, are associated with the specific time and are used in relation to this religious festival to construct the religious Muslim identity. These phrases are repeated and al revolve around one theme, namely expressing good wishes for the month.

In these messages, Arabic predominates as the main linguistic resource. This is a typical and expected practice highlighted by a multitude of scholars, including (Spolsky, 2003), who notes the strict association between Arabic and religious practices. However,

Ghassan then provides an English translation of the text, perhaps speaking to a non-Muslim audience and making them aware of this occasion. Thus, the construction of the religious identity on Twitter might be less subject to linguistic constraints than first supposed. Nonetheless, in his tweet, Ghassan indicates that certain practices or rituals are associated with this month, namely fasting and prayer: "*May he (God) aid us in fasting and praying during it"*.

The tweet shown in Figure 5.7 depicts the religious identity in many components, but mainly that this identity is socially and culturally rooted. This appeared clearly through using and repeating formulaic phrases used in religious festivals, reflecting Muslims' practices and counting the self within the group. Specifically, the translation of the passage in which Ghassan asks God to aid us suggests that the religious identity is also a social identity in that he is part of the (religious) group, as expressed through language and practice (Riley, 2007).

5.3.2 How the religious Muslim identity is constructed

The tweet presented in Figure 5.9 is another example that establishes the Muslim identity constructed through certain linguistic and non-linguistic resources, similar to those identified above.

مبارك عليكم الشهر أحبتي ، تقبل الله منا ومنكم صالح الأعمال

Translate Tweet

1:17 pm - 6 May 2019 - Twitter Web Client

Translation: May this month be blessed for all and may Allah accept our good deeds.

Figure 5.9. Tweet posted by Tariq

This tweet was posted by Tariq on the first day of Ramadan and again uses a phrase repeated in many tweets posted by the participants at this time. This indicates that this is a social and cultural ritual, being recited in a prescribed order and at a particular time. The use of Fusha Arabic is part of the ritual employed by the participants to construct their religious Muslim identity, as exemplified in Figure 5.10, which shows a tweet posted by Nora about Ramadan.

مبارك عليكم الشهر الفضيل #رمضان_2019

Translate Tweet

1:48 AM · 06/05/2019 from Glasgow, Scotland · Twitter for iPhone

Translation: May this holy month be blessed for all #Ramadan_2019

Figure 5.10 Tweet posted by Nora

The tweet posted by Nora on the first day of Ramadan is in Fusha Arabic, reading "Mubarak alaykom alshahr alfadheel", with a hashtag indicating the year and the month. In my interview with Nora, I asked her about this tweet and the use of Arabic.

Interviewer: Do you think that the religious occasion here has inclined you to use Arabic?

Nora: Yes of course.

Interviewer: Why do you think so?

Nora: Tweeting about religious topics in English is in appropriate in my opinion, unless you do have Muslim followers who speak English.

I would prefer to say it in Arabic to Arabic speakers. It is the greeting that we get used to hear since years ago.

Extract 5.3. Interview with Nora

Nora's response to my question resonates with my reading of these tweets. Nora clearly indicates that this is something that she regards as a habit, or as she puts it, something "we get used to hear". What is interesting here is that Nora uses "we" rather than "I", suggesting that she considers herself part of a (social) group. Following this structure, the language in these tweets is therefore part of showing affiliation and belonging to this group and hence constructing the Muslim identity.

Nora also explains that it is unconventional, or as she puts it "inappropriate", to use a language other than Arabic, except when you have Muslim followers who speak English. The construction of the Muslim identity here adheres to the conventional, unmarked form, strongly indicating that this theme concerns a social identity that the participants construct according to the norms and rituals familiar to them in relation to this social and cultural theme. Besides using a particular linguistic resource (Fusha Arabic), all these tweets also combine the formulaic phrases used at certain times, such as Ramadan Mubarak and Ramadan Kareem, which can be ascribed to the social and cultural roots of this identity.

Besides the use of Arabic, there is also another significant multimodal feature that recurred in these tweets concerning Ramadan, which is the image of the lantern. In Arabic, this is called Fanous Ramadan (see Figures 5.7 and 5.9). The lantern is used to decorate homes and streets during the fasting month of Ramadan. Hence, it is used in this tweet to depict the religious atmosphere and contributes to the construction of the participants' religious identity as a non-linguistic resource echoing common practice among the same social group (Muslims).

These tweets therefore suggest that the participants in this study can construct their religious identity, which is part of their social identity, through similar practices, such as employing linguistic resources (Fusha Arabic) and – but in a lesser role – non-linguistic resources (e.g. the lantern). The construction of Muslim identity can be characterised as semi-static, following certain protocols in employing linguistic and non-linguistic resources. This theme recurs on other religious Islamic occasions, such as the Eid festival. It is important to consider the similarities in the tweets to understand the development of this theme in terms of how the religious identity can be constructed as a social identity, as exemplified in the observation note and tweet shown in Extract 5.3 and Figure 5.9 respectively.

After fasting this month and at the first day of the following month which is known in the Islamic calendar as (Shawaal), Muslims celebrate the first day which is known as (Eid Alfitr)

It is a day of breaking fast and celebration, gathering, and showing joy. These periods like (Ramadan and Hajj) are announced based on moon sight and thus they cannot be determined before that. Most Islamic countries have official organizations entitled for such observations and this has its certain protocols and procedures. For these participants and most Muslims living in non-Islamic countries, they would follow the announcements of Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia declaring if the following day will be Eid or a completion of the fasting month of Ramadan.

The practice of moonsighting follows the guidance of the prophet Mohammad who said "Fast when you see it and stop fasting when you see it". It refers to the crescent of a new month. Eid is about sharing happy vibes and thanking God for the completion of the fasting month.

During the period of my observation, Eid Alfitr was on the 4th of June 2019, that is the first day of the new month called Shawaal in the Islamic calendar. Given that these occasions cannot be definite, Muslims have these anticipations and excitement before announcing these officially.

Extract 5.4. Observation note reflecting on Eid, June 2019

The Muslim identity is also constructed at other times related to religious festivals, specifically Eid, which is the first day of the new month after Ramadan and the first day for breaking fasting (see Figure 5.11).

عيدكم مبارك وكل عام وانتم بخير
#عيد_الفطر_المبارك_1440

Translate Tweet

12:20 PM · Jun 5, 2019 from West Midlands, England · Twitter for iPhone

---

Translation: May your Eid be blessed and may you be blessed every year. #Eid_Alfitr _almubarak (blessed)_1440

Figure 5.11. Tweet posted by Nora

This tweet was posted by Nora, who in an interview explicitly mentioned that using Fusha Arabic was part of what she was accustomed to doing. In that interview (see Extract 5.3), she referred to herself as part of "we", an interesting aspect of constructing her social identity. Looking at this tweet about Eid, Nora again uses the classic Fusha Arabic to express her good wishes for a happy Eid, referencing Eid Al-Fitr, a formulaic phrase considered to be the usual greeting.

"Kol a'am w antm b khair" is another phrase used at Eid, which translates as "May you be blessed every year". This appears in a tweet posted by Mohammad related to the second Eid festival, Eid Al-Adha (Figure 5.12).

Maher AlQuaimi عامر القمي
@Maher_87

كل عام وأنتم بخير وتقبل الله منا ومنكم صالح الأعمال
Happy Eid
#HappyEidAlAdha

9:38 AM · Aug 11, 2019

Translation: May every year be blessed with goodness and may Allah (God) accept from us and you the good deeds. Happy Eid. #HappyEidAlAdha

Figure 5.12. Tweet posted by Mohammad

Eid Al-Adha is the second such festival that Muslims around the world celebrate during the Hajj (pilgrimage) period. The second Eid in the Islamic calendar occurs in the tenth of the twelve lunar months known as "Thu Alhijjah". The first nine days before Eid are the Hajj period.

The Eids are significant and happy days of celebration. This is expressed, as the tweets show, in certain formulaic phrases, such as those posted by Mohammad and Nora. However, Mohammad's tweet differs from Nora's in how it ends with "Happy Eid" and the hashtag Happy Eid Aladha, both in English. Using English in this tweet with the hashtag that gives the name of the Eid is significant and implies that it is not specifically addressed

to Arabic readers, but also non-Arabic Muslims or non-Muslims. In the interview with Mohammad, I asked about this and his response is shown in Extract 5.5

Interviewer: Which language would you most likely use to tweet about new Hijri year or Ramadan?

Mohammad: I would use Arabic about Ramadan sometime I mix so my non Arabic followers knows that we are approaching a holy month. I don't think I have ever tweeted about Hijiri yeat.

*Mohammad: *Year (correcting the typo)*

Interviewer: Like this tweet about Eid the base (the big chunk) of your tweet was in Arabic, but also you switched to English? Can you talk about your language choices here? Why it was first in Arabic and then English? [I sent him the screenshot of the tweet.]

Mohammad: As I stated in my previous comment since the topic belong mainly to Arabs. Sometime I do it because it is easier for me. In this tweet for example I don't think I know how to write in English and you can tell by using a very simplified version of it when I tried to write it in English.

Extract 5.5. Interview with Mohammad

The interview was conducted in English. This extract reveals that his use of Arabic is largely influenced by the audience (Arab). Although he also uses English, he notes that it is easier for him to use Arabic. This is similar the point made by Nora in her interview (see Extract 5.3): both participants expressed the view that using Arabic would be expected in such tweets.

In the same interview, I asked Mohammad if he thought his imagining of the audience would influence how he tweeted (see Extract 5.6).

It is hard to say who is the egg who is the chicken. I think both influences each other. I intend to tweets and focuses on medical field and that what bring followers from the same interest. And since I am being followed by people from medical field in general, I tweet in English.

Recently a nurse that I worked with asked me to tweet in English because she follows me. I started to to [repetition] that more but sometimes I move back to Arabic.

Extract 5.6. Interviewee with Mohammad

Thus, these participants are aware of the audience when they construct their identities. Mohammad, for example, appreciates having non-Arabic and perhaps non-Muslim followers; one of them personally asked him to tweet in English, which explains why he added English and even named the Eid (see Figure 5.11). At the same time, Mohammad complies with the practices typical in the construction of the social religious identity by using formulaic expressions, wishing happy Eid in the accustomed way first and then addressing the non-Arabic audience in English.

The religious (Muslim) theme in these examples shows that religion is part of the social and cultural identity of these Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK. This is part of their identity, constructed diligently following social cultural protocols, as shown in these examples. The data analysed reveal notable similarities in the construction of this particular identity and they all imply that language and audience are significant in this regard, consistent with the literature reviewed in section 2.31 (Riley, 2007).

This theme appears to be relatively static in terms of its construction, being to a great extent linguistically constrained, with classic Arabic being used as the main linguistic resource. Moreover, it is marked in terms of time. The Muslim identities constructed by the participants are thus shaped in certain and similar ways. This theme can be viewed as one constructed according to perceptions of social identity, represented by the use of "We" (see Extract 5.3). This implies a sense of belonging to a social group and this is where I started to see a link between Themes 3 and 4, discussed in the following section.

5.4 The Link Between the Saudi Arabian and Muslim Identities: Muslim Saudiness

Looking back at the data in which the Muslim identity theme emerged, I noticed the presence of the social identity through the ways in which the participants expressed their Muslim identity by referring to themselves as "us" or "we". This suggests that the Muslim identity is rooted in the social and cultural identity of the participants from Saudi Arabia. In one of the interviews I conducted at the time, the focus was on language use. I asked Bushra if Arabic had a cultural value for her (see Extract 5.7).

Interviewer: Does Arabic have cultural values to you?
Bushra: Yes no doubt.
Interviewer: Why?
Bushra: My mother language.
My religion language.

Extract 5.7. Interview with Bushra

This exchange reflects the strong association between language and religion but also implies the construction of identity through language. This appears mainly in Bushra's emphasis on Arabic being her mother language, meaning mother tongue, and then she adds quickly "my religion language". The use of "my" here shows a stance, the feeling of

something that is part of "me" or "myself". This demonstrates how Bushra associates Arabic and religion with each other and considers them both to be part of her identity.

The two themes (Saudi Arabian and Muslim identities) are both significant in terms of their frequency in tweets posted by most of the participants and they are also timed, appearing at certain times across the observation. In addition, they are related to social and cultural perceptions of the participants' identities. In my interview with Mohammad, I asked him about a tweet he posted in Arabic (see Extracts 5.3 and 5.4). He expressed the view that tweeting about Eid in Arabic was something that "belongs mainly to Arabs", which implies that he thinks that this religious festival has significance for a particular ethnic, social and cultural group that is "Arab" and likely excludes non-group members (i.e. a non-Arab audience). This is further evidence that identity is socially and culturally rooted in certain ways, in which language plays a significant part, primarily in the important role Arabic plays in how they construct their Muslim identity.

On 14 May 2019 – a Tuesday – I received a notification from Twitter that three of my participants had posted about Saudi Arabia. It did not take me long to gather from Twitter that there had been Hothi rebel attacks on Saudi oil facilities (see Figure 5.12).

اللهم أحفظ بلادنا و ولاة أمورنا من كل سوء ، اللهم اكفنا الأعداء بما شئت

Translation: Allah, protect our country and our guardians from every evil, Allah, keep our enemies from us as you see fit.

Figure 5.13. Tweet posted by Tariq

This tweet, posted by Tariq, is a representative example of others at the time, as I found in my observation notes concerning similar tweets posted by other participants. In it, he uses Fusha Arabic, asking God (Allah) to protect the country. His feelings of belonging – his "Saudiness" – are made clear in his use of "our country" and "our guardians", referring to the royal family. Linking to this is the image, which shows the King and the Crown Prince, and behind them the Saudi flag.

The tweet combines a sense of belonging to a certain social group (Saudi) with religious identification, expressed in the form of prayers asking Allah for aid. Hence, Tariq constructs his social Saudi identity together with his Muslim identity, asking God to protect his home country. The Saudi Arabian identity constructed in this tweet is portrayed through a religious tone, which appears similar to the construction of the Muslim theme in the "religious genre", particularly in the use of Fusha Arabic. Moreover, the Saudi Arabian identity is constructed in a similar way as in Theme 3, using Arabic, a sense of affiliation through pronouns, and including the national flag and pictures of the royal family. The link between the two themes – Saudi national and Muslim identities – is apparent. Being Saudi is part of being Muslim, believing in God (Allah). The Saudi Arabian flag is a symbol of this as it carries the Islamic shahada (there is no God but Allah; Muhammad is the prophet of God [Allah]). The linkage was depicted by the participants in this study when they constructed their national and religious identities on Twitter (see Extract 5.3 and Figure 5.13). The intersection is broadly inclusive, as presented in Figure 5.14.
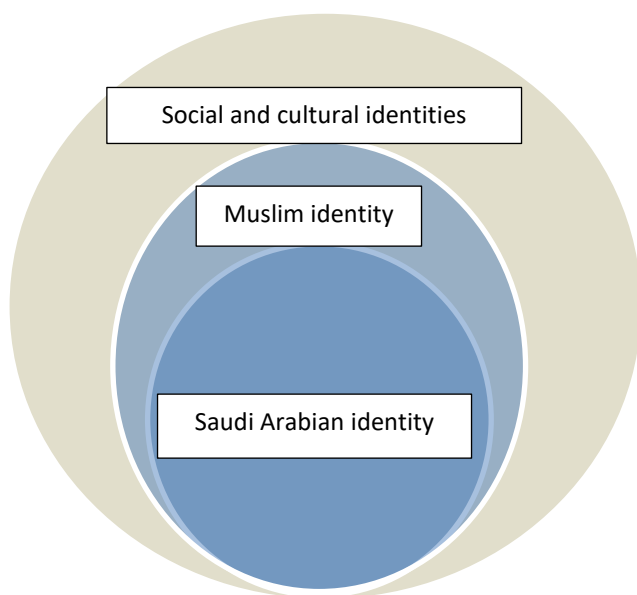
Figure 5.14. Link between Themes 3 and 4

In Chapter 2, I discussed the social and cultural identities based on two theoretical frameworks: Riley (2007) conceptualisation of social identity and how language plays a part in the construction of that identity and Jenks (2005) view of the interrelated nature of social and cultural identities. Based on that, I developed Figure 5.14 to demonstrate the relationship between the two themes, the national and religious identities, which then intersect with the social and cultural identities of the participants and become part of that circle.

As can be seen, the outer circle, representing the social and cultural identities, encompasses the religious and national identities, which indicates that the latter are components of the "social and cultural identity" of this particular group. In other words, the data presented here show that the Saudi PhD students in the UK constructed their social and cultural identity through the representation of their national identity and religious Muslim identity. In this representation, consistent with Riley (2007) and Harrison (2019), language plays a major part, but the participants also employ non-linguistic resources related to these identities (i.e. the green heart, the flag, the lantern).

There is another complex interrelation between the religious and national identities shown in the inner circles, in which the national identity is enfolded in the religious identity. These

relationships can be seen in many examples presented above (see, e.g., Extracts 5.3 and 5.13). Unlike the link between Themes 1 and 2 (see section 4.4), which meet at an intersection, these two themes appear to be rooted together and linked in their construction with the social and cultural identities (Tajfel, 1978; Lemke, 2008).

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined two significant themes that emerged during the observation period. Both themes are strongly linked to the social and cultural identities of these participants. Their construction can be therefore linked to Lemke (2008) conceptually, representing a multiplex construct that is rooted in the social and cultural identities.

There are notable similarities in terms of how these identities were constructed, such as using a particular variety of Arabic (mainly Fusha) and certain hashtags, as well as non-linguistic resources (e.g. the lantern and the Saudi Arabian flag). There was more variety in how the Saudi national identity was constructed compared to the Muslim identity. The former incorporated the use of English and present differences in terms of how the Saudi national identity was viewed by the participants. During the religious festivals that took place during the observation period, the Muslim identity was notable and was constructed in significant patterns that presented similarities in the use of linguistic and non-linguistic resources, indicating the social and cultural practices acted out in constructing the national identity theme. The theme was semi-static in terms of how it was constructed through the more or less similar use of phrases and practices.

My observation of Twitter at that time revealed many tweets posted by other participants that looked similar in terms of their structure and the language used, as well as the main topic (wishing happy Ramadan). However, while the tweets before or near the beginning of Ramadan expressed heartfelt wishes for a peaceful and blessed month, this changed towards the end, as discussed further in Chapter 6.

Finally, the chapter ended with a discussion of the link between the two themes. The following chapter focuses on the third research question, which concerned when and how these themes emerged over the observation timeline.

Chapter 6. Findings: Themes Over the Timeline

6.1 Chapter Overview

As explained in the earlier chapters of this thesis, the observation of Twitter started in May 2019 and ended in January 2020. Afterwards, I conducted Twitter interviews with the participants. Further follow-up interviews were conducted until October 2022. The thematic analysis was informed by a grounded theory approach, which resulted in the development of four main themes, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. In this chapter, I move on to address the third research question:

RQ3. When and how are these identities constructed over the observation period?

This chapter discusses the interrelations between the themes and when and how they appeared during the observation period. The construction of each theme is presented along a timeline (see Figure 6.1). I discuss the themes by taking one of the participants as a representative example.

Before discussing the interrelation of the themes, section 6.2 provides a review of the tweets and the themes generated over the timeline. Section 6.3 then presents further examples illustrating how the identities are constructed dynamically over the timeline. In section 6.4, I outline how the themes were interrelated in many instances. Finally, section 6.5 provides a summary of this final chapter of analysis.

6.2 Themes of identity over the timeline: complex and multiplex

This section provides an overview of the themes and the presence of each over the timeline, representing the construction of identity as dynamic, fluid, and complex or multiplex. To demonstrate this, Table 6.1 shows the frequency of the tweets related to each theme during the observation period. The total number of sampled tweets was 60 (see section 3.8). However, as explained earlier, the themes were fluid and overlapped in many instances. In other words, an individual tweet could be seen to be constructing more than one identity (see Table 6.1).

	PhD identity	PhD and global identities in one tweet	Global identity	National identity	National and religious identity	Religious identity
No. of tweets tagged under themes	38	18	38	10	2	12
Timing	Throughout the observation	Throughout the observation	Throughout the observation	20–26 September 2019 One only posted in May (Ramadan)	14 May 2019	Between May (Ramadan) and June (Eid) and August (Eid) One tweet only in January 2020 (Friday)

Table 6.1. Frequency and timing of tweets in different themes

The table illustrates many important aspects about the construction of identity, primarily in tweets, and how complex it can be. In total, 60 tweets were sampled and these were analysed and tagged to the four themes. The columns in yellow represent the intersectionality between themes. There were many tweets in which two themes were represented and thus they could not be tagged under a single theme. This is a strong indication of the multiplexity of identity construction. For example, the PhD identity (38 tweets) and the global identity (38 tweets) intersected frequently, resulting in 18 tweets falling under the two themes simultaneously. The same applied to the religious and national identities, although to a lesser extent, with two tweets that could be categorised and tagged under both. One of these was the tweet posted by Tariq analysed in Chapter 5 (see Figure 5.13). The frequency does not indicate that the relationship between the religious and national identities is not significant as these data only relate to the tweets and the profiles of the participants showed the salience of the relationship between the two (see Extract 5.7 and Figure 5.13).

I turn now to the timeline itself and provide an overview of the occurrence of themes along the timeline.
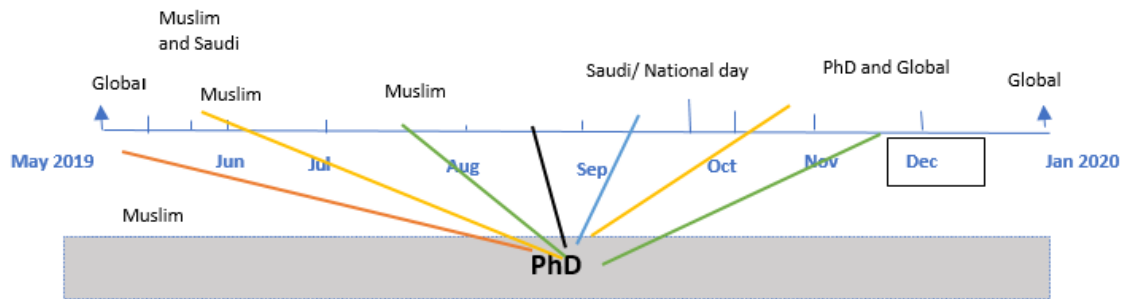
Figure 6.1. Occurrence of themes over the observation timeline

Figure 6.1 illustrates the identities that the eight Saudi PhD students constructed during the observation period on Twitter. Overall, the timeline shows the multiplex nature of the construction of identities, as identified in the relationships discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 (see The Link Between Globalisation and PhDism and The Link Between the Saudi Arabian and Muslim Identities: Muslim Saudiness). Indeed, the linkages between the themes meant that a clear line could not be drawn between them and more than one appeared in many of the tweets, illustrated in Table 6.1.

The timeline in Figure 6.1 illustrates that time is relevant to the construction of the religious and the national identities. For example, the Muslim identity was constructed and represented significantly during religious occasions such as the fasting month of Ramadan that year (May 2019) and Eids (in June and July respectively). In contrast, the PhD and global identities appeared throughout the observation timeline and not only during marked times.

The following sections address the themes by presenting examples that demonstrate how the identities were constructed and represented dynamically over the observation period.

6.3 Dynamicity of Identity Over the Timeline

Having illustrated the complex and multiplex construction and representation of identities over the timeline, this section addresses the following: first, how one participant, Mohammad, constructed his identity as dynamic over the timeline; second, how this can

be linked to other participants and other data collected. This analysis is consistent with the grounded theory approach:

> It means learning about the specific and the general-and seeing what is new in them-then exploring their links to larger issues or creating larger unrecognised issues in entirety. (Charmaz, 2006, p.181)

Presenting the results in this way can help show how the datasets were analysed independently first and then holistically. The next sub-section shows how the PhD theme, as an individual representation of identity, was constructed as fluid and dynamic, reflecting the development of the identity over time as the participants' PhD studies progressed. The examples presented in Chapter 4 illustrated this aspect as the participants portrayed being a PhD researcher and being a member of the PhD community, sharing tips, reflecting on the challenges they encountered and celebrating their achievements (see section 4.2). These findings resonate with theories of identity as dynamic and undergoing constant change as a result of interacting with life experiences, as well as reflecting how the dynamicity of identity can be represented in social media (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Lemke, 2008; Darvin, 2016).

In Chapter 4, I presented examples that illustrated how the participants constructed their PhD identity in many ways, by representing themselves as PhD students in the UK on their Twitter profiles and portraying how they dealt with and reflected on their experiences in undertaking the PhD. I demonstrated how this identity appeared in a static form in the students' Twitter profiles, showing "who I am", and was represented in various forms in the participants' bios (see Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). This static representation meant it did not change throughout the observation. However, it would likely change eventually when they completed their PhD and their status changed.

Additionally, and in the same chapter, I demonstrated how this identity was represented and developed continuously in the participants' tweets in ways that showed how it was constructed to show its evolving nature, growing and developing through the PhD experience. The timeline in Figure 6.1 shows that this theme recurred throughout the observation period. In this respect, the construction of the PhD identity by the participants in this study depict it as a dynamic identity that undergoes change as the participants reflect in their tweets on their experiences and growth through their PhD studies (see

Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7). This is in line with the view of identity held by scholars such as Harrison (2019) and Kershen (1998).

Many examples of how the PhD identity changed and evolved were reviewed in Chapter 4, but it is worth recalling one example here, represented in a tweet posted by Mohammad (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2. Tweet posted by Mohammad

The month in which this tweet was posted was a marked time for these participants ahead of the Saudi National Day. This tweet shows Mohammad sharing a thought on something that might happen, a challenging situation that some PhD students might encounter. In it, Mohammad reflects his expert voice, telling the #PhDlife community that experiencing this challenge is normal. The tweet also depicts his evolving PhD identity in getting past this experience and sharing it with the PhD community. Mohammad revealed clearly in the follow-up interview how the PhD had changed him in many ways (see Extract 4.6).

In constructing their PhD identity, the participants employed a variety of resources, including the use of hashtags aimed at the wider PhD community (#PhDlife and #PhDchat) and showing their sense of affiliation with other PhD students. The extensive use of English was also notable and contributed to how the participants constructed their PhD identity as linked to linguistic breadth and having a high level of education (see section 4.2.2). This indicates that the social capital embedded in the linguistic construction of the PhD identity is not in flux. In other words, although the construction of this identity was

dynamic, undergoing change and growth, the language aspect that reflected social capital did not change over the timeline, but was maintained throughout the observation when the participants tweeted about the PhD. In discussing Extract 4.1, I highlighted the participants' awareness of the capital associated with the PhD identity (Bourdieu, 2011). Both Faisal and Mohammad expressed the view that English could be associated with being highly educated.

Interviewer: What about English in Saudi is it regarded as a choice of highly educated people?

Faisal: That's right... English in movies or education make the product (person or film) more attractive.

Extract 6.1. Interview with Faisal

Faisal conveys that the use of English in tweets about PhD studies could be "attractive". Mohammad confirmed this and added another significant point, as shown in Extract 6.2.

Interviewer: What about English in Saudi? Is it regarded as a choice of highly educated people?

Mohammad: Yes. In general l, talking in English or using English words during casual conversation.

Mohammad: Sometime I do it personally not to impress others, but the English words come to my mind quicker when expressing something.

Interviewer: Do you think it is a prestigious language choice?

Mohammad: I have seen people do it. Personally I don't use it that way unless I am speaking with someone who is trying to impress me with his or her language.

Extract 6.2. Interview with Mohammad

These examples demonstrate how the participants constructed the PhD identity dynamically. Thus, it was in flux and changed over the timeline. The examples also show how this identity is rooted in the participants' social backgrounds and confers social capital (Riley, 2007; Bourdieu, 2011), which is represented through certain less changeable linguistic practices.

In contrast to the evolving nature of the PhD identity, the religious Muslim identity, discussed in Chapter 5, was not constructed dynamically over the timeline. The participants constructed this identity in similar ways that showed particular perceptions of how they should do so (see, e.g., the interview with Nora in Extract 5.2). There is an expectation of how the religious Muslim identity should be constructed based on certain protocols practised at particular times.

First, the Muslim identity was expressed notably during religious festivals and the participants used Arabic – mainly Fusha Arabic – in their tweets, a choice the participants viewed as normal practice. Within this theme, the relation between language, culture and identity is made visible. Second, the Muslim identity was constructed as semi-static given the constraints related to it, largely in terms of the linguistic resources used. Similarly, the construction of this identity in the participants' profiles was static, remaining unchanged over the observation timeline.

The data presented in 5.3 showed the Muslim identity to be one that the participants in this study constructed diligently. However, the theme did not appear as frequently as other themes (see Table 6.1). This was because it was a timed theme (see Figure 6.1), meaning that it was especially salient at certain times but not all the time, and the participants constructed and represented this identity at similar times, predominantly occasions notable in the Islamic (Hijri) calendar, such as Ramadan and Eid and the Muslim sabbath, Jumu'ah (جمعة), i.e. Friday.

اللهم صل وسلم على سيدنا محمد صلاة تهب لنا بها أكمل المراد وفوق المراد، في دار الدنيا ودار المعاد، وعلى آله وصحبه وبارك وسلم عدد ما علمت وزنة ماعلمت وملء ما علمت.

#يوم_الجمعة

Translate Tweet

11:19 AM · Jan 10, 2020

Tweet translation: O Allah, bless and grant peace to our prophet Mohammad, a prayer that bestows upon us the fullest desire and above the desire, in the abode of this world and the abode of the resurrection, and upon his family and companions, and bless and grant peace the number of what you have thought, the weight of what you have thought, and the fullness of what you have thought. #Youm_ al Jum'aa (Friday)

Figure 6.3. Tweet posted by Duaa on the Muslim Sabbath (Friday)

The tweet in Figure 6.3 is an example that demonstrates how and when the participants in this study constructed their religious identity. The tweet was posted on Friday, which is a special day for Muslims, especially men, to come together in their communities to perform the Jumaa prayer and listen to that day's sermon. Muslims are urged to recall and pray for the prophet Mohammad. This practice is considered proper etiquette on Friday. The tweet also illustrates the timed nature of the construction of the religious identity. It

differs from those the participants posted around the month of Ramadan, which depicted their religious identity in that month and represented them engaging in appropriate activities, namely fasting and praying (see Figure 5.7).

Although both tweets concern the construction of the religious identity, clearly there is a difference in how they are constructed related to the practices involved at these times. Duaa's reflects the religious identity through following a regular practice undertaken weekly on Friday (praying for the prophet), while Ghassan's tweet about Ramadan depicts the rituals associated with that month: praying, fasting and asking God to help him. Time, therefore, plays a part in how the participants construct their religious identity, drawing a picture of what they do in relation to specific periods and events.

I started the observation in May 2019, when Ramadan (the fasting month) was about to begin. The construction of the Muslim identity at that time was strikingly similar across the different participants. The theme reappeared at the first Eid (after Ramadan) and again at the second Eid in August 2019. At both these times, there were also notably similar patterns in terms of how the identity was constructed. For example, looking at the tweets posted by the participants before Ramadan, they all expressed wishes for a happy and blessed Ramadan using similar language and words founded in classic Fusha Arabic and containing fixed formulaic phrases, such as Ramadan Mubarak and the phrase "May this month be blessed", employed before and during the first week of Ramadan to express heartfelt wishes (see Figures 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9).

Different phrases are used in the last 10 days of Ramadan, known in Arabic as Alashr alawakher. In this period, there are different rituals as Muslims increase their prayers and extend the length of worship and prayers at night, called "al tahajud". These conclude with Duaa, prayers before preparing to eat Shoor (the last meal before starting the fast on the following day). In these 10 days, there is a night known as "Laylat al qadar", a holy night in Islam honoured in a verse called "surat alqadr". Among the prayers and certain phrases recommended by the Prophet Mohammad during this period is this prayer (see Figure 6.4).

اللهم انك عفو تحب العفو فاعفو عنا .. #ليلة_القدر

Translate Tweet

3:26 AM · May 26, 2019 from Coventry, England · Twitter for iPhone

Tweet translation: Oh Allah, you are forgiving and you love forgiveness so forgive us. #Alqadar_night

Figure 6.4. Tweet posted by Nora

Nora posted this tweet on 26 May 2019, the first of the 10 last nights of Ramadan, asking Allah for forgiveness and then ending with the hastag #layalt alQadr (Night of power). The construction of the Muslim identity in this tweet is clearly influenced by the timing. Timing was also an influence in her construction of her Muslim identity on the first day of Ramadan, when she posted the formulaic fixed phrase wishing happy Ramadan (Figure 5.9).

Hence, time is a strong factor influencing the construction of the Muslim identity. Also, the representation of this identity was consistent, as represented by these examples in which the participants adhered to certain protocols and wording. Arabic – Fusha Arabic in particular – plays a significant role in the construction of this identity. Arabic has a notable presence in discourse in general and in displaying the Muslim identity in particular (Spolsky, 2003, pp. 84-85). Also, the ways in which the identities were constructed in the examples provided show that the Muslim identity is culturally and socially rooted. This is evident from similarities in the format of the tweets, their order and the use of fixed formulaic phrases, all of which can be linked to certain social and cultural perspectives concerning the Muslim identity held by the participants.

Having demonstrated how the participants constructed and represented their identities dynamically during the observation period, I move on in the following section to present the differences between these themes of identities, primarily by showing how they can be presented on the static–dynamic continuum I developed with regard to identities, which represents an extension of Marwick and Boyd's (2011) work to be considered in understanding identity construction through Twitter discourse.

6.4 Identities on the Static–Dynamic Continuum

There are differences in terms of how the various identities were constructed by the participants on Twitter. This can be seen in many aspects but one that is clear lies in the

nature of the identities they constructed and represented in their tweets, ranging from the static to the dynamic, shown on a continuum presented in Figure 6.16. This conceptualisation draws on the works of (Lemke, 2008), (Kershen, 1998) and (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), reviewed in Chapter 2. Moreover, this extends on the continuum developed by Marwick and Boyd (2011) to address how the static and dynamic aspects of the participants' identities can be constructed on Twitter (see Figure 6.5).
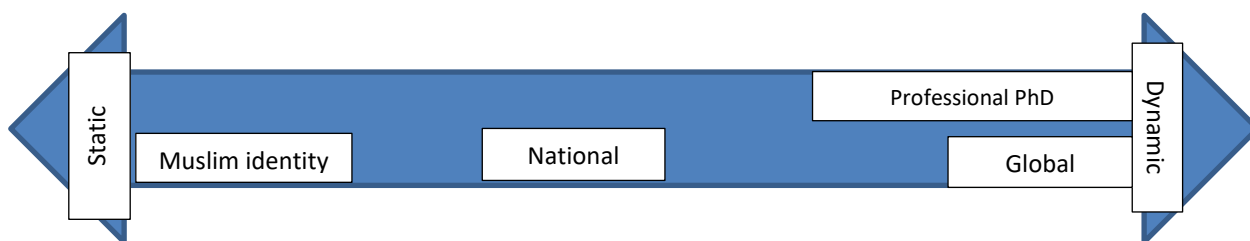
Figure 6.5. Identities on a static–dynamic continuum

It should be noted that the PhD identity was constructed as a static aspect in the participants' profiles, mainly in their bios, which stated "who I am". In contrast, later observation of their tweets showed the construction of this PhD identity was highly dynamic as they reflected on their experiences, tweeting about challenges, good and bad days, sharing or seeking tips, and identifying the self as within the PhD community. Moreover, through their tweets they constructed their growth during their studies. Considering these examples and the participants' own reflections on their experience, the PhD identity and global identity can be both be classified as dynamic (see section 4.2).

On the continuum, there are similarities between the PhD identity and the global and the national identities in that they were constructed in ways that revealed their dynamicity. For example, the global identity appeared in different tweets showing a sense of affiliation with international associations (see Figure 4.9) and also through linguistic resources, including drawing upon a new language (Spanish). Moreover, the participants depicted this identity through showing adaptation to new cultures. Significantly, the tweets (see Figures 4.11 and 4.13) and what the informants said about their experience of being abroad (see Extracts 4.6 and 4.7) and how it had been a transformative experience all indicate that the PhD and global identities are two sides of the same coin, both dynamic in nature.

The Saudi national identity in this study was constructed in a way that contrasts with other scholars' perspectives on the relationships between language and nation (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5) There was a notable use of English in the participants' tweets, conveying a change in how Saudi identity can be presented dynamically by moving between different linguistic resources. In addition, the ways in which they constructed their national identity varied: in Figure 5.3, Nora posted a tweet constructing her national identity using the lyrics of a national song, while Faisal in Figure 5.5 depicted his Saudi identity through travel and celebrating it at the embassy, and Rose in Figure 5.4 did so by reflecting on a good example of the Saudi identity represented by a renowned female doctor. Therefore, the participants constructed their Saudi national identity in different ways that depicted different views of what constitutes the national identity.

There were also some resources used repeatedly in the participants' construction of the national identity through tweets (see Figures 5.3 and 5.6), for example hashtags, the green heart and the Saudi flag and the outlook, which are all symbols used to represent the Saudi national identity through Twitter profiles (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2). This indicates that there are certain aspects that can be used in common to construct this identity. Thus, I consider that the construction of the national identity lies between the dynamic and static poles: it is dynamic in terms of how the participants seem to view what constitutes their national identity but static in how they construct the identity through the resources or symbols that reflect their nationality (e.g. the flag and hashtags).

In contrast, the construction of the religious identity appeared to follow a more or less similar format and structure. The participants' construction of this identity, both in tweets (see Figures 5.7 and 5.9) and their reflections in the interviews (see Extract 5.3) revealed its semi-static nature. It is an identity rooted in social and cultural norms and thus reflects the participants' understanding of how this identity should be performed in terms of the protocols and timing. When I asked the participants about some of their tweets, they gave similar answers, such as being of the view that this identity is better expressed and constructed in Arabic (i.e. Fusha Arabic). Therefore, the Muslim identity appeared to be static in the way it was constructed by the study participants.

In summary, the dynamic identities in this study are considered to evolve, depicting change and growth through interacting with life experiences along the timeline (Kershen,

1998). This is in contrast to the static Muslim identity, constructed and represented as relatively fixed in its format and style over the timeline. This is because the religious identity is culturally and socially rooted (Harrison, 2019) and thus its representation requires certain practices to portray their membership which tend to be less evolving (Tajfel, 1978).

Having reviewed how identities were presented on the timeline, and how they can be presented on the static and dynamic continuum, the following section reviews examples that portray how multiple identities can be constructed together in a tweet, demonstrating the fluidity and multiplicity of identity representation online.

6.5 The Construction of Multiple, Fluid and Interrelated Identities

At the beginning of this chapter, I presented the timeline, showing the construction of the different identities over the observation period from May 2019 to January 2020. I then discuss the extent of dynamicity in the construction and representation of the identities. In this section, I discuss how the identities were constructed as fluid and interrelated. I follow the same order of presentation here, focusing first on one participant and then broadening the discussion to a more holistic perspective, making links to other cases and data. It should be noted here that the timeline presented in Figure 6.1 shows the themes arising in a particular month, as exemplified in Figure 6.6.
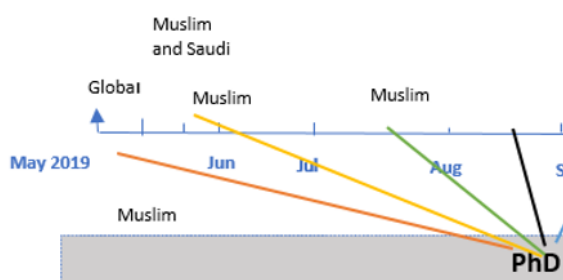
Figure 6.6. Inter-relation between themes

Figure 6.6 shows a screenshot of a segment of the observation timeline in Figure 6.1, taken from May 2019- August 2019. It demonstrates how different identities can be constructed – separately or in combination – at around the same time by one individual. For example, on the first day of Ramadan in May 2019, the global identity theme appeared

with the PhD identity theme, but the religious (Muslim) identity was constructed in tweets about Ramadan that had nothing to do with the global or PhD identities. As an example, I draw on tweets posted by Nora on 6 May, the first day of Ramadan, when she was in Glasgow attending an international conference related to her PhD subject. I present and discuss these tweets in chronological order. Although the three tweets were all posted by Nora on one day, the identities she constructed in them relate to different themes.

She posted her first tweet in the early hours (1:48). I checked the Ramadan prayer times for 2019/1440 in Glasgow and found that the Fajr prayer, which is when Muslims should start fasting, was scheduled for 3:19 am. Thus, Nora might have been tweeting as she prepared to eat the Shoor meal, before prayers and fasting, which lasts until sunset and the call for Maghrib prayer (at 21.05, Glasgow time).

مبارك عليكم الشهر الفضيل #رمضان_2019

Translate Tweet

1:48 AM · 06/05/2019 from Glasgow, Scotland ·
Twitter for iPhone

Translation: May this holy month be blessed for all #Ramadan_2019

Figure 6.7. Tweet 1 posted by Nora on 6 May

In her tweet in Figure 6.7, Nora constructs her Muslim identity in a way that is similar to tweets posted by other participants, particularly one posted by Tariq (Figure 5.8) that used the same phrase – Mubarak alykom alshahr – to express happiness and warm wishes at the beginning of the month. This indicates that her Muslim identity is culturally and socially rooted: she is doing something that is customary and that she would usually do at this time. This what she described when I asked her about her Ramadan tweet in the interview and she explicitly stated that using another language would be inappropriate and the phrase she tweeted in Arabic "is something we used to hear" (see Extract 5.2). Nora uses "we" here either to refer to herself and the Muslim community, or to herself and me, being both Saudi and Muslim. In either case, there is an interrelation between the Muslim identity and the Saudi social and cultural identity.

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Nora posted many tweets every day when in Glasgow attending the conference, which took place over three consecutive days from 9 May. I have 12 screenshots of her tweets during this event in my observation notes sharing the content of the events she attended. The posting of these tweets during Ramadan shows that the religious (Muslim) identity and the PhD identity can be constructed and represented simultaneously but in separate tweets, demonstrating the complexity of identity construction. Nora posted the tweet in which she constructed her religious identity in the early hours of the morning of the first day. She later posted two tweets constructing her PhD identity on the same day at 9:17 am and 10:25 am.

In the tweet shown in Figure 6.8, Nora announces that the president of the event is on stage. She tags the president and the organisation account, adding the hashtags that she used repeatedly when attending the conference.

Figure 6.8. Tweet 2 posted by Nora on 6 May

Figure 6.9. Tweet 3 posted by Nora on 16 May

Both tweets (Figures 6.8 and 6.9) were posted by Nora on the same day, constructing her global PhD identity by showing attendance at different workshops at the international conference related to her PhD. In both tweets Nora added the conference hashtag and tagged other Twitter accounts for those who organised the event, depicting the part she played and hence contributing to the construction of her global PhD Identity.

In the first tweet (Figure 6.7), Nora constructs her Muslim identity presumably as she wakes up, extending greetings and warm wishes as she would do normally before starting her fast. In the latter tweets (Figures 6.8 and 6.9), there is no sign of her Muslim identity. These tweets show that each theme has its own dimensions, despite the tweets being posted in a single day, as the themes do not necessarily co-exist.

The Muslim identity constructed by Nora (see Figure 6.7) portrayed the relevance of time in relation to this identity. Nora constructed and represented her Muslim identity earlier that day in a tweet that portrayed this identity only. However, later on, Nora attended the conference and posted other tweets (see Figures 6.7 and 6.8) in which she constructed and represented her PhD and global identities, sharing and tweeting about this global conference and employing the conference hashtags to show her membership of the conference worldwide on Twitter. It is notable that her Muslim identity is not represented in these two tweets.

On the last day of the conference, 9 May, Nora posted a tweet at 18:50, a few minutes before Iftar, writing "Until next year #chi2019" (see Figure 6.10).

6:50 PM · May 9, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

Figure 6.10. Tweet posted by Nora

Nora added two images below her tweet, one showing a blackboard signed by the many people who attended the conference and the other showing the illuminated letters also used in the hashtag, CHI 2019. This abbreviation denotes the title of the conference, "Computer Human Interaction", as Nora explained to me. The conference was organised by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), also mentioned in Nora's tweet (see Figure 6.9).

"Until next year" indicates that the conference has ended. In these tweets (Figures 6.8, 6.9 and 6.10) there is an interrelation between Nora's identity as a PhD student, attending the conference related to her PhD subject, and her global identity, attending the conference in another city and socialising with people from around the world using English. It is clear that this event attracted international attendees, either presenting or participating as delegates, as in the case of Nora, studying at UK university. Here, her global identity cannot be detached from her PhD identity as they are interrelated.

There are similar examples of this interrelation between the global and PhD identities elsewhere in the data (see section 4.4). In contrast, such an interrelation is not found between the Muslim and PhD identity themes in the examples reviewed above, despite the tweets relating to a single day (see Figures 6.7, 6.8 and 6.9).

These examples indicate that identity can be constructed in fluid and multiple ways, with the participants representing themselves as religious (Muslim), PhD and global in a single day. This is in line with Benwell and Stokoe (2006) in depicting the fluidity and multiplexity of representation online but in this study it was Twitter.

As explained in the previous section, the construction of the PhD identity was not constrained by time, unlike the Muslim and Saudi national identities. Indeed, the PhD identity theme overlapped with all other themes. This does not mean that there is a direct interrelation, but rather that it continues to be present during the times other themes arise. For example, the PhD identity was still being constructed in the month of Ramadan and during the Eid festival, both times when the Muslim identity was more frequent in tweets. This is shown in the tweets in Figures 6.11 and 6.12 posted by Duaa.

the stress hasn't fueled in yet ماش مع رمضان الله يشرفه
!   And I'm only 21 days away from my first
                              year PhD panel! Yeey

2:24 AM · May 12, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

Tweet Translation: With Ramadan – may God bless it – and the stress hasn't fueled in yet! And I'm only 21 days away from my first year PhD panel! Yeey

Figure 6.11. Tweet posted by Duaa

First Annual Progress Review ✔️
PhD Thesis ♾️
#PhDchat

5:38 PM · Jun 3, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

Figure 6.12. Tweet posted by Duaa

In the first of these tweets, Duaa expresses how strange it is that she does not feel stressed yet about her first PhD panel, which is 21 days away. The tweet was posted in the second week of Ramadan, which started on 6 May 2019 and Duaa starts this tweet by stating explicitly that it is Ramadan. This implies that the reason she is not experiencing stress yet is because of Ramadan. However, at the same time her tweet suggests that the PhD panel is significant and something she thinks about. Hence, in this tweet, Duaa constructs her PhD identity by signalling a future event – her first PhD panel. Duaa's construction of her PhD identity here represents her as calm, not stressed, and she shows that she cherishes that calmness in using "Yeey" ("Yay") to express joy. In the same tweet Duaa represents her Muslim identity, referring explicitly to Ramadan. There is an implicit indication here that her articulation of what she is feeling – calm – might be linked to her Muslim identity and being in the month of Ramadan. This can be seen as an implicit construction of religious Muslim identity traits. Thus, in this single tweet, multiple identities can be seen at play: PhD and Muslim.

Moving to the second tweet in Figure 6.12, Duaa posted this after the PhD panel, the night of Eid. Here, the hashtag #PhDchat reappears as Duaa shares the news that she has passed the panel, indicating this with a tick. Sharing this with the PhD community can be

seen as a way of constructing the PhD identity, showing progress but also highlighting that she has a lot to do to complete her PhD thesis through the use of the eternity symbol. The observation note I made after that tweet illustrates the fluidity and multiplex nature of this identity.

03/06/2019 at 10:00 pm

That day was special day for Duaa as well as myself. Both of us had our first annual review progress panel. Fresh in that experience we both decided to meet the daybefore 02/06 and do mock panel for each other while fasting .

Duaa was nervous naturally, as soon as she finished she called me to tell me about her experience. And she was excited and happy to get back for two weeks to see her family in Riyadh. That day was the last fasting day of Ramadan. Reflecting on that Duaa told me how she feels the Eid joyment being double as she passed her Panel and ticked the first year hard work off.

Extract 6.1. Observation note: Duaa (June 2019)

The tweets and the observation note reveal how the PhD identity is articulated together with the religious identity. Duaa's reflection on how she started to feel the joy of Eid early is due to her accomplishment having passed the PhD panel. This is not explicitly stated but is clear through the participant observation.

These examples demonstrate the construction and representation of identity as fluid, multiplex and interrelated. Both Nora and Duaa constructed their identities as Muslim, PhD and global in combination. Sometimes these were contained in one tweet depicting multiple identities at play at the same time (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p. 243). At other times, these were constructed fluidly and separately by the participant on the same day in different tweets (Darvin, 2016, p. 524).

6.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has addressed the third research question, focusing on when the participants' various identities were constructed and how over the timeline of the study. Section 6.2 of this chapter presented the timeline of the observation and highlighted the frequencies of themes in tweets posted and sampled for analysis from May 2019 to January 2020. In section 6.3, I addressed how these identities were constructed over the timeline and how they can be presented on a continuum from static to dynamic, established based on the findings. This was followed by section 6.4, in which I presented the construction of identities on the static–dynamic continuum, extending Marwick and Boyd's (2011) conceptualisation to explore identity construction on Twitter. In section 6.5,

I then presented examples that illustrated how the identities were constructed as multiple and fluid, as well as sometimes inter-related.

Having presented this final set of findings, the following chapter addresses and discusses the relevance of these findings and their contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Chapter 7. Discussion

7.1 Chapter Overview

This study examined a particular group of international PhD students, Saudi sojourners, in the UK, looking at how they constructed their identities on Twitter. Having explained and identified earlier (see sections 1.3 and 2.4) that little is known about how PhD international students construct their identities on social media while overseas, this study could be described as exploratory, seeking to unearth insights through an online ethnographic approach (Skågeby, 2011).

The activity of eight participants in total (four males and four females) on Twitter was observed from May 2019 to January 2020 and this was then followed by interviews in June 2020, with follow-up interviews in 2021 and 2022. The aim of this online ethnographic study was to examine closely the identities the participants constructed on Twitter and how and when over the timeline of observation. The study was conducted through participant observation (see section 3.6) and the datasets were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006), with the coding grounded in line with Charmaz (2006b).

In Chapters 4 and 5, I outlined the findings, delineating the identities this group constructed on Twitter and how. In Chapter 6, I focused on when these identities were constructed over the observation timeline across the Twitter profiles and tweets and depicted identities as being constructed and represented dynamically, fluidly and in a multiplex manner. This chapter offers a richer understanding of the meaning and significance of the themes presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, together with a discussion of the perspectives of the participants and relevant literature.

The first section in this chapter provides a summary of the themes. The second part is divided into four main sections discussing each theme in turn and engaging with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The discussion highlights the contribution this study makes to this body of knowledge and revisits the key models and theories reviewed previously based on their relevance to the research questions and the findings obtained. The third part of the chapter addresses the interrelations between the themes and their

construction over the timeline, with a particular focus on the concept of multiplexity. The following section then revisits the research questions and provides a summary of how the themes of identities relate to the theories discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary.

7.2 Overview of Themes and Findings

In Chapters 4 and 5, I outlined the main themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' Twitter profiles, tweets posted over eight months (May 2019 to January 2020) and the interviews I conducted via Twitter, as well as my observation notes. The data revealed that the participants constructed and represented different identities: the PhD identity, the global identity, the national identity and the religious (Muslim) identity. The construction of these four main thematic identities took various forms. The observation revealed significant patterns in terms of similarities in how these Saudi PhD students constructed and represented these identities. This can be considered a social identity practice, in line with Harrison (2019) and Lemke (2008), who view identity as being rooted culturally and socially. It is also linked to other significant theories reviewed in Chapter 2, which I will revisit in this chapter. The overall themes are summarised in the following sub-sections.

7.2.1 The PhD identity

As outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, I found the "PhD identity" theme to be the most significant in terms of its frequency and strong presence in the data throughout the observation and interviews. In their Twitter profiles, for example, all the participants highlighted this identity significantly (see sections 4.2 and 6.2). Their tweets and the interviews, as well as the observation notes, indicated that this this identity can be constructed through certain practices, such as using PhD hashtags and deploying specific linguistic resources, mainly the extensive use of English. I will discuss these in detail in 7.3.

7.2.2 The global identity

The second theme identified in this study was the global identity. This theme was established in different forms by the participants, such as showing that they were global travellers and reflecting a global and open-minded perspective. The construction of this identity was reflected particularly through the use of a variety of linguistic and non-

linguistic resources, which in my view support the global theme (see sections 4.3 and 6.3), discussed further in 7.4.

7.2.3 The national identity

The third theme that emerged from the analysis was the national identity, which was marked at certain times over the timeline, such as Saudi National day (see section 6.4). It was also constructed and represented in the participants profiles, particularly in images (see figure 5.1 and 5.2). The Saudi national identity was constructed in a way that I identified as unique given how the participants showed it an unusual use of English with their national Arabic identity. The theme also revealed broad perceptions of what being Saudi Arabian meant to these participants (see sections 5.4 and 6.4).

7.2.4 The religious identity

This theme was marked and constructed and represented at certain times of religious significance for Muslims, such as Ramadan and Eid. The construction of this identity shows the social and cultural roots of religion within the context of nationality (Saudi Arabian). The use of Fusha Arabic was a tool that the participants employed significantly in their construction of this identity. The findings reveal that this identity is constructed as a social identity by these participants, with Arabic being regarded as an integral part of its representation; this involves certain ideologies and beliefs held by the participants (see sections 5.3 and 6.5).

The following part of this chapter discusses these themes in more detail, keeping in mind their relevance to the research questions and the reviewed literature.

7.3 The PhD Identity: Towards the Practice of PhDism

As seen in the presentation of the findings covering the theme of the PhD identity (Chapters 4 and 6), how the participants constructed and represented their PhD identity changed significantly throughout the observation period and in different ways. This identity can be captured as a form of social capital and social identity moving towards situating this identity as a practice (PhDism).

First, in Chapter 4, I presented many examples of how the participants constructed their PhD identity as it shifted and grew over their PhD experience. This was also discussed in

Chapter 6 (see sections 4.2 and 6.3). These changes in the construction and representation of this identity illustrated its dynamicity and the complexity, consistent with Darvin (2016, p. 524):

> Because a person's sense of self and relation to the world continuously shifts, identity is dynamic, multiple and even contradictory.

Darvin (2016) argues that this dynamicity and complexity are natural outcomes of how the individual shifts and develops with life experiences. There was clear evidence of this in how the participants in this study constructed and represented their PhD identity (see section 4.2).

Second, within this theme, I discussed how Twitter profiles were used to construct their PhD identity, mainly through their bios, which explicitly stated that they were PhD students. It was also significant that this information about the self was placed first in expressing their Twitter identity (the profile). This is a clear sign of the importance of this theme.

The interviews also revealed that the practice of PhDism could be prompted by the appeal that this identity (undertaking a PhD overseas) has in Saudi Arabia, the home country of these participants. The participants in this study not only stated that they were PhD students but also ensured that others would know that they were studying overseas (in the UK). This resonates with Faisal's point regarding the social capital that PhD students abroad gain in Saudi Arabia (see Extract 4.1).

Another significant pattern that emerged in how this identity was constructed and represented was the extensive use of English. In this vein, Almuarik (2019) qualitative study of PhD student returnees found they were highly aware that English was regarded as a mark of prestige denoting their level of education. In this study also, the participants appeared to curate their tweets and Twitter profiles consciously to create and represent a specific identity (that of the PhD student in the UK) for their readership. This was demonstrated by Nora, when she referred to academics who study abroad like herself and others as socially expected to tweet in certain ways (see Extract 4.2). In this conversation, she highlighted that high-level educational qualifications could be a constraint, potentially limiting her freedom to tweet in a manner that failed to conform to expectations.

It must be recalled that the participants were Saudi faculty staff members at Saudi universities, undertaking their doctoral studies in the UK during the period of this study. Being overseas students demonstrated that they were all in receipt of government funding and had several advantages, such as their academic background. This is highly regarded in Saudi Arabia, where academic and faculty staff members with high-level qualifications are regarded as being among the elite. In this regard, Lewin (2009, p. xv) points out that obtaining a degree overseas is of social value, which is the case for these participants and their culture (Almuarik, 2019).

Being a faculty staff member in Saudi Arabia indicates a high level of education, which is key for social standing and a financially rewarding career, particularly as many members of the Saudi Council of Ministers run by the King previously worked as faculty staff. Most of these participants also obtained their educational qualifications abroad in countries such as the UK or US. In this study, the participants were eager to represent this aspect of themselves to others on Twitter, indicating that they were faculty members and PhD students overseas (see Chapter 4).

Both the point made by Faisal about the social privilege associated with being a PhD student overseas and the participants' view that using English in their tweets marked their "highly educated" PhD identity, since English has a certain status, exemplified in Extract 6.1, are important aspects indicating that the PhD identity can be viewed as a form of social capital, consistent with Bourdieu (2011). Bourdieu's (2011) theory is that all forms of capital can be categorised under one root – economic capital – capable of transformation. Although undertaking a PhD overseas had considerable social value for the participants, giving them a sense of privilege and credit, it could also, as indicated by Varghese (2008), represent commercial value. Thus, for these participants the PhD could be seen as a form of economic capital, giving them entry to the powerful elite of their society.

I agree with Bourdieu (2011) that certain capital is convertible, which makes it difficult to determine only one form and use it to describe these practices. A form of cultural capital can be observed in the educational qualifications the participants obtained and added to their Twitter profiles. The social form appears in their use of the PhD as a title for presenting the self, but at the same time this could be seen to embody cultural capital, in

presenting their highly educated academic background. The PhD also appears as a form of symbolic capital:

> …that is to say, capital—in whatever form—insofar as it is represented, i.e., apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition, presupposes the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity. (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 27)

This appeared in their tweets about PhD life and what counts as knowledge. I would add that within symbolic capital, there is a more specific form I would term "linguistic symbolic capital". This was enacted in the participants' linguistic practices, such as the use of English to reflect their knowledge and education. This study agrees with Almuarik (2019) contention that studying for a PhD in the UK can be perceived as having both cultural and social capital aspects. However, there are also constraints that can be experienced before their return home, represented in how they are expected to represent themselves, as explained by Nora (Extract 4.2).

Therefore, being a PhD student in the UK was viewed by the participants and their society as something of social value that gave them a sense of power. Being international students and highly educated can be seen as a form of capital in line with Bourdieu (2011). The Twitter practices of these participants comprised representations of forms of capital through language and their expression of their professional identity as PhD students overseas and faculty member staff at Saudi universities. The representations in their Twitter profiles, for example, were an explicit portrayal of capital, using the PhD as a title in the bio to introduce the self (see Chapter 4). This identity was also constructed implicitly as a form of capital through their tweets about PhD life in general and what PhD students encounter (see section 4.2). In a follow-up interview in April 2022, I asked Faisal how Saudis view overseas PhD students and how Saudi PhD students are regarded socially. He explained that crucially they are expected to be "a good person and future leader" (see Extract 4.1).

Based on these findings, I argue that the PhD identity in the context of this study can be constructed as a form of capital. It is also important to recognise how this capital was constructed in certain and I should say "diligent" ways, conveying that this group engaged in a certain system of practices (see section 4.2). The PhD identity represented in their

tweets emerged as a significant theme, with the primary commonality being the use of PhD hashtags. This leads me to concur with Gershon (2010) and argue that the participants' PhD identity was constructed through certain idioms of practice:

> Groups of friends, classes, workers in an office will develop together their own ways of using media to communicate with each other. Sometimes they realize that their way of using a medium is distinctive, that it marks them as different from other people. Sometimes they don't perceive that their use of a medium is unique until some miscommunication or unexpected way someone was communicating made it clear (often unpleasantly clear) that others have different idioms of practice. (p. 39)

The PhD identity was a forceful theme in terms of its re-occurrence, used repeatedly by all the participants in their Twitter profiles and bios, which explicitly stated that they were PhD students. This was reflected over the entire observation timeline and consistently in their tweets about the PhD, indicating that this identity is important socially and can be constructed in certain ways. Among the idioms employed in their tweets were PhD hashtags – #PhDlife and #PhDchat – which played a significant role and emphasised their PhD identity through ambient affiliation (Zappavigna, 2011).

Moreover, as pointed out by Zhu and Procter (2015), Twitter hashtags can be used to reach a wider audience and promote the researcher identity. In this study, the participants also demonstrated that Twitter hashtags and tweets can be shaped in certain ways to target and reach a desired audience, comprising as an idiom of practice that shows affiliation with the PhD community (see Figure 4.2). Thus, the PhD identity can be viewed as a social identity constructed through certain idioms of practice.

There was also the extensive use of English in the PhD tweets, sometimes to show their highly educated background, which can again be linked to Bourdieu (2011) theory of capital, but also as it was easier to use on occasion and something they used to address a specific audience particularly the PhD audience on Twitter. These uses are consistent with the findings of Bell (1984) and Seargeant, Tagg and Ngampramuan (2012) in terms of how the audience influences the construction of what the participants tweeted and how. Moreover, Riley (2007) argued that language can play a significant role in constructing social identity; in this case, language was used to construct the PhD identity through certain linguistic cues or shared resources, such as PhD hashtags. This leads me to

consider that such a use of English might be an audience design practice that the participants used to construct and show their membership of the PhD community (Tagg and Seargeant, 2014). This is both an instance of an idiom of practice and a form of social identity portrayed through certain linguistic practices (Garcia and Wei, 2013).

Indeed, a key argument in this thesis that contributes to existing knowledge is that the PhD identity can be constructed and represented on Twitter by calling on certain idioms of practice, such as PhD hashtags and the use of English. Hashtags are used to design an audience and represent membership of that social group. It can further be argued that the PhD identity requires certain idioms of practice. I add that these practices revolving around the construction and representation of that identity lead towards the practice of "PhDism", as these examples showed significant patterns in terms of similarities in how this identity was constructed and represented.

While Riley (2007) model, discussed in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2.1), enhanced my understanding of how social identity is constructed in relation to others, Figure 7.1 illustrates how the PhD identity develops through idioms of practice towards PhDism. In this regard, it is important to recognise how capital theory can inform on the construction of identities on social media, in line with (Bourdieu, 2011) and Wood (2016), who argues that English has become a form of capital, particularly given its prevalence in business, media and communication around the world. In the case of this study, it was clearly used to communicate and construct social capital in the PhD identity through idioms of PhDism.

The interview with Mohammad (see Extract 6.2) showed that speaking English is generally regarded as a mark of highly educated people and they tend to use it to indicate this in casual conversation. This implies that the participants' extensive use of English when constructing their PhD identity could be ascribed to the same reason, i.e. showing their highly educated background. This can only add to the social capital accrued in constructing the PhD identity. However, Mohammad also noted that sometimes using English was simply more convenient. This is to be expected given that they were conducting their PhD studies in English while in the UK. Mohammad added that he did not normally use English as a mark of prestige but would do so in some cases if he felt the other person was trying to impress him with his own language use. Therefore, English can be used to show off.

Figure 7.1 demonstrates how the PhD identity moves towards being a practice in which the above point concerning the use of English represents one idiom of practice in which it is deployed as a form of social capital.
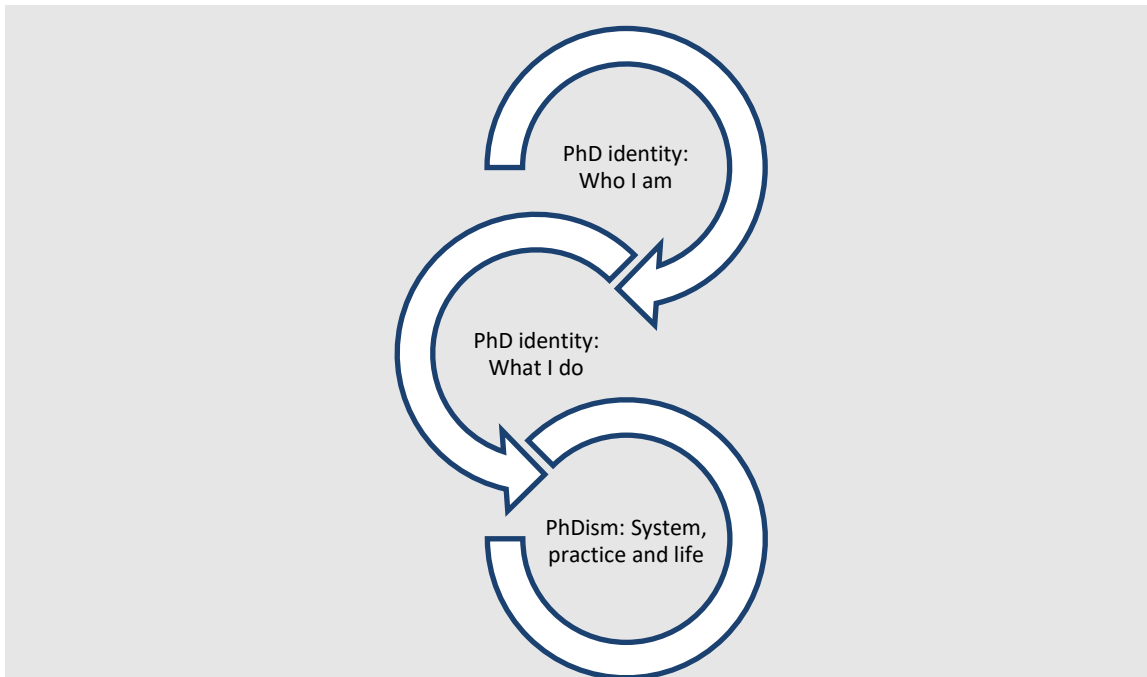
Figure 7.1. Progression of the PhD identity towards PhDism

Figure 7.1 illustrates the growth and development of the PhD identity over time, starting with how all the participants used the PhD to identify who they were (PhD student, PhD candidate and so on; see Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3), then progressing towards what they did as PhD students in tweets reflecting many aspects of PhD life (the challenges, stresses, achievements and so on; see sections 4.2 and 6.2). The empirical data show the "what I do" construction as a PhD student through idioms of practice that are shared, the audience design in linguistic choices, and the affiliation with the PhD community through the use of hashtags – regardless of whether they were aware or unaware that they were engaged in this common construction. It is this shared practice in which PhDism as a system, lifestyle and community practice appears. Hence, this is in line with Gershon's (2010) idioms of practice in terms of how the PhD participants in this study drew upon shared repertoires with other PhD communities on Twitter.

The PhD identity in this study aligns with Riley's (2007) model of identity (see Figure 2.1), reflecting how Saudi PhD students constructed this as a social identity through their

Twitter profiles and self-awareness in their tweets about the challenges, achievements and work entailed in the life of a PhD student. The PhD identity is therefore a complex identity that can be constructed in various forms, but most importantly through the idioms of practice embedded in PhDism. The notion of PhDism also includes that Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK on their return home will share a similar academic background with most ministers in terms of having studied abroad and being a faculty member at a Saudi university before moving up the career ladder. Thus, the shared characteristics and practices the PhD students engaged in, consciously or unconsciously, are encompassed under the umbrella term of PhDism.

From another angle, this study adds to Twitter studies in Arabic contexts. While this study did not set out with presumptions in terms of how Twitter might be used by this group or whether politics would be a significant subject of their use, the online-ethnographic approach adopted revealed that this particular group of PhD students had their own idioms of practice in their use of Twitter to present and construct their professional PhD identity and Twitter seemed to be a tool for enhancing their academic, PhD networks. Among other studies that have looked at this very lively social media platform, Al-Jenaibi (2016) focused on how Twitter enhanced the expression of opinions in the Middle East, addressing conservative societies in the Arabian Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar. The study concluded that Twitter can be a powerful agent in political change.

Looking at a different context and subjects, this study offers the understanding that Twitter can be used in such a way as to enhance the students' PhD identity, which is esteemed by their society. Moreover, the platform enabled them to construct their identity in a dynamic way that kept growing throughout their sojourn in the UK. The findings of this study are in line with Rogers and Jones (2021), who examined the Twitter bios of Americans and argued that these can be a powerful means of showing social identity. However, going beyond this, in presenting themselves as highly educated and making recourse to the related social capital in Saudi Arabia, as pointed out by Nora, this could constrain how one tweets since it must be congruous with the identity constructed.

Thus, the participants in this study showed an awareness of the importance of their position in their society through its appearance in their Twitter profiles, their description of the self and the fact that it became an important theme of their tweets, which were

constructed in similar patterns. In summary, this section has discussed how PhD identity as a theme can be explained through the theoretical lens of PhDism and the idioms of practice that the participants in this study employed in line with their PhD identity on Twitter. Most importantly, this section has also explained why this theme was of great significance to the participants in this study.

7.4 The Global Identity

In Chapter 4, I illustrated how the theme of global identity emerged from the analysis of the different datasets: tweets, Twitter profiles, interviews and observation notes. Section 4.3 extensively discussed how the participants in this study constructed their global identity and what resources they used. In this section, I move on to discuss why it was so significant. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to recall how scholars define this concept. According to Inglis (2014, p. 99) it entails a non-political sense of belonging to a named country. It is about identifying oneself as a global citizen. In a different vein, (Durkheim, 1992, p. 75) views this as a moral concept:

> But societies can have their pride, not in being the greatest or the wealthiest, but in being the most just, the best organized and in possessing the best moral constitution. To be sure, we have not yet reached the point when this kind of patriotism could prevail without dissent, if indeed such a time could ever come.

The moral cosmopolitanism advocated by Durkheim (1992) entails justice, development and improvement. Similarly, in Kant's theoretical work, globalisation was situated as a social and legal theory.

Delanty (2006, pp. 43-44) notion of globalisation seems more relevant to this study and the data (see section 2.5). Delanty highlights important qualities that come with being a global individual, focusing on the abilities of accepting and tolerating what is different and being able to self-transform. According to this view, being global is not only about adaptation to other cultures but involves a transformation of the self that paves the way for new cultural forms. Delanty (2006, p. 36) also differentiates between globalisation and cosmopolitanism, considering the former to lead to the latter, but not substituting it and unable to replace it. This is in contrast to Cabrera (2008), who argues that a global citizen can be a synonym for a cosmopolitan citizen when individuals act to reach out across the globe, help protect rights aiming for a global institution and involve themselves in the

process of putting such a system in place. In this study, I tend to agree with Cabrera (2008) approach, making no distinction between global or cosmopolitan. However, I follow Lewin's (2009) use of the term global, which is a better fit with this study's international educational context.

Looking back at the data presented earlier (see section 4.3), it is clear that the participants constructed their global identity in different ways and it is thus challenging to give a single definition of how they did so. At the start, this leads me to agree strongly with Lemke (2008) argument of the complexity of identity. The participants in this study constructed their global cosmopolitan identity in many forms, such as being a world traveller. This can be seen in many examples, for example the Twitter profiles representing themselves as being abroad (see Figures 4.2, 4.12 and 6.6).

In this regard, Urry (2012, p. 173) argues that globalisation would naturally result from being abroad or traveling extensively. This reasoning aligns with the point Mohammad made in his interview when asked about his study abroad experience, namely that the experience had changed him for the better, or as he put it made him a more "easygoing" person. Being abroad and living in other countries (the US and UK) while studying had changed his views about many things, including helping him to be more open with others (see Extract 4.3). This is aligned with ALQahtani and Hezam (2015) study of Saudi students in the UK, which found that the experience enhanced the ways in which these students accepted difference and changed their views about many things. They gave the example of one of the participants who changed some aspects of the way she dressed outside to show her religious background. Two women in their study discussed wearing the Hijab, while other participants claimed that their attitudes had changed, helping them become more accepting of others and being more open, trying to understand who and what was different from them and their background. Therefore, it can be argued that the experience of studying abroad – in this case for the participants in the UK – can be a rich experience that enhances the global and intercultural identity, in agreement with Bukhari and Denman (2013, p. 288).

From a different perspective, Fine (2007) suggests that globalisation entails a sense of belonging anywhere. This is perhaps mirrored in the way Bushra described how she felt being back in Saudi Arabia amid the COVID-19 lockdown, when she changed the furniture

in her house in Saudi Arabia to look like her home in the UK. In addition, while this can be seen as a sense of nostalgia for a certain place, it also suggests that it is a part of who the participants are their ability to belong. As Fine (2007) puts it:

> For me, the appeal of cosmopolitanism has to do with the idea that human beings can belong anywhere. (p. x)

Moreover, this demonstrates that Bushra did not find it difficult to adapt and feel a sense of attachment to a new place (the UK) and her strong sense of belonging remained when returning to her home country, similar to the Saudi PhD returnee experience described by Almuarik (2019). In another example, consistent with Fine's (2007) view of the cosmopolitan ability to belong anywhere, Mohammad depicted his membership of a European conference held in Spain in a tweet (see Figure 4.10), showing his sense of belonging.

Another way of constructing the global identity, consistent with Delanty (2006), was portrayed by Nora in a tweet that showed her ability to accept and indeed embrace her new lifestyle and ways of thinking (see Figure 4.9). This was borne out in the interview in which she described her shift towards minimalism. Having this ability to learn and adapt to a new and different lifestyle she explained clearly was something she came to through the PhD experience.

This sense of adaptation and openness was also constructed by Duaa and Mohammad in their tweets about the New Year (see Figure 4.13 and Figure 6.8). As already discussed, these Saudi PhD students did not grow up celebrating New Year. The Hijri (Islamic) calendar is the official one used in Saudi Arabia. However, recently I have seen that events in the Georgian calendar have started to play a bigger role and become more significant. What is important here is that even though these celebrations were not part of the participants' background, they now took part. In my interview with Mohammad, I asked him about his tweet concerning New Year resolutions (Figure 6.8 and Extract 6.3). He explained that celebrating New Year is not common in "our culture" (referring to us both as Saudis), but that it is a common thing to talk about in Western culture, illustrating his embrace of what he perceived to be "Western culture". Therefore, these tweets show that the participants had a sense of openness and adaptation to what is different, enabling them to fit in anywhere (Delanty, 2006); (Fine, 2007).

These participants therefore constructed their global identity in many forms: being a world traveller, open-minded and able to belong anywhere. In terms of how this theme was constructed, it is clear that there was no single definitive linguistic resource employed. This is in contrast to many studies that argue English is perceived as a language choice used by international non-English speaking sojourners to show their global identity (Han, 2018; Han, 2020). In Arabic contexts, Albirini (2016), for instance, claims that English is associated with being global and highly educated (prestigious). I would like to argue against the first part of that claim. The participants in this study of Twitter clearly showed that there were other linguistic and non-linguistic resources that could be cultivated to portray and construct their global identity. For example, Nora used Arabic to demonstrate her adaptation to a new lifestyle (see Figure 4.15) and Mohammad combined English and Spanish in a tweet before going to Spain (see Figure 4.10).

Nonetheless, I tend to agree with Albirini (2016) in terms of how English can be used by Arabic speakers to sound highly educated and more prestigious. There is support for this claim from an interview with Mohammad in this study (see Extract 6.2). However, it is necessary to differentiate between what it means to be global and to be highly educated, specifically when looking at how bilinguals view their language choices and considering their views. In the interviews, informants such as Mohammad explained that sometimes English came to mind first, mainly when they were tweeting about the PhD. In this case, I find Garcia and Wei (2013) argument fits this context. The participants constructed and represented their global identity through English, in line with how Chinese visiting scholars in the US in their study reflected their global citizenship on WeChat through linguistic practices (Garcia and Wei, 2013, p. 13).

I also agree with the sociolinguistic view that identities can be constructed through language. The participants in this study did not rely on a single linguistic resource to establish their global identity. Indeed, they even incorporated non-linguistic resources, such as short clips or images. For example, a tweet posted by Duaa (Figure 4.13) showed a view of vibrant London amid New Year's Eve celebrations to add substance to the global identity she constructed when wishing a happy New Year to those around the world.

To sum up the argument, I find the global identity to be a significant theme that the Saudi PhD students in this study constructed over the timeline and in various forms, showing

the complexity of identity. The cosmopolitan global identity can be constructed as being a world traveller, open-minded and easy going, and having a sense of belonging anywhere. The participants in this study showed that the global identity entails certain qualities, but mainly having the ability to grow and embrace what is different or unusual.

I further argue that there is no one way of constructing the global identity; nor is there a single language in which people do so. This identity can be portrayed through multiple, different linguistic resources and non-linguistic resources, although it is fair to say that English is one of the dominant linguistic choices to portray the theme of global identity. This is based on the findings of this and other relevant studies conducted on social media platforms that have looked at international (sojourners) abroad, such as Han (2018, 2020).

7.5 The National Identity

The findings outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 (see sections 5.2 and 6.4) revealed the significance of the national Saudi Arabian identity for the participants and how they constructed it through participating in hashtags related to the national day. Being Saudi Arabian was part of their social and cultural identity. The theme appeared in different datasets, including their Twitter profiles. The male participants in this study constructed this identity through their profile images, in which they appeared wearing the Saudi male dress (see Figures 4.1, 6.9 and 6.10). In some other profiles, the Saudi Arabian identity was constructed through other symbols, such as adding the country flag in the bio or the Twitter header. One participant, Nora, added pictures of Saudi royal family members (see Figure 5.1). These are all different examples and resources that the participants cultivated in constructing their Saudi identity, showing who they were and where they came from.

In Chapter 5, I also explained that I found this theme very notable in my observation of Twitter around the Saudi National Day in September 2019 (see sections 5.2 and 6.4). I also highlighted how this theme was timed as it appeared to be especially significant on certain days, such as the Saudi National Day. Being an insider, I was also able to observe and collect data outside Twitter on the Saudi National Day in Newcastle, capturing how Saudi students typically celebrate. The empirical data around this event support the significance of the theme and illustrate how Saudi students construct their identities while studying overseas.

From the examples provided in section 5.2, I argue that the Saudi identity was constructed in various ways that conveyed many ideas about how this identity is viewed by the participants. Again this is in line with Lemke (2008) view of identity as complex and not fixated or fixed. The national identity and how they constructed it indicated this complexity of identity perceptions and how one theme of identity can be constructed in myriad shapes and also convey different ideas of what constitutes the national identity. The participants' construction of this identity reflects the views of Lemke (2008) and Kershen (1998) in the many ways in which they depicted the various meanings they attached to this identity, suggesting its complexity and malleability (see section 5.2). In addition, this construction on Twitter reflects Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 243) and their view of how identity can be played out and constructed online in countless ways.

The different examples in the data also show how important they considered the Saudi National Day to be. The tweets contained emotional expressions of belonging and love and can be seen as a way of showing what Durkheim (1992) described as patriotism. Durkheim (1992) pointed out that patriotism lies in the sense of collectiveness that binds people together as one state, which would be one possible theory to explain why the date was of such significance for the participants; being in another country, this would be an occasion for signifying such a bond. Likewise, Audi (2009, p. 305) defines patriotism as a form of emotion and Bar-Tal and Staub (1997) describe it as entailing loyalty, love and a feeling of belonging.

While the data under this theme conveyed many of the concepts discussed above (see section 5.2), Durkheim's (1992) view is perhaps most relevant given that this is a social event for sojourners away from home; it might be a particularly substantive event in terms of giving them a sense of support and belonging. The Saudi National Day celebrations are normally funded by the government, which is the sponsor of most Saudis in the UK and all the participants in this study.

The government (the official sponsor) encourages Saudi students to participate in cultural events and be a cultural moderator, taking their cultural norms into account. ALQahtani and Hezam (2015) highlight the goal of the Saudi Cultural Mission in the US to provide Saudi students not only with the knowledge and skills they need but also the awareness of patriotic commitment. Therefore, these students are expected to represent Saudi

culture through taking part in events and this can be seen as another factor that prompted these students to construct this identity. It is also important to take into account that being sponsored might influence the ways they construct their identities.

In the examples analysed in Chapter 5, I pointed to a forceful expression of the sense of belonging, mainly constructed through the use of certain linguistic cues such as "our" in "our national day" in a tweet posted by Faisal (see Figure 5.5), denoting the self as part of a bigger social group. This leads me to consider that the national (Saudi) identity could be a form of social identity as described by (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63):

> Social identity will be understood as that part of an individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.

This social identity was constructed by the participants in many ways, most importantly when they established a sense of membership, being a member of a group and having emotional attachments to that group or named country. This can be described as a representation of both types of national identity identified by Komisarof and Leong (2020) and discussed earlier (see section 2.2.3). The national identity is constructed and represented through social values and beliefs, but also through reflecting ideas and national symbols. Therefore, there is no clear way of classifying or drawing a line between what is civic and what is ethnic. The representation of the national identity entails more or less the same aspects, such as the flag, paying tribute to the Royal family and showing a sense of affiliation through language and it is not possible to distinguish between them as social markers of an ethnic or civic nature; rather, I tend towards viewing them as a combination of the two.

Turning to another aspect, Rogers and Jones (2021) showed that Americans use their bios to present their social (political) identity on Twitter. However, in this study I found that Saudi PhD students in the UK use many aspects of Twitter to construct their Saudi identity. For example, the Twitter header can be powerful aspect in the construction of national identity, as in the example of Nora (see Figure 5.1). Moreover, the national identity can be constructed in tweets, such as those the participants posted on the Saudi National Day (see sections 5.2 and 6.4). Thus, I reiterate that social identity can be constructed powerfully on Twitter through different aspects, not primarily in the bios. In this study, the

Saudi identity emerged in tweets and Twitter headers (part of the profile), but also through multimodal non-linguistic resources such as the country flag or national colours. Significantly, social identity can also be constructed through participating in Twitter hashtags (see Figures 5.3 and Figure 5.5).

Moreover, it is important to recall that the participants in this study did not stick to one language when they constructed their Saudi Arabian-ness. Indeed, in this very theme there was a noticeable presence of English (see Figures 5.3 and 5.5), in contrast to the notion of "one language one nation", which argues against the view that it is language (Arabic in this case) that conveys the sense of nation and national identity (Suleiman, 2019, p. 20). In this study, there is evidence of national identity being conveyed through another language, namely English. Therefore, the theme of Saudi Arabian identity is somewhat fluid linguistically, as the participants did not seem to ascribe to a particular language ideology.

Moving on to another important aspect highlighted earlier concerning how the participants in this study constructed different views of what being a Saudi national means and entails, the findings resonate with Lemke's (2008) argument about the non-fixed, complex aspects of identity that can give rise to different perceptions. All the participants in this study constructed their Saudi Arabian identity, but they each had their different notions of what it constituted and how it might be represented to comply with their individual perceptions.

To sum up, the Saudi Arabian identity appeared to be a significant and timed theme in this study. The participants constructed is as a social identity of who they were and where they came from. With that, I also argue that the social identity theory of Riley (2007) and Tajfel (1978) can be useful to furnish richer understanding of this theme and its significance to this group. The construction of social identity within this group differed from the common notion that it is mostly made apparent through somehow expected language. This group drew on a linguistic resource (English) that is not normally used in such national contexts. Moreover, they also established their Saudi Arabian social identity through hashtags portraying their sense of membership of Saudi Arabia.

Finally, this theme cannot be considered static, semi-static, or dynamic as in the case of the PhD or global identities. It was neither static nor semi-static as it was constructed at

various salient times in different ways, using both linguistic and non-linguistic resources; among the former, the participants commonly used a different linguistic resource than the one that would typically be used (i.e. standard Arabic). The use of English in this study contrasts with Suleiman (2003) study. Nor can the national identity be considered dynamic, despite being portrayed in different ways and conveying various meanings attached to the notion of Saudi-ness. This identity is rooted in certain social and cultural attributes that influence its construction and representation, such as being loyal to the royal family, reciting patriotic lyrics and depicting a sense of being a member of a distinctive national group. Therefore, I arrive at the conclusion that this identity, based on the findings, lies in between the semi-static and dynamic positions on the continuum.

7.6 The Muslim Identity

The religious Muslim identity the participants constructed through Twitter was the fourth significant theme which emerged during the observation, mostly in what I describe as marked times in the Islamic calendar. Time played a part in how this identity was constructed through certain word choices. For example, tweets before Ramadan were not the same as those posted at the end of Ramadan (see section 6.5). Before discussing this theme and how and why it was constructed in these ways, we should revisit the role of religion for this group (Saudi Arabians). Religion plays a significant role in the culture and background of Saudi Arabia. For Muslims around the world, their religion is a sacred subject and a system of beliefs.

A study conducted by Sercombe (2018) concerning the self-perceptions and adjustments of international students in Newcastle upon Tyne in the UK showed religion to be a salient theme for students of Islamic backgrounds, who described it as a strong source of support for them in their new environment. Importantly, Sercombe (2018, p. 52) notes that this theme emerged as significant for Muslim students only and not for students with other religious backgrounds.

As stated earlier in this section, the participants in this study constructed their Muslim identity at marked times (during religious festivals), which in turn reflected the importance of their religion in their lives even when away from home in a different and multi-denominational country. In addition, they did so in certain and noticeably similar ways, showing that they were aware of how this identity could be constructed and seeming to

adhere to certain norms and practices. When discussing religion in this context, it is important to note that it is entwined with the cultural background of these participants; Islam and Islamic laws are at the core of how Saudi Arabia defines its law and culture. Saudi Arabia is the homeland of Mecca and Madinah, the two holy cities for Muslims worldwide. Hence, I agree with Rodrigues and Harding (2009) that religion may be part and parcel of how one gains a greater understanding of a given society, in this study Saudi students in the UK.

It was interesting to see how this theme was bounded by time, in contrast to the PhD and global identities (see section 6.5). The participants' Muslim identity appeared at marked times in the Islamic Hijri calendar, such as in the month of Ramadan (before, during and after) and at Eid. However, it was not apparent throughout the period of observation was the PhD identity. In addition, I also noted how language, predominantly classical Fusha Arabic, was utilised as the main linguistic resource to construct that identity.

In my interviews with Nora and Bushra (see Extract 5.2 and Extract 5.5), they explained that Fusha Arabic is perceived as the main resource they associate with their religion (Islam). Indeed, Nora reported choosing to use Arabic when tweeting or discussing Islam as something rooted in their culture; using another language would be "inappropriate" when tweeting about Islamic-related topics. These examples demonstrate that there is no set line between what is perceived to be part of culture and religion for these participants.

Arabic also has a spiritual value for Muslims, as revealed by Alsaawi (2017) study conducted in the UK. The study examined the language practices of imams in Jumaa (weekly sermons) in different UK mosques. The imams and Jumaa attendees were from different linguistic backgrounds, including English. The study concluded that Arabic has a forceful function and is described as "spiritual", being the language of the holy Quran, even by non-Arabic speakers. Therefore, it can be argued that the use of Arabic in such Islamic discourse may be a taken-for-granted practice, in line with constructing the Muslim identity not only for these participants but also for most Muslims. Many studies have highlighted the complex relationship and interplay between language and religion. Fishman (1966), for example, discussed how Islam reserves a single language for religious practices, such as reading the qur'anic texts and prayers, similar to practice in

Judaism. As noted by (Spolsky, 2003, p. 84), "Islam is basically and strictly associated with Classical Arabic".

Moreover, in terms of constructing the Muslim identity (see sections 6.5 and 5.3), not only was this done in Classical Arabic, but also to a great extent using the same formulaic phrases. The tweets before, during and at the end of Ramadan and at Eid are all clear examples that show the participants following certain protocols: they know what, how and when they should say or tweet formulaic phrases, such as Ramadan Kareem or Eid Mubarak. This study therefore adds to the existing literature showing that the Muslim identity can be constructed in virtual environments such as Twitter with and through diligent adherence to certain linguistic practices, mainly using Classical Arabic in relation to religious festivals.

Another important aspect concerns the remarkable similarities in how this identity was constructed, which suggests that the Muslim identity in this study can be seen as a practice of social identity (Tajfel, 1978). Riley (2007), akin to most sociolinguistics, argues that language can play a significant part in the construction of the social identity. This is what the participants in this study did in their tweets, in which they manifested their Muslim social identity through Classical Arabic as a strong pillar that supported them in doing so on Twitter. Rogers and Jones (2021), in their study of how Americans present their political social identity through Twitter bios, argued that the expression of social identity is explicit. However, I consider that the social identity can also be manifested in less explicit ways through language and genre. For example, the participants' tweets about Ramadan and Eid in this study clearly show that their Muslim identity adheres to the social and cultural system and practices (see sections 5.3 and 6.5). However, in their construction of this as a social identity, they did not make it explicit in their Twitter profiles. Hence, I argue that it is important to consider what and how people tweet when examining identity on Twitter since a single aspect, such as the profile, might not reveal certain aspects related to social identity practices.

The participants constructed their Muslim social identity as something rooted in "we" as a group, something that they practised as part of "who they are". This is exemplified in the interview with Nora (see Extract 5.2) in which she explicitly considered her Muslim identity and her use of Arabic as something "we get used to". The "we" here either references

herself and other Saudis or herself and me as Saudis. In either case, it is clear that she perceives it as something that is shared and that she grew up with. Hence, the Muslim identity is one that presents both the cultural and social backgrounds of these participants; such practices might not be observed among other social groups, especially those related to what precisely should be said at certain times, such as Eid and Ramadan.

In this vein, I agree with Jenks (2005) perspective concerning the co-existence of the cultural and social. However, Kim (2001) takes a different view:

> Cultural identity, as such, refers to a self-definition and definition by others and serves as a frame of reference or a system of knowledge and meaning—an extended conceptual horizon against which the individual assesses his or her own thoughts and actions. Cultural identity, in turn, helps differentiate one group from other groups (De Vos, 1993; De Vos & Suarez-Orozco, 1990b) and breeds a sense of fellowship, or "we-feeling." Like gender identity, a fully formed cultural identity becomes a given or ascribed entity rather than an acquired one. (Kim, 2001, p. 49)

According to Kim (2001), cultural identity is the construction of the self-image by others. It is what is ascribed rather than acquired. Similarly, social identity according to Riley (2007) is about what others perceive and construct about "you". Being Muslim in this study is an indication of the complexity of the notion of identity as it can be rooted in and intertwined with other complex issues: cultural, social and linguistic. Therefore, I would argue that these are part of how the participants view themselves as Saudi Muslims (see sections 5.4 and 6.6).

To sum up, the participants in this study depicted the Muslim identity as a significant theme representing who they were culturally and socially (Saudi Arabian Muslims). The theme was manifested through particular and fixed linguistic practices, indicating the influence of a social and cultural system to which the participants adhered. In addition, the Muslim identity in this study was constructed as static, developed through similar and specific linguistic and non-linguistic practices, time constrained and not changing dynamically over the continuum (see Figure 6.2). I am of the view that it is necessary to examine how individuals use Twitter and for what – how they tweet and what they tweet – in addition to scrutinising different aspects of their Twitter profiles when examining any aspect of their identities on Twitter. I argue further that this would give a holistic and clear view and would certainly enrich our understanding of how identities can be constructed on Twitter.

7.7 The Imagined Audience in the Construction of Identities on Twitter

Earlier in this thesis, specifically in Chapter 2, I reviewed the concept of audience and how this influenced language design and identity construction (see 2.3.4). Bell (1984) proposed a theory explaining how speakers deploy their language according to their perceived audience. This theory was developed further to explain how the audience can be influential, even online. Marwick and Boyd (2011) discussed the impact of the imagined audience on Twitter. In the same line, Litt (2012) proposed a framework for the imagined audience that emphasises its significance in the construction of identity.

Having discussed the four main findings (themes), this conceptual theory is relevant in discussing how the participants constructed their identities on Twitter, mainly the PhD and the religious identities. Marwick and Boyd (2011) and Litt (2012) argued the significance and influence of the audience in terms of how people tweet or perform online even though in digital spaces the audience is mostly likely invisible and not necessarily present. Nonetheless, according to Marwick and Boyd (2011), people do not tweet in the void.

This study adds to the aforementioned works by illustrating how the participants reflected their consciousness and awareness of their audience and how they tweeted and constructed their identities accordingly. This was evident in their construction of the PhD identity, which was mostly designed for Western academics. In this construction, the participants drew heavily on English but also used Twitter hashtags and researcher PhD cues to emphasise this identity. Twitter hashtags, such as #PhDchat and #PhDlife, were common in their tweets about their PhD studies. These were considered part of showing their ambient affiliation towards PhD communities on Twitter but they were also idioms of practice that highlighted their awareness of the PhD audience and how this influenced the way they performed their PhD identity in their tweets.

In addition, the imagined audience played a significant role in how the participants constructed their religious "Muslim identity". They were not only conscious of who they were addressing in their tweets but also when and how. In other words, the tweets in which they constructed this theme of identity were significant during religious festivals, such as Eid or Ramadan. What is more, the participants showed consistency in terms of

how they tweeted about these occasions. The Muslim audience seemed to impose certain constraints in terms of language choices as the participants drew essentially on standard Arabic. Their rationale was clear in that it was what they were used to do and what they were expected to do. It would, therefore, be odd to tweet about these festivals in another language. The participants also used stock formulaic phrases, which again indicated their perceptions of what to tweet and how to design their tweet for their particular audience. Therefore, I argue that the imagined audience on Twitter can play a vital role in how people construct certain identities on Twitter.

7.8 The Interrelationship Between Themes

Throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I addressed the interesting relationships between the themes and how they could sometimes co-exist in what looked like mutually inclusive relationships (see sections 4.4 and 5.4) and I highlighted that it was sometimes challenging – indeed not possible – to categorise the data under a single theme. Finally, in section 6.6 I discussed how these themes were interrelated with each other over the timeline (see Figure 4.16). At this stage, I go further to argue that identity is not only complex but also multiplex, i.e. being both Saudi and Muslim. This concurs with the view of identity proposed by Lemke (2008), which highlights multiplexity and offers a flexible and open approach to dealing with identity in different contexts, including online, as in this study.

Identities are sometimes construed in such a way that it is impossible to claim or establish a dichotomy between them. A clear example of this is presented in Chapter 5 (see Figure 5.12) in a tweet posted by Tariq containing religious text asking God to protect the country after a Houthi attack on Saudi Arabian oil facilities. The tweet showed both the Saudi Arabian and Muslim identities through the context and the religious text. Tariq constructed his Saudi national sense of belonging and love clearly through the text, which read "Allah, protect our country and our guardians from every evil, Allah, keep our enemies from us as you see fit" (translation of Tariq's tweet, Figure 5.12). His use of "our country" and "us" in the text shows a strong sense of belonging to the country. Therefore, it is not possible to ascribe this tweet to the construction of a single identity; rather, is about multiple identities, namely being Saudi and Muslim.

This multiplexity and co-existence was also apparent in the interview with Nora, in which she explained that the use of languages other than Arabic (the language of the tweet) would be inappropriate, something she referred to as being part of "we" in "greeting that we get used to hear since years ago" (see Extract 5.2). Nora here is articulating that the use of Arabic in tweets about religious festivals is natural, this being something that "we" – Saudis and Muslims – will be used to hearing and used to doing. Thus, she sets out this construction of her Muslim identity as following an expected path, one that she grew up with and that reflected how she perceived her Muslim Saudi Arabian identity. This association of the Muslim and Saudi Arabian identities in a social construct is also present in the tweet posted by Tariq cited above (see Figure 5.12).

This multiplicity was evident in the PhD and global identities too, as explained previously (see sections 4.4 and 6.6). In the examples provided, it would not be a fair representation to suggest that the participants constructed either their PhD identity or global identity in isolation: there is no clear-cut line between the two. Indeed, it can be argued that the former involves the latter in many ways. This overlap can be challenging in establishing dichotomies between identities, in line with Lemke (2008) view of identity as multiplex. One example is Mohammad's tweet illustrated in Figure 4.10 about participating in the European conference on respiratory matters. In it, he presented himself as a member of the conference based on his PhD work and the abstract he submitted to take part. Thus, his PhD is part of his global identity related to the conference.

This also suggests that going abroad to study, as in the case of these PhD students, could provide opportunities to take part in international events and enhance their PhD and global perspectives. Indeed, this is what Mohammad told me in the interview about his experience of studying abroad (see Extract 4.3). Such findings are in line with those of other studies, such as Lewin (2009), ALQahtani and Hezam (2015), Han (2018) and Almuarik (2019), all of which discuss how the sojourners' experience enriches their global background.

I therefore argue in favour of Lemke's (2008) view on this subject. I add to this that the multiplex nature of identity on social media is a concept that refers to the ability of individuals to express multiple aspects of their identity on social media platforms and in this study through tweets and profiles. This can include aspects such as expression their

religious and national identities, PhD and global identities and sometimes religious and PhD identities in combination. The construction of this multiplexity can be enacted in different elements of the social media and might be impacted by its affordances. For example, a single tweet is restricted to 280 characters, which might influence the production of this multiplexity.

It was also evident that the themes can be constructed separately from each other. For example, Nora tweeted about Ramadan and the conference she was attending in Glasgow at discrete points, showing that the Muslim identity and PhD identity could be constructed independently of each other (see Figures 6.14, 6.15 and 6.16). However, some identities, such as the PhD identity and the global identity, tend to intersect. This supports the argument made by Lemke (2008) that identity can be complex, multiple, or indeed multiplex. For this reason, examining the concept of identity on social media can be challenging and requires a flexible, open approach. In this regard, Lemke (2008) potentially offers a way of operationalising such qualities in dealing with identity. Finally, the concept of multiplex identity on social media has become increasingly important in recent years as social media have become an integral part of our lives. Social media platforms provide a space for individuals to express themselves and to connect with others who share similar interests and experiences. This has allowed individuals to explore and construct multiple aspects of their identity in ways that were not possible before.

7.9 Overall Observations of Identity in this Study

So far, this chapter has discussed each theme in turn and revisited the most relevant body of literature. This section brings the various aspects together and provides a discussion of the observational data to then be able to synthesise the final arguments concerning identity construction and representation on Twitter and address the research questions:

RQ1. Which identities do Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK construct on Twitter?

RQ2. How are these identities constructed (e.g. through images, text, and display of membership of specific communities)?

RQ3. When and how are these identities constructed over the timeline of observation?

Concerning the first question, the findings showed that the eight Saudi PhD students constructed identities reflecting four main themes over the observation period: the PhD identity, the global identity, the national (Saudi) identity and the religious (Muslim) identity. However, the observation showed that these identities were not constructed discretely and took various forms. Thus, each of these identities has many different components. This resonates with Lemke's (2008) view that identity can have multiple components. For example, the PhD identity is variously constructed and represented as being a researcher (see Figure 4.1), a professional PhD working at a Saudi university (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3), a member of the PhD community on Twitter (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5), and the PhD student as an achiever (see sections 4.7 and 4.8). These all point to identity as not being innate or fixed but able to take multiple forms, potentially in a single tweet (see section 4.2).

Moving to the second question, each identity was constructed in various forms, but the observation revealed that in the case of the PhD and religious identities, the participants employed certain idioms of practice. With regard to the PhD identity, the data showed that these participants constructed this theme drawing upon certain resources to design the audience with which they identified. This was clear in the consistent use of PhD hashtags, such as #PhDlife (see Figures 4.4 and 4.6). Moreover, English was used in the construction and representation of this identity. The participants conveyed this as a social identity perceived to have social capital in Saudi society. Thus, for the PhD identity, language and audience design play a part in depicting this as a source of social capital. The participants' representation of this identity depicted that it was an important aspect of who they were and how they wanted to be seen on Twitter, reflecting the theoretical frameworks drawn on in this study (Riley, 2007; Bourdieu, 2011), as well as being consistent with the empirical studies of Tagg and Seargeant (2014) and Harrison (2019).

The religious identity was also constructed as socially and culturally rooted. Moreover, it was depicted in more or less the same way, deploying one language (Standard Arabic). The participants conveyed that using another language (e.g. English) would be inappropriate. This resonates with scholars who have discussed the strong relationship between religion and language, especially for Muslims (see Spolsky, 2003). In addition,

the social and cultural embeddedness of this theme reflects a social identity that can be articulated with reference to the theoretical perspectives of Tajfel (1978) and Riley (2007).

I formerly argued that the PhD identity can viewed as a social identity that progresses towards the practice of PhDism based on the Gershon's (2010) theory of idioms of practice. Moreover, the construction of this identity is dynamic, represented in the shifts it undergoes resulting from the PhD students' experiences over the timeline. This resonates with Darvin's (2016) argument that identity can be dynamic and multiple in online contexts. In contrast, although the religious Muslim identity is also rooted as a social and cultural identity, it is not constructed or represented dynamically, since its representation is constrained by beliefs, ideologies and norms (see Extract 5.3).

In summary, I argue that the construction and representation of the themes take complex and various forms and can be explained with reference to identity theory and the concept of membership, represented in the works of Tajfel (1978) and Riley (2007) in terms of how social identity can be performed through language, and in Gershon's (2010) concept of idioms of practice in terms of how online communities, such as Twitter, engage in shared practices with larger groups (PhD communities). Finally, the PhD identity confers social capital (Bourdieu, 2011).

Regarding the third question, concerning how identities are constructed and represented over time, I have argued based on the observation that the religious Muslim identity and the Saudi national identity are bound by time. The former is particularly evident at the time of religious occasions, such as Ramadan and Eid, and tweets representing this identity contain certain wording and phrasing related to the religious practices and rituals engaged in only at these times (see Figure 5.7).

The national identity is similar to the religious identity in being manifested mainly at the time of a national occasion (i.e. the Saudi National day). This leads me to consider the national Saudi identity as lying somewhere between static and dynamic on the continuum (Figure 6.5). However, this identity was constructed and represented in a less fixed format than the religious identity; the participants depicted it through English as well as Arabic and also drew upon new ideas of what might constitute that social identity, such as being dedicated to one's job, which was integrated in the understanding of the Saudi national

identity by Rose (see Figure 5.4). This suggests that the social national identity has a civic aspect (Komisarof and Leong, 2020).

The other two themes – PhD identity and global identity – were not linked to time as they were constructed throughout the observation period and were dynamic and interrelated, forming a global PhD identity in many instances (see Extract 4.6). The global identity in particular can be related in many ways to intercultural theories as it was constructed and represented as being influenced by the PhD overseas experience (see Figure 4.13 and Extracts 4.6 and 4.7).

The final argument to be derived from the observation is that the construction and representation of identities on Twitter is a complex matter that relates to social and cultural theories, such as the works of Riley (2007), Lemke (2008), Harrison (2019), Greshon (2010), Tagg and Seargeant (2014), and Bourdieu (2011). A close examination revealed that identity construction on a social media platform is fluid and enables the participants to construct their identities as multiplex in a process in which language plays a major part (Darvin, 2016).

7.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the main themes that emerged from the analysis of the different datasets: Twitter profiles, tweets, interviews and observation notes. I have argued that the PhD identity was a significant theme that seemed to progress towards a practice of PhDism. Here, I found Gershon (2010) idioms of practice to be a robust framework for considering how the PhD identity was constructed and developed and proposed a model showing how the PhD identity grows and develops from "who I am" to "what I do" and then towards PhDism (see Figure 7.1).

Another notable theme was the global identity. This recurred in many forms and showed the participants as world travellers, open-minded and having the ability to belong and adapt to being anywhere. In contrast to most findings regarding language choice within this theme (being global), this study argues that the global identity can be constructed through different language practices and the cultivation of many resources, not only English, aligned with the work of Canagarajah (2012). However, at the same time, the findings also suggest that English is dominant in the representation of this theme, as found

in many studies. Notably, both the PhD identity and global identities were constructed dynamically on the continuum, with English playing a considerable role (Figure 6.1).

The other two themes seemed to be more closely related to each other and to the participants' social and cultural identity, in agreement with the literature concerning religion, language and culture discussed in this chapter. However, it was surprising to see that the presentation of Saudi identity in this study took an unusual form, incorporating the use of English, leading me to contest the nation's statement of identity which considers adherence to a single language (Arabic) to be a critical aspect of nationhood. The Muslim identity was semi-static in its construction through both linguistic and non-linguistic resources. The participants' (insider) perspectives showed its entanglement with the Saudi identity in terms of how they viewed it as part of who they were and the way it was rooted in social and cultural norms.

Reflecting on the above, this study has enabled me to see how critical it is to consider different aspects of Twitter rather than focusing on one affordance or mode, in particular when exploring identity. The tweets and different parts of the Twitter profiles, besides the notes I took throughout the observation and the interviews, all enriched the study and my perspectives on self and identity. For example, I found that social identities, such as being "Muslim" and beliefs demonstrated by fasting in the month of Ramadan, were enacted through tweets, which could be constructed implicitly in one part of Twitter (e.g. profiles) based on names or the way they were dressed. Such implicit messaging could only be gleaned from spending considerable time observing the participants' Twitter behaviour and conducting interviews. However, there were also instances in which the participants constructed their various identities explicitly through tweets and interviews (see Chapter 4).

Finally, this study shows that Twitter as a social media platform enables the construction of multiplex identities in various ways. The observation clearly revealed how individuals construct themselves as overseas PhD students and global beings, with a social and cultural sense of belonging to their home country and religion. This can be added to sociolinguistic perspective on the construction of identity through discourse on social media. The participants in this study were keen to represent their overseas status and portray how this enhanced their global identity and perspectives. However, they also

constructed and represented their cultural and social backgrounds as Muslim and Saudi. All of these indicate the potentials of the sociolinguistic approach for studying identity through discourse on social media.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

8.1 Chapter Overview

Having presented the themes in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and then discussed them together in relation to the literature in Chapter 7, this concluding chapter provides a final summary of the study, highlights the contributions, implications and limitations and provides suggestions for future research. The final section is my reflection on the entire process of conducting this research and its impacts.

8.2 Synopsis of the Study

This section provides a summary of the study aims and the process as a whole. The main aim of this thesis was to provide an in-depth, exploratory study of how a group of international Saudi PhD students in the UK constructed their identities on Twitter. This was inspired by my desire to understand what other PhD students encounter in this process and how they reflect that on Twitter. Moreover, the study aimed to contribute to existing knowledge of online identity construction by examining the phenomenon among PhD sojourners in the UK interacting on Twitter while overseas. There is a dearth of research on this particular subject, even though the numbers of international students are constantly increasing (Schartner and Young, 2020). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the significant role of social media in the lives of many people and especially international students (Wong, 2014).

The significance of the study lies in addressing identity construction and representation on social media, which has become an increasingly important topic as these platforms are constantly evolving and play a larger role in people's social and work lives. Studying identity on social media can lead to a better understanding of how people interact and communicate online. Furthermore, it can provide insights into the ways identity is constructed on social media. Thus, the study of identity representation on social media can be beneficial in understanding the dynamics of online identity construction. Moreover, this study is of significance in the contribution it makes to research on the experience of international students. This research has considered how a particular group of

international students (Saudi PhD sojourners) express their identities and global perceptions online.

The focus of this study is on providing an in-depth perspective by exploring the multiple realities of the insiders (the participants and myself as the researcher). The study employed an online ethnographic approach to address three main research questions exploring the identities constructed by Saudi PhD students in the UK on Twitter, how they are constructed and when over the timeline of the study. The group comprised eight participants in total (four males and four females) and data collection encompassed their Twitter profiles and tweets from May 2019 to June 2020, followed by Twitter interviews conducted with four of them in June 2020. Further follow-up interviews took place later in 2022 with some of the informants previously interviewed.

The study findings cannot be claimed to be comprehensive or generalisable given the qualitative nature of this study. However, the study provides empirical data and evidence, with detailed descriptions that can add to understanding of how sojourners, here PhD Saudi students, construct their identities on the well-known social media platform, Twitter. Moreover, being an insider myself means that there is a strong emic perspective in this study and thus I aimed to adopt a reflexive approach (see 3.10.2).

The themes that emerged from the analysis were informed by the grounded theory approach advocated by Charmaz (2006) and Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. These were discussed in detail in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, reporting the findings from the analysis, and Chapter 7, which discussed the findings in relation to the literature. The following section discusses the contributions that this study makes to the body of research.

8.3 Contributions and Significance of the Study

The contributions of this study can be seen as falling under two categories: theoretical and methodological. These are reported in turn.

8.3.1 Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contribution lies primarily in the in-depth and exploratory nature of this study, which examines an underdeveloped aspect in the emerging field of identity construction, namely that of international students and sojourners online using social media. This study provides empirical data demonstrating how the participants constructed and represented their identities discursively on Twitter through their profiles and tweets, which contributes to sociolinguistic research in the field of social media.

Sociolinguistics studies that addressed similar areas of research, such as Alhejely (2020), Han's (2018), and (2020), shed light on the experience of sojourners focusing more on language choices on WeChat. They illustrated how mobility and ethnicity can play significant roles in language choices. This study contributes to the sociolinguistic field by addressing the discursive construction of identity through Twitter discourse. It demonstrated how particular identities and identification can be performed through discourse, such as the sense of identification to PhD and academia as a vital element in constructing the PhD identity.

Another significant contribution to the field of sociolinguistics and identity studies comprises the in-depth insights provided into the intersectionality between identities, manifested especially in the intersecting categories of nationality (Saudi) and religion (Muslim). This points to the significance of the sociolinguistic approach in examining identity, specifically in revealing intricate relationships and enriching understanding of how people's social, cultural and educational backgrounds and life experiences integrate in the discursive construction of identity on social media.

Another contribution of the study is that it shows how identity can be constructed and represented semi-statically or dynamically over time (see Figure 6.5). The study is timely in showing the value of long-term observation in revealing significant patterns of similarities; these were visible in how the participants constructed their identities as part of a community sharing different aspects, i.e. Saudi, Muslim, PhD students in the UK.

This study therefore contributes to the field of research looking at international students and their intercultural experience during their sojourn abroad, in particular by providing

authentic examples of the experience of Saudi PhD sojourners in the UK and how they portrayed this on Twitter.

8.3.2 Methodological contributions

Methodologically, this study makes several significant contributions in terms of the approach and method adopted. The study is grounded and online-ethnographic. As such, it incorporates various insider perspectives, i.e. the participants' and my own as the researcher. I was a participant observer of the participants' interactions on Twitter and I shared with the participants the characteristics of being Saudi and a PhD student in the UK. While this has advantages in terms of enhancing the insider perspective, through the shared language and cultural background, it does have the potential to lead to greater subjectivity and the potential for bias. Hence, a reflexive approach was implemented to mitigate any issues.(see 3.10.2). Moreover, the study employed interviews conducted via direct messages on Twitter, consistent with the online-ethnographic approach and enhancing the emic perspective by incorporating the participants' insights.

Implementing the interviews through Twitter is another contribution to online ethnography, as this is a novel approach which was smooth in terms of implementation and was convenient for both parties (researcher and informants).

Overall, this study answers Marwick's (2014) call for ethnographic research conducted on Twitter to gain in-depth insights and rich data on insiders' perspectives, as obtained in this research.

8.4 Implications of the Study

It is important to note that the sample size of this study is very small. However, the findings have implications for different constituents, including the academic community and institutions.

First, the international PhD sojourners reflected on their learning in many ways, but hashtags played a significant role in their communication with the PhD communities and PhD networks in different fields. The tweets posted by the participants during conferences or just to vent about PhD life and journey are worthy of attention. Academic stakeholders could make use of these to enhance their communication and awareness of several issues

that sojourners and PhD students raise in terms of their studies abroad. I urge wellbeing teams at host universities to keep an eye on certain hashtags, such as #PhDlife and #PhDchat as they provide valuable information on the most common challenges that PhD students tweet about. In particular, such tweets could help advisory teams at universities identify what support might need to be offered to PhD students broadly and international students in particular. Based on my experience, I know how difficult it can be for international postgraduate students to articulate their problems to others but their tweets in these hashtags provide clear examples of the issues they face.

The participants in this study illustrated that identities can be constructed online and clearly indicated the importance of undertaking a PhD. They also showed that intercultural communication can take place online through engaging with different PhD students from different backgrounds on Twitter. This platform can be used as an effective resource for communication between students and other stakeholders, including teachers or academic supervisors, at any level of higher education. Most importantly, it could be of use to academic staff in understanding the issues overseas PhD students face, helping them plan and offer support, both educational and ensuring well-being.

In addition, Twitter offers an interesting service for researchers who want to use online interviews; these can be conducted in two ways, either synchronously (asking participants to be present at the time of the interview as in this study), or asynchronously (by sending questions and waiting for the informant to answer them when convenient). In terms of online observation, Twitter offers the option of setting notifications to be received for certain accounts (involved subjects) that the researcher can make use of and keep up to date with what participants are posting and doing on Twitter.

For academic institutions, I consider the findings indicate how hashtags can be used to organise conferences and structure useful discussion. This might be done at a lower cost and more conveniently than by other means. For instance, having mini-Twitter conferences could yield many positive outcomes, both academic and professional, depending on their content. This would also enhance networking, potentially resulting in global cooperation and collaborations between researchers in different fields.

Universities that are part of the Saudi scholarship scheme (both international universities and participatory scholarship management teams in home universities) should also make use of Twitter to maintain contact with scholarship students abroad and offer the support needed.

8.5 Limitations of the Study

Having discussed the contributions and implications that this study offers, I turn to the study limitations which future research might consider.

First, the findings cannot be generalised to all Saudi or international PhD students abroad. This study targeted a small sample (eight Saudi PhD students in the UK) and other overseas students in other countries might provide different insights based on new empirical data.

Second, this study was interpretive in nature and carried out by an insider participant observer (myself). To mitigate any issues arising from this aspect, I diligently implemented a reflexive approach to the observation and my participation as explained in 3.10.2

Third, this study did not analyse the engagement between participants and others (likes and interactions between tweets) given that when I started data collection the focus was on language choice, not identity. It would be interesting to undertake such a study as it might reveal different insights.

While Twitter is an interesting forum for conducting studies about identity construction, there are many other platforms that might be equally valid sites in terms of yielding interesting findings. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the identities constructed are online (Twitter) identities and it cannot be claimed that these are the same as those representing in the real-life setting.

Moreover, while Twitter offers an interesting service for researchers who want to use online interviews, as already noted above, there is a risk of misunderstanding and possible delays or crossed conversations. Such issues should be acknowledged before choosing this option. Also, interviewing bilingual participants requires the researcher to have knowledge of both languages. In this case, being an insider with a shared language is an advantage. However, this also means that translation arises as another issue. Recruiting

an outside translator, someone with a bilingual background and from the same origin (in this study, a Saudi national and bilingual in English) might be useful and reduce the potential for bias that might otherwise arise from the researcher (especially an insider of the community) undertaking the work. However, it can be difficult to recruit such a person and expensive.

In this study, I found the change in focus was one of the main limitations that hindered me from delving into some themes in greater depth. For example, concerning the national identity theme, it would have been interesting to explore what constitutes this identity with the participants in the interviews and then engage fully with Komisarof and Leong (2020) distinction between civic and ethnic national identities.

The participants were not always active on Twitter and thus a polymedia approach such as the one proposed by Tagg and Lyons (2021) would be valuable for future work. In addition, the intersection of additional identities, such as being a mother or father, were not considered. They were not particularly salient over the observation period but might well be in other studies.

Another limitation that might be applicable to all studies conducted on social media is that the platforms keep changing and adding new features. For example, late in 2020, Twitter added a new feature that enabled its users to tweet voice recordings lasting 120 seconds. My observation of Twitter data lasted eight months and concluded before this feature was added and hence I did not have to deal with this issue. Later, in July 2023, Elon Musk decided to change the Twitter brand to X, losing the blue bird symbol overnight and amending the tweet option to post. All of these changed happened in short order after the completion of this thesis.

Moreover, I think it is worth noting that researchers looking at social media platforms like Twitter might wish to consider unexpected changes before embarking on their research since it might entail doing multi-modal analysis dealing with texts, emojis, voice recordings and videos. Analysis of Twitter data and interviews can be done through software packages, such as CAQDAS or NVivo, but the latter has issues with Arabic script.

Another limitation was the lack of integration of multimodal analysis to address the images and multimodal resources. There are many software packages available, such as

Multimodal Analysis Image, which can enrich analysis of how these resources are used to make meaning and contribute to identity construction. However, this was not possible due to time and resource constraints.

8.6 Recommendations for Further Research

International students are well-researched subjects in intercultural communication and language learning and pedagogy studies. However, the construction of international students' online identities is a relatively emerging field that needs more research. This study looked at a small number of participants in a particular group (Saudi PhD students in the UK) due to the convenience sampling approach outlined in Chapter 3. Future studies might explore the experiences of international students from different countries to see how they construct their identities online.

In a different vein, researchers in intercultural studies might conduct a comparative study to examine intercultural competence and how it is developed by PhD students studying abroad and home students on Twitter.

Another recommendation would be to conduct longitudinal studies to see how identities are constructed over the long term while overseas and the impact on returning to their home countries.

Another suggestion for identity researchers engaged in social media and Twitter would be to address how Twitter profile informs the way people use Twitter and what they tweet. For example, Rogers and Jones (2021) conducted an interesting study that showed how Americans presented their social political identity in Twitter bios, but it would perhaps be more informative had it also shed light on how this informed the way they used Twitter and what they tweeted, i.e. if profiles inform the way people use the social media platform.

Another recommendation for future research on Twitter and identity would be to incorporate multimodal analysis as online contexts such as Twitter can be rich in the deployment and use of many resources.

Based on this study, I would also like to propose that future researchers in the field of identity focus on social media given their prevalence. Moreover, I recommend taking a holistic approach rather than adopting a narrow focus and examining only certain

attributes or affordances of a given platform. This would help establish solid grounds for future research to go further and explore intricate subjects in the future.

Other interesting approaches might be to seek posters' reflections and analysis of their own online identities through autoethnography. In addition, research could look at how overseas students construct their identities in their interactions with students of other nationalities in Twitter hashtags or replies.

8.7 Concluding Remarks

This thesis has been the longest project I have ever undertaken. My life over the past four years has mostly revolved around it. This work has impacted my life in many ways, both personally and as a researcher. My learning experience started back in 2018 and continued until March 2023 – and I am still learning. Looking at how a small group of eight Saudi PhD students constructed and represented their identities on Twitter has enhanced my perspectives and expanded my knowledge in different fields including sociology, psychology, computer communication, language and identity.

My personal interest in the subject and urge to understand myself during the major change in my life of moving to study in the UK was the main driver for me to conduct this research. Through this process, I developed my research skills and learned to be flexible, critical and – crucially – open to different perspectives. This work started as a project to research code-switching practices on Twitter and became a completely different project aimed at exploring identity construction by Saudi PhD students in the UK on Twitter. This shift had great impact on me, both positive in terms of enjoying researching the topic and negative in imposing constraints, but mostly it enhanced my perspectives as a person and as a researcher. The great lesson I have learned from this exploratory research is to be open to different possibilities. Moreover, I have learned that we keep learning from our experience, from the ups and downs, from the people around us, from our supervisors and their experience, and from our reading.

This study has revealed interesting findings concerning identity construction on Twitter. The participants constructed four main identities: PhD, global, religious and national. The construction of these identities was complex and involved the participants' social, cultural and educational backgrounds. This thesis contributes theoretically to the existing body of

knowledge in the field of identity, specifically the construction of identity online. This study has shown Twitter to be a site that enables identity construction, contesting Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) argument. In addition, the findings reflect the constructivist theory of identity as fluid and complex, or indeed multiplex.

Methodologically, this study contributes to online ethnographic research, providing an empirical example of how one might carry out participant observation and conduct interviews using the affordances of Twitter. This thesis has its limitations, which I have already reviewed in this chapter, and makes several recommendations.

8.8.1 Future research directions

There are several potential avenues for further research. First, there would be value in exploring the construction of identity among other groups of international students, taking a comparative approach. Such studies of identity interested in international students and their intercultural experience might also conduct more research on social media platforms as these are an integral part of international students' lives while they are abroad.

Personally, I am interested in further exploring how Saudi PhD students who have undergone the experience of sojourn abroad then construct their identities when they finish their studies in the UK and return to Saudi Arabia. Moreover, I would like to expand the exploration and include other aspects of interaction on X, such as likes and interactions between those posting. I would also like to work more broadly with other researchers who share my interests in identity and social media.

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Appendix A. Twitter Privacy Policy

We believe you should always know what data we collect from you and how we use it, and that you should have meaningful control over both. We want to empower you to make the best decisions about the information that you share with us. That's the purpose of this Privacy Policy. You should read this policy in full, but here are a few key things we hope you take away from it:

- Twitter is public and Tweets are immediately viewable and searchable by anyone around the world. We give you non-public ways to communicate on Twitter too, through protected Tweets and Direct Messages. You can also use Twitter under a pseudonym if you prefer not to use your name.

- When you use Twitter, even if you're just looking at Tweets, we receive some personal information from you like the type of device you're using and your IP address. You can choose to share additional information with us like your email address, phone number, address book contacts, and a public profile. We use this information for things like keeping your account secure and showing you more relevant Tweets, people to follow, events, and ads.

- We give you control through your settings to limit the data we collect from you and how we use it, and to control things like account security, marketing preferences, apps that can access your account, and address book contacts you've uploaded to Twitter. You can also always download the information you have shared on Twitter.

- In addition to information you share with us, we use your Tweets, content you've read, Liked, or Retweeted, and other information to determine what topics you're interested in, your age, the languages you speak, and other signals to show you more relevant content. We give you transparency into that information, and you can modify or correct it at any time.

- If you have questions about this policy, how we collect or process your personal data, or anything else related to our privacy practices, we want to hear from you. You can contact us at any time. Information You Share With Us We require certain information to provide our services to you. For example, you must have an account in order to upload or share content on Twitter. When you choose to share the information below with us, we collect and use it to operate our services. Basic Account Information: You don't have to create an account to use some of our service features, such as searching and viewing public Twitter profiles or watching a broadcast on Periscope's website. If you do choose to create an account, you must provide us with some personal data so that we can provide our services to you. On Twitter this includes a display name (for example, "Twitter Moments"), a username (for example, @TwitterMoments), a password, and an email address or phone number. Your display name and username are always public, but you can use either your real name or a pseudonym. You can also create and manage multiple Twitter accounts, for example to express different parts of your identity. Public Information: Most activity on Twitter is public, including your profile information, your time zone and language, when you created your account, and your Tweets and certain information about your Tweets like the date, time, and application and version of Twitter you Tweeted from. You also may choose to publish your location in your Tweets or your Twitter profile. The lists you create, people you follow and who follow you, and Tweets you Like or Retweet are also public. Periscope broadcasts you create, click on, or otherwise engage with, either on Periscope or on Twitter, are public along with when you took those actions. So are your hearts, comments, the number of hearts you've received, which accounts you are a Superfan of, and whether you watched a broadcast live or on replay. Any hearts, comments, or other content you contribute to another account's broadcast will remain part of that broadcast for as long as it remains on Periscope. Information posted about you by other people who use our services may also be public. For example, other people may tag you in a photo (if your settings allow) or mention you in a Tweet. You are responsible for your Tweets

and other information you provide through our services, and you should think carefully about what you make public, especially if it is sensitive information. If you update your public information on Twitter, such as by deleting a Tweet or deactivating your account, we will reflect your updated content on Twitter.com, Twitter for iOS, and Twitter for Android. In addition to providing your public information to the world directly on Twitter, we also use technology like application programming interfaces (APIs) and embeds to make that information available to websites, apps, and others for their use - for example, displaying Tweets on a news website or analyzing what people say on Twitter. We generally make this content available in limited quantities for free and charge licensing fees for large-scale access. We have standard terms that govern how this data can be used, and a compliance program to enforce these terms. But these individuals and companies are not affiliated with Twitter, and their offerings may not reflect updates you make on Twitter. For more information about how we make public data on Twitter available to the world, visit https://developer.twitter.com. Contact Information and Address Books: We use your contact information, such as your email address or phone number, to authenticate your account and keep it - and our services - secure, and to help prevent spam, fraud, and abuse. We also use contact information to personalize our services, enable certain account features (for example, for login verification or Twitter via SMS), and to send you information about our services. If you provide us with your phone number, you agree to receive text messages from Twitter to that number as your country's laws allow. Twitter also uses your contact information to market to you as your country's laws allow, and to help others find your account if your settings permit, including through third-party services and client applications. You can use your settings for email and mobile notifications to control notifications you receive from Twitter. You can also unsubscribe from a notification by following the instructions contained within the notification or here. You can choose to upload and sync your address book on Twitter so that we can help you find and connect with people you know and help others find and connect with you. We also use this information to better recommend content to you and others. You can sign up for Periscope with an account from another service like Twitter, Google, or Facebook, or connect your Periscope account to these other services. If you do, we will use information from that service, including your email address, friends, or contacts list, to recommend other accounts or content to you or to recommend your account or content to others. You can control whether your Periscope account is discoverable by email through your Periscope settings. If you email us, we will keep the content of your message, your email address, and your contact information to respond to your request. Direct Messages and Non-Public Communications: We provide certain features that let you communicate more privately or control who sees your content. For example, you can use Direct Messages to have non-public conversations on Twitter, protect your Tweets, or host private broadcasts on Periscope. When you communicate with others by sending or receiving Direct Messages, we will store and process your communications and information related to them. This includes link scanning for malicious content, link shortening to http://t.co URLs, detection of spam and prohibited images, and review of reported issues. We also use information about whom you have communicated with and when (but not the content of those communications) to better understand the use of our services, to protect the safety and integrity of our platform, and to show more relevant content. We share the content of your Direct Messages with the people you've sent them to; we do not use them to serve you ads. Note that if you interact in a way that would ordinarily be public with Twitter content shared with you via Direct Message, for instance by liking a Tweet, those interactions will be public. When you use features like Direct Messages to communicate, remember that recipients have their own copy of your communications on Twitter - even if you delete your copy of those messages from your account - which they may duplicate, store, or re-share. Payment Information: You may provide us with payment information, including your credit or debit card number, card expiration date, CVV code, and billing address, in order to purchase advertising or other offerings provided as part of our services. How You Control the Information You Share with Us: Your Privacy and safety settings let you decide:

- Whether your Tweets are publicly available on Twitter

- Whether others can tag you in a photo

- Whether you will be able to receive Direct Messages from anyone on Twitter or just your followers

- Whether others can find you based on your email or phone number

- Whether you upload your address book to Twitter for storage and use

- When and where you may see sensitive content on Twitter

- Whether you want to block or mute other Twitter accounts Additional Information We Receive About You We receive certain information when you use our services or other websites or mobile applications that include our content, and from third parties including advertisers. Like the information you share with us, we use the data below to operate our services. Location Information: We require information about your signup and current location, which we get from signals such as your IP address or device settings, to securely and reliably set up and maintain your account and to provide our services to you. Subject to your settings, we may collect, use, and store additional information about your location - such as your current precise position or places where you've previously used Twitter - to operate or personalize our services including with more relevant content like local trends, stories, ads, and suggestions for people to follow. Learn more about Twitter's use of location here, and how to set your Twitter location preferences here. Learn more about how to share your location in Periscope broadcasts here. Links: In order to operate our services, we keep track of how you interact with links across our services. This includes links in emails we send you and links in Tweets that appear on other websites or mobile applications. If you click on an external link or ad on our services, that advertiser or website operator might figure out that you came from Twitter or Periscope, along with other information associated with the ad you clicked such as characteristics of the audience it was intended to reach. They may also collect other personal data from you, such as cookie identifiers or your IP address. Cookies: A cookie is a small piece of data that is stored on your computer or mobile device. Like many websites, we use cookies and similar technologies to collect additional website usage data and to operate our services. Cookies are not required for many parts of our services such as searching and looking at public profiles. Although most web browsers automatically accept cookies, many browsers' settings can be set to decline cookies or alert you when a website is attempting to place a cookie on your computer. However, some of our services may not function properly if you disable cookies. When your browser or device allows it, we use both session cookies and persistent cookies to better understand how you interact with our services, to monitor aggregate usage patterns, and to personalize and otherwise operate our services such as by providing account security, personalizing the content we show you including ads, and remembering your language preferences. We do not support the Do Not Track browser option. You can learn more about how we use cookies and similar technologies here. Log Data: We receive information when you view content on or otherwise interact with our services, which we refer to as "Log Data," even if you have not created an account. For example, when you visit our websites, sign into our services, interact with our email notifications, use your account to authenticate to a third-party service, or visit a third-party service that includes Twitter content, we may receive information about you. This Log Data includes information such as your IP address, browser type, operating system, the referring web page, pages visited, location, your mobile carrier, device information (including device and application IDs), search terms, and cookie information. We also receive Log Data when you click on, view, or interact with links on our services, including when you install another application through Twitter. We use Log Data to operate our services and ensure their secure, reliable, and robust performance. For example, we use Log Data to protect the security of accounts and to determine what content is popular

on our services. We also use this data to improve the content we show you, including ads. We use information you provide to us and data we receive, including Log Data and data from third parties, to make inferences like what topics you may be interested in, how old you are, and what languages you speak. This helps us better design our services for you and personalize the content we show you, including ads. Twitter for Web Data: When you view our content on third-party websites that integrate Twitter content such as embedded timelines or Tweet buttons, we may receive Log Data that includes the web page you visited. We use this information to better understand the use of our services, to protect the safety and integrity of our platform, and to show more relevant content, including ads. We do not associate this web browsing history with your name, email address, phone number, or username, and we delete, obfuscate, or aggregate it after no longer than 30 days. We do not collect this data from browsers that we believe to be located in the European Union or EFTA States. Advertisers and Other Ad Partners: Advertising revenue allows us to support and improve our services. We use the information described in this Privacy Policy to help make our advertising more relevant to you, to measure its effectiveness, and to help recognize your devices to serve you ads on and off of Twitter. Our ad partners and affiliates share information with us such as browser cookie IDs, mobile device IDs, hashed email addresses, demographic or interest data, and content viewed or actions taken on a website or app. Some of our ad partners, particularly our advertisers, also enable us to collect similar information directly from their website or app by integrating our advertising technology. Twitter adheres to the Digital Advertising Alliance Self-Regulatory Principles for Online Behavioral Advertising (also referred to as "interest-based advertising") and respects the DAA's consumer choice tool for you to opt out of interest-based advertising at https://optout.aboutads.info. In addition, our ads policies prohibit advertisers from targeting ads based on categories that we consider sensitive or are prohibited by law, such as race, religion, politics, sex life, or health. Learn more about your privacy options for interest-based ads here and about how ads work on our services here. If you are an advertiser or a prospective advertiser, we process your personal data to help offer and provide our advertising services. You can update your data in your Twitter Ads dashboard or by contacting us directly as described in this Privacy Policy. Developers: If you access our APIs or developer portal, we process your personal data to help provide our services. You can update your data by contacting us directly as described in this Privacy Policy. Other Third Parties and Affiliates: We may receive information about you from third parties who are not our ad partners, such as others on Twitter, partners who help us evaluate the safety and quality of content on our platform, our corporate affiliates, and other services you link to your Twitter account. You may choose to connect your Twitter account to accounts on another service, and that other service may send us information about your account on that service. We use the information we receive to provide you features like cross-posting or cross-service authentication, and to operate our services. For integrations that Twitter formally supports, you may revoke this permission at any time from your application settings; for other integrations, please visit the other service you have connected to Twitter. Personalizing Across Your Devices: When you log into Twitter on a browser or device, we will associate that browser or device with your account for purposes such as authentication, security, and personalization. Subject to your settings, we may also associate your account with browsers or devices other than those you use to log into Twitter (or associate your logged-out device or browser with other browsers or devices). We do this to operate and personalize our services. For example, if you visit websites with sports content on your laptop, we may show you sports-related ads on Twitter for Android. How You Control Additional Information We Receive: Your Twitter Personalization and data settings let you decide:

- Whether we show you interest-based ads on and off Twitter

- How we personalize your experience across devices

- Whether we collect and use your precise location

- Whether we personalize your experience based on where you've been

- Whether we keep track of the websites where you see Twitter content You can use Your Twitter data to review:

  o Advertisers who have included you in tailored audiences to serve you ads

  o Demographic and interest data about your account from our ads partners

  o Information that Twitter has inferred about you such as your age range, gender, languages, and interests We also provide a version of these tools on Twitter if you don't have a Twitter account, or if you're logged out of your account. This lets you see the data and settings for the logged out browser or device you are using, separate from any Twitter account that uses that browser or device. On Periscope, you can control whether we personalize your experience based on your watch history through your settings. Information We Share and Disclose As noted above, Twitter is designed to broadly and instantly disseminate information you share publicly through our services. In the limited circumstances where we disclose your private personal data, we do so subject to your control, because it's necessary to operate our services, or because it's required by law. Sharing You Control: We share or disclose your personal data with your consent or at your direction, such as when you authorize a third-party web client or application to access your account or when you direct us to share your feedback with a business. If you've shared information like Direct Messages or protected Tweets with someone else who accesses Twitter through a third-party service, keep in mind that the information may be shared with the third-party service. Subject to your settings, we also provide certain third parties with personal data to help us offer or operate our services. For example, we share with advertisers the identifiers of devices that saw their ads, to enable them to measure the effectiveness of our advertising business. We also share device identifiers, along with the interests or other characteristics of a device or the person using it, to help partners decide whether to serve an ad to that device or to enable them to conduct marketing, brand analysis, interest-based advertising, or similar activities. You can learn more about these partnerships in our Help Center, and you can control whether Twitter shares your personal data in this way by using the "Share your data with Twitter's business partners" option in your Personalization and Data settings. (This setting does not control sharing described elsewhere in our Privacy Policy, such as when we share data with our service providers.) The information we share with these partners does not include your name, email address, phone number, or Twitter username, but some of these partnerships allow the information we share to be linked to other personal information if the partner gets your consent first. Service Providers: We engage service providers to perform functions and provide services to us in the United States, Ireland, and other countries. For example, we use a variety of third-party services to help operate our services, such as hosting our various blogs and wikis, and to help us understand the use of our services, such as Google Analytics. We may share your private personal data with such service providers subject to obligations consistent with this Privacy Policy and any other appropriate confidentiality and security measures, and on the condition that the third parties use your private personal data only on our behalf and pursuant to our instructions. We share your payment information with payment services providers to process payments; prevent, detect, and investigate fraud or other prohibited activities; facilitate dispute resolution such as chargebacks or refunds; and for other purposes associated with the acceptance of credit and debit cards. Law, Harm, and the Public Interest: Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this Privacy Policy or controls we may otherwise offer to you, we may preserve, use, or disclose your personal data if we believe that it is reasonably necessary to comply with a law, regulation, legal process, or governmental request; to protect the safety of any person; to protect the safety or integrity of our platform, including to help prevent spam, abuse, or malicious actors on our services, or to explain why we have removed content or accounts from our services; to address

fraud, security, or technical issues; or to protect our rights or property or the rights or property of those who use our services. However, nothing in this Privacy Policy is intended to limit any legal defenses or objections that you may have to a third party's, including a government's, request to disclose your personal data. Affiliates and Change of Ownership: In the event that we are involved in a bankruptcy, merger, acquisition, reorganization, or sale of assets, your personal data may be sold or transferred as part of that transaction. This Privacy Policy will apply to your personal data as transferred to the new entity. We may also disclose personal data about you to our corporate affiliates in order to help operate our services and our affiliates' services, including the delivery of ads. Non-Personal Information: We share or disclose non-personal data, such as aggregated information like the total number of times people engaged with a Tweet, the number of people who clicked on a particular link or voted on a poll in a Tweet (even if only one did), the topics that people are Tweeting about in a particular location, or reports to advertisers about how many people saw or clicked on their ads. Managing Your Personal Information with Us You control the personal data you share with us. You can access or rectify this data at any time. You can also deactivate your account. We also provide you tools to object, restrict, or withdraw consent where applicable for the use of data you have provided to Twitter. And we make the data you shared through our services portable and provide easy ways for you to contact us. Accessing or Rectifying Your Personal Data: If you have registered an account on Twitter, we provide you with tools and account settings to access, correct, delete, or modify the personal data you provided to us and associated with your account. You can download certain account information, including your Tweets, by following the instructions here. On Periscope, you can request correction, deletion, or modification of your personal data, and download your account information, by following the instructions here. You can learn more about the interests we have inferred about you in Your Twitter Data and request access to additional information here. Deletion: We keep Log Data for a maximum of 18 months. If you follow the instructions here (or for Periscope here), your account will be deactivated and then deleted. When deactivated, your Twitter account, including your display name, username, and public profile, will no longer be viewable on Twitter.com, Twitter for iOS, and Twitter for Android. For up to 30 days after deactivation it is still possible to restore your Twitter account if it was accidentally or wrongfully deactivated. Keep in mind that search engines and other third parties may still retain copies of your public information, like your profile information and public Tweets, even after you have deleted the information from our services or deactivated your account. Learn more here. Object, Restrict, or Withdraw Consent: When you are logged into your Twitter account, you can manage your privacy settings and other account features here at any time. Portability: Twitter provides you a means to download the information you have shared through our services by following the steps here. Periscope provides you a means to download the information you have shared through our services by following the steps here. Additional Information or Assistance: Thoughts or questions about this Privacy Policy? Please let us know by contacting us here or writing to us at the appropriate address below. If you live in the United States, the data controller responsible for your personal data is Twitter, Inc. with an address of: Twitter, Inc. Attn: Privacy Policy Inquiry 1355 Market Street, Suite 900 San Francisco, CA 94103 If you live outside the United States, the data controller is Twitter International Company, with an address of:

Twitter International Company Attn: Data Protection Officer One Cumberland Place, Fenian Street Dublin 2, D02 AX07 IRELAND If you are located in the European Union or EFTA States, you can confidentially contact Twitter's Data Protection Officer here. If you wish to raise a concern about our use of your information (and without prejudice to any other rights you may have), you have the right to do so with your local supervisory authority or Twitter International Company's lead supervisory authority, the Irish Data Protection Commission. You can find their contact details here. Children and Our Services Our services are not directed to children, and you may not use

our services if you are under the age of 13. You must also be old enough to consent to the processing of your personal data in your country (in some countries we may allow your parent or guardian to do so on your behalf). You must be at least 16 years of age to use Periscope. Our Global Operations and Privacy Shield To bring you our services, we operate globally. Where the laws of your country allow you to do so, you authorize us to transfer, store, and use your data in the United States, Ireland, and any other country where we operate. In some of the countries to which we transfer personal data, the privacy and data protection laws and rules regarding when government authorities may access data may vary from those of your country. Learn more about our global operations and data transfer here. When we transfer personal data outside of the European Union or EFTA States, we ensure an adequate level of protection for the rights of data subjects based on the adequacy of the receiving country's data protection laws, contractual obligations placed on the recipient of the data (model clauses may be requested by inquiry as described below), or EU-US and Swiss-US Privacy Shield principles. Twitter, Inc. complies with the EU-US and Swiss-US Privacy Shield principles (the "Principles") regarding the collection, use, sharing, and retention of personal data from the European Union and Switzerland, as described in our EU-US Privacy Shield certification and Swiss-US Privacy Shield certification. If you have a Privacy Shield-related complaint, please contact us here. As part of our participation in Privacy Shield, if you have a dispute with us about our adherence to the Principles, we will seek to resolve it through our internal complaint resolution process, alternatively through the independent dispute resolution body JAMS, and under certain conditions, through the Privacy Shield arbitration process. Privacy Shield participants are subject to the investigatory and enforcement powers of the US Federal Trade Commission and other authorized statutory bodies. Under certain circumstances, participants may be liable for the transfer of personal data from the EU or Switzerland to third parties outside the EU and Switzerland. Learn more about the EU-US Privacy Shield and Swiss-US Privacy Shield here. Changes to This Privacy Policy We may revise this Privacy Policy from time to time. The most current version of the policy will govern our processing of your personal data and will always be at https://twitter.com/privacy. If we make a change to this policy that, in our sole discretion, is material, we will notify you via an @Twitter update or email to the email address associated with your account. By continuing to access or use the Services after those changes become effective, you agree to be bound by the revised Privacy Policy. Effective: May 25, 2018 Archive of Previous Privacy Policies

Appendix B. Sample Interview Transcript in Twitter Direct Messages

Interviewer: Hi Mohammad, hope you and your loved ones are well. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Before we start, I would like to explain how this interview will go. This interview consists of two parts; in the first part, I will ask you general questions. In the second and the last part, I will send you some screenshots of your tweets and will ask you specific questions related to these tweets and ask you to comment on them. Please do not hesitate to ask me or stop me if there is anything you are unsure about. Shall we start?

Mohammad: Alright

Interviewer: OK. Thank you

Interviewer: Generally speaking, what languages do you often use on Twitter?

Mohammad: I think I use both. Depending on what message I am trying to send or to whom. When it come to science, I often use English. For other matters like jokes I use Arabic.

Interviewer: So, I gather from your answer that you are aware of your English language use on Twitter?

Mohammad: Yes.

Interviewer: Being able to speak/ or having command in these languages do you consider yourself as a multilingual /bilingual speaker?

Mohammad: Yes. I am bilingual I speak Arabic as my first language fluently. I speak English but my language is stronger on my field and in science in general. When it come to other fields I struggle.

Mohammad: I am not sure if you want less detailed answers.

Interviewer: No thank you made it very clear

Interviewer: Do you feel confident and comfortable expressing yourself as an academic in English?

Mohammad: Yes. In academic I feel confident. Specially with help of spell checker

Interviewer: In your opinion, What kind of topics can incline postgraduate academics - like you and me- in the UK to use English on Twitter? Can you think of some examples?

Mohammad: By the word incline you mean that we might like?

Interviewer: Yes, what kind of topics in your views might trigger or prompt them to choose English?

Mohammad: I think it is mainly scientific topics. Also novels or anything related to wisdoms. Or something they feel it is easier to express in English. Either things that doesn't have clear translations to Arabic or just easier to express in English

Interviewer: Alright

Interviewer: Do you think that -Tweeting or using English on Twitter – is a common practice of most Saudi Postgraduate academics in The UK?

Mohammad: I don't think so. I have seen many use Arabic more. I guess it depends on the person language strengths and or the audience.

Interviewer: Do you think that the education level can impact the language choices people make on Twitter?

Mohammad: I think it does but not the only factor. There are PhD graduates that uses Arabic. I think it depends on the speciality audience and ability of using English. Not all postgraduates have strong English. Specially in UK where PhD students don't spend any time in improving English, or talking in English. Most of us spend time with each other and only use English when we meet our supervisors. I was luck to teach undergraduate and had some time to talk to native speakers

Mohammad: Lucky*(correcting the typo)

Interviewer: I see, good for you

Interviewer: What about English in Saudi is it regarded as a choice of highly educated people?

Mohammad: Yes. In general l, talking in English or using English words during casual conversation

Mohammad: Sometime I do it personally not to impress others, but the English words come to my mind quicker when expressing something

Interviewer: Do you think it is a prestigious language choice?

Mohammad: I have seen people do it. Personally I don't use it that way unless I am speaking with someone who is trying to impress me with his or her language

Interviewer: I see. Do you think that English language use -by Saudi academics- in general, is mostly related to academia and PhD life, especially on Twitter?

Mohammad: In general yes. Unless they have only English speakers to tweet too. It also depends on their perspective about twitter. Some sees it as a tool to communicate with scientific experts, learn new things. But I have a friend who is against this idea. He thinks twitter is only for fun and that's including all social media in his opinion.

Interviewer: Do you think that the experience of living in the UK – can be one of the reasons that make Saudi postgraduate academics in the UK choose English on Twitter?

Mohammad: Of course but I don't think it is specifically UK, I think living in any native English speaking country would make the same impact.

Interviewer: Why do you think so? Is it because of the place, or because they are students?

Mohammad: We spend long time abroad. We learn many new vocabularies. I guess it is both the place and being a student.

Interviewer: What about Arabic , Does Arabic have cultural values to you?

Mohammad: For me I love Arabic I listen to music mainly in Arabic. I like to watch sports in Arabic even if it is an English game. I also like Arabic names. They have deep meanings. Strangely, I watch only English movies and I don't like Arabics movies at all.

Interviewer: Have you ever been criticized for using English on Twitter?

Mohammad: Never.

Interviewer: As you see it, why would people tweet in a #?

Mohammad: To make the tweets more pupular (Popular). To reach more audience. To organise tweets to special category.

Interviewer: So you do not think that people design language choices to meet the expectations of their 'imagined' audience?

Mohammad: Yes. I think so.

Interviewer: your language choices are not then influenced or impacted by your followers?

Mohammad: It is hard to say who is the egg who is the chicken. I think both influences each other. I intend to tweets and focuses on medical field and that what bring followers from the same interest. And since I am being followed by people from medical field in general, I tweet in English.

Mohammad: Recently a nurse that I worked with asked me to tweet in English because she follows me. I started to that more but sometimes I move back to Arabic.

Interviewer: I see

Interviewer: Do you think that Saudi postgraduate academics doing their studies in the UK would use English on Twitter more than other Saudi postgraduates who are doing their studies in Saudi for example or any other Arabic speaking countries?

Mohammad: Yes definitely.

Interviewer: Why do you think so?

Mohammad: It is the influence of the place the degree and type of followers from English friends that they made or co workers

Interviewer: I see

Interviewer: Ok. Thank you Mohammad, now it is time to move to the second and last part of this interview I will share with you some examples of your tweets and will ask you specific questions related to them ok?

Mohammad: Alright

Interviewer: (sent a screenshot of a tweet posted by Mohammad)

See you soon #ERS2019 #ERSCongress hola amigo
that's the limit of my #Spanish !

Interviewer: Can you talk about this tweet? Why did you mix here and use English and then Spanish?
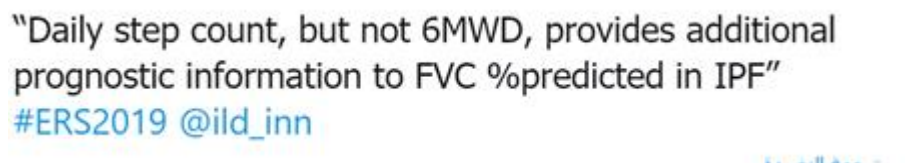
Mohammad: That's funny. I was going to a conference in Spain and wanted to joke about my limited Spanish.

Mohammad: Even after coming back from the conference my Spanish didnt change

Interviewer: I noticed that most of your tweets about this conference were in English, was English assigned as the language for communication or delivering talks or seminars at that conference?

Mohammad: There were many languages used in the conference, but English was the main one.

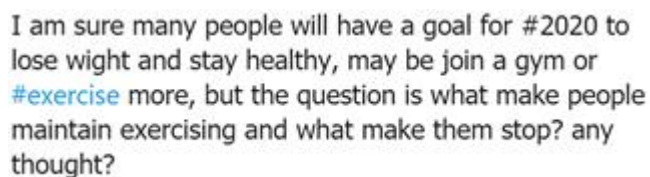Interviewer: (sent a screenshot of a tweet posted by Mohammad)

"Daily step count, but not 6MWD, provides additional prognostic information to FVC %predicted in IPF"
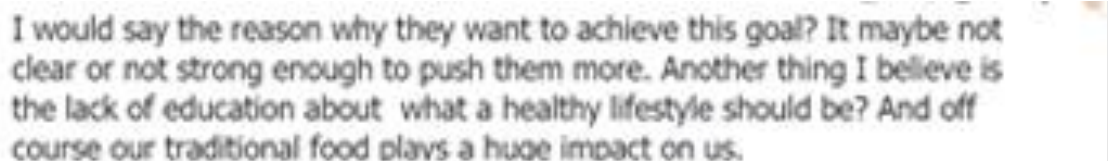#ERS2019 @ild_inn

Interviewer: Most of the tweets about your subject are in English like this one, can you comment on this tweet for example and explain why English was the base language here?

Mohammad: I always tweet in English when it come to science stuff. I have used the conference hashtag also to reach more people attending the conference. I also mentioned an organisation specialising in this disease condition that the tweet was about. The organisation in UK

Interviewer: (sent a screenshot of a tweet posted by Mohmmad and a reply from one of his followers)

I am sure many people will have a goal for #2020 to lose wight and stay healthy, may be join a gym or #exercise more, but the question is what make people maintain exercising and what make them stop? any thought?

I would say the reason why they want to achieve this goal? It maybe not clear or not strong enough to push them more. Another thing I believe is the lack of education about what a healthy lifestyle should be? And off course our traditional food plays a huge impact on us.

Interviewer: in your tweet about 2020 resolutions you also draw upon English. Interestingly- and I do not know if you have noticed that -but all replies were in English too from other Saudis or Arabic followers -if I am not mistaken-. Firstly, Do you think that the new year resolutions as a topic incline you to use English?

Mohammad: I think so yes. It not commonly in our culture to discus our plans for the next year. This something common in western culture. But I think regardless of the topic, if the main or first tweet was in English, usually the replies will be using the same language

Interviewer: so, you believe that your language choice here has inclined them to use English?

Mohammad: Yes

Interviewer: Which language would you most likely use to tweet about new Hijri year or Ramadan?

Mohammad: I would use Arabic about Ramadan some time I mix so my non Arabic followers knows that we are approaching a holy month. I don't think I have ever tweeted about Hijiri yeat

Mohammad: Year* (correcting the typo)

Interviewer: (sent a screenshot of a tweet posted by Mohammad)

كل عام وانتم بخير وتقبل الله منا ومنكم صالح الأعمال
Happy Eid
#HappyEidAlAdha

Interviewer: Like this tweet about Eid the base (the big chunk) of your tweet was in Arabic, but also you switched to English? Can you talk about your language choices here? why it was first in Arabic and then English?

Mohammad: As I stated in my previous comment since the topic belong mainly to Arabs. Sometime I do it because it is easier for me. In this tweet for example I don't think I know how to write in English and you can tell by using a very simplified version of it when I tried to write it in English.

Interviewer: I see

Interviewer: This is the end of our interview, My apologies that it took longer than it should, but it was nice talking to you. I really enjoyed it. Thank you very much Mohammad for your precious time you dedicated for the interview. I appreciate your cooperation and commitment with me in this study and wish you all the best in your academic journey. Please feel free to contact me when you need to know more about this study.

Mohammad: How long more time we will need. I might need to leave?

Interviewer: We finished, sorry that my message confused you

Mohammad: Not a problem just needed to be somewhere else. Happy to chat again. I am very interested to read your thesis.

Interviewer: Thank you :)

Mohammad: Wish you the best in your studies

Appendix C. Observation Consent Form

The purpose of this observation is to provide the Researcher with data for the multilingual practices employed on Twitter by Saudi scholarship academics in the UK. The observation and your information are highly confidential; your real name and personal details are not to be displayed in the study. Instead, pseudonyms (a made-up name) will be used. However, if you agree, your profile picture might be used in the examples.

What is the project about?
The project is about the Twitter multilingual practices of Saudi scholarship Academics in the UK. My interest lies in the use of English among other multilingual practice. I would like to understand the functions of English language use on Twitter, the reasons underpinning this choice, and how English is being used. I understand that you have kindly given your permission earlier in the pilot to observe your Twitter account but, I am entitled to take your consent at this stage as part of the ethical requirements recommended by the ethical committee at Newcastle University.

What does participating involve?

It involves providing the Researcher with your permission to analyse tweets where multilingual practices appear. Tweets chosen for this purpose will be screenshotted and analysed. Your tweets and any personal information will be confidential and kept secure for the purpose of this research. The Researcher might then ask for a single interview after the analysis –you are free to refuse taking part in the interviews. This project or part of it might be published, but your personal data will remain confidential and private.

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in this sheet.	
2	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	
3	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	
4	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing, nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	
5	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	
6	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	
7	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	
8	If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, pilot study forms or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	
9	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	

Participant:

_____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Researcher:

Appendix D. Digital field notes

لن يضرّ الحرم شيء بعد أن سأل ابراهيمٌ ربّه أن
يؤمّنه ويؤمّن أهله

(رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا وَارْزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ مَنْ
آمَنَ مِنْهُم بِاللَّه وَالْيَوْم الآخِر)

اللهم احفظ بلادنا الحبيبة وأهلها وأدم عليهم سترك
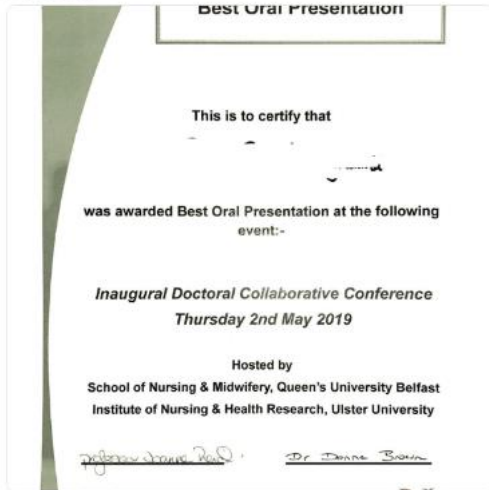
#الحوثي_يستهدف_قبلة_المسلمين

Note taken : Monday 20/05/2019 at 10:15 at university

Ghassan posted this tweet Sunday night at 11:43 five four days after the Houthi attack on Saudi Oil facilities that took place on Saturday 14th of May. During that week this hashtag was trending and on the same day of attack Tariq also posted a tweet praying for the country. Ghassan tweet has two images to the right a symbol of Saudi Arabia the two swords and the palm tree with a phrase of the Saudi National anthem ''my home country Live long as the pride of all Muslim'

To the left an image of the holy mosque in Makkah. Ghassan here depicts his national Saudi identity with reference to its religious position in the heart of Islamic world. He also added a verse of Quran to emphasize the scarcity of this country.

ولله الحمد والمنه فزت بأفضل إلقاء في مؤتمر
اليوم على مستوى طلاب الدكتوراه من كليتي
التمريض و القبالة بجامعة كوينز بلفاست و
التمريض والعلوم الصحية بجامعة ألستر #UU
#QUB أهدي هذا النجاح لوالدي ♥ ♥ و
للبروفسور #الدكتوره_سلمى_معوض ♥

Translate Tweet

Best Oral Presentation

This is to certify that

was awarded Best Oral Presentation at the following
event:-

Inaugural Doctoral Collaborative Conference
Thursday 2nd May 2019

Hosted by
School of Nursing & Midwifery, Queen's University Belfast
Institute of Nursing & Health Research, Ulster University

Dr Donna Brown

10:54 am - 2 May 2019

What a great day today! I won the best oral
presentation award!This is one of happiest
day of my PhD journey #phdlife
@oliver_perra @Breidge #QUB

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12:49 pm - 2 May 2019

4 Retweets 10 Likes

Q 4   ↻ 4   ♡ 10   ✉

238

Note taken Thursday 02/05/2019 at 13:00 university

Rose posted these two tweets on the same day Tuesday 2nd of May 2019, the same day she was awarded for the best presentation in a conference related to her PhD subject. Rose posted the first one at 10:54 a.m in which she added the photo of the award and tweeted in Arabic explaining what the award is for and how she is happy about it thanking Allah at the begging. Dedicating that to her parents and a former professor at the end of her tweet.

Ater nearly a couple of hours , rose posted another tweet with the same photo of the certificate however, she tweeted in English expressing her happiness of this achievement and how the day is special. In this tweet Rose did not include a reference to Allah (God) and she did not also include her parents as she did in the Arabic post. This tweet and the one before seem to be designed to two different audiences (Arabic- English) in the Arabic Rose constructed her identity as a daughter and loyal student. In the second English one Rose appeared to be happy about her achievement more independently.