Gender Performance and Social Media Platforms: Identity Presentation among Facebook Users in Iraq

Thesis Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work

To: My dear wife: DHUHA and my lovely son: ABDULLAH
ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates individual Iraqis’ performance and use of social network sites, and particularly the Facebook platform to determine the potential challenges and opportunities that this offers when they construct their online identities and use social media in their daily interactions. The study mainly investigates the issues of negotiating and presenting identity in online environments and the variations that occur in the participants’ enactment of the self-online compared to the offline self. The study aims to contribute to the current knowledge of identity presentation by focusing on Iraqi users of both genders and explores how they negotiate the multiple pressures placed on them when they use Facebook as a platform to engage in various activities, and for communicating and interacting with other users on the site.

This study utilised an explanatory sequential mixed qualitative methods of research model, which was divided into two phases of data collection. The first phase consisted of interviews; two types of interviews were conducted, offline and online. The second phase was based on ethnography that was in the form of virtual ethnographies of the self-performance and the activities presented by the research participants on Facebook. The thesis is conceptually informed and the analysis is positioned within a critical engagement framework based on studies of Goffman’s dramaturgical approach, Goffman’s Modal of Face, the social role theory of gender differences, and social capital and social media milieus.

The results constitute a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in relation to our understanding of the ‘space’ that internet social networks provide for Iraqi users to negotiate the boundaries imposed on them by cultural and societal rules. Firstly, the findings reveal how Facebook is used by participants as an ‘affinity space’ to construct an alternative persona that enables them to perform different roles and to serve certain purposes. The study proposes an extension to the scope of relationship construction through initiating a new type of relationship based on the weak ties formed by bounding relationships. Secondly, this thesis also contributes to our understanding of the connection between ‘impression management’ and the concept of ‘face’ via the participants’ attempts to construct and present the virtual self in a way that protects their face (persona) in both
the online and offline worlds from any negative consequences. Thirdly, the findings reveal the extensive effort invested by the research participants in constructing and managing their online identities, with attention paid to the contents presented, the management of their private and public regions, and the prevention of context ‘collapse’. Finally, the study reports on the relationship between identity formation and presentation and Facebook audiences, by revealing the strategies utilized by the research participants in managing their online viewers. Evaluation of the participants’ online and offline identities and their self-presentations, performances and activities enabled a correlation to be made between the users’ online and offline lives and how their offline interactions impacted on their use of Facebook.
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Finally, I hope that this work will be a valuable contribution and add more knowledge regarding gender performance and the use of social media sites in Iraq.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SNS: Social Network Sites
OSNs: Online Social Networks
CMC: Computer-mediated Communication
IT: Information Technology
SMPs: Social Media Platforms
SRT: Social role Theory
ICT: Information Communication Technology
GT: Grounded Theory
CCA: Constant Comparative Analysis
TA: Target Language
SA: Source Language
SCT: Social capital theory
IM: Impression Management
KR: Kurdistan region
TX: Textual Analysis
WWW: World Wide Web
FB: Facebook
IQ: Iraq
P: Participant
MUDs: Multi Users Dimensions
IRC: Internet Relay Chat
IREX: International Research & Exchanges Board
SSM: Snowball Sampling Method
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CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The internet is considered as one of the most influential developments of the late 20th century. There is no doubt it has heralded a new era of access to information and communication. The internet connects people across the globe. Bahdi (2000), stated that 'By using the Internet, individuals’ living in different countries can connect through their computers almost instantaneously.' (p. 881). Internet applications such as email, chat, messaging, etc. is used by people to keep in touch with their friends and family around the world. The World Wide Web (WWW) has become the new social, cultural, and technological revolution of the 21st century. It can be said that the internet is the technological platform that has created a global environment which has enabled the assimilation of cultures, beliefs, communication patterns and human activities in a way no other invention has. However, Lovink (2013: p 58), stated that ‘whether or not we are in the midst of yet another internet bubble, we can all agree that social media dominates the use of the internet.’ The development of internet technologies, including information and communication technologies (ICT), as well as networking technologies have become powerful tools enabling communication interactions which can take over several aspects of peoples’ lives and thus become a natural, background part of their everyday life. This development has had a tremendous impact on social interactions, communication and the exchange of information between individuals.

The social use of the internet use has significantly changed since the development of social networking and mobile technologies (Reyaee and Ahmed, 2015). These innovations have had a considerable impact on the number of internet users world-wide, especially in many developing countries where the number of users has grown considerably over recent years. The growth in user numbers is not a phenomenon that is limited to the United States and Europe. Several studies about the development of the internet in the Arab world in general, and in Iraq in particular, show a short, but rapidly changing history (Mourtada and Salem, 2012). Among 135 million users of the internet in Arab regions at the end of 2013, almost 71 million Arabs reported using social media...
(Reyaee and Ahmed, 2015). A report issued by the Internet World Statistics indicated that ‘In the Middle East, there are an estimated 146,972,123 Internet users, and between 2000 and 2017 the region has shown an impressive internet usage growth rate of 3.8 %.’ (Internet World Statistics, 2017). The report also showed a 9.5% growth rate of internet usage and the number of Facebook users in Iraq.

This extensive use of a social internet and particularly social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook is becoming increasingly popular. Reyaee and Ahmed (2015), defined SNSs as ‘an online service, platform, or a site that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people, who share interests or activities. Social networks encompass the interactions among different individuals, members of a community or members across different communities.’ (p. 24). Boyd and Ellison (2007: p. 13) defined SNSs as ‘web-based services that allow individuals to, 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.’. This is generally done via creating a personal profile that allows users to share various information and by providing a description of themselves. SNSs are progressively used by people in their daily lives to create and exchange content, establish personal and social relationships, broadcast ideas, share pictures or videos, express beliefs, and build virtual communities that are more significant and based on common interests (Cardon and Marshall, 2014 & Chang and Heo, 2014).

Many studies indicate that SNSs play substantial roles in shaping the interaction processes between people. Anonymous sites (e.g., Multi Users Dimensions MUDs and chat rooms) offering computer-mediated communication (CMC) and asynchronous interactions provide users with the opportunity and freedom to swap gender and to role-play (Hussain et al., 2008; Huh and Williams, 2010; Eklund, 2011; Turkle, 1995; Tsikerdekis and Zeadally, 2014). Roberts and Parks (1999, p.26), stated that ‘in the virtual text-based social worlds of the internet, however, people possess unparalleled control over the construction and presentation of their identities’. The nonymous nature (non-anonymity) of many social media sites brings more personal engagement into the online sphere. Research studies have assumed that virtual social platforms such as Facebook and formerly Myspace provide individuals with greater opportunities through their profiles to construct their identities, manage their online self-presentation, promote the self, adopt
new identities, present an idealized version of themselves, and change or reshape their identities in the online world (see Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Michikyan et al., 2014; Gibbs et al., 2006; Miller, 2012). Online social networking sites have significantly impacted today’s societies, and this burgeoning influence of these technologies has also affected the way that users of these new platforms present their identity while they interact with others in this virtual world. Their performance might be changed in a way that reflects a clear difference between their real and ‘virtual’ identities.

The relationship between users’ identities both in real life and what is presented on the internet has become an exciting new area for research. Guta and Karolak (2015) stated that the internet brings new ways for users to express their identities through the use of several tactics (such as profile information, names, and pictures). In their study, Bargh et al., (2002) found that more facets of the self were represented by individuals in internet environments. Users tended to construct their identity in a way that differed from the one in their offline life to highlight other facets of their personality. Research into self-presentation in social networks reveals mixed results about this phenomenon. One set of experimental studies showed that users tended to idealize themselves in social networks (Van Dijck, 2013; Brivio and Ibarra, 2009: Manago et al., 2008; Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011; Walther, 2007). In contrast, results of other research studies conducted on Myspace and Facebook that investigated profiles on personal websites, indicated that the users’ profiles presented their real selves (Ellison et al., 2006; Gosling et al., 2007; Marcus et al., 2006; Vazire and Gosling, 2004; Back et al., 2010; Gosling et al., 2007). Zhao et al. (2008) suggested that such ‘constructions of identity in social networking websites tend to reflect more of the true identity of the user’, implying that aspects of the authentic self are repressed in everyday life.

Furthermore, today a large number of internet users consider SNSs as a social and cultural phenomenon. Their use has brought about a substantial shift in the cultural norms of social relationships and enables the establishment and maintenance of societal relationships as well as the sharing of personal information (James and Hassan, 2008). The role of SNSs in individuals’ communication, behaviours and social capital has highlighted the potential of such sites in building and maintaining social relationships. Donath and Boyd (2004) hypothesized that rebuilding weak relationships could be greatly enhanced by SNSs because they represent a suitable technological means to maintain such ties cheaply and
easily. It has been suggested that SNSs are able to help with identity construction due to their ability to create deep social connections. According to (Harter, 1999 and Utz and Muscanell, 2015), the ability of SNSs to enable interpersonal feedback and peer acceptance can help with the process of creating a personal identity and is connected to the production of social capital.

At the same time, members of online social networks can build trusting relationships due to increased information exchange among virtual groups which in turn, enhances the potential of SNSs to increase social capital. In other words, the roles of SNSs in making users feel like they are part of their community and in increasing their social ties with other members can enhance their sense of mutuality and trust, which in turn leads to creating opportunities for their engagement in both their civic and political lives (de Zúñiga et al., 2012). SNSs offer people great opportunities by providing them with ‘a voice in a public space that they would never previously have had’ (Almakrami, 2015: p. 1). Despite the benefits offered by SNSs, they also bring their own complexities and challenges. Among these are issues such as privacy concerns, the sharing of personal information, and the collapse of different contexts along with social and cultural conflicts (Joinson, 2008; Tufekci, 2008; Marwick and Boyd, 2010). The use of these sites in a non-western context such as the Arab world might have different implications due to the role of culture and the social norms that shape the use of social networks (e.g., Straub et al., 2001). The younger generation of the Arab population have been highly impacted by both modern cultures and traditional Islamic rules which are sometimes opposed to each other (Solberg, 2002). People in Iraq, which is mostly Muslim, have access to the internet and its many resources. All the evidence indicates that SNSs have emerged as a significant social phenomenon in Iraq, and this is noteworthy.

Facebook is among the most widely adopted SNS used by Iraqis. Statistics indicate there were 14,000,000 Facebook subscribers as of June 2016, which is a 37.3% usage by Iraqi Muslims (Internet World Stats, 2017: Arab Media Forum, 2014). Facebook has become an integral part of people’s daily lives, which is more constrained in comparison with Westerners and East Asians, especially regarding people’s offline activities. Iraq has an Islamic culture, in which any distinction between the cultural norms and religious values is incredibly difficult because they are intertwined, as is also the case for other Arab counties such as Saudi Arabia (Al-Lily, 2011). This mixture of Islamic rules and cultural
norms has played a significant role in shaping the identity of Iraqis, as well as their beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and behaviours.

Research studies in the West and Eastern Asia have aimed to understand how users have adopted, utilized and constructed their identity on social media. They have also investigated the impact of cultural context on usage patterns of social media platforms (Kim et al., 2011). The usage of social media in the Arab world is extensive, and there is recent literature discussing this social media use (see Arab Media Forum, 2014). However, there is a gap in the literature with regards to the exploration of the use of social media among Iraqi Arab users who belong to conservative societies and whose life is governed by many religious and cultural norms. The current literature is lacking any empirical and statistical data which is vital if we are to understand the use of social media sites and users’ performance in Iraq, as well as their self-presentation strategies when constructing their online identity. For a Muslim country such as Iraq, the adoption of social media sites as new platforms for communication is significant and has greatly impacted the daily lives of Iraqis, however, our current understanding of users’ performance on these sites is limited and further research is required.

1.2 RESEARCH RATIONALE

The idea for this study emerged from both personal and public discussions regarding the opportunities that social media offers to users in Iraq, and about how they utilize this new media to circumvent the social and cultural limitations of their real lives. Iraqi society is regarded as a relatively conservative society due to the central role that religion and culture play, not only in shaping individuals’ attitudes and behaviours but also in how they perceive different aspects of their lives. Gender segregation also occurs due to the religious and cultural instructions, especially after 2003. For women, interacting with unrelated men in public is not allowed. The social situation is very much affected by the political climate in the country. Politics is an important factor that affects different sectors of the population, as well as the media and how people are able to access the media. Before 2003, under Saddam Hussein’s regime, there were no free media and the internet was limited and controlled. It was not affordable for people, and only a few individuals had access. Saddam’s rule considered the internet as a threat to the government (Al-Rawi,
After the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the country has undergone radical changes in its political situation, which in turn have affected the process of developing both the economic and the social conditions. However, this development remains directly affected by the situation in the country. A sectarian power-sharing formula emerged in Iraq after the political sectarianism of 2003, and these sectarian divisions have impacted on the lives of people, creating new norms and behavioural codes in Iraqi society. The result of this was the imposition of additional limitations on individuals’ interactions and communication in both the physical and cyber (online) environments.

SNSs provide opportunities for people to construct and perform different identities, and to communicate and interact with other people (users) on the sites, forming and enhancing their interpersonal relationships, and enabling them to raise and discuss different topics (such as political, social and religious issues). The use of these sites represents a challenge for some users in certain cultures and social contexts where individual interactions, communication with others, and the disclosure of personal information are in opposition to several social and cultural considerations. Thus, it is vital to understand individuals’ use of social media and how it might contribute to gaining a better insight of how both male and female users in Iraq construct and present their identities on social media; this research investigates gender performance and the use of social networks such as Facebook. In Iraq, there is a lack of studies that examine the performances of men and women on social media sites, and without an understanding of this, there is no basis for further research to build and shape new perspectives on this performance construction. This study focuses on users’ performance, identity construction and presentation on Facebook in Iraq. Although similar topics have been investigated in depth in the West, Asia and in several Arab countries, none have focussed on identity construction and self-representation in the specific online environment of Iraq. Existing accounts of Western social media use, identity creation and performance differ significantly to the researcher’s own experiences in Iraq.

In this research, a narrative approach was employed to investigate how self-presentation on social network sites is conducted by the users, particularly when they login into Facebook and the types of self-presentations, personal interactions and relationships they conduct using the platform. Additionally, the researcher was interested in exploring the correlation between Facebook users’ identities in the online and offline environments.
Also, through analysis of their Facebook use, this work investigates, identifies and accounts for these differences. This provides a fundamental understanding of Iraqi male and female experiences within the digital space of Facebook, and provides an insight into the users’ views and opinions about identity construction, interaction, and socialization in virtual worlds. This study will provide new opportunities for exploring this area of research, as well as enabling future research into social media site-use among Iraqis. The findings of the study will increase our understanding of identity construction and self-presentation in general and how users have achieved it specifically in the virtual world.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS

This research investigates the range of identities that individuals are willing to create in their use of social media to understand how discourses of gender are mobilized by Iraqi users in their online and offline lives. It also investigates how identities are performed on Facebook in such a relatively conservative society. There are two main factors that form the key issues that shape the outcomes, namely, ‘Iraqi users’ self-presentation strategies and online identity construction on SNSs (and particularly Facebook)’.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is the first study that aims to investigate identity construction and self-presentation among Facebook users in Iraq. The research questions were informed by a review of the related literature and previous studies on social media site use, especially Facebook, and are discussed in the data analysis chapters. The research questions directly relate to the self-presentation and performance on Facebook through identity construction and management. It provides a rich source of data on identity performance in virtual spaces, impression management, tactics adopted by Iraqi users in the process of identity formation and self-presentation when using Facebook, and the strategies used to manage their identity in the presence of other users.

Main Research Question: How do Iraqi users of social media choose to present their identities in Facebook as a new means of communication?

There are number of sub-questions that in fact represent an essential ‘operationalisation’ of the general question: -
Q1: To what extent do Iraqi users’ digital identities on Facebook vary in comparison to their offline selves?

Q2: How do Iraqi users engage in impression management in response to ‘Face’ threats encountered on Facebook?

Q3: How do Iraqi users construct and manage their identities on Facebook?

Q4: What kind of tactics are employed by Iraqi users to manage their audience on Facebook?

1.5 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the performances of men and women on social media in Iraq. The primary focus of the study is on identity production and self-representation in the virtual environment. The research participants were selected based on their socio-political status, which could be described as conservative (i.e., from the southern central region of Iraq, which is more conservative due to the role of religion, cultural norms, tribal rule and Islamic political parties), their academic qualifications, class and their unique identity construction and performance on the internet, and particularly on social media platforms. Furthermore, their use of social media would not be considered the norm for most other Iraqis who are very conservative and aware of themselves when interacting in online and offline worlds. The methods adopted by this particular group of users online and on social media platforms, who can be described as a conservative middle class, represents an important area for research and significantly adds to our understanding of their attitudes and behaviours.

The research data was collected by means of interviews that took the form of semi-structured interviews (face-to-face), internet interviews and virtual ethnographic methods by observing the users’ Facebook accounts. However, the participant interviews were the main data collection methods used in this study to investigate the issues outlined. The findings were integrated and used to draw up an overall picture of identity construction, performance and presentation in social media sites of Iraqi men and women, and how this relates to their performance in their everyday offline life.
1.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research study is both theoretically and practically significant because it enhances our current understanding of Iraqi users’ interactions on social media through identity construction and representation on Facebook. It will thus contribute to the literature on gender and social media studies in Iraq, as well as enhance Western reader’s understanding of the phenomenon of social media and identity production and self-representation in the specific online environment of Iraq. It is hoped that this study will prompt further investigation into people’s performance on other social media sites in Iraq as there is currently limited information on this topic.

This research also increases our understanding of gender behaviour and performance differences on Facebook in a distinctive culture such as the Iraqi Arabian culture (representing Arabic and Islamic cultures). The findings provide alternative views and perspectives as they offer a more in-depth understanding from that provided by previous SNS studies which have focussed mainly on Western participants and are mostly homogenous in nature because of this single population focus (see Ellison et al., 2007; Back et al., 2010; Dijck, 2013; Young, 2013; Villata et al. 2017; Governatori et al., 2014; Hogan, 2010; & Van den Berg and Leenes, 2011). The study enhances the ‘cross-cultural awareness’ of Facebook and provides a baseline for future studies in the field.

Furthermore, the study contributes to our understanding of online SNSs and the people who inhabit them, by exploring how Facebook users in Iraq manage their private and public regions. It also identifies the tactics adopted by users to avoid the ‘collapse’ of these different contexts. Additionally, the research investigates the correlation between users’ online and offline personas by demonstrating how Facebook users in Iraq construct and represent their virtual personas in comparison to their offline personas. The research contributes to the on-going debate on the impact of social media use on Iraqi users’ performance and their traditional lifestyles. In addition to forming and enhancing existing relationships on SNSs, the study demonstrates a new level of relationships that are enhanced by the use of social media. This new environment of communication and interaction has helped Iraqis to form new personal relationships from very loose ties which I have called ‘Bounding relationships’. Lastly, this study aims to draw the attention
of the Iraqi government and national and international organizations to the importance of gender issues, such as gender rights and equality in Iraq by highlighting the type of topics discussed and the interactions conducted by women online. It also sheds light on the interactions and communication spaces that online venues offer to both men and women, enabling them to overcome the limitations present in their physical lives, and it directs the organizations and institutions concerned to focus on these issues.

1.5 THE STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

This thesis is divided into the following chapters:

**Chapter One**: Presents an overview of the study. It consists of a brief introduction, a statement of why this research was undertaken, the research aims, questions, the context and significance of the study, the structure of the thesis and a chapter summary.

**Chapter Two**: Comprises the theoretical background of the study. It contains a critical review of the relevant literature on social media, gender and identity.

**Chapter Three**: Provides a general overview of the history of Iraq, including, characteristics, the Iraqi Arab culture, the concepts of masculinity and femininity in the Iraqi Muslim society, discourse strategies and gender, social behaviour and interactions, family values and honour, language diversity, the relationship between language and gender, gender expectations and dress code, and finally a chapter summary.

**Chapter Four**: Highlights the development of the internet and social media in Iraq. This chapter covers the following: internet infrastructure, social media in Iraq, SNSs and social issues in Iraq, SNSs and religion in Iraq, effects of SNSs on Iraqi social life, and a chapter summary.

**Chapter Five**: Discusses the theoretical framework. The chapter outlines Goffman’s dramaturgical framework, including identity and interaction, the presentation of the virtual self, separations of regions, impression management, audience segregation, the idealized version of the self, Goffman’s notion of face, the relevance and critiques of Goffman’s dramaturgical framework applied to SNSs, the social role theory of gender differences, social capital theory and ends with a chapter summary.
Chapter Six: Presents the methodological approach adopted in this research study. It covers the general methodological considerations and the qualitative approaches used. It describes the four project phases: 1) considers the process of sampling and participant recruitment, 2) discusses the data collection methods adopted in this research, 3) focuses on the transcription and translation of the data, and 4) discusses the data analysis.

Chapter Seven: This presents the initial results and demonstrates the advantages of virtual spaces provided by Facebook, as an affinity space, for Iraqi users and how they create and perform alternative personas on Facebook. It also reveals the new type of relationships constructed by participants in these virtual spaces.

Chapter Eight: Presents the second set of results obtained and discusses the way in which Iraqi user of Facebook employ impression management strategies to protect their reputation (face) online.

Chapter Nine: Presents the third set of results regarding the presentation and management of the self in the online context.

Chapter Ten: This is the final results chapter and focuses on the segregation mechanisms used by participants to manage their audiences on Facebook.

Chapter Eleven: Discusses and evaluates the research findings. It includes a complete summary of the results gathered from the primary data and evaluates them to form the final outcome of the research findings. It includes a summary of the theoretical, practical and methodological contributions. The chapter also indicates the scope of the research as well as the limitations and ethical considerations. The chapter ends with recommendations and directions for future research and concluding remarks.

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY
This chapter has presented the introduction of the research and why this research was undertaken. It also indicates the research aims, questions, and the context and significance of the study and the structure of the thesis.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION
This chapter starts with a review of the theoretical background of social media in the context of Arab countries. It offers an overview of the presence of the social internet and social media sites in the Arab region and emphasizes the use of these new technologies by Arab people. It also sheds light on the studies conducted and literature available regarding social media in these countries. The Internet, social networking sites and Facebook in Iraq are discussed in this chapter to emphasize the gap that the current study aims to address. Then, the chapter introduces the theoretical framework for the present study and provides a review of existing studies on gender and identity in offline and online worlds and identity performance in social network sites to show its significance in interaction and construction of individual’s identity. Finally, the chapter discusses the types of communicative competence on Facebook in relation to the research objectives to find out the tactics of a self-presentation made available to people in the online world when they interact with other audiences, followed by a concluding summary.

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE CONTEXT OF ARAB COUNTRIES
Today, information and communication technologies have witnessed significant advances through massive innovations in technology and software. These rapid changes in online practices have made substantial differences to the way in which Arab people live their day-to-day lives. The rapid spread of new interactive web tools such as Web 2.0, and the social networks that represent the most popular Web 2.0 services (O'Reilly, 2005), have altered several aspects of Arabic social interactions and have led to new forms of identity performance in the ways that Arabic people present themselves on these new platforms. Social networks, which are also known as ‘social software’, ‘social applications’ and ‘social network sites’ (Barnes, 2006), fill ‘a middle ground between home pages and blogs in which the individual is primary, and online communities in which the group is primary’ (Baym, 2011: p. 385). According to Lovink (2013: p. 58), ‘Whether or not we are in the midst of yet another internet bubble, we can all agree that social media dominates the use of the internet.’
Facebook is considered as one of the most popular platforms for social networking. Facebook was designed by Mark Zuckerberg and his co-founders Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes and Eduardo Saver in and was launched in 2004. Initially, Facebook was developed to be used by students at Harvard University to serve as an online yearbook for Mark Zuckerberg’s classmates (Hillstrom, 2010). The use of this application has expanded massively and attracted audiences from other educational institutions. In 2008, Facebook became one of the most popular and visited social networking sites on the internet (Boyd and Ellison, 2008) and is now available in 70 different languages (Sharma and Sharma, 2016). Currently, Facebook has more than 2.07 billion active users per month word-wide (Socialbakers, 2017).

Facebook was primarily created for personal communication and interactions through which people could socialize with each other via posts and texts, as well as presenting themselves to others through the construction of personal profiles where they could include personal information, including photos. The latest Facebook massive data scandal has made the social media giant in the centre of an ongoing dispute over the use of personal data. The use of the site was not limited to personal use only, but soon extended to other, sectors such as education and trade. Facebook also became a global phenomenon that has been widely used by people in different countries regardless of their cultures. Social media has had a significant impact on almost every facet of Arabic people’s lives.

In 2009, Facebook became the most popular SNS with the advent of the Arabic version, which was launched to attract a wide range of users from the Arabic world, and this made the Arabic version of Facebook the fastest growing language version in that year (Inside Facebook, 2010). By the end of 2010, the number of Arabic users reached 26 million (Alriyadh, 2011). According to the Socialbaker’s website, only two Arabic countries out of twenty-two are not using Facebook (retrieved from www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics, 12/12/2017). By October 2011, there were more than 33.07 million users across the Arabic countries. Many studies indicate that SNSs play a substantial role in shaping the interaction processes between people (e.g., Kim et al, 2011; Smock et al, 2011; Chiu and Huang, 2015; Tsiotsou, 2015). Many Arab nations adopted a relatively liberal approach to their internet use (such as Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon (Warf and Vincent, 2007)).
People in Arab countries increasingly use social internet and social media sites, and this has attracted the attention of researchers interested in studying the various aspects of how this new medium is used. There have been a lot of studies conducted in Arab countries that have discussed several issues related to internet technology and new social networks use and adoption. These studies provide a valuable insight into the aspects associated with behavioural changes in users of internet technologies, and the influence of these behavioural changes on different fields, such as the economy, education, politics, culture, and on society in general. The study of these technologies and the online communities in the Arab region also provides an in-depth exploration of these communities in a cultural context. This will aid our understanding of how the internet and social networks affect people’s behaviour in the online world, as well as how they behave, which is often in ways considered to be contradictory to their cultural beliefs and norms.

These studies include exploring the history of the internet (Alshahrani, H.A., 2016), the use of the internet among Arab women (Aldhaheri, 2011), Arab women using the internet in the UAE and OMAN, online presentations of gendered selves (Jyrkiäinen, 2016), online presentations of gendered selves among young women in Egypt and privacy patterns (Abokhodair and Vieweg, 2016). Other scholars have investigated the impact of Arab norms on the use of social networks (Omoush et al., 2012), the impact of Arab cultural values on online social networking (Shen and Khalifa, 2010), Facebook usage among Arabic college students (Guta and Karolak, 2015); The role of social media in the empowerment of Arab women (Odine, 2013). Global Media Journal, 12, pp.1-30, education (Alwabil and AlShawi, 2013); ICT opportunities and challenges for development in the Arab World (Nour, 2002); Effectiveness of using information technology in higher education in Saudi Arabia (Alfahad, 2012); Online learning in the Arab world, (Guessoum, N., 2006); Arab Women Using Internet Case Study The UAE And Oman (Aldhaheri, K., 2011); The impact of the Internet on Saudi Arabian EFL females’ self-image and social attitudes (Al-Salem, S.A., 2005); E-learning challenges in the Arab world: Revelations from a case study profile, (Abouchedid, K. and Eid, G.M., 2004).

Political changes in the world have also had an impact on the internet and social media. The political shift that occurred in the Arab countries over the last few years, but mainly in 2011 (known as the ‘Arab spring’), along with the other protests that swept through the
Middle East, have led to the studies on the role of digital social media tools and networks in the political sphere, with regard to their organizational and communication aspects. Tufekci and Wilson (2012) stated that ‘Social media are just one portion of a new system of political communication that has evolved in North Africa and the Middle East.’ (p. 349). The use of Facebook in the Arab world at the time of the political change was another interesting area of research. There have been a range of studies on cyberactivism on Facebook, for example, that of Arafa and Armstrong (2016). Other research studies demonstrate the role of Facebook in enhancing people’s engagement in social, political and civic issues as well as their position at this time in the Arab world (e.g., Abdel-Fadil, 2016, in Egypt; Abadi, 2014, in Morocco; and Wagner, 2011 in Saudi Arabia; Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011, (Ghannam, 2011); After Egypt: The limits and promise of online challenges to the authoritarian Arab state, (Lynch, M., 2011; Dalacoura, K., 2012); The 2011 uprisings in the Arab Middle East: political change and geopolitical implications; Facebook and Twitter key to Arab Spring uprisings, (Huang, C., 2011); Role of the new media in the Arab Spring, (Khondker, H.H., 2011); Social media and the Arab Spring: Politics comes first, (Wolfsfeld, G., Segev, E. and Sheafer, T., 2013); Opening closed regimes: what was the role of social media during the Arab Spring, (Howard, P.N., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M.M., Mari, W. and Maziad, M., 2011); The role of information communication technologies in the “Arab Spring”, (Stepanova, E., 2011); Revolution without revolutionaries: making sense of the Arab Spring, (Bayat, A., 2017); and The Middle Eastern Gender Gap: The State of Female Political Participation Before, During and After the ‘Arab Spring’, (Merrill, R.C., 2017).


Despite the fact that these studies conducted in the Arab region and researched several topics, they lack to focus on gender behaviour and role difference in conservative context as well as how users of such contexts circumvent different sources of limitation and constrain imposed on them in their offline life when they extended to the online experience. Additionally, most of these studies focused on studying the role of social
media platforms in social connection and interaction with particular concertation on bonding and bridging relationships that resulted in social capital. However, these studies limited the role of social network sites to this extent which is the issue that the current study will address to find other vital sides that such platforms can lead to form relationships that result in social capital. The connection between social media and politics also studied by several scholars in some Arab countries. Their studies dealt with the issue of social media platforms and political liberalization in the Arab region and the role of information communication technologies in the “Arab Spring.” However, there was not any particular focus on social media, gender use and how these platforms become essential venues for self-presentation and political and social engagement for less powerful groups (e.g., women) in certain communities like Iraq, where women suffer from social constraints and prevention from taking part in such issues. Finally, there is an apparent lack in studying the issue of audience on social media and how users of specific cultural context in Islamic Arab countries like Iraq deals with their audiences and viewers while communication and interacting on social media platforms. The study aims at addressing the limitations of this body of literature and provide new perceptive for scholars especially in Western world.

To understand the impact of social media on Arab life, it is important to examine the Arabian culture. Cultural beliefs and norms represent crucial aspects of Arabic people’s lives. According to Askool (2012: p. 204), ‘Culture has been highlighted to be an external factor that influences the use of technology and information system (IS) - which leads to the question of how society culture influences the behaviour intention and in turn the actual use of such a system’. Conversations on online platforms and in real-life settings (face-to-face) are similar in terms that individuals require appropriate impression management. Since social networking websites, and particularly Facebook, are widely used by people in the Arab region (Askool, 2013), it is vital to gain an understanding of the impact of social networks on people’s lives and particularly on specific social-cultural practices. The extensive use of social media among people in Arab countries has been affected by the traditional rules of Islam. These rules have a direct effect on gender roles, because social media sites in Muslim countries are perceived negatively by the religious institutions. For example, the use of social media sites, and particularly Facebook, has been criticized severely by the Saudi preacher Ali al-Maliki, who claims that it will
corrupt the young people of the nation: ‘Facebook is corrupting people because it is open [sic] the door for lust and it leads both males and females to waste their money and time on the internet and mobile phones rather than spending them on their requirements for daily living. Islamic women are required to adhere to particular demands (e.g., to be shy, reserved and modest) to meet their society’s expectations’ (Al-Saggaf, 2011). Different trends in behaviour or beliefs are often violently resisted by cultural norms (Al Lily, 2011).


The growth in the use of social media websites has encouraged several researchers and scholars to study the phenomena of social media in such Arabic Islamic context to explore the impact that such new media has on people’s attitudes and behaviours. As more and
more people use these tools, researchers found that it is necessary to gain adequate understanding of users’ attitudes towards usage of these technologies.

2.3  INTERNET, SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND FACEBOOK IN IRAQ

When you review the literature on the use of internet and social media in the Arab region, there is a significant amount of research about these topics in Arab countries but nothing on Iraq. While the relationships between social media and several issues in the Arab context and some leading events such as the ‘Arab Spring’ have been paid much attention, topics such as identity construction, self-presentation, social transformation and the use of new social internet technology in Iraq and mainly social media have been relatively absent from the literature. Also, there are some studies that look at the area of the present study, but none of these seem precisely related to performativity, gender performance and social media sites or apply Goffman performance and the concept of stages to the use of Facebook by people in Iraq. As a result, little is still known about the most basic levels regarding the use of new media and gender performance in the context of Iraq. This study seeks to lay the basis for understanding the place of social media among Iraqis, and to contribute to the analysis of the issue of performance, identity construction and negotiation, and cultural norms and limitations as a whole for the region. Given the fact that there are no previous studies in Iraq, the current study must be considered as an initial exploration of the complex dynamics of social media use in the country, and a beginning for future research.

Iraqis gained access to the internet in 1999 (Al-bab, 2017). Despite it coming late to the use of the internet and social media sites, Iraq is now one of the fastest growing users of Facebook in the Arab world. For example, in Iraq, spending time on Facebook has become one of the most important daily online activities. After 2003, as a result of the improving economic situation, there was a sharp increase in the number of internet users in Iraq. The number of internet subscribers increased from 12,500 in 2000 to 11,000,000 in 2015 (www.Internetworldstats.com/stats.htm, 20/1/2018). Currently, the internet sector in Iraq is unregulated, making it one of the most liberated environments in the world (UNESCO, 2012). The use of this new medium is very popular among Iraqis, and particularly among younger people. According to a study carried out by (Reyae1 and
Ahmed, 2016), access to the internet is growing in Iraq, and this is fuelled by the burgeoning mobile and social media usage, particularly among the younger generation. However, the religious restrictions and cultural barriers imposed by Iraqi society have opened up discussions about gender issues, identity and performance relating to the use of the internet technologies and social applications.

The use of the media in the Arab region in general, and Iraq in particular, has strong ties to Islam and Arab culture. In Muslim societies, discussions about gender and media consumption cannot be separated out from faith. Islamic Arab society maintains a set of social attitudes that are conservative, and conformity is required from its male and female members (Abokhodair and Vieweg, 2016). Religion plays a crucial role in the cultural processes of the nation and is an important variable that participates significantly in building a sense of community. McDaniel and Burnett (1990) defined religion as a set of beliefs and ideas that are shared by particular communities or societies, and that have a certain impact on human lives. Religious discourse plays a key role in the formation of ideas about gender. In Islam, the sexes are perceived, in the explicit religious discourse, as complementary. Men are responsible for supporting and protecting women and in exchange for that role women should obey, please, satisfy and serve their husband. Women are responsible for saving their virginity for marriage, and thereafter, for showing complete loyalty and chastity to their husbands. Sheth and Mittal (2004: p. 65), state that religion, as a cultural factor represents, ‘A system of beliefs about the supernatural and spiritual world, about God, and about how humans, as God’s creatures, are supposed to behave on this earth.’

The conservative rules and regulations of Islam represent key factors that influence media consumption in the Iraqi context. Though Iraq is considered to be a secular country to some extent, the conventional norms of Islamic culture play crucial roles that affect the daily lives of people in the country (Fas, 2016). Therefore, traditional media represented via the Iraqi regime of TV programming, retains and refers to all of these rules and norms. Programs broadcast by the TV stations in Iraq, even by the secular-run stations, are censored for sexual innuendo; scenes of nudity, bedroom scenes and explicit language are shown (Ameen, 2001; Kamil, 2015). The Haya (the codes and rules of modesty) require that Iraqi Muslim men and women observe a strict regime of personal behaviour which conforms to the standards of social morality. Additionally, the conservative
environment impacts on how women and men use the media. Iraqi journalist Jamal Ashraf, in his comments on the Iraqi entertainment TV show ‘Ako Fad Wahed’, which was banned by the Iraqi Commission of Media and Communication (ICMC), stated that programs that contain sexual jokes and revelations that contradict with public decency are not acceptable in Iraqi community and for various types of viewers (skynewsarabia, 2016).

The Iraqi media environment can be regarded as a reflection of the religious, cultural, political and social situation of the society (Al-Rai, 2014). Media consumption might be controlled to a certain extent regarding various religious restrictions. In Iraq, television is the primary medium for news and entertainment programs. However, TV programs are governed by several restrictions from a Shari (Islamic Law) perspective, such as spreading corrupt beliefs, encouraging music and singing, seeing tempting scenes or immoral pictures, etc. (Islamqa, 2016). As the rules of the Quran commanded, Iraqi’s should be modest, lower their gaze and have a sense of Haya.

The roles that males and females play in society are highly impacted by another factor which is the societal and cultural norms and conditions. Instead of watching television, men are more likely to take part in public activities (e.g., meeting a friend, gathering in cafes, playing sports), whereas women are required to deal with the domestic duties and operate within their domestic spaces. As a result, Iraqi women might be seen to watch television more than men. This situation is identical to that in Saudi Arabia in terms of the culture and gender roles, and activities in the country. It is expected that women are more interested in watching television than men, due to the restrictions imposed by the religious and cultural norms on their movements and their ability to participate in outdoor activities (Miliyan, 2013). In Iraq, the freedom provided by internet technology might raise concerns in the family regarding any perceived danger that might ensue for women, more so than for men (Mohammed, 2011).

The restrictions imposed on traditional media have also extended to the new media (such as the internet and social networks). Several religious clerics have cautioned men and women about the internet, stating that it is a place of sin and adulterous behaviour. They have aimed this warning mainly at Muslim woman who they feel might be encouraged by the internet to break the rules of Haya. The religious cleric Abudula Mahdi al Karbalai
has warned against internet use among young people in Iraq, stating that it will destroy them, ‘I warn against the negative use of the internet among the young people because it will destroy their mental and physical ability and prevent them from developing themselves’ (Alsumaria News, 2016). Islamic standards require males and females to conform to specific behavioural codes that ensure they maintain face and keep the honour in their communities, not only in the real world but also in the virtual world. For example, interactions between unknown males and females via the internet, such as posting personal pictures or discussing certain topics, is not allowed unless it complies with the Islamic standards of modesty (Guta and Karolak, 2015).

Online social networks, and mainly Facebook, which is the focus of this study, increased significantly in Iraq after the general election in March 2010 (Al-Rawi, 2014). The number of SNSs users started to grow rapidly and many individuals began joining and using them to call for reform and express their dissatisfaction about the policies and strategies of the government. The result of this process was dozens of protests which began on February 12, 2011 (Al-Rawi, 2014). Activists succeeded in organizing and launching several political campaigns on Facebook, which were a mere reflection of their opposition to many government decisions and activities. For many Iraqis, social media provides valuable platforms for freedom of expression. In Iraq, the political, economic, and social situations led thousands of Iraqis, who fed up with the problems the country was facing, protested to demand an end to sectarianism and corruption. Many Facebook pages were created to play an essential role in the effort to inform the Iraqi public about the protests. The Facebook site became a famous venue for political activism in Iraq, and as a result, a considerable number of people have been encouraged to join the site (Al-Rawi, 2014).

These discussions are mainly concerned with behaviours and attitudes of Iraqi males and females who use the new digital media. Despite there being a considerable number of studies that investigate internet-use, social network site use, identity performance and identity presentation in the West, there is a lack of research into internet- and social media use in the Arab region, and in particular in the Iraqi context. There is also a lack of research into the aspects of gender and social media use. Hence the aim of this study is to investigate how people use the internet and social media sites to explore their identity in this online environment (and particularly on Facebook). The focus is on Facebook use
among people in Iraq, as well as the online personas created by users to explore the concept of virtual identity in terms of construction and performance as well as its relationship to the offline real identity. To this end, it is vital to present theories that have been created to deal with the process of identity construction and presentation in a virtual environment.

Since the advent of the internet and social networks in particular, the construction of virtual identities has become a significant topic, particularly for those researchers exploring social interactions set up by users online, and the topic of identity formation in online and offline worlds. There are lots of studies in the Western culture on performativity and online world and the use of Facebook, but they are more focused on individualistic culture. However, none of the research look at the collective culture in particular context of Iraq. The literature used in this study provides a kind of theoretical methodological purchase, because there are no precedent studies on the topic of Iraq. It is not possible to build on directly critical work because it is not there. Instead, the present work is built on what has been done in terms of performativity and performance literature available on these topics which is mostly applied in the Western cultural context. Through the remainder of the literature review, the nuances of these debates as well as the benefits and challenges presented by SNSs are presented. The relative lack of boundaries in the virtual world of the internet compared to face-to-face interaction creates an environment where people can discuss, perform and shape themselves in the online world. Cyberspace is seen as a venue to explore new ways to express and develop a variety of identities based on virtual places (McLelland, 2017). It provides individuals with several opportunities and benefits to interact and perform in the way they like. However, it seems to impose certain challenges in certain contexts due to the nature of the relationship with their use such as the uses of the sites and users’ adherence to social norms (especially the women), the impact of cultural norms on the process of identity construction and presentation online, how users manipulate their public and private domains, and how users challenge the general cultural expectations.
2.4 GENDER AND IDENTITY IN OFFLINE AND ONLINE WORLDS

‘All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players’ William Shakespeare, 1564 - 1616

The term gender usually refers to ‘the physical and/or social condition of being male or female” and “all males, or all females, are considered as one group’, whereas the term sex refers to “the state of being either male or female” (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2008: p. 596). Gender characteristics are the main determinants by which we differentiate between masculinity and femininity, and by which we define ourselves and others (Chen et al., 2001). ‘Sex attributes’ are the main way in which we behave, and they determine our interactions with others, as well as enabling us to organize the real social context (O’Brien, 1999). Both biological and natural features are the main indicators of whether an individual is male or female (Arnold, 2010; Van Anders, S.M., 2015). However, this hypothesis is challenged if we consider that gender is socially, psychologically and culturally constructed. Therefore, gender might be regarded as one of the accepted means by which societies classify people (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2016).

It is believed that gender is a social and cultural construction that encompasses the idea of being male or female, masculine or feminine, and the way in which women and men are expected to think and act according to their shared rules and beliefs (Coates, 2004; Butler, 1999; Sedgwick, Goktan, and Gupta, 2015). Furthermore, culturally, the roles of men and women are very different according to the society in which they operate.

Gender has been an important topic in academia, dating back to the 1970s. From a sociological standpoint, gender is defined as ‘the socio-cultural aspects of being a man or a woman – that is how society sets the rules for masculinity and femininity – while sex refers to the basis of biological sex differences ['male' and 'female']’ (Oakley, 1972 cited by Bradley, 2007; p15). In psychology, the term gender is ‘synonymous’ with the study of femininity and masculinity. These concepts provide an indication of the male and female characteristics through the social and cultural interpretation of the situational and behavioural actions of both men and women (Burr, 2000; Eagly and Wood, 2013; Helgeson, 2015). According to Tripp (2000), biology, psychology and sociology work in conjunction with each other to shape what we term ‘gender’.
Gender within social constructivism has been studied through examining socially constructed characteristics that are associated with either men or women (Carlson, 2001; Burr, 2015). According to Eriksson et al. (2002), there is a social and psychological requirement to be either male or female, with no grey areas. Scholars regard sex as a natural construct, while gender is generally created by social norms. In the case of newborn babies, the process of assigning gender at birth is always based on their physical and biological sex. The term ‘boys’ refer to male babies and ‘girls’ to female babies, while intersex babies are placed in either one category or another. Both the biological sex and the gender that are assigned to children are essential factors that confirm their specific gender roles in their society. Similarly, just as ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are used to differentiate between males and females, sex also refers to the biological distinction between males and females, and gender can refer to their masculinity and/or femininity (Chancer and Watkins, 2007). It has been suggested that a connection exists between femininity and specifically associated features, such as 'private' and 'domestic,' 'submission' and 'passivity.' On the other hand, the associated characteristics such as 'public', 'control' and 'activity' are regarded as being masculine (Chancer and Watkins, 2007; Spijkerboer, 2000). It must be borne in mind that gender refers to both sexes and indicates the differences between them; gender enables people to see everyone as male or female. It also enables us to understand that our social roles are not permanent and that they can change. Individual’s identity, is naturally a very complex construction, and gender is only one part of the self (Gauntlett, 2002; Bamman, Eisenstein, and Schnoebelen, 2014). The main question that naturally emerges when investigating identity is certainly about the notion of identity itself.” Identity is the way that an individual’s presence is shaped within their own society; it provides us with reference points which enable us to answer the question of “who someone is”, and to establish their lifestyle that makes them unique and different from other individuals (Roesler, 2008). Gender is the most change-resistant aspect of identity. However, the prevalence of new venues provided by computer-mediated communication (CMC) has changed this view to some extent and has enabled people to think about their mental and physical appearance (Turkle, 1995). The internet is a space that has been used by individuals not only for communication and interaction and creating networks of links among certain individuals, but also for establishing and even altering their gender identities.
The idea of identity forged within the arena of specific public interactions inspired Judith Butler to construct her argument about gendered identity. Butler (1988, 1990) claimed that learning how to be a woman was a continuous and societal process and that consisted of both identity performance and negotiation. She further argued that gender identity, “is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts (Butler, 1988, p. 519). ‘Gender identity is a performative construct. Females, and males for that matter, learn to perform their gendered identity in accordance with cultural and societal expectations of the roles and identities associated with each gender’ (Guta and Karolak, 2015: p.117). The central concept of the structure or discourse of gender for Butler is that the idea of he/she gender is constructed through their own repetitive performance of gender. In other words, Butler’s theory does not accept stable and coherent gender identity.

Butler’s argument is built upon her view that gender identity is a performance, in other words, the character is a performative construct which is framed through a process of repetition of particular acts and habits. The emergence of new communication technologies has brought about substantial benefits to certain individuals, particularly in male communities. In both the cultural and societal arenas, males have governed the way that females must conform, perform and adhere to their gender. According to Simone de Beauvoir, ‘becoming a woman is not an instinctive aspect but a public creation’ (Butler, 1988: p. 519). The virtual boundaries of the internet create an environment for people to discuss, perform and shape the self in the online world. Cyberspace might become a venue for exploring new ways to express and develop a variety of identities based on virtual places. According to McKie (1997), for example, a transgendered individual can create a website to discuss or show off his/her personality because the boundaries of the internet arenas are virtual, making it difficult to establish whether the identity of that person is real or virtual.

The way individuals use the internet has changed significantly because of the advent of communication technologies (such as smartphones, tablet computers and laptops) and social networking applications. These changes have substantially altered the way that individuals interact with each other, and how they allocate time and access to information. This also has important behavioural and social implications (Rotondi et al., 2017). The
easy environment provided by the internet made has made it possible to cross over the cultural boundaries, allowing identities to be reconstructed without any regard for real physical space (Hegland and Nelson, 2000; Haimson and Hoffmann, 2016). The virtual realm of the internet is constantly changing and updating and is in a state of smooth transition, rather than being fixed. A great deal of evolving programs are created on internet websites and this allows individuals’ identity to escape from the cultural boundaries of their real lives.

Gender presentation might be affected by the new features available on internet applications such as building their profile, amending personal information, staying anonymous, which enable a wide range of activities for users in the virtual world, activities which they are not able to take part in their real lives. For instance, using the internet for communication enables people to hide their gender because the physical and auditory clues are not present in messages sent to others. This has facilitated the emergence of a new method of identity production which is due to the disembodiment and anonymity features of computer-mediated communication (Bargh et al., 2002; Melchor-Couto, 2017). According to (Herring, 2003; & Haimson and Hoffmann, 2016), this environment can provide men and women with a wide range of interactions. Men can risk being more open and friendly in their online communication through the use of anonymity features (Morahan-Martin, 1998). The main element that has emerged from the use of these new technologies in terms of identity is that people are willing to take on different personas that are entirely different from their offline selves (Stone, 1996; & Humphrey, 2017). In other words, the online environment encourages people to shape and reshape their identities by hiding undesired body features. For example, women can pretend to be male, an athlete or even a movie star.

2.5 IDENTITY PERFORMANCE IN SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

“Identity is part of drama to me. Who am I, why am I behaving this way, and am I aware of it?” (Matthew Wein, 2015)

Today, internet applications and social media sites are of interest to many disciplines because they can be perceived as a prominent method for people to construct and negotiate their identities (Davis, 2010). The continuous development of internet
technologies provides identity theorists and symbolic interactionists with a continuous opportunity to focus on new communication and interaction technologies. Research into identity performance and creation pre-dates the invention of the internet and digital media. Goffman’s approach, which was set before the advent of the internet, is an applicable method for internet studies. The original work on Goffman and online identity formation was about web pages. Lamb and Davidson (2002) indicated the central concepts of Goffman’s dramaturgy approach such as, ‘expected and realized reciprocity, awareness of the audience, framed interactions and co-construction of identity’, are essential factors for identity formation in both offline and online worlds. Other researchers involved in the study of identity construction have also adopted Goffman’s methods, for example, Lamb and Davidson (2002) and Arnold and Miller (2000). In their 2002 study, Lamb and Davidson examined the technologies used by oceanographers to manage professional identity within their sociotechnical networks. They found that the professional identity of the academic researchers was efficiently shaped and presented through websites and other internet communication technologies (ICTs) used in their close interactions with their counterparts. However, identity performance on personal web pages was the primary focus of the majority of these studies, rather than the social applications. The present study is in line with these studies and it employs the Goffman approach as it aims to focus on the role performed by the participants and their intention to present disparate identities in various domains. It considers the life and the online platforms (mainly Facebook) as stages where individuals are able to perform different roles and for different audiences. The idea of stages and performance is highly recognized in Goffman work as a dramaturgical approach. Goffman (1959) crucially points out that ‘it is through performances that social reality – including selves and the social world – is created. While every social interaction is a performance and every person an actor, in social life people often play parts and display attributes that they conceive as true to their selves.’ (1959: p.19).

In the early days of the internet, very little attention was paid to the connection between online and offline identities. Sherry Turkle was one of the first researchers to focus on internet identity and the effect of the new technology on identity construction processes. Her work, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, was first published in the USA in 1995 and the UK in 1996. Turkle asserted that ‘computer-mediated
communication can serve as a place for the construction or reconstruction of identity.’ (1995: p.342). She argued that the disembodiment and anonymous nature found in the online world encouraged the emergence of a new mode of identity production. Turkle debated that fluidity and fragmentation were the characteristics of online identity and her work is typical of studies of the correlation between identity construction and cyberspace (Turkle, 1995). Her interpretation of the concept of identity specifically focused on the fact that identity is multiple and fractured. The possibility of shaping new online identities that are totally different from the offline ones has subsequently been available to internet users, who can create several identities or reshape their pre-existing one by choosing ‘what information to put forward, thereby eliminating visceral reactions that might have seeped out in everyday communication’ (Boyd, 2007: p.12).

The online environment has offered users the opportunity to practice multiple identities without being recognized or known by others. Therefore, thanks to this ‘disembodiment or dislocation of the self’ Turkle (1995: p.178) ascertained that the internet has led to the creation of multiple identities. She examined the potential of the postmodern selves for fragmentation and multiplicity and assumed that CMC would create a space that could be used for identity construction (Turkle, 1995). Turkle’s research subjects were mainly college students, and through her research subjects in multi-user domains (MUDs) she constructed her views and claims about multiplicity and fragmented identity on the internet. She identified that MUDs users forged their own fictional personas or avatars and revealed the reason underlying MUDs ability to assist in the creation of multiple online identities (Robinson, 2007: p.102). Furthermore, a social media user ‘may even change their nationalities and genders to gain respect from other web users’ or create new online identities with a different race and gender ‘to get experience that they are not able to have in the real world’ (KiYanC, 2010). Nakamura (2002: p.40) adds her voice to this argument stating that being accepted in internet communities is one of the main reasons behind internet users’ willingness to construct online personas that are different from their offline identities.

Turkle’s approach uses the postmodern notion of decentred identity through the potentials offered by the internet. However, she introduced a different notion by committing to the concept of a unified character due to the difficulties created by the multiplicity and fragmentation concepts of identity. This was also asserted by Paasonen (2002: p. 25) who
identified that online and offline identity separation was problematic online, particularly in the case of gender.

‘Gender (as well as the category thought of as ‘sex’) is constituted as the ritualized reiteration of norms that govern cultural intelligibility, as compulsive repetition. This ‘doing gender’ is far from voluntary activity, it is performativity that concerns the very sense of the self... Since being gendered (raced, classed) is a precondition for thinking, living and making sense of the world, the individual cannot take up any identity positions she/he pleases. Virtual environments are valuable as places where we can acknowledge our inner diversity. But we still want an authentic experience of self. One’s fear is, of course, that in the culture of simulation, a word like authenticity can no longer apply.’ (Turkle, 1996: p. 254).

The change of the digital space from the anonymous environments of MUDs to a nonymous (opposite to anonymous) one has moved online identity and interaction studies towards an understanding of the complex relationship between the online and offline selves. The nonymity of the environment (e.g., Facebook) means a milieu that ‘makes people less likely to “act up” or play-act at being someone else as they tend to do in places like MUDs or Chat Rooms’ (Zhao et al., 2008: p.1826). According to Zhao et al. (2008) the online identity in nonymous environments is, to some extent, connected to offline activities and identity. The popularity of social networking websites enabled further observational studies as the online and offline selves became more interlinked. Online communication channels and social media have exploded, and new platforms have emerged, with online blogs being among the most prominent social media platforms. The construction of a personal online identity, and how an individual projects him/herself within this online arena has important philosophical ramifications. Users of these types of sites are encouraged to (re)construct and maintain their identities online. On the internet, ‘profile pages' are considered a way for individuals to project their own identities for their friends, to other people in the outside world, or they can project an alter ego for narcissistic purposes. Their profiles become a presentation of who they wish to be in the internet world. Users might have multiple accounts with alternative profiles on social networking sites in which they might appear with a unique personality in each one. This makes it difficult to differentiate between an individual’s real-world identity and his/ her online or virtual identity.
In her book, Rettberg debated the construction process of both virtual identity and community in social internet sites. She stated that blogging could be described, ‘As a form of narrative and as a form of self-representation.’ (Rettberg, 2008: p.111). Her finding was that these communication platforms are enabling particular types of communication and interactions, especially considering the ability of blogs to facilitate the transformational process from mass media to a participatory media, which facilitates and shapes both the real-world sense of self and community (Baker, 2012). Bargh et al. (2002) found that the ‘true’ selves of internet users could be better communicated online, and their ‘actual’ selves in real life interactions. According to Bargh et al. (2002: p.45), ‘the relationship between the true self and the idealized self is closed and they found that the cyberspace environment, fosters idealization of the other in the absence of information to the contrary.’ This phenomenon has been investigated further by McLaughlin et al. (2011) in their study of online identity construction and expectations of future interactions. They identified that attempts to display a ‘true’ representation of the self-arose as a result of the nonymity of the online environment, and possibility also in real future face-to-face interactions.

This kind of interaction between users in a network makes sense in terms of the different persona that are constructed in the virtual world. There are many different perspectives on understanding the self/identity in online social networks. Recently there has been much debate about the clarity of the relationship between ‘real identity’ (an individual’s offline life), ‘virtual identity’ (his/her online self) and social networking sites. This issue leads us back to the traditional question about identity. How do we understand the identity of an individual? Identity is deeply linked with the process of socialisation of individual in offline life where they are gradually moulded into a social being and he learns social ways of acting and feeling. It is therefore important to understand what underlies personal identity online and how it is formed, as well as the relationship between the online and offline identities. The construction process involves a clear and precise grasp of the idea of the individual’s identity as a constant along with a fundamental essence of the self, or the tendency to develop multiple and fragmented selves.

Social media networking is continually evolving, and several new social networking websites have emerged, including Snapchat and WhatsApp. These types of sites have attracted the attention of interaction theorists who have concluded that play acting is a
way of expressing an idealized sense of the self. Boon and Sinclair (2009: p.103) found that the vast majority of individuals were creating, ‘idealistic virtual re/presentations of our real-world selves.’ In this sense, identity was not considered as being so fluid or plural; the online self was clearly interlinked with the offline self. Research into these conclusions led Baker (2012) to conclude that applying postmodern identity theory to study these platforms was no longer appropriate as both the online self and the embodied self were integrated and not separate from each other.

The emergence of Facebook as a social networking site that requires real-life identification gives rise to a new phase of identity theorization which focuses on the degree of accuracy and truth in the communication and interaction processes between individuals. According to Zhao et al. (2008), identities created in Facebook are evidently real because they contain actual concerns about the daily lives of the people who constructed them. Individuals using social internet sites tend to be more factual in their identity representation, as referred to by McLaughlin et al. (2011: p.8) in his statement, ‘because SNSs connect existing friends, these self-presentations tend more toward accuracy than idealization’. They identified a transition stage from idealization to singular self-presentation.

Despite the internet being considered as the venue where individuals can construct, shape and reshape their identities by creating new characters in the mould of how they wish to be perceived, it is still difficult for them to fully separate out from their real-life identities. Boyd (2008) states that, ‘through the act of articulation and writing oneself into being, all participants engaged in performance intended to interpret and convey particular impressions.’ (p.153). The current research aims at investigating the gender performance in the online environment, and particularly on Facebook, to explore how this platform is used and how people present their identities online and to identify the type of identity constructions and performances used, as well as to gain an insight into the reasons underlying this phenomenon.
2.6 GENDER IDENTITY IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION (CMC)

The emergence of the internet has provided new ways for self-presentation, enabling individuals to present and establish their identity, and to find out about others. Over the past 20 years, a significant amount of research has investigated the relationship between gender and internet technologies. The focus of these studies has been on the issue of gender identity and its manifestation in CMC. For example, one study examined offline self-representation in online environments (Van Doorn et al., 2007). They conclude that in ‘online platform of weblogs, users present their gender identity through narratives of ‘everyday life’ that remain closely related to the binary gender system. However, their performance of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ is more diffuse and heterogeneous than some theories in the field of gender and CMC would assume. In addition, the act of diary writing on weblogs can be understood as challenging the masculine connotation of the weblog as an ICT, demonstrating that the use of a technology is pivotal in shaping the ways in which technologies themselves are conceived of as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine.’ (p. 1).

Several theoretical perspectives have examined the idea of establishing and presenting different versions of the self-online. For example, Vaast (2007) explored the formation of ‘new selves’ online. In their studies, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013), indicated that users of the online world are involved in changing several aspects of their selves. This is similar to the ideas expressed by Goffman of gender as a performance (1959). According to Goffman, each person can be viewed as an actor who can become a performer in a social situation. He argued that individuals express themselves through social interactions to be who they want to be and how others define them. Thus, in terms of computer users, they can be considered as ‘performers’ who play a role using a virtual identity (Goffman, 1959). A number of studies of social media identity apply Goffman in their analysis. For example, A study conducted by Livingstone (2008), Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers’ use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression, found that younger teenagers attempt to recreate continuously a highly-decorated, stylistically-elaborate identity while older teenagers favour a plain aesthetic that foregrounds their links to others, thus expressing a notion of identity lived through authentic relationships. Another study, ‘The presentation of self in the age of
social media: Distinguishing performances and exhibitions online by (Hogan, 2010), who argues that self-presentation can be split into performances, which take place in synchronous “situations,” and artifacts, which take place in asynchronous “exhibitions.” In (2012) a project conducted by Baker, The Sincerity Game: An Exploratory Study of Erving Goffman’s Dramaturgical Framework about Interaction and Identity Construction Online, support the applicability of Goffman’s framework to online interaction. Bullingham, L. and Vasconcelos (2013), conducted their study, the presentation of self in the online world’: Goffman and the study of online identities. They indicated in the findings of their research that participants were keen to re-create their offline self-online instead of engaging in whole persona adoption.

Similarly, studies of the relationship between gender identity in online and offline worlds from a representational point of view, have identified that identity performed in cyberspace is as an embodied persona of that also found in real life. For instance, Baker (2009) introduced this perspective through his concept of a ‘blended identity’; when the creation of a new self is informed by the offline self, then the latter will be re-informed by the online-self through interactions with people whom that individual has met online for the first time. The main focus of many studies has often been on the gender differences and similarities of different internet use scenarios. A number of CMC technologies have been investigated, ranging from highly interactive sites such as Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Usenet groups and MUDs, to other communicating media using the World-Wide Web (WWW) (Döring, 2002). Miller and Mather (1998) have studied the enduring relationship between the offline persona in real life and the online persona represented on the internet. Their study investigated gender presentation in the real world and found that men’s pages were shorter than women’s pages, and that there were more self-references as well as more references to the reader in women’s pages, and they seemed to be showing more awareness of those who could be viewing their pages than the men. (Miller and Mather, 1998; Miller and Arnold, 2000: p. 335).

Advances in the virtual environments available on the internet such as profile building, privacy settings, and content access control, have provided people with the opportunity to control the ways in which they can create and present their identities. Online gender switching is the most prominent example of this type of control. Unlike face-to-face interactions, on the internet people are able to hide and behave in a way that renders them
unrecognizable from their biological, social and psychological characteristics (Roberts and Parks, 1999). Gender swapping (or gender switching) describes the behaviour where an Internet user presents different gender than that in their physical life (Chou et al., 2014). The occasional occurrence of gender swapping in the real world makes this an interesting phenomenon. The idea of swapping gender contradicts traditional essentialist biological determinism because gender selection is not only ‘search for one’s second self but also as an experimentation of the second self.’ (Paik and Shi, 2013: p. 6). Humans used to be understood from an essentialist position as having a ‘core identity’ (Sutherland, 2005; & Gill et al., 2014) while relativists consider identity as fluid, highly contextual, and historically situated (Rattansi and Phoenix, 2005). From a postmodernism position, identity is conceived as a multiplicity which consists of several integrated parts (Elgezeery, 2015). Aaron Balick states that ‘postmodern discourse … argues strongly against unitary expressions of self in favour of identities that are multiple, fluid, and decentred’ (2014: p.145, cited in Elgezeery, 2015). Several scholars have argued the fixedness or fluidity of identity. For example, Ostwald considers the fixedness or fluidity of identity as something that ‘is linked to the way in which the individual is prompted, by the characteristics of the environmental bubble, to alter their projected persona.’ (Ostwald, 2001:p. 194). This indicates that identity and the environment are firmly connected with each other (see also, Grad, Rojo, and Ostwald, 2015).

The idea of constructing identity and the flexibility of presenting gender in computer-mediated communication has featured in an increasing number of studies. Gender-switching has been recognized by several scholars, including Turkle (1995) and Rheingold (2000). This phenomenon is prominent within virtual social environments such as MUDs and Massive Multiplayer Online games. However, it was in the text-only environment of MUDS where cases of gender swapping were first noticed (Rheingold, 2000). Some were predominantly among men (Van Gelder, 1991), whereas others occurred in both sexes (Bruckman, 1993).

These environments are characterized by several features which make them ideal places for users to experience the highest level of self-presentation and identity expression. Firstly, these textual worlds lack nonverbal artefacts such as vocal quality, smiling, eye contact and physical appearance. Secondly, individuals’ online descriptions cannot be crosschecked. Finally, online activities (which are ‘available on- or performed using the
internet or other computer networks’ according to the Dictionary of British and World English), are always anonymous and have no consequences in the offline life (Roberts and Parks, 1999). Players in such worlds can control their identity by creating a different character or ’avatar’. They can create and even alter these avatars. DiGiuseppe and Nardi (2007) noticed that character gender-swapping occurred recurrently in gamers.

The flexibility of constructing a virtual identity offers individuals the opportunity to leave their real identities behind. Traditionally, gender swapping has been considered as a negative behaviour (Song and Jung, 2015). For instance, Huh and Williams (2010) stated that gender swapping behaviour was prevalent in (MUD) environments and it was considered as being deceptive. However, according to Turkle (1995), swapping gender online can be a spontaneous and beneficial behaviour for those individuals who are willing to explore their virtual identity, and it could even be considered as a common phenomenon in this context. Adopting a different identity allows users to express some of the hidden aspects of their personality. Number of scholars stated that individuals might change their gender in virtual settings deliberately to reflect certain aspects of their personality (Robert and Parks, 1999; Song & Jung, 2015; Chou, Lo, & Teng, 2014; Martey et al., 2014; & Paik and Shi, 2013). Swapping gender in the online world might be a way for individuals to show certain character traits that they cannot express in their offline life. In Western cultures, the importance of understanding the reasons underlying this behaviour is a motive for studying this phenomenon. Exploratory interviews (Roberts and Parks, 1999; Martey et al., 2014; & Paik and Shi, 2013) and the existing literature (Turkle, 1995) have revealed a wide range of attitudes.

Another area of research has focussed on the potentials of creating different identities in cyberspace but with a different emphasis. They have explored the idea of ‘gender-free communication’ in cyberspace where individuals can express themselves or behave in a way that is not available in real life. As Danet (1998) pointed out, gender-free communication on the internet becomes recognizable due to the lack of common gender signals, such as information about a corporal body, physical features, nonverbal cues and dress. According to Turkle (1995: p.184) the internet is the place where ‘you can be whoever you want to be. You can completely redefine yourself if you want. You can be the opposite sex.’ The absence of social encounters in the virtual world provides people
with a free place to explore other aspects of their selves or even entirely change their identities.

The internet makes it possible for individuals to interact fully disembodied, without revealing any aspects of their physical characteristics (Zhao et al., 2008). Several studies that have investigated the construction of gender identity in the virtual world consider the internet as an arena that enables the process of creating gender identities that are separated from the real anatomy, allowing for the generation of fluid identities that overcome the binary gender system (O’Brien, 1999). In addition to the malleability of CMC identity, a number of academics have suggested that this new communication media enhances the ability of individuals to construct identities in a more flexible way (Kuhn, 2006; & Turkle, 1995). The rapid development of technology enables the self to be continuously changeable and adaptable to the new online settings (Anderson and Buzzanell, 2007). For example, Castells (2004) states that people’s identities tend to be more flexible in internet-based societies which frees them from previous conventional constraints imposed by either local or national communities. Without the robust implementation of identity, the online environment will continue to provide individuals with more opportunities to explore their identities.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY
This chapter has discussed the existing literature relating to the presence of the internet world and SNSs in the Arab region. The literature review establishes the lack of studies that deal with such topics in the conservative culture of Iraq. The chapter identified the body of literature on the construction and presentation of identity within contemporary social media environments on the internet. The literature suggests that the presence of SNSs has changed the way in which people interact and socialize with each other. The participation of men and women in computer-mediated communication creates a new public environment for them to interact and communicate, especially in less democratic communities. Finally, the literature review has shown how the new venues provided by world of the internet and social networks have raised issues and enabled people (and particularly women) to participate in activities that are not necessarily open to them in the physical world, and how new opportunities created by SNSs have led people to create
identity presentations and interactions that are not available in their offline lives. Several theories and approaches primarily associated within the Western context of the study of social media have been reviewed because of the lack of similar studies in Arabic scholarship. They form an important base for the current study to build on while investigating the topic of social media, gender, and identity construction on Facebook in Iraq. Reading the existing accounts of western social media usage and gender performance seems to indicate significant differences to the researcher’s own experience in Iraq. It is this that provides the motivation to investigate the reasons that lay behind gender performance variation in the electronic environment. These studies show the lack of testing of the applicability of specific concepts and approaches such as Goffman’s dramaturgical approach of self-presentation and impression management in non-Western contexts particularly in Iraq that the current research study aims to address. There is a lack of studies that examine gender performance in social media sites particularly in non-anonymous platforms such as Facebook, and without such understanding, research will not be able to build and shape an oblivious idea about the user’s strategies of self-presentation and performance in such environments. The present study also will debate a number of issues mentioned by prior studies such as the separations of regions, impression management, audience segregation, an idealized version of the self, the notion of the face, and fragmentation identity in non-anonymous online environments. The context of this study will also attempt to extend the study of Social Role Theory (SRT) to SNSs in conservative Islamic culture during a time of change to add value to the SRT in the context of information technology and gender behaviour differences. The study also aims at addressing the limitations of previous studies regarding the connection between Facebook and relationships formation and how this new platform Facebook provides participants with ‘affinity spaces’ where they can create affinity identities and interact with other users with whom they share several aspects to form social capitals. Additionally, the study aims to contribute to the literature by investigating the reactive strategy that people in conservative cultures adopt to minimize the threat when interacting with social networking sites. Finally, the current study also aims at exploring the tactic of SNSs’ users of collectivistic culture adopt when they construct and perform their identity in an online environment to provide researchers and scholars with new insight when they compare it with users of the online world in an individualistic culture.
CHAPTER 3: THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the historical, cultural and social backgrounds of the country and society of Iraq. Herein I link these cultural aspects to the use of new technology to show how these impact on Iraqi culture, behaviour, and other interactions, and how they apply to the new world of social networking where some of the limits no longer exist. There are likely to be tensions between the offline cultural practices and online world which will be played out online. The sections in this chapter provide a clear picture of the cultural and communal behaviours and attitudes that exist among the people in Iraq and enable a better understanding of the nature of the lives of the Iraqi people.

3.2 IRAQ: CHARACTERISTICS

Iraq is an Arab country in the Arabian Peninsula, located in Western Asia, and is officially known as the Republic of Iraq. ‘Iraq is positioned in the Middle East, a recognized geographical region of south-western Asia, and is situated in both the northern and eastern hemispheres. Iraq is bordered by the countries of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and a small stretch of the Persian Gulf’ (World Atlas, 2015). Iraq shares a wide series of sandy plains with neighbouring countries, and particularly Syria. The west of the country is covered by the Syrian Desert, while the land close to the Persian Gulf in the southeast is characterized by low, marshy, and often flooded areas (World Atlas, 2015). Iraq is one of the first great nations in the Middle East and was historically known as the “Cradle of Civilisation”. Iraq was known among western cultures as Ancient Mesopotamia, the region located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In Arabic, these rivers are known as the Dijla and Furat. Iraq represents the centre and birthplace of successive civilizations, such as the Sumerian-Babylonian, Akkadian and Assyrian empires from 3500 BC to 539 BC.

These civilizations changed the world and moved humanity from prehistory into history. As an ancient civilization, Iraq was host to multiple tribes, ethnic groups, and races (Hunt, 2005). The term ‘Iraq’ is as old as the lands that it used to refer to that stretched from the region of Tikrit in the north towards the Arab Gulf in the south. Even though the name
‘Iraq’ dates back to the Kashi era (from 1600 – 1100 BC) and was discovered printed on a clay plate as ‘Ariqa’ (Bakir, 1970), Arab geographers did not use the name ‘Iraq’ in literature until the eighth century. The term ‘Iraq’ was used to define ‘the shore of a great river along its length, as well as the grazing land surrounding it’ (Tripp, 2002: p.8). In the modern day, ‘Iraq’ is explicitly used to refer to the current Iraqi state and all its lands, which was created in 1921. The estimated population of Iraq in 2016 was 39,192,111 (CIA, 2018). There is also a relative demographic balance between the percentages of males and females in the Iraqi population. In 2017, the percentage of males is estimated to reach 50.8% in comparison with 49.2% of females (Ministry of planning Iraq, 2016). The modern history of Iraq is marked by three essential periods. The first was after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the start of the British Mandate period in 1920, during which time Iraq was under British control. The second period started in 1932 after the end of the British Mandate, when Iraq became an independent state and joined the League of Nations. This period marked a new start in the modern history of Iraq. The direct rule of Britain led to the revolution in 1920, which ended with the establishment of the Hashemite Monarchy in Iraq. The British crowned King Faisal I in 1921. King Faisal I had been brought over from Saudi Arabia and was assigned to be king due to his relationship to the Prophet Muhammad. His monarchy lasted for 26 years. The third period began in 1958 when a coup d’etat conducted by the ‘Free Officers’ movement led to the end of the monarchy and the declaration of the Republic of Iraq. Iraq became a republic, and this lasted for 45 years. After this, Iraq was ruled by Saddam Hussein from 1979 until he was overthrown by American forces in 2003. His regime was the worst era in the modern history of the Iraqi state as it cost the lives of an estimated 500,000 Iraqis. Saddam Hussein’s regime is characterized as a period of insecurity and oppression for most of the Iraqi people. After the fall of Baghdad in 2003 and of Saddam’s government, Iraq was transferred into a democratic country. Between that period and 2010, Iraq held two rounds of free elections. However, political liberty and stability were lost almost immediately after the eruption of sectarian violence among the population in Iraq, particularly between the Shia and Sunni Muslim people. The religious divide between Shias and Sunnis has widened significantly since the American invasion and the formation of the new Iraqi government. The changes in Iraq have had a significant impact
on men and women in the country and have reshaped the way they present and interact with their communities.

3.3 IRAQ: ARABIC CULTURE
Culture reflects people’s lives and affects every aspect of their existence. This includes their customs, attitudes, behaviours, values and languages, and can be used a means by which to measure their quality of life. Considering Iraqi culture will provide a better understanding of individuals’ attitudes and actions by illustrating their backgrounds and identifying the differences between various aspects of their values and principles.

The general concept of culture does not have a single definition in the literature. Instead, many different interpretations explain various aspects of human activity. There exist over 400 definitions of culture. However, all share the view that the ethics and norms of the members of a society are influenced and shaped by the cultural environment (Sørnes, Stephens, Sætre & Browning, 2004). Marian Golka (2007: p.59) claimed that, ‘culture is a set of patterns of behaviour, behaviours themselves and their products which are created, acquired, applied and transformed in the course of social life.’ According to Schein (1985), culture is, ‘The sum total of all the shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that a group has learned throughout the history.’ (p. 29). These definitions deal with culture from a non-physical perspective, as a combination of concepts, values and norms. However, UNESCO defines culture as a ‘set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyle, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs’ (UNESCO, 2002: p.67). Likewise, Dahl referred to ‘culture’ as a set of different aspects which applied to various societies and larger groups that interact with each other to shape specific behaviours (Dahl, 2004).

Edward Hall stated that cultures can be characterized as either high- or low-context which differentiates between two different methods of interaction. He referred to this in his book Beyond Culture (1959), wherein he outlines the fact that:

‘A high-context communication message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, (...). A low-context communication is just the opposite, i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code’ (Hall, 1976: p.155). Thus, a culture that recognises the importance of family relationships,
solidarity, responsibility for family members and kinship ties can be identified as a high context culture (Berger et al. 2015).

Iraqi society is high context, in some cases not much information can be gathered from the verbal interactions since there are many implicit messages in the non-verbal communication. As Salleh (2005: p.33) explained, ‘Individuals from high context cultures would particularly emphasize another’s feelings in the communication process, and so care to be less direct, use more analogous language, be more personal, and prefer nonverbal to verbal communication.’. There are several embedded thoughts and values that have contributed to constructing and shaping individuals’ behaviours. A high context culture contains much behaviour that has not been created through familiarity among its members but rather because of an extended period of interaction. As such, members of the Iraqi community are always well-informed about others who are present in their lives. Their relationships are close and personal. They try to share a lot of information among family members, acquaintances and friends. This type of culture is easily recognised by its interlinking social bonds, enduring relationships, solid restrictions and relationships (Dahl, 2004).

Conservativeness is one of the key features of Iraqi societal life due to the role religion plays in the culture of the country, especially in communication between Iraqi populations, as it constitutes the basis of their behaviour and the way in which they treat one another. According to Alsagaf and Williamson (2004: p.5), ‘[Islam does] not only shape people’s attitudes, practices, and behaviours but also shapes the way they see and do things and perceive their lives.’ So, Islam not only participates significantly in the diffusion of morals, norms and attitudes but also shapes the relationships between the family as a basic social unit and the rest of society. It also impacts on relationships within the family itself, which in Arab society, is known as the centre of its social organization. The family is of paramount importance to Iraqis, as is honour. Family members are responsible for their conduct; the way they behave is under much scrutiny as any wrongdoing might bring shame to the whole family. ‘The family remains the primary focus of loyalty; it transmits values and standards of behaviour of the society to its members and holds them responsible for each other's conduct’ (Library of Congress, 2015: p.21). Family solidarity is also stressed as being highly important.
Iraqi society, due to its conservative nature, also places great emphasis on sexual modesty and premarital chastity. Such virtues are highly regarded and respected within Arab culture in general and in Iraqi culture, and they are primarily applied to women. These morals are an essential part of the social life, connected to both family honour and religious commitment. Modesty is another key feature that characterizes individuals’ behaviour, and people are tasked with upholding this. The social standards of decency apply to both genders. However, their importance relates mainly to women. Furthermore, having a cautious nature is part of the Iraqi culture, which in practice means that they avoid topics and actions that may embarrass others. Crumrine (2000) stated that ‘Arabs focus on the group; therefore, they seek to avoid bringing shame on themselves and their group(s). The idea of not directly criticizing anyone is at play; a no personal fault culture. They seek to avoid affixing personal blame and depersonalize issues. This may be done by using the reflexive or passive voice in speech or writing. Besides avoiding bringing shame on themselves or their group, Arabs will also seek to avoid bringing shame on the SAO.’ (p.16).

Iraqis are diverse in their race, language and religion; individuals also share physical resemblances that can be best accredited to certain traditions of eastern civilizations. Its diversity is one of the most interesting aspects of the Iraqi population and is considered a prominent feature that characterizes this eastern nation. Religious and ethnic diversity is an aspect that distinguishes Iraqis. Islam is officially recognized as the main religion in Iraq, making Iraq a predominantly Muslim nation. Iraqi Muslims represent an estimated 97% of the population. Iraq also contains other minority ethnicities, such as Armenians, and other religious groups, such as Christians and Yazidis (Al-Badr, 2012). The Qur’an verses (the scared words of God dictated to his Prophet Mohammad) and the Hadith (what Prophet Mohammad said or approved) are the primary codes that instruct Muslims in their way of life and their obedience to God. However, the majority of individuals are Moslems, whether Shi’a or Sunni.

Iraq is an ethnically diverse nation. The Arab population forms the majority ethnic group in the country making up 75-80% of the population, the rest are Kurds (15-20%) and the final 5% is made up of other ethnic groups such as Turkomans, Assyrians, or Christians (CIA, 2014). There are two main groups of Muslims in Iraq; Arab Shi’a Muslims, and Arab Sunni Muslims. Shi’a Muslims live in the southern part of Iraq (Dhi-Qar, Muthanna,
Basra, Qadissiyah, Najaf, Karbala, Babil and Misan) and Baghdad, and they constitute most of the population, comprising 60 - 65%. (Iraq: Cultural Appreciation Booklet, 2007). Most people speak the same language, practice the same religion and share the same ethnicity. For that reason, traditions, habits, history and culture are shared among the population there (Al-Badr, 2012). The Arab Sunni Muslims, on the other hand, are in the minority, comprising 17 - 20% of the population. (Iraq: Cultural Appreciation Booklet, 2007). They are mainly grouped around the central belt of Iraq. Even though Iraqi culture has been dominated by the Shi’ites, traditionally, the country has been led by the Arab Sunnis, both before and during Saddam Hussein’s regime. Northern Iraq is an area that is occupied by Kurds who live in the Kurdish region (Dahuk, Erbil, and Sulaymania).

Social structure is also one manifestation, especially with its separation of the genders, which is distinctly recognisable in Moslem communities. It is believed that Islamic ideologies play a significant role in this segregation. The position of men in society reinforce the concept of male domination. Al-Wardi, a prominent Iraqi sociologist, emphasised the role of the ethical and cultural values of Islam in constructing Iraqi society, particularly regarding gender. He believed that these values were the essential elements that affected daily life and the community (Ghareeb & Dougherty, 2004). The Quran says:

Men are the managers of the affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the others and because men spend of their wealth on women. (al-Nisa 34).

Even though this verse is open to different interpretations, it has been widely quoted by intellectuals who use it as evidence for their claims about women’s rights and status in Islam. Gender segregation is also prevalent in Iraq, and it impacts on everyday life and on individual’s public networks. The separation of individuals along the lines of gender
is commonly prescribed by Islam as a means of individual and societal protection; it does not allow free mixing or socializing of females with unknown males. ‘The passage from adolescence to maturity is swift. Upon reaching puberty, there traditionally is a separation of sexes, and girls are excluded from male society except that of their close kin’ (Library of Congress, 2015: p.21). During adolescence, there is a big difference between the genders, with boys having much greater freedoms than girls. Furthermore, this separation is not only ascribed to Islamic rules but also to cultural norms that significantly impact the position of individuals within Iraqi society. The relationship between the country’s customs of the traditional patriarchal system, the family norms of ‘honour’, reputation and religious beliefs, and women’s rights (i.e., their socio-economic position), make for a difficult situation (Lasky, 2006). In Iraq, as in other parts of the Orient, it cannot be denied that men dominate, and social life systems are built to please and suit them. This situation had made life quite difficult for women.

Bedouin social values have been used as a tool to control women for a long time. According to al-Wardi, over four centuries of Ottoman rule and up to the First World War, the social norms and mentality of Iraqi populations were closer to the Bedouin social values than to those of the organized modern state. He states that Iraqi personality is a combination of both urban and tribal values which are in a continuous struggle (Ghareeb & Dougherty, 2004). These Bedouin values have had a long-term influence on the Iraqi population. Berger notes that the conduct of the individual is apparently accredited by his/her family and tribe in Bedouin society (Berger, 1964). This concept is evident in the notions of shame and honour which are linked to women’s sexual conduct, as they can bring shame, not only on themselves but also on their kin.

3.4 THE CONCEPTS OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY IN IRAQI MUSLIM SOCIETY

The concepts of masculinity and femininity in Islam have no single obvious definition. This issue exists because religion is practiced and interpreted in different cultures and contexts. This makes the definition of a true Muslim image of masculinity and femininity impossible, and it cannot be ascertained whether it comes from Islam or is rooted in culture (Hopkins, 2006). To understand how men and women construct the concepts of masculinity and femininity, the role of religion in Muslim societies must also be
considered (Lukens-Bull, 2016). Religion plays a significant role in providing both genders with a context through which they construct and negotiate their masculine and feminine identities and provides an understanding of the traditional forms of masculinity and femininity (Hart, et al., 2017).

Having briefly discussed the role of religion in the Muslim formation of masculine and feminine identities, the crucial roles of identity markers and social difference in influencing the processes of both men and women in managing, constructing and performing their masculine and feminine identities in a collective environment must also be investigated. These identities are impacted by the characteristics of the groups in that environment. In other words, identity markers of certain sub-cultures, such as ethnicity, culture and age, and the difference in the social status, such as class and gender, have a mutual relationship in the formation of masculinity and femininity (Hopkins, 2006, 2016).

It is important to fully understand the meaning of masculine and feminine concepts in the Iraqi society. In the building of a modern Iraqi nation, this issue has several factors. These can be identified through exploring the social attitudes towards men and women in this conservative environment. There is an apparent contrast between the notion of ‘traditional’ Muslim masculinity and liberal interpretations of what it means to be a man. For Muslim men, accepting ideas of liberty for women and freedom of expression could conflict with concepts of family honour and the truths of their faith. They have adopted other norms, such as proper gender roles, dress, the authority of the family and marriage as a method to reduce the liberty of young women (Macey, 1999).

The way of life for women in Iraq today does not differ significantly from that over the past few decades. Even though their status in society has improved to a certain degree, it is still subject to the effects of religious, societal and cultural norms. Thus, different perspectives must be used to examine the status of women in Iraqi society. Particular aspects of life, such as family name, chastity and obedience, can show how women are treated and of the rights they may or may not have throughout their lives. For example, even though a married woman retains her family name, her sons take their father’s family name. Thus, her offspring cannot carry her family name or pass it on to the next generation.

The different treatment of men and women within the family has impacted on their roles in life, their contributions and expectations. In Iraq, men are supposed to be strong,
independent and rational, while women should always be submissive, calm and emotional (Al-Khayat, 1990). The primary concern of a mother is how to teach her daughter to be submissive, to socialize her to fit in with the feminine stereotype. Girls are expected to be very polite when they ask for something and not be demanding. Boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to ask for what they want directly. From an early age, a girl is taught to be obedient and to listen to what adults in the family say and demand. Disobedience in girls is considered to be immodest.

The behavioural code of conduct for women in Iraqi society is understood through the concept of honour, as it is in other Arab regions. This concept works as an umbrella term for a wide range of actions which girls should adhere to, to avoid being considered as immodest. The idea of honour is essential due to its direct link with offensive sexual behaviour of women. There is a robust social belief that if a woman commits a shameful act, she will bring shame and scandal to her family. Sexual honour is the most important of the forms of honour because it relates to the moral reputation of the girl.

There is another term that has a direct relationship to the concept of honour, and this is known as ‘aib’ عيب. The Arabic term ‘aib’ عيب might best be translated as “immodesty”. This term has a direct relationship with the girls’ way of talking, dressing and their outdoor activities. The girls’ dress code is an essential issue as they are strictly encouraged to be aware of their appearance and to follow the prescribed standards of the society. They are always reminded to lower their voice and to be careful of how they talk and move. Girls should not partake in any types of “male” activities, particularly games and sports.

Females most acutely feel the dichotomy between public and private spaces. Newcomb (2006: p. 294) stated that female movements are defined by one simple rule, ‘One should remain within the space reserved for one’s gender… The feminine space is directed inwards, toward the courtyard; the masculine space directed toward the outside, the streets.’

Adherence to all these unwritten laws is demanded of women and girls, who are always expected to be polite and shy. The basis of rules lies in the direct relationship between honour and shame and family ties. Thus, these aspects of social conduct are taught to girls from a very early age to avoid them being seen as immodest. They are required to learn what is seen as being ‘aib’ and what is not, to avoid carrying out a dishonourable act that might involve their families in scandal and damage their reputation.
3.5 DISCOURSE STRATEGIES AND GENDER

The distinct roles of males and females in Arab societies, including Iraq, have led to the creation of specific gendered discourse strategies. These approaches are often referred to as masculine or feminine aspects of conduct. Several studies on the linguistic differences between females and males showed that linguistic features are not only a cause of the variation in language use, but also the adoption of different discourse strategies (Vicente, 2009). Several factors have a direct relationship with the contexts and the behavioural attitudes of males and females, such as the individual’s power relationships and status within his/her community. Social concepts such as honour and modesty have a direct relationship to the linguistic choices of both genders in Iraqi society (al-Khayat, 1990; & Mosquera et al., 2002a).

The dual concepts of honour and modesty have a direct relationship with the social organization and code of manners in the social life of women in Arabic countries, where a woman who acts against the rules will bring shame to herself and her whole family (al-Khayat, 1990; & Aslani et al., 2013). In his study on Arabic sociolinguistics, Bassiouney (2009) stated that linguistic practices in Arabic-speaking societies were mainly determined by the concepts of honour and modesty. According to Bassiouney (2009), a good understanding of the function of these two concepts within an Arabic society helps significantly in providing a clear picture of the linguistic choices available for women in this environment. From an anthropological perspective, these two terms (honour and modesty) help to explain the behavioural differences between not only Arabic women and men, but also their counterparts in western societies.

The term of address also reflects the variation in male and female discourse. It has been used as an indicator of the lower social status of women in their societies. Several authors have referred to the role of speech in distinguishing between men and women in different Arabic countries, for example, Al-Khayat (1990) on Iraqi Arabic, Al-Ali (cf. 2005) on Jordanian Arabic, and Herrero (cf. 2008) on Moroccan. These authors hold the belief that the differences between the genders in Arabic-speaking societies are reflected in the forms of address and naming conventions, since these are a product of conventional cultural and social attitudes. According to Al-Khayat (1990), until the latter end of the nineteen century, the men in some Arabic towns and villages, would not mention the
name of a woman without following it with the words ‘ajallaka Allah’, which is roughly translated as, ‘May God put it on a higher level.’ This phrase is usually associated with animals. Another example of the relationship between the terms of address and female status is can be seen in the words used by husbands in Iraq, who do not normally say the name of their wives, or even call them ‘my wife’ (marati), but instead address them as, ‘the mother of the boys’ (Um al-walad) or ‘my folk’ (Al-Khayat 1990). However, these attitudes may not be representative of the entire male Iraqi society, as this can be affected by several factors, such as geographical location, the nature of the community and the period. In some cases, concealing their wife’s name is considered as a matter of respect. The variety of discourse used serves as an indicator of status within their societies, which is shown through their language choices. This variation in language reveals essential differences between Iraqi males and females and their western counterparts. Language variation is yet another factor that shapes the differences between men and women, such social class, age and occupation, and has an essential relationship with other parts of life, especially for women. It also describes relationships and the interactions between the genders in the Iraqi context. The cultural rules that are rooted in every practice of life and even in language has an impact on men and women and the way they perform and interact.

3.6 IRAQ: SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND INTERACTIONS
Understanding the patriarchal structure of Arabic societies is vital to understanding the position and occupation of individuals, as well as the gender relationships within Iraqi society. Patriarchal rules are very noticeable in the foundations of the community. Additionally, age and gender are important in defining the position and function of individuals. In the early stages of their life, members of Iraqi communities, both males and females, are taught how to show respect for others. Boys are prepared to take responsibility for the female members of their family. In turn, girls are taught to respect and obey their fathers, grandparents, brothers and uncles.

Iraq’s patriarchal society is profoundly impacted by culture and religion. For most Iraqis, religion and community are the centre point of their lives. According to Al-Khayat (1990), Iraqi society is male dominant, and this is strengthened by Bedouin traditions. Ali al-Wardi, the prominent Iraqi social scientist and historian stated that the construction of the Iraqi society was based on Bedouin traditions (1965). For Al-Wardi, the Bedouin
culture is characterized by three main elements: raiding, tribalism and chivalry. He claims that the ‘taghut’ (predominance) concept is the primary definition of each of these elements (1965). The Bedouin individual seeks to persuade by the force of his tribe, his strength, and his sense of superiority (Rubin, 2015).

Religion plays a vital role in dictating several issues regarding how a person should behave. It prescribes the choices that they can make regarding food, relationships, public behaviour and leisure. Islamic rules have a direct impact in shaping Iraqi community and affecting the manners of everyone. Working hours and culture are significantly dictated by the Islamic faith. For Muslims, Friday is the holy and this take is taken off work. Most Muslims also perform the five daily Prayers (at dawn, midday, in the afternoon, at dusk and night) required by Islam, which makes their regular schedule more structured. Behaviour such as a man touching a woman in public or even holding a spouse’s hand is considered as improper. Even shaking hands with the opposite sex can be deemed as inappropriate by a conservative Muslim. Even though there are greater freedoms today about how to act and behave, these rules and traditions are still largely validated among most of the people and particularly those who live in less secular religious communities.

The institution of patriarchy in Iraqi society impacts on gender equality, which in turn affects the social order. Gender equality between Iraqi men and women is not valued in their society. Many aspects of life are still entirely controlled by men, especially finances. However, women do have some power. An Iraqi man has a clear role and influence in his family as he is recognized as the head of the household and maintains full authority. Despite this, his wife may also have an entire sphere of influence, even though she is kept behind the scenes (Nydell, 2012). Arab society holds a traditional view of women, in which the role of the woman is to be devoted primarily to managing the house and bringing up the children (Abdalla, 1996). Most Iraqi women follow this traditional model of being a mother and wife, particularly in rural areas, because this is supported by religious teachings and social values which play significant roles in shaping this view.

In Iraqi society, context and situation are also important factors governing the nature of interactions between members of the opposite sex. Despite communication between males and females being accepted in the work environment or in a professional context to certain extent, interactions in public spaces are still very carefully controlled. The difference in the level of control might vary from one area to another depending on the
religious or secular nature of the society and region. Private meetings where men and women are alone together (even for short periods of time) are avoided as it is considered as inappropriate behaviour to be in a room with a non-related man with the doors closed. Overall, in Iraqi society, cultural, social and religious mores create the framework for social interactions and shape the position of individuals within their society. They help significantly in providing an apparent social code for communication between people in Iraq.

3.7 FAMILY VALUES AND HONOUR

In both traditional and contemporary Arab society, the family is considered as the basic unit of social organization (Moghissi, 2005). The fundamental characteristic features of the Arabic family apply to all Arabic countries. In the Arab world, the family unit may have differing values. However, most of these countries share specific patterns. In Iraq, concepts such as hospitality, dignity, pride, strength and honour are still valued among communities (Kahraman, 2015). Honour is the most widely known value of these concepts. It is a crucial part in the construction of the Iraqi family as it implies a sense of dignity, status, race, and identity among the community members (Kim & Cohen, 2010). For that reason, Iraqi society considers maintaining the family honour as one of its highest values.

Family members are highly accountable for their actions. Families consider their members responsible for their own conduct, as any bad behaviour would bring shame to the entire family, but more so for a woman than a man. Therefore, dishonour is highly linked with the potential misconduct of the female members of the family (Mehana, 2009; Aslani et al., 2013). As a result, a female family member who has committed any wrongdoing may ‘raise suspicion or provoke an attack on her morality, the consequences of which the entire family would suffer’ (Arebi, 1994: p.40). According to Joseph (1994), ‘the cultural assumption has been that a person’s actions reflect on her/his family as a whole, and the reputation of them as a whole as borne by each of its members.’ (p. 34).

In this context, family honour has taken the role of controlling the behaviour of the family members, due to the direct relationship between the concept of family in Iraqi society and the social, political and economic security. The notion of family honour has given rise to the patriarchal system by limiting women’s movements in social environments, and to
some degree, opportunities to work outside of the home. This results in enhancing the authoritative power of fathers, brothers, grandfathers and male relatives over the female members of the family. This increases restrictions on the exposure of female identities, including photographs and voice (Jamjoom, 2009).

3.8 IRAQ: LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

Presently, at least four of languages are in use in Iraq; Arabic, Aramaic, Kurdish and Turkman, and these languages belong to three major groups (Arab, Kurd and Assyrian). These languages are considered a crucial factor in defining the features of the groups and communities that make up the population. The situation in Iraqis similar to the situation in other Arabic countries. In Iraq and other countries of the Arab region there are standard and dialect forms of Arabic in use (Murad, 2007).

The most common spoken language in Iraq is Standard Arabic (SA), which is the primary official language of the country. It is the language that is widely used in a variety of official and formal domains, such as in official government departments, the media, in the courts and in performing prayers. SA is spoken in most provinces of the country, in addition to Kurdish, which is the official language in Northern provinces of the Kurdish region of Iraq (Jacob and Abedalla, 2013). The Arabic dialect spoken by Iraqis is most closely related to the dialects spoken in neighbouring countries such as Syria and Saudi Arabia (Jacob and Abedalla, 2013). Even though Iraqis do not use SA in casual conversations, some of its forms are occasionally adopted in certain situations. The primary language used by Iraqis in their daily interactions is Iraqi Arabic (IA). Nader (1962: p. 280) states that distinct spheres are assigned for SA and IA use which enable speakers to use them in particular contexts. He also notes that, ‘we could say that colloquial Arabic and Quran sayings are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, the classical Arabic and scolding a child would be mutually exclusive… whereas bidding someone farewell could be done either in colloquial or classical Arabic’.

The second most important language which is spoken by the minority is Kurdish. Since 2005, Kurdish has been recognized as the second official language in the country following authorization of the Iraqi constitution. However, it is only recognized regionally, as it used solely within the Kurdish region in the northern part of Iraq. The role of the Kurdish language has significantly increased to coincide with the new structure
of Iraq. Iraq is the only state where the Kurdish language has official status. For this reason, SA and Kurdish are starting to be used across the country in different areas, for example, such as in the educational curriculum. On a formal level, both languages are used in the creation of laws, legislation and official documents. Even the Iraqi constitution was written in SA and Kurdish.

Different ethnic groups in Iraq speak a range of other minority languages. These include Turkmen, Armenian and Assyrian, which are considered less common, and are only spoken by several ethnic minorities. Most speakers also speak IA, as they learn it at school since it is the language of interaction and communication with the majority of people in Iraq. However, within their communities, they will use their native language. Language is considered as an essential element of culture due to its direct relationship with the people speak it.

3.9 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Language and gender studies come within a framework of an interdisciplinary field. These topics consider anthropology as well as linguistic and cultural studies (Murad, 2007). Gender and the variance of speech in social contexts initiates a considerable amount of interest in sociolinguistic research. Studies have aimed to explain how, and for what reasons people vary in their way of speaking (Holmes, 2006). The relationship between gender and language can be divided into two separate subcultures, one for males and another for females (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). How males and females talk can be used to identify variations between the genders and their style of language use. For example, domination and long utterances usually characterize male speech, whereas female speech is often defined by support and attention.

Variations in speech patterns occur in different societies across the world. Arabic-speaking communities are known to share some general cultural principles. These principles, which shape similar strategies of communication, contribute significantly to the variation of discourse between men and women (Vicente, 2011). Sadiqi and Ennaji have noted these common cultural principles. They claim that, ‘Although it is culturally diverse, this region shares many commonalities with relation to women that are strong, deep, and pervasive: a space-based patriarchy, a culturally strong sense of religion, a
smooth co-existence of tradition and modernity, a transitional stage in development, and multilingualism / multiculturalism.’ (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2011: p.29)

Studies have investigated the differences in language style between genders in Iraq and have found that standard forms of language are more widely used by women than men, who are more willing to use the vernacular (Al-Harahsheh, 2014). Homes (2008) claimed that different reasons lay behind this female language use and the high tendency of women to adopt the standard forms of language. First are the social norms, which consider a woman as a representative of society’s values and therefore she is expected to behave in a way that matches her societal prospects. Second, in terms of status, cautious women are seen to be of higher status than men, and as a result are greatly respected due to the conventional beliefs that women should be observed for behaviour and manner of speech, so that whatever they say, ‘can be used against them as an evidence of their deficiencies’ (Holmes, 1985: p.25). Third, their lack of status in society can also explain why women use the standard forms of speech. According to Holmes (2008: p.164), women are doing so as an attempt to acquire that status ‘and by reporting that they use even more of these forms than they do.’

In Iraq, the variances in the style of language use between men and women suggests that there are clear lines drawn between their subcultures. The social interactions of males and females are usually influenced by certain social factors, such as the context, the addressee and the topic and these affect their linguistic choices. Holmes (2008: p.27) states that social factors such as ‘the participants, the social context, the topic of interaction, and the interactions functionality’ are determined the kind of linguistic repertoire used. Female social insecurity is considered an essential element that pushes women towards adopting more prestigious standard forms of language to enhance their position within a society that is deemed to be patriarchal. Based on previous studies by Abu-Haidar (1989) and Ladegaard (2000), there is a substantial relationship between gender and language. The role of gender significantly impacts the sociolinguistic behaviour of the speakers. For example, a study on the sociolinguistic behaviour of Iraqi woman found that the prestigious forms of language tended to be used more by women than by men (Abu-Haidar, 1989).

There is a considerable difference in the practices of the genders in different cultures, groups and geographical areas (Eckert, 1998). This difference is due to the direct impact
of religious, social and cultural norms in organizing the relationships between males and females in a society. For example, individuals who live in Arabic nations expect an appropriate linguistic style from a woman, such as intonation and vocabulary. Iraqi women are always careful in the way they choose their words because any unexpected word might be considered as a breach of the societal standards and norms for their behaviour in Iraqi society. The language used by women is always expected to be more conservative than that of the men because their social position requires them to be more aware of their status or manners, whereas the men merely must look sharp and brash (Holmes, 2008). However, men are more cautious in the way they address women, particularly in public (Abu-Haidar, 1989). The social construction of public life in Iraq regards men and women as entirely different in their status in society. Toughness and braveness are considered as masculine features, while women are more likely to be courteous and status-conscious, because of the vital role that the social norms play in governing the way that men and women speak.

3.10 IRAQ: GENDER EXPECTATIONS AND DRESS CODE
The manner of dress is an essential issue in Muslim countries in general, and in Iraq in particular. Dress style is considered of great importance to Iraqi people and raises the issue of how men and women should dress in public. It a fundamental necessity of life that helps the individuals through simple modification of their bodies to build a sense of community. For many Iraqis the way they dress, like other cultural items such as monuments, flags, and architecture, can ‘foster national belonging and a sense of identification’ (Guibernau, 2004: pp. 125-141). The relationship between individuals and culture is expressed through clothes. This topic is vital to our understanding of the link between the sense of modesty, which an important part of an individuals’ code of practice according to Islam, and the cultural norms, especially for women.

In terms of Iraqi fashion, it should be noted that dress codes are subject to variables such as time and space, which affect what individuals wear in their everyday life. However, despite the fact that many people have started to wear western clothing, traditional clothing is still worn by the majority of the people living in the rural areas of Iraq are very different from those living in the urban areas. In the rural areas, people adhere to traditional male and female fashions. Iraqi Arab men often wear a traditional dress known
as a dishdasha (دشداشه)، which is a long cotton shirt that covers the whole body from the neck down. This item of clothing can be in different colours, but is mainly either white, black or brown. Men may leave their heads uncovered or wear a keffiyeh or shmakh (شماغ)، which is an item of clothing used as a head covering. A circular black band that is placed over the fabric keffiyeh or shmakh hats (شماغ) is known as aygal (عکال). This type of dress is usually worn by the older generation and by people living in rural areas. Younger generations are more likely to wear modern clothes such as t-shirts, shirts and jeans. On the other hand, Iraqi Muslim women wear an ‘abaya’ in public, which is a traditional loose-fitting gown that always comes in black. They also wear the hijab (headscarves or veils) out of modesty. This item of traditional dress is wrapped around their neck and covers their hair, so only their faces can be seen. Scholars see the hijab as a necessity for women and dispute the justification for wearing it in the religious texts. They highlight the Qur’anic justification within the Surrah al-Baqara that warns women to cover their beauty: ‘Allah wants you to guard your beauty, lower your gaze, and protect your chastity. He wants you to cover your beauty, but not in the presence of you Mahram males, such as the members of your family. Lastly, Allah (Exalted and Glorified is He) wants you to wear modest clothing, and to behave modestly; this is your path to Paradise.’ (Euler, 2013: p. 15).

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

Cultural tradition is also evident in the links between place and dress code in Iraq. It is an essential element that affects the way that people dress in the country. This can be seen in public settings where expectations of dress vary between that in holy cities and in relatively secular ones. For example, residents of the holy towns Najaf and Karbala, and particularly the women, are obliged to wear modest clothing as a matter of respect for
these holy areas. However, the dress codes in the secular and urbanized regions of Iraq, such as in Baghdad, Basra, and Erbil might be entirely different from the rest of the country. People are less restricted and can dress more as they like. Many women have started to wear shirts, long trousers and simple scarves, or they combine traditional headwear with modern clothes that are similar to what can be seen in the rest of the world. Men have also begun to wear tight-fitting clothing, stylish shoes and branded t-shirts and have modern hairstyles which are a favourite among the youth.

Both the public and the private concepts have also affected individuals’ clothing styles, and in particular, those of the women. Women’s private and public personas are identified in the form of the clothes they wear. For example, in domestic spaces, women do not have to wear the hijab because it is a private place and only mahram (male blood relatives to whom marriage is forbidden), or other females are present. However, in public they behave completely differently, and women are obliged to a certain extent to wear the hijab. Iraqis, and the women especially, consider the domestic space as a place without boundaries where they can present themselves in a different way from that which they portray in public.

Following the fall of Baghdad in 2003 and the removal of Baath Regime, western and modernized styles of clothes have started to make an appearance on the clothing markets of Iraq as the country develops a taste for western clothes. Many Iraqi people, and particularly the younger generation, feel that they could not isolate themselves from the world of fashion, and have thus adopted more western-styled clothing. For women, the solution is a mixture of modern and traditional dress. However, Iraqi clothing styles are subject to a certain level of scrutiny from Islamic religious movements and there are limitations placed on them based on cultural traditions. Both men and women are aware of these factors and tend to cover up by wearing loose clothes and long-sleeved shirts and trousers. This is especially the case for women, as religion has started to gain the upper hand in Iraq. Many religious leaders are warning Iraqis about the problems in striving for new look and are calling on them to defy the western dress codes (Daily Mail, 2016).

Because of the change towards the more conservative movement in Iraqi society, the number of veiled women has significantly increased (Al-Monitor, 2016). Recently, the fashion seen on the streets of Iraq is a representation of the direct influence of Islamic society and politics. The style of clothing in the country is an issue that remains closely
associated with all of these religious and political factors. They play a significant role in shaping the dress codes that people should adhere to in their daily lives.

Based on this background and personal observations of gendered spaces in Iraq, the present study has investigated how individuals, and mainly women, present themselves online. This research can help identify the link between clothes and the presentation of a sense of modesty and interactions on Facebook. For example, whether women choose to wear the hijab on Facebook and how modest dress is reflected in the use of social media.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presents the cultural background of Iraq and its people, and they are considered as the main participants of this study. It contributes to the knowledge base of culture and personal identity in a conservative community such as Iraq. The chapter sheds light on multiple concepts and attitudes adopted by Iraqis in their daily lives. It also covers several issues such as dress code, interactions, and language-use and gender, and uncovers the role of culture and religion in shaping people's daily practice based on these concepts.

This has significant implications as it creates for the reader, a vital sense of the cultural influences on the lives of the people in Iraq. The information presented in this chapter also plays a significant role in showing the cultural background of the research participants who belong to this culture are subject to the same rules and behavioural code of conduct found in their physical life. These religious, cultural and social norms and roles set the base of the discussion as they show the nature of the research participants’ offline life and their interaction and communication in their community, which are going to be compared to their online experience and how these norms of the physical life are discussed in their online life reality. By differentiating between these two realities found both in online and offline worlds, the reader, as well as the researcher, will be able to consider specific findings. For example, the extent to which the research participants in Iraq, both men, and women, reconstruct their identity and life in regard to such roles and norms found in their real life and how they present their self in online world. It also provides essential information about the techniques that people in the research adopt to deal with such customs and restrictions when they interact online and how their life online might differ from the ones found offline.
CHAPTER 4: THE PRESENCE OF THE ONLINE WORLD IN IRAQ

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Information technologies and telecommunication are industries in Iraq that never flourished adequately before 2003. The lack of adequate development is due to several issues; firstly, Iraq was under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and his governing party the Baath Party for more than twenty years (Relly, Zanger, and Fahmy, 2015). Saddam Hussein’s government was unwilling to embrace new technology as he considered information technologies to be a threat to his authority and the country’s internal security. Secondly, Iraq suffered from two major wars against Iran and Kuwait and international sanctions that lasted for more than a decade (Relly, Zanger, and Fahmy, 2015). However, after the American-led invasion in 2003 and the removal of the Saddam Hussain regime, Information Communication Technology (ICT) and telecommunication have become sectors that have witnessed fast growth in Iraq. Access to the Internet has increased dramatically in recent years due to mobile phone and social media usage, particularly among the younger generation in the country (Reyaee and Ahmed, 2015). This chapter discusses the development of the ICT sector in Iraq and how it is utilized by Iraqis. It also examines the impact that such new media has on people regarding communication and interaction in the online world. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to the Internet infrastructure in Iraq.

4.2 IRAQ: THE INTERNET INFRASTRUCTURE

Internet adoption in the Arab world is considered as being relatively new in spite of the fact that the Internet has been developing for five decades. Iraq, like other countries in the Arab region, lagged behind the rest of the world in adopting the Internet. The history of Internet use in the Arab area dates back to the early 1990s. The Internet was initially taken up by Tunisia, which was the first Arab country to be connected to the service, in 1991. One year later, after the Iraqi invasion, the Kuwaiti government established Internet service in the country as a part of its reconstruction process. It was followed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates which connected to the Internet in 1993 (Warf and Vincent,
In 1994, Jordan established an Internet connection, while the last two countries in the Arab region were Syria and Saudi Arabia, who set up a link to the Internet with regular public access in 1997 (Wheeler, 2006). The Internet was introduced in Iraq in 1998 and came into use in 2000 when the government established The State Company of Internet Services (SCIS) (Al-Hassani, 2013). This company was responsible for providing Internet access to people. However, the use of this service was limited and not readily accessible to the public. For Iraqi citizens, the ability to use the Internet was governed by accepting many restrictions and conditions imposed by the government. Furthermore, an Internet subscription application had to be completed and signed by those who wanted to use the Internet which stated: ‘the subscription applicant must report any hostile website seen on the Internet, even if it was seen by chance. The applicants must not copy or print any literature or photos that go against state policy or relate to the regime. Special inspector’s teams must be allowed to search the applicant's place of residence to examine any files saved on the applicant's personal computer.’ (The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2004).

When we initially accessed the Internet in Iraq, it was the slowest state in the region in establishing Internet services and allowing public access. This situation was as a result of the continuing Iraq wars (Iraq-Iran War and Iraq War) and UN sanctions which affected the establishment and use of this service, while the Internet in other Arab countries was becoming widely used. In Iraq, use of personal computers and Internet connection was banned by Saddam Hussein’s regime until 1999 (Relly et al., 2014 and Al-bab, 2016). The Internet in Iraq was very limited, not very affordable, tightly censored and controlled by the government because it was considered a threat (Rashid, 2012).

During Saddam Hussain’s regime and before the American war on Iraq in 2003, there was no free media as Saddam’s government strictly censored and controlled the sector. Media outlets were a mere tool of government propaganda and mouthpiece that supported the Ba'ath authority. All the media outlets were state-run (Ricchiardi, 2011). There were only three newspapers, two television channels, a radio network and a single news agency in Iraq, which served as a mouthpiece for the government (Awad & Eton, 2013). Iraq’s media landscape as described by Ofra Bengio was ‘an omnipotent propaganda machine [which] played the role of the Ba‘ath regime’s watchdog, thus contributing significantly to its survival and longevity.’ (Bengio 2004: pp.109–110). Additionally, the Internet was
limited, and few people had access to this service which was only available in universities and government institutions (Al-Ani et al., 2010).

The country suffered from inadequate Internet connectivity as well as the state authorities’ procedures such as extreme filtering and censorship which resulted in low access to the Internet. Saddam Hussein’s regime severely restricted the use of the Internet. During his authoritarian government, The Iraqi Ministry of Communications played an intensive role in controlling Internet usage in the country. Internet use was limited to just one provider. Likewise, emails and phone calls were monitored and censored by the security agencies. During Saddam’s rule, very few people were allowed access to the Internet (Arab IP Centre, 2014). According to Al-Hassani (2013: p.21), ‘Internet access was subject to strict censorship with several websites blocked for what was considered indecent, anti-Islamic or anti-Arab content.’ Internet centres established in universities and institutions were under direct censorship by those in charge who had the right to review and read students’ received emails as well as reading emails students intend to send before doing so (Al-Hassani, 2013). In the Kurdistan region (KR) in northern Iraq, however, there were no restrictions on Internet access and the Internet was available for people there. Iraqi Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) gained more independence from their central government in Baghdad during Sadam Hussein regime. By March 1991, after Sadam’s failure in the Gulf War the Iraqi Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) achieved their autonomy and created its autonomous government and a de facto state in the region. Kurdistan governments has taken some dramatic steps toward the development and reform of several sectors in the region and Telecommunication sector was among them.

In March 2003, Saddam Hussein’s regime toppled the by US led-troops and as a result, Internet access extended to the public and people started enjoying access to the Internet. The improvement of Iraq’s economic situation and the enjoyment of their relative freedom after the fall of the Ba’ath ruling regime encouraged many Iraqis, both those living inside the country and abroad, to have access to the Internet and run their webpages. According to Internet World Stats (2014b), in 2000 there were only 12,500 Internet users in Iraq; however, this number dramatically increased in 2014 to 2,997,884 users, representing 9.2% of the population. Recently, there has been a significant increase in the use of the Internet and social media sites due to the increasing number of Internet
hosts in the country, which reached 26 hosts (CIA, 2014). In spite of this improvement, Iraq is prevented from becoming globally competitive due to poor connectivity. The Iraqi government and private companies run several Internet cafés which have been set up across the country. People in Iraq are gaining access to the Internet and, as a result, the number of the Internet users has been increasing in the country (Hadhum, 2012 and Arab IP Centre, 2014). In Iraq, an official national Internet filtering policy is not present, and there is no clear evidence that any filtering process is practiced by the Internet providers. However, some measures have been taken by the Iraqi government to block ‘immoral’ Web content and regulate Internet cafés (Beccalli, 2012). Such actions are justified by the Iraqi government as a process for censoring certain websites which encourage violence and negatively impact young Iraqi communities. At the very beginning, Internet services in Iraq were highly dependent on private companies to supply Iraqi people with the Internet, ‘dozens of wireless Internet providers started a business and hundreds of Internet cafés opened in the capital, Baghdad, and other provinces’ (NBC News, 2016). Several private sector ISPs are available and rely on satellite connections to provide Internet services.

Most Internet users in the country have depended mainly on private companies to offer Internet services either by VSAT, microwave links or Wi-Fi hotspots (Beccalli, 2012). As a result, until 2010, the rate of the broadband penetration in the country was insignificant. The Iraqi government worked hard to change this situation by commissioning several projects to develop the country’s ICT infrastructure. In 2011, two fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) access network projects in Iraq were announced by both the Iraq Telecommunications and Post Company, the incumbent fixed operator. The government also signed a major investment project in 2012, with the Gulf Bridge International (GBI), a regional communication infrastructure company. GBI provided Iraq with connectivity in Basra’s Al-Faw port by placing the first subsea fiber-optic cable with the Iraqi Telecommunication and Post Company. However, high-speed Internet connectivity in Iraq was lacking due to the absence of a reliable connection with the outside world (Beccalli, 2012). The key challenge facing the growth of Internet services in Iraq is the deterioration of the country’s infrastructures (Beccalli, 2012). The extent and nature of the telecommunications infrastructure in Iraq have profoundly affected the
evolving process of Internet services there, which is less developed than in other countries in the Arab region.

4.3 THE PRESENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN IRAQ

In Iraq, social media like in other places in the Arab world is a fast-growing method of communication. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as ‘Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of content which is user-generated.’ (p.34). Much has been made of the role that social media plays in organizing people, generating support, unifying public opinion, disseminating ideas and providing a virtual platform for exchanging thoughts. The development of new social technologies has encouraged many Iraqis to join various online platforms. Iraqis have started running their websites and blogs, as well as enjoying other social media sites, particularly Facebook which is the most popular website among Internet users in the country (Al-Rawi, 2014). The development of digital communications technologies such as mobile phones, tablets, and portable computers has increased the number of Iraqi users on SMSs particularly Facebook to in excess of eleven million (Internetworldstatus, 2018)

The use of social media has witnessed a constant development across Arab countries since 2011, alongside the principal change which occurred in usage trends. The advancements which happened in the Arab countries after the Arab Spring in 2010/11 was not limited, but extended to other countries such as Iraq. Social media was a powerful tool that fostered the Arab Spring 2010/11 and spread information to the international community. The shift in the use of Social Network Sites (SNSs) is seen now unlike days before as social media sites turn from being a means of social interaction and entertainment to an effective communication means that becomes central to the lives of hundreds and has impacted on almost every aspect of their daily lives. These sites effect people’s social interaction, the way they do business, play a part in civil society movements and engage with government. The Arab Spring that followed the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in 2008 indeed led to a rapid increase of Facebook users in the Arab region (Al-Rawi, 2014). Facebook represents an essential virtual venue for Arabs to remain connected to the online world.

Social media and mobile devices started playing a more crucial role in the consumption and distribution of news progressively as well as enhancing people’s ability to face the
vying groups that attempted to control Iraqis’ social lives and liberties. On the 9th of April 2003, the Americans toppled Saddam Hussain’s authoritarian regime, and Iraqi media free-for-all flourished. The imposed limits on freedom of expression evaporated overnight. Having a free media sector and a variety of media outlets is promising, particularly after more than three decades of autocratic monopolization during the Ba’ath regime. However, the chaotic state of the Iraqi media turns it into being a means for serving individuals and parties who have political or economic motives. As a result, Iraq’s ethno-sectarian media have formed and become a relatively common element in Iraq’s fourth estate. Iraqi people have become desperate for such media as evidenced by the low trust in the traditional media according to studies conducted by the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) (Masterofmedia, 2018). Iraqi users’ utilization of online social media has evolved to include social change, political participation, and civic engagement. The availability of these new modern communications technologies has made Iraqis specially men more comfortable to exercise their freedom of expression and use these online platforms to share news and express their opinions. They also enjoy relative liberties to confront the political situation and call for political and social reforms. The active role of Internet platforms, particularly social media sites, has attracted many people in Iraq to join this public sphere to express themselves freely and debate on various issues. Several Iraqis, both inside and outside the country, started constructing and running their websites and blogs that held different perspectives and ideologies (political or religious), in addition to the ones that were characterized by being independent and secular in nature. Iraqi activists started to influence the government’s strategies as well as monitoring its services through the use of SNSs. They serve to strengthen networks of social and political activism (Chadwick & Howard, 2009). Both activists and ordinary people started using these social Internet platforms to express themselves, their opinions and thoughts.

In March 2009, the number of users joining Facebook started increasing dramatically. After the Arabic version of the site was released, 400 users participated in the first two months (al-Haidari, 2011). As of April 2013, Iraq climbed to 50th place regarding Facebook’s penetration in the world with 3,265,880 monthly active users and 11.01% penetration (Al-Rawi, 2014). The number of users on SNSs is growing exponentially every day, with more Iraqis who believe that SNSs enable them to stay connected with
friends and relatives, chatting, uploading video clips about their everyday life, communicating with others to thickening relationships, maintain friendships, etc.

4.4 SOCIAL NETWORK SITES AND POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN IRAQ

The growing popularity of social networking sites and the use of these online venues are subject to much debate. These sites have been questioned as to whether they contribute to people’s societal life by allowing individuals to become informed and raising their participation in civic life (e.g., Bennett, 2008), or do they have an adverse effect on individuals’ quality of life such as reducing their involvement in public affairs weakening real-world relationships and distracting them from political engagement (e.g., Hodgkinson, 2008)? However, the impact of these sites might vary from one country to another. The level of engagement and other social, political and economic situations could be seen as necessary factors that explain the real role of these digital sites in a particular society.

Engagement through the Internet and social networking sites such as Facebook has become a marked feature in the daily life for a significant portion of Iraqis. According to work done by Internet World Stats, Internet and Facebook use had reached 14 million users by 30th of June 2016 (Internet World Stats, 2016). Despite the fact that the use of these new mediums of interaction in Iraq, like anywhere in the world, for entertainment, making new friends or keeping in touch with old friends and relatives, Social network sites have some additional functionality and become venues for discussing and sharing information about public affairs. For example, individuals are willing to learn about what happens around them and in their community, debating about it and reflecting on it constructively, and opportunities are available for collective work as well as discussing hot political issues.

The innovation of this new, mediated digital environment has developed the process of sharing and disseminating news among people. According to Beccalli ‘Access to the Internet and social media has the potential to foster change, create a free and unfettered flow of information and positively impact Iraq’ (Beccalli, 2012: p.7). Despite this, Iraqis continue to rely on traditional media, mainly TV and radio, as their primary source of news and information. A study conducted by IREX (International Research & Exchanges
Board) organization about media consumption in Iraq indicated that social media and mobile devices play a progressively important role in distributing and disseminating news and information (IREX, 2012). The studies undertaken by IREX conclude that the presence of social media in Iraq can be considered an essential platform that preserves its place in news distribution.

In addition to the fact that social network sites contribute profoundly to circulating news, it has been noted that it has also provided a platform for political participation. These virtual sites have significant effects on individuals’ political tendencies. Iraqis utilize these sites to discuss several political issues ranging from government performance to most critical issues such as calling for reform and fighting corruption. The emerging virtual public sphere has contributed to offline political activity. The role of the online sphere in political protest in Iraq is prominent, and it dates back to 2011 after the Arab Spring burst forth in uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt earlier that year. Iraqi activists created several Facebook pages which were directed to the public and formed part of the efforts to inform them about the protests (Al-Rawi, 2014). Among the most popular pages was ‘Support the Iraqi Youth Revolution’; it had more than 130,350 followers and was established on February 9, 2011 (Al-Rawi, 2014). For the majority of Iraqis, Facebook is an important platform that provided them with a means to connect with their extensive social networks all at once.

Iraqi activists, human rights supporters and even ordinary people found SNSs very useful platforms to help them achieve their aims. They represented a new trend to call for justice, share public activities and to raise social awareness of different issues among the community. People began utilizing these sites for developing their communities and launching several fundraising campaigns directed at poor people and displaced people as a result of internal wars against terrorism. These sites turned from being a means to communicate with a friend into effective platforms for achieving social goals (Sahlin, 2015). War coverage and support for Iraqi military forces are always prominent uses of these sites. Many people began to share the daily news and pictures of the operations happening daily in Iraq. ‘These private social media outlets have increased the speed with which people can receive the news that relates to their lives, often upstaging the official government websites’ (Rudaw, 2016).
4.5 SOCIAL NETWORK SITES AND RELIGION IN IRAQ

Social networking sites are now regularly used by many different types of people around the world and for many various reasons. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become platforms that people can use to exchange their thoughts and ideas about everyday life. People have begun to share and talk about various topics such as their fears, favourite hobbies, their beliefs and religious affiliations. In Iraq, the majority of Iraqi people consider Islam an essential element in their life that represents a complete way of life. The importance that religion has in the real world makes it one of the reoccurring themes in the digital world that seems to have a significant relationship with SNSs use. Like other parts of the world, sharing religious beliefs, activities, principles, and instructions through these sites is one of the prominent issues that Iraqi social media users, religious leaders, and religious institutions are willing to perform in the digital world. Many Iraqis have become enthusiastic about sharing their religious beliefs and expressing their spiritual thoughts publicly on social media websites. They engage in various electronic forms of religious activity to feel a sense of community, get more social support and stay connected with others. McKenna and West (2007) found in their study *Give me that online-time religion: The role of the Internet in spiritual life*, that the benefits an individual can gain from their engagement in “online religious forums” is more social support, feeling a connection to those who share their faith and personal views. Religious leaders and institutions consider the flourishing of religious social media to be positive. This is due to the belief that it might enable a deepening of individuals’ spirituality (Cheong, 2011). Despite the positive view that can be shaped by the role that social media plays in the religious life of people in the country. These sites have negatively participated in boosting sectarianism in Iraq and raised its ugly head. They made it easier than ever to spread toxic and intolerant messages. The Sunni-Shia Muslims’ divide between ‘Iraq’s three major sectarian/ethnic communities: the majority Shia Arabs, the Sunni Arabs, and the Kurds’ became clear and led to years of brutal sectarianism and political violence in Iraq (Fuller, 2003).

The unstable political and social situations in Iraq, as well as the prominence of social media among the religious followers, made Iraqi-Islamic politicians more aware about learning the language of this new means of communication as well. Religious leaders from both groups Sunni and Shia turn to social media sites to achieve religious purposes,
to build their public profile and to make new contacts. They consider digital media connections an essential phase of continuity and complementary to religious affiliations due to the supportive role that these sites provide for religious authority. They try to seize social media to reach out to their people through various social media outlets. Religious leaders use social Internet sites to circulate religious ideas or practices that reinforce people’s beliefs and sense of belonging to their sect or ethnicity. For many religious leaders, the use of social media communication is an attempt to appropriate new patterns of interaction to maintain communicative influence on these platforms to re-circumscribe them as scared spaces. This vision, in turn, participates in constructing new practices and reinforcing their epistemic authority. However, this situation raises another concern among religious institutions regarding their ability to keep up with the continuous development of social media. Cheong writes, ‘Religious leaders also face increasing pressures to learn new skills to keep abreast of the latest technological developments and appear credible to young and wired populations.’ (Cheong, 2014: p.3). For many, the democratic nature of new media, which is characterized by the ability to bypass the traditional structures of Muslim orthodoxy, can have harsh consequences and cause a real challenge to those professions associated with a conventional way of learning that is based on text learning, such as religious scholars and the clergy.

Furthermore, the flourishing of religious social media among followers might pose a threat to the power of religious leaders and institutions as it tends to reflect dislocation. According to Cheong (2014), the earlier studies on religious authority and communication technologies indicated that social media use reflects and supports a logic of disjuncture, which ‘disrupts religious authority by posing a threat to the power of traditional institutions and leaders to instruct and interpret religious symbols. The religious leaders’ primary concern is that traditional religious activities such as regular in-person attendance to places of worship might be substituted by virtual religious events on social media (Salem, 2016). Additionally, the empowerment and the ability to express religious views that users gain from these sites might threaten religious ideas and instructions and even the way that people partake in religious events. Religious authorities try to keep up a connection and relationship with electronic media to be in touch with virtual faith communities and forums.
4.6 THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES ON SOCIAL LIFE IN IRAQ

In Iraq, the use of social networking sites can be described as a double-edged sword. This is due to the fact that despite their positive uses as an outlet for people to express themselves freely as well as a tool for lobbying the government and decision-making centres, they also have negative effects as they are seized by different players to enrich some undesirable aspects such as sectarianism, religious and cultural radicalization and several imported thoughts and ideologies within the country. After 2003, Iraq witnessed radical changes in different facets of its social, cultural, religious and political life and several groups emerged and started competing to control the situation and meddle in social affairs. The blooming of the Internet world, and especially after the introduction of social media, has naturally transformed several social functions.

There has been a typical transition in the country’s value system from traditional to a modern one. For example, family functions have changed regarding individuals’ positions and respect which require a high level of respect from younger to older individuals. This respect can appear in different situations such as avoiding discussion of critical issues or addressing older people in a disrespectful way. The relationships between family members have also changed, and young individuals have started having limited contact with their parents and other people in the family. Users of social networking sites have started challenging their family commitments. This might have a particular impact on the family structure and retaining family commitments. Al-Saggaf (2004) stated that ‘family ties and relationships with relatives, according to religion, are very important, participation in online forums could be a danger to the fabric of the family structure.' (p.23). For these reasons, Islam compels all Muslims to protect their families, to care of them and to maintain family ties (Al-Saggaf, 2004). The nature of the Iraqi community is so dependent on religious teachings which require keeping strong family ties and relationships with relatives.

Mixing traditions with religion is another essential element that raises several issues in Iraqi society. Consequently, a lot of public activities and decisions are made under the religious umbrella particularly in the name of Islam, despite the fact that these activities and decisions have nothing to do with Islamic rules because they are just traditions. The
result of this situation is a huge number of societal contradictions that become pervasive in Iraqi society both in offline and online lives which in turn led to several arguments and oppositions among people in the country. Issues such as dealing with a divorced woman, societal consideration for disabled people, women’s labour, women and sport, and romantic relationships are some of the contentious topics that are discussed between users of the online world. Support for such issues might face real opposition and humiliation from those who consider them dead-end topics.

Provoking clashes between people is the other negative role that social media has played in the country. People start humiliating each other on social media sites which have become the platform that enables them to cross even some sacrosanct lines. As an example, religious ethno-sectarian arguments are one of the most noticeable topics that provoke arguments between ordinary Iraqi people and enhance hatred between them (Rashid, 2012). Publishing fake reports or news on social media sites and the wave of comments that follow them can reveal that fact. Several ethno-sectarian pages have been formed on different digital platforms to support one part or another. These fractured media environments used as means of encouraging violence in the country.

In addition to the social change that social media has created, it plays a negative role in supporting the political battle in Iraq. Social media accounts have been excessively used by political parties and factions to help and backup individuals or to disseminate certain ideologies or thoughts. Iraq’s political sectarian divisions have become prominent in the traditional media mainly through media ownership and political orientation which represent the power players in Iraq. Political-sectarian divisions started in 2005 have evolved from a political power struggle into TV channels. According to Amos ‘the majority of Iraqi media, today follows one political party or the other depending on who funds them.’ (Amos, 2010: p.3). Iraq’s sectarian political battles have become highly prominent not only in traditional media but also in social media environments, which in turn fractures the Iraqi national identity.

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY
This chapter aimed to provide a contextual background that focuses on discussing several important issues regarding the ICT sector in Iraq. It includes information about the presence and development of the Internet world and social networks sites in Iraq. It sheds
light on the relationships between Internet social networks and individuals in Iraq. The chapter also discussed the type of limitations connected with Internet applications mainly SNSs in Iraq before and after the American led-Invasion in 2003. These limitations have a clear connection with the social and political situation in the country despite the fact that the presence of the internet social networks represent a new era of communication. But the question is how is the Internet and interactive mediums such as SNSs in a country like Iraq, where the religious and cultural norms are consistently present in shaping the people’s lives and attitudes and do not permit mixing and interacting with the other sex, used to cross these long-established rules? Further, how has this new virtual world created new horizons for individuals, particularly women, to negotiate their cultural constraints and limitations and interact freely to express their identity in a liberated manner? How does the positive relationship between ICT, such as SNS use, citizen engagement and social capital help to gain a distinct idea about the process of personal identity construction among people in the context of Iraq? See chapters seven and eight.
CHAPTER 5: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the key concepts that form the theoretical framework of the research study. The framework includes various theories and approaches such as Goffman’s dramaturgical framework of self-presentation and Goffman’s concept of face, Social Role Theory and Social Capital Theory. There are several reasons for adopting multiple theories in this research. The first reason is to study and understand varied dimensions in the phenomenon under investigation. According to Durham and Kellner (2009) using several theories within a single media research project provides the researcher with the knowledge required to understand varied extents of the phenomenon under investigation and gain a complete understanding of the topic. The second reason is that having multiple theories instead of one single theory is more liberating because each theory has its own strengths and weaknesses (Bruce, 2010). It helps to avoid limitations to explaining every aspect of the phenomenon. It also supports the researcher in addressing different assumptions grounded in this phenomenon that one single theory cannot explain. The research uses these three theories to provide a better understanding of how Facebook users in an Iraqi context construct, present and perform their identities in the online world of social networks, especially when they use Facebook and they negotiate the social and cultural limitations in their society. Theories used in this research have widely applied to media research and share roots in social psychology.

5.2 GOFFMAN’S DRAMATURGICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL INTERACTION AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

‘All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely player’

A famous Shakespearean phrase which shaped the idea on which Erving Goffman built his sociological perspective. He argued that ‘members of society are constantly engaged in dramaturgical modes of interaction with each other, meaning our behaviours metaphorically represent being on a theatrical stage.’ (Chou & Edge, 2012: p.15). In this
section, I consider the contribution of Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to the performance of identity to my study. In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) argued that, through the process of social interactions, individuals operate techniques to control receivers’ perceptions about their identity:

‘I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them.’ (p.11). Tashmin (2016) referred to the link between social interaction and theatre concept according to Goffman’s conceptual framework. She compared between the theatrical and real settings. See figure 5-1.

**According to Goffman:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Theater</th>
<th>Social Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Flow of interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Social Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>People observing the individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Stage</td>
<td>Where the individual’s action is performed defined by particular status set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Stage</td>
<td>Where individual’s action is oriented: a. toward a different set of others defined by status set b. toward what is going to happen in the front stage or toward what has happened</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5-1: the link between social interaction and theatre concept according to Goffman’s conceptual framework. (Tashmin, 2016)

Goffman’s work has provided me with ways of understanding the construction and the performance of my participants’ identities: defining the strategies of self-presentation that both men and women adopted in relation to their online settings, their ways of behaviour and their ways of performing masculine and feminine roles, as well as their relationships with other users. There are several theatrical concepts included in Goffman’s (1959) impression management theory (1959) such as frontstage and backstage dynamics, the
audience, the setting, the actor and props (Schulz, 2012). The richness of the impression management theory provides me as a researcher with the ability to use this framework to study the users’ (actors’) performance, the users and the audience, and the interaction process between them. The researcher is also able to study the reaction process between the actor and the audience. Additionally, the researcher can assess the actor’s use of fronts to depict his or her role (Schulz, 2012). The main concern of this study is to focus on the construction and self-presentation strategies people use on Facebook as a space to perform various aspects of their identities inconsistent with their real ones, such as gender roles. The users of Facebook represent the actors and the Facebook site represents both the frontstage in which those performers enact their show and the back stage that show a clear reflection of the users’ offline life.

Although a number of scholars have referred to the concept of identity as a set of traits that have been practised by an individual through their life cycle, this definition might not seem to describe identity performance in online settings. According to Goffman (1959) individuals create their personas through a dramatic performance which looks more precise. By considering the work of Goffman here, I started looking at the concept of interaction order. Despite that fact that Goffman adopted that notion for the entire face-to-face interaction domain (Goffman, 1982), he argued individuals’ conversations conducted via telephones are essentially ‘a departure from the norm’ (Goffman, 1964). Social expectations and norms were always regarded by Goffman as interesting points (Siibak, 2009) which led him to think about individuals’ identities and the constraints that impact on their performances and lead them to highlight or conceal certain aspects of themselves. The roles that individuals enacted through the course of their life as performers who interact with other members of society to express their identities, represent a clear picture of one control over his/her own image they want to present to other people.

A number of scholars have argued that this performance is mainly governed by an individuals’ intention to convey certain messages about themselves and achieve particular aims. Goffman (1959) defined performance as ‘all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants’ (p.15). Additionally, Bortree (2005) indicated that ‘self-presentation strategies often are dependent on the presenter’s goals.’ (p.27). According to Jones (1990), gaining power is
considered to be the key factor behind the performance of self-presenters in their relationship with an audience. Individuals’ expressions that they give and those that they give off are one of Goffman’s key arguments. The expressions we give are what individuals introduce intentionally and have control over, but expressions given off are less controlled (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). In addition to the impressions created by our expression that we give or give off, Goffman also has several important metaphors such as the ‘mask’ (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). According to Goffman, the mask can be used by individuals as a means of showing or concealing certain aspects of his/her self through the interaction. However, by doing so individual (s/he) is not becoming a different person but rather the two persons, the one who wore the mask and the one behind it, are of the same individual (Park, 1950).

Individuals who engage in social interactions create performances that express their true perspectives as well as their view of themselves, unlike stage actors, who try to influence their audience, by performing with different identities which are inconsistent with their real ones (Collett and Childs, 2009). However, by talking about performances’ authenticity we don’t mean that all of them are true. Goffman (1959) showed that the images others have about certain performers are operated and conducted by those performers’ motives. To Goffman, the form of every day interaction is the foundation of social structure. As a result, Goffman referred to the need for a mutual understanding of the interaction from both the macro- and micro levels. He stated that each setting of interaction whether it is personal, contacts, encounters, platform performances, or celebrative social occasions, has its particular guidelines (Goffman, 1983: p.7). These guidelines involve a particular set of expectations which control the individuals’ interaction process. For that reason, it can be stated that the order of interaction is ‘a web of normative beliefs that facilitate communication and social interaction’ (Goffman, 1953: p.353, see Ritzer, 2008: p.51). This fact can shape the ground rules for users, in terms of interaction on Facebook, which highly adheres to audience expectations that are acknowledged by Iraqi Arab culture and norms.

As these expectations lead the way in which performers manage their identities and by doing so they reproduce the order. Their performance should be consistent with audience expectations because any interruption will make the interaction order unsuccessful. Therefore, the users’ self-presentation is either well prepared or he/she will be negatively
judged. Consequently, men and women’s adherence to their norms may give greater consideration to offline norms in online settings, which in turn impacted on their interaction and performance in these platforms. Goffmanian perspective on Facebook analysis conceptual framework can be explained in figure 5-2. (Tashmin, 2016)

**GOFFMANIAN PERSPECTIVE ON FACEBOOK ANALYSIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Theater</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Flow of Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>Persons Using Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Way of Interacting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>People Observing the Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Front Stage</td>
<td>Where the Individual’s Action is Performed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Stage</td>
<td>Where Individual’s Action is Oriented towards What is Going to Happen or Toward What has Happened</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5-2: Goffmanian perspective on Facebook analysis conceptual framework.

5.3 **GOFFMAN AND THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN THE ONLINE WORLD**

The study mainly deals with four components of Goffman’s dramaturgical approach which are: separation of regions, impression management, and audience segregation, and idealized version of the self. It also utilizes Goffman’s notion of ‘face’. The use of the concept of self presentation and social capital with Iraqi young people can be seen as falling into the two groups, impression management and presentation of the self, following Goffman and collective action following Coleman and Putnam. Taking inspiration from these ideas, the research on Iraq people asks to what extent they themselves access and/or generate social capital and show agency in acquiring and using it. Within this framework, and emerging from the impression management and self presentation and social capital, I have become interested in social capital networks generated by young people in socially liberated environments represented by SNSs mainly Facebook. This study encompasses a range of contexts of potential sources of

5.3.1 SEPARATION OF REGIONS

Goffman’s form of dramaturgical analysis ‘associated social interaction to a theatre and people in everyday life to actors on a stage, each playing a variety of roles.’ (Tashmin, 2016: p.92). His approach to study symbolic interaction is his best-known contribution to social theory, ‘He believed that when an individual comes in contact with other people, that individual will attempt to control or guide the impression that others might make of him by changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance and manner.’ (Tashmin, 2016: p.90). Goffman’s self-presentation approach suggests that individuals manage their own impressions to enact certain performances that fit with the requirements of a particular situation. As actors in stage drama, individuals in everyday interactions, according to Goffman's dramaturgical analogy there are two main regions that have effects on an individual’s performance: the frontstage and backstage.

According to Goffman (1959), frontstage is that region where certain performances take place and it represents ‘that part of the individual’s [or team’s] performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance.’ (p.22). Goffman also observes that what performers express backstage regarding behaviours, attitudes, and emotions are concealed in frontstage. Thus, identities produce in the front region is a result of constant interaction between self-presentation and audience evaluation. For him the front region is where desired impressions, the positive aspects of the idea of self are highlighted.

Goffman defined the backstage as a place ‘where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted’ and ‘where the performers can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude.’ (1959: pp.112-113). The back region is the place where the actors (individuals) can stop playing their roles and their performance in society and be themselves: ‘Here the performer can relax; he [sic] can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character’ (Goffman, 1959/1990: p.115). It represents the place where the preparations for front region performance take place and
mistakes and errors are corrected before the performance. In terms of formality, backstage is considered a less formal area in which performers can behave routinely (Tashmin, 2016). Goffman’s dramaturgy framework concentrates on the meaning of individuals’ daily life interactions within the social context as well as exploring symbolism. In this study, I argue that Facebook users utilize the platform in ways that represent both their front/backstage selves. They are creative in performing the self they desire in their frontstage where they can enact a performance which cannot be seen by their audiences in the backstage and is not available for them in their real account which is similar to their offline life.

5.3.2 IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

In everyday life, individuals adopt several strategies in an attempt to convey favourable images of themselves to the public while they interact with others who are their audience. Goffman believed that when individuals come to interact with others in social interactions they attempt to engage in certain practices to control the impression that they might make of themselves (1959). Norris (2011) states that ‘impression management is a self-presentation technique that focuses on improving a person’s image in the eyes of others’ (p.47). For example, the process of changing or fixing their appearance, managing their words and their settings are among these activities that they employ to achieve their goal. Goffman uses the term performance to refer to all the activity of an individual. To Goffman the term ‘performance’ involves all of these activities that individuals intend to act out in front of a particular audience. According to Goffman this performance is a self-presentation and creates or manages an impression to be conveyed to others as impression management. Playing roles and wearing masks are strategy individuals tend to adopt in their representations which shape the ways they see themselves or how they are perceived by others (Goffman, 1959). Goffman described impression management as how:

‘The individual tends to treat the others present on the basis of the impression they give now about the past and the future. It is here that communicative acts are translated into moral ones. The impression that the others give tend to be treated as claims and promises they have implicitly made, and claims and promises tend to have moral character. In his
mind, the individual says: ‘I am using these impressions of you as a way of checking up on you and your activity, and you ought not to lead me astray.’ (1959: p. 249)

The general assumption of many approaches to the study of impression management is based on the idea that individuals want to convey a favourable image to others and therefore act accordingly in a particular setting(s) (Leary, 1996). The acts of self-presentation and their motivations can vary across approaches. This variation can be seen clearly in the ways that some scholars adapted their studies to view the self-presentation process such as Jones and Pittman (1982) and Baumeister and Tice (1986). Jones and Pittman interpret self-presentation as a way to increase an individual’s power over another while Baumeister and Tice describe it as an effort to construct a public identity. Impression management is always said to be done with people in real life but what about those who are not physically present? Several scholars have suggested that research conducted regarding self-presentation and impression management has moved from mass media (Mendelson, 2007) to more recent forms of new media (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010).

Early research on computer-mediated communications (CMC) suggested that face-to-face communication and CMCs differ in the sense that the latter has limited visual and social cues, such as appearance, facial expressions, body language and vocal tone that results in reducing the ability of individuals to practice the process of managing impressions (Culnan and Markus, 1987; Sproull and Kiesler, 1986). However, the functionality of the medium used can help in the process of social impression formation and compensates for the lack of social cues. For example, the use of an avatar in an online environment can be defined as a character representing an individual (Inal, Y and Cagiltay, 2006) and this in fact helps assessors to make a strong and quick evaluation of a SNSs user due to the personal information disclosed and presented (Donath, 2007).

Several scholars consider the emergence of CMC as an important environment that has provided scholars with several novel settings for examining impression management efforts (Pearce and Vitak, 2016). Rosenberg (2015) stated that computer-mediated environments provide individuals with the motivation to manage their impressions just as much as they do in their face-to-face milieus. According to Social Information Processing theory the ‘impression-bearing and relational functions, for which communicators rely on
nonverbal cues face-to-face, are translated into verbal content, linguistic, stylistic, and chronemic cues in the CMC environment’ (SIP; Walther, 2006: p. 466). Hypothetically, this means that Information Processing Theory (SIP) refers to the fact that there are a variety of modalities in social media that can be used to transmit social cues and in turn enhance its efficiency. With regard to online SNSs such as Facebook, SIP theorizes that forming impressions is still applicable for users despite the lack of the visual and social cues presented in face-to-face communication.

Social media are ‘Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selective self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user generated content and the perception of interaction with others.’ (Carr and Hayes, 2015: p.50). This is based on the information provided so long and the availability of time individuals offered to make their evaluation. This indicates that a Facebook profile and activities might enable observers looking at it to build an assessment of a user’s personality regardless of the reduction of social cues and without even interacting with the account owner.

Ellison NB (2007) argue that ‘SNSs constitute an important research context for scholars’ investigating processes of impression management, self-presentation, and friendship performance.’ (p.10). In some cases, users of such sites create multiple versions of accounts for different audiences which is to some extent similar to what we do in face-to-face contexts when we present different versions of ourselves. Tashmin (2016) states that Goffman concept of impression management is a common underlying process that involves social and cultural implications. In regard to the social implications, impression management allows people to carefully craft and construct their public perception.’ (p.90). The construction of the self in social networking sites like Facebook may serve Facebook users who are not currently linked as friends to view personal aspects of one’s profile may also be a strategy to increase the size of one’s social network. In support of this view such profile information in users second account and the creation of the new identity, encourages the development of ties based on shared experiences. This relationships development through engaging in the enactments of different kinds of people (identities) can lead them to different kind of relationships/interactions that generate different kinds of social capital. This has significant implications regarding the intention of research participants to present different selves online and the concept of
social capital and helps to understand why users would seek an alternative second account, in which to enact another identity. As a result, the current study investigated the following questions: What kind of tactics do my participants’ use in the process of managing their audience’s impressions while they are constructing and managing their identities on Facebook? What role do religious, social and cultural norms of offline life influence play in this?

5.3.3 AUDIENCE SEGREGATION

According to Goffman, the concept of ‘audience segregation’ is part of the methods with which identities are created and expressed through the interaction process that occurs between individuals in everyday contexts. He suggests that an individual’s desire to convey a favourable image of themselves before his/her audience represents the core of the impression management approach (Alsaggaf, 2015). To Goffman, ‘impression management is key in such self-presentations’ (van den Berg & Ronald, 2010). Performers’ expectations and sense of audience are the main elements in the strategies utilized to present the ideal self. Goffman’s notion of ‘audience segregation’, suggests that the performer ‘ensure[s] that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting.’ (Goffman, 1959: p. 57).

This characteristic of audience segregation also implies that each individual performs multiple roles for different audiences in different settings. This fact necessitates the need to segregate the audience for each role, in such a way that one group witnessing a particular role or performance cannot witness the role intended for another group or audience. Drawing on Goffman’s (1968) approach of examining groups for whom impression management is intensified due to their position in society, this research aims toward attaining a better understanding of the ways in which individuals tailor their behaviour for certain audiences within specific contexts to achieve certain goals. People’s experiences relating to identity presentation and impression management on Facebook reveals the way that stigmatized identity performances can be adapted to SNSs’ technological affordances to harness, manage, or prevent context collapse from one hand and the formation and maintenance of social capital on the other hand. Participants may use the sites to interact with people they already know offline or to meet new people. The
online social network application analysed this research, Facebook, enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate “friends” who can post comments on each other’s pages, and view each other’s profiles. Facebook members can also join virtual groups based on common interests, see what classes they have in common, and learn each other’s’ hobbies, interests, musical tastes, and romantic relationship status through the profiles.

People engaged in ‘audience segregation’ through their presentation of specific roles can maintain face before each of these audiences. In this way, Goffman’s work suggests a multiplicity of personas for different categories of connections and that is closely linked with his theory of frontstage and backstage. Goffman distinguishes between what is a private (backstage) and what is a public (frontstage) setting. The performers’ segregation of their audience on SNSs creates a clear separation between these settings. The frontstage is the place where the actor (individual) plays his/ her role to present an idealized version of the self in front of their audience, whereas the backstage is the place where the performer returns to his natural behaviours (Weintraub and Kumar, 1997: p.183). Despite the fact that performers’ interactions in online settings can separate between their frontstage selves performed in front of their audiences and their backstage selves. The actors can also present different identities to different connections based on their goals and their consideration of public and private. This idea can fit in an interesting way with online identity formation. Goffman’s idea, for example of ‘the emphasis on multiplicity which he referred to by stating the need for different personas and necessitating different addresses.’ (Dijck, 2013: p.201). This is fact in line with my emphasis on the multiplicity of users’ identities. For example, users could utilize Facebook features to construct a private (personal) digital identity on one Facebook profile and a completely anonymized public digital identity on another profile. These practices have been demonstrated in the current study on Iraqi gender performance on Facebook through users’ identity construction and self-presentation strategies.

5.3.4 IDEALIZED VERSION OF THE SELF
Goffman’s theory of impression management, first discussed in 1961, which is also known as self-presentation, indicates that individuals in social situations are concerned
with the impression they convey to the people they interact with, who are also known as the audience. Goffman, in his seminal work, considers this self-presentation as a form of performance (1959). He employs the metaphor of the individual as an actor in a play to explain the way in which he/she communicates or conveys certain messages to the audience. According to Goffman (1959) these performances are relatively controlled by performers (1959). For example, the performer may aim to manage his/her behaviour strategically and present to others a beneficial image of themselves (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). In other words, they may portray or present to others an idealized version of themselves that they want to display through interactions with other people. The idealized image the actor or performer wants to convey may be accomplished by highlighting certain aspects ‘when the individual presents himself before others, his performances will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behaviour as a whole’ (Goffman, 1959: p.35), or by concealing facets: ‘If an individual is to give expression to ideal standards during his performance, then he will have to forgo or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards [the code of society regarding social and cultural norms].’ (ibid: p. 50).

The idea of an actor or performer depicting an idealized version of him or herself proposed by Goffman in (1959) is discussed in online contexts such as CMC and SNS. For example, a considerable number of researchers investigate the relationship between the SNSs and this idealized portrayal. On a SNS users may give information that expresses the favourable image that he/she wants to convey and in turn sustains a positive portrayal of the user. On a similar level, users may cancel content that might affect this idealized version of the self he/she wants to display. Research about self-presentation in social networks has demonstrated two different views. The first group of studies of self-presentation in social networks suggested that users of these sites create and communicate idealized selves (Walther, 2007; Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Brivio & Ibarra, 2009; and Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011).

According to these studies, the hyperpersonal model of communication in virtual environments is confirmed and indicates that the technological aspects afforded by online settings are utilized by the users to manipulate the impression they want to present to other people in socially desirable ways (Walther, 2007). In his study with group of MySpace users Manago et al. (2008) discussed their use of the site. The results indicate...
that users’ aim was to try their idealized aspects of their personalities on the sites as this was the self they hoped to become. Brivio and Ibarra (2009) conducted another study with Facebook users and asked them about the goal behind using Facebook. The results showed that Facebook users consider friends ‘likes’ as an important personal goal for which they idealize their self-presentation. A contrasting view shown by another group of studies describes the way of utilizing SNSs to display non-idealized self-presentation. This view suggests SNSs are used to express users’ accurate information and their real selves by presenting their actual personality and characteristics. According to these studies, users’ profiles enable strangers to judge them correctly based on profiles on Facebook (Gosling et al., 2007 and Back et al., 2010) and on MySpace (Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2007). SNSs extended the social context in which various aspects of personality characteristics can be integrated and displayed online, which in turn fosters valid and accurate information about personality (Hall & Bernieri, 2001; Vazire & Gosling, 2004; and Ambady & Skowronski, 2008). Moreover, creating idealized identities should be hard to accomplish because (a) OSN profiles include information about one’s reputation that is difficult to control (e.g. wall posts) and (b) friends provide accountability and subtle feedback on one’s profile. The present study challenges the extended real-life hypothesis that indicates SNSs are used to communicate users’ real personality, which in line with the essentialist approach that argues that identity is not fragmented by having different performances on different profiles. I suggest a different way of understanding the self-idealization process in which the users present a favourable image of themselves to other people through performance manipulations that involve presenting certain aspects of identity that are associated with a positive impression and navigating others that cause a negative portrayal. The aim of this performance is to display a version of personal identity that complies with cultural norms. This is based on the fact that users in an Iraqi context navigate presenting their real identity by creating different accounts which contain no personal information or pictures.

5.3.5 GOFFMAN’S MODEL OF FACE

Research on the concept of ‘face’ has seen a dramatic increase in the past three decades (Tao, 2014). As noted by various researchers, “face has become firmly established as a key concept not only in pragmatics but also in anthropology, sociolinguistics,
communication studies, sociology, psychology, and other related fields” (Haugh, 2010: p.2073). The notion of face was first introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman in (1955). Goffman (1967) defines ‘face’ as ‘an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes.’ (p.5). His definition of face is widely used and it represents a starting point to review the construct of face or identity. Goffman (1967) employed the term ‘face’ in his work to refer to the projection process of an individual of his/her public image to others. He acclaimed that the process of constructing our identity or face is a socially oriented process that includes ourselves and our conversation patterns.

Goffman’s conceptualization of an individual’s face as something that is not ‘lodged in or in his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter.’ (p.7). Building on this conceptualization and interpretation, Goffman outlines face as ‘the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact.’ (1967: p.5). He assumes that social interaction is one of the significant factors that plays an important role in shaping not only an individual’s position in, but also how they acquire knowledge of the world.

Goffman’s 1967 book Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour dealt with the analysis of the ritual elements in social internment. According to Goffman, every individual in this life lives in a world of social encounters in which he/she is involved in either face-to-face or mediated interaction with other members of society. According to him this process of social interaction and communication is governed by ‘interaction rituals’. These rituals represent a group of moral rules that shape the flow of events and govern the social interaction between the interlocutors. Also, they give the sender and receiver an ability and power to evaluate their own behaviour and follow other participants’ patterns and ways that contribute to the social interaction.

Goffman also acknowledges the important role of a face-saving act. According to him, ‘traffic rules’ represent an essential element of face-saving acts that people depend on in organizing social interaction in co-operative principles (1967: pp.13-15). On this basis, Goffman also put forward certain practical procedures that might be used by individuals to help in the process of saving face, beginning with a defensive face process which a person obtains while attempting to save his/her own face. The second procedure that Goffman describes is a protective face process used when a person is trying to save others’
face. Both of these are subsumed under ‘facework’. Goffman (1959) indicates that the facework or interpersonal work shapes the base that one creates to save his/her own and other’s faces. Goffmanian analysis of social interaction means that a person behaves according to the social order in a particular society, rather than as his/her own individual person (Marques-Reiter, 2000). For Goffman, this signposts that individuals behave in conformity with culturally-expected norms of behaviours that are established and authorized by society and it is on loan for those individuals from their society (Lin X et al., 2013).

Goffman maintains an image of face construction in any society, as being collectively oriented. By referring to the impact of these norms and social rules, he indicates that individuals do not have absolute freedom to do whatever they want in their society but instead they should adhere to its rules and act in line with them to give more credit to the face they want. Once individuals behave in a way that is not in line or contrary to the expected social interactions or behaviours, face definitely will be at risk and becomes subject to loss that might incur negative consequences. Goffman stated that ‘although face is the possession of the individual, it is on loan from society and can be withdrawn from the person once he/she behaves in any way that runs contrary to the rules endorsed by the society.’ (p.10)

Goffman’s definition of ‘’face (1967) was not the only interpretation he gave regarding this concept. Goffman also pays attention to cultural differences and how they affect the orientation of face. According to him, face-saving also involves aspects of social conventions and he stresses that ‘each person, subculture, and society seems to have its own characteristics, repertoire of face-saving practices. It is to this repertoire that people partly refer when they ask what person or culture I really like.’ (p.13). Vilkk (2006) stated that ‘the notion of face has been in use as a metaphor in different cultures of the world for a very long time. It has metaphorically referred to individual qualities and/or abstract entities such as honour, respect, esteem and the self.’ (p.325). This fact has led to the proposal that the notion of face is culturally specific. Several scholars (e.g. Mao 1994; Matsumoto 1989; Ting-Toomey 2005) dispute the universality of the notion of face.

Goffman contends that the roles people adopt in public by putting on a face in everyday life are similar to a performance. However, face-to-face interaction is not the only way of
forming or constructing identities. The face we present online is also related to the image of the self we would like to show on the internet. This may represent a modern way to manage our public image of the self. The information on social network sites such as Facebook adds value to the way people construct their identity or face in which they become much more aware of their public image. People are more concerned with this image because if it is threatened or disconfirmed it may result in losing face. The development of this new form of constructing a public face leads the present research to study and investigate the cultural particularity of face in Iraqi Arabic culture throughout face-saving and protecting online and how several aspects play an important role in this process. One might expect to find a different implementation of face by the Iraqi Arabic people. This is due to role of cultural norms and the importance of maintain face in the conservative community of Iraq for both men and women.

5.4 RELEVANCE AND CRITIQUES OF GOFFMAN’S DRAMATURGICAL FRAMEWORK TO ONLINE PRESENTATIONS OF THE SELF

Although Goffman’s theories were formed before the emergence of the Internet, his ideas can be particularly valuable for studying communication on the Internet. The central concepts of Goffman’s dramaturgy framework, such as co-construction of identity, awareness of the audience and framed interactions represent key bases for shaping identity, whether in online or offline worlds (Lamb and Davidson, 2002). According to Hogan (2010), Goffman’s approach is a useful grounding for studying and understanding identity construction and online self-presentation. Several studies used Goffman’s methodology to this end such as Pearce and Vitak (2016) who studied the affordances of social media for surveillance and impression-management in an honour culture and Paliszkiewicz and Mądra-Sawicka’s ‘Impression Management in Social Media: The Example of LinkedIn.’ (2016). Lewis, Kaufman and Christakis’ 2008 study draws on Goffman’s frontstage/backstage distinction for deriving research questions about privacy. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) apply Goffman’s approach to study identity and presentation of self in blogging and Second Life [SL] contexts. Also, the social networking site Twitter has been studied by Marwick and Boyd, who claimed that users adopt the imagined audience technique to manage their audience’s impressions (2010: p.114). Zarghooni (2007) emphasised the applicability of Goffman’s front/backstage
terms in Facebook settings. All of the studies mentioned represent the process of managing impressions that performers adopted for their audience who are physically not present. Scholars claimed that the imagined audience technique has been used by online users to manage their audience’s impressions.

Though these previous examples of studies demonstrate the value of Goffman’s impression management and self-presentation approach to understand the way in which people perceive, present, and represent themselves in the CMC world, a number of scholars criticized the applicability of some aspects of his approach to studying people’s interaction online. For example, in relation to Goffman’s notion of audience segregation Ahmed et al, (2014) stated that the “current online social networks don’t provide users with a fine-grained mechanism to separate and manage various audiences. Many social network sites only provide their users with the option to collect one list of contacts, called ‘friends’. Some of the social networks offer the functionality of creating separate lists which require users’ time and efforts.’ (p.7). Marder, Johnson and Shankar (2012) explore the difficulty of managing multiple audiences in social networks and align this problem with Goffman. Rui & Stefanone (2013) indicated that impression management in SNSs is challenging because users are faced with multiple audiences where they have to use one single front from one hand and have no opportunity to present for specific audience members and achieve desirable impressions from the other hand. Also, DiMiicco and Miller (2007) in their study ‘Identity Management: Multiple Presentations of Self in Facebook’ indicated that the majority of SNSs’ users do not manipulate their online behaviour or online profiles to address diverse social networks which include professional and nonprofessional audiences. However, the findings of the above studies contradict my approach; I would suggest that users were very creative in managing multiple audiences on Facebook by adopting several strategies, either by constructing different online identities, managing multiple faces on the Facebook platform or by creating purposeful specific audience zones to avoid any threat to their public image.

Aspects of the adoption of Goffman’s performance and stages of interaction (frontstage and backstage) theories to the online environment are also criticized by some scholars. For example, Hogan’s study ‘The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online’ (2010), argues that Goffman’s self-presentation in online environments (e.g. Facebook) is a group of divided presentations
which are performances that can take place in synchronous ‘situations’, and artefacts, which take place in asynchronous ‘exhibitions’. For him, users online are not engaged in performances, but rather it is a form of exhibition where they leave artefacts for their audiences to view at their convenience. Hogan’s reference to the synchronous and asynchronous presentations that take place in forms of performance and exhibition make both approaches applicable to Facebook. As a result, I argue that Facebook, for this research, is utilized by users for both performance and artefacts to be displayed.

Concerning the stages of interaction in online environments, mainly Facebook, several researchers such as Tufekci (2008) and Lewis et al. (2008) consider Facebook as a backstage to relate it to the concept of privacy. Farquhar (2009), argues that Facebook represents a frontstage where users perform to their audience and present contents that can be viewed by all of them. Hogan (2010) stated that ‘From Goffman’s definition anywhere can be a back stage to another frontstage.’ Despite the different interpretations offered by Tufekci 2008 and Lewis et al., 2008 and Farquhar, 2009 regarding Facebook, they all indicated the applicability of Goffman’s front/backstage terms to the Facebook setting. In this study, I suggest that Facebook accounts can be considered as both frontstage where users can present their desired image of themselves through posting different content and participating in different activities and as a result present their ideal self as well as backstage where they can contact and interact with their online connections and retain their offline life.

Regarding Goffman’s concept of self-idealization, number of scholars such as Lin, C., Fang, W. and Jin, J., 2017; Back et al, 2010; Gosling, S. D., Augustine, A. A., Vazire, S., Holtzman, N., Gaddis, S, 2011; Marder, Joinson & Shankar, 2012; Siibak, 2009; Strano, 2008; Weber & Mitchell, 2008; Willett & Ringrose, 2008; Zhao & Elesh, 2008 confronted the idea of presenting the ideal self by suggesting that the nature of online social networking, particularly the Facebook platform, encourages users to present an online identity which is reflective of their offline self. Their studies indicated the presentation of a real, rather than idealized version of the self in the online world. For example, Lin, Fang and Jin’s (2017) study, ‘you are what you post in “circle of friends” of WeChat: Self-presentation and identity production from a personality perspective’, indicated that user interaction online reflects the user’s real personality traits. In their study, ‘Manifestations of Personality in Online Social Networks: Self-Reported Facebook-
Related Behaviours and Observable Profile Information, Gosling, et.al. (2011) stated that people extend their offline personalities on Facebook rather than escaping them. Also, Back et al (2010) in their study ‘Facebook Profiles Reflect Actual Personality, Not Self-Idealization’, of 236 ONS users, argue that user identities on SNSs are a mere reflection of their offline identities and there is no self-idealization because they are more concerned about maintaining their offline relationships. This concept is also contradicted by the findings of this research study, as the users were able to present their idealized version of themselves. Their public digital selves present this face in which the users (performers) were able to conceal several aspects of their personality and present the perfect version of their identity through interaction by presenting everything positive about them and present it to other viewers.

5.5 SOCIAL ROLE THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER DIFFERENCES

Biological sex is one of ‘the first things noticed and encoded during social interaction’ (Skitka and Maslach 1996: p.53), males and females engage in different behaviour that is observed by people on a daily basis, which in turn fuels gender stereotypes (Eagly & Wood, 2012; and Wood and Eagly, 2015). These gendered behaviours shapes ‘the belief that men and women are fundamentally different [which] is often linked to the idea that there are particular social roles for which men and women are best suited’ (Ruble and Martin, 1998). Ashmore and Sewell (1998) stated that in the period between the late eighteenth century and the 1980s, gender studies developed and scholars turned their attention from examining gender differences in the area of human intelligence (Deary et al., 2012; and Halpern, 1997) to focus on gender as a social construct. The term gender has come to be used to refer to the ‘socially constructed attributions and expectations assigned to individuals on the basis of their biological sex’ (Suzuki & Ahluwalia, 2003, p.120). Each gender, male and female, has their own culturally constructed roles. Gender roles are defined by O’Neil (1981) as ‘behaviours, expectations, and role sets defined by society as masculine or feminine which are embodied in the behaviour of the individual man or woman and culturally regarded as appropriate to males or females.’ (p.203).

A social role refers to ‘a comprehensive pattern of behaviour and attitudes, constituting a strategy for coping with a recurrent set of situations, which is socially identified – more
or less clearly – as an entity.’ (Turner 1990: p.87). Lucal (1999), stated that the role genders may play in a person’s private or social lives made the perspective about gender as a social construction widely acceptable, which lead to the fact that gender is doing and that sex and gender are distinct. Thus, such behavioural norms, beliefs displayed by both sexes (males and females) are significantly related to traditions and social settings rather than biology. In other words, gender difference can be looked at from the perspective of a person in a social context (Ashmore and Sewell, 1998). Gender roles that include a certain set of qualities and behaviours considered suitable for males and females have formed the main argument of Eagly’s (1987) social role theory.

According to social role theory, most societies have a historical categorisation of gender roles (Eagly, Wood, and Diekman, 2000). These roles work as the main indicator of the behavioural prescriptions that men and women should adhere in their lives (Smith et al., 2013). For instance, communal characteristics include sympathy, gentleness, and submissiveness as examples of traits associated with femininity, by contrast, agentic characteristics such as assertiveness, dominance, and aggression are supposed to be more related to masculinity (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clark, & Rosenkratz, 1972 and Smith et al, 2013). Miville et al (2013) stated that the enactment of gender roles (e.g. dress, bodily movements and duties) is one of the ways that individuals adapt to ‘do’ gender. Behaviours that men and women intend to show in their community correspond with the normative conceptions of social attitudes (Mahalik et al., 1998). Mahalik et al. (2003) uses the term ‘gender roles’ to refer to a set of social determinants that indicate how both sexes (males and females) behave in regard to a variety of interests, responsibilities, opportunities, limitations, and behaviours.

These role determinants significantly affect not only how men and women behave, but also the way that their behaviours are perceived and evaluated (Smith et al., 2013). Furthermore, gender roles work as an indication of individuals’ statuses within their communities in accordance with their conventional prescriptions and norms of masculinity and femininity as well as reflecting the domestic and work main roles and features such as appearance, behaviours, personal ethics, and principles (Miville et al., 2013, and Miville ML, Ferguson AD., 2014). According to Johnson & Repta (2012) various roles that individuals play during the course of their lives are constructed by gender roles which in turn affect different aspects of their daily life from their external
appearance to the work position they prefer. In many cultures, the division between feminine and masculine settings (e.g. domestic settings and work settings) has much to do with the gender roles within society traditionally associated with boys and girls.

Scholars have pointed out that in a vast number of societies, but not all, gender role has a mutual relationship with social status and power and resource manipulation. From a sociological stand point, power can be interpreted as a status of authority that individuals or groups have in order to control other individuals or groups within a particular society, in spite of their oppositional stances (Jones, 2003). This has resulted in status variation by appointing men to leadership positions, whereas women are assigned to subordinate roles. The process of power refers to ‘the ability to do, to act, or to effect.’ (Jones, 2003: p.31). An individual’s social life experience teaches him/her how to build appropriate behaviours which fit his/her gender. It might be possible for individuals to follow or ignore conventional patterns of behaviour when they create a self-presentation in various settings. However, masculine and feminine patterns of behaviour still have a significant impact on many aspects of society due to the fact that they are considered a powerful means of social organization. Individuals’ experiences are constructed and restrained by gender roles which in turn affect the way that men and women are treated. (Eagly, et.al, 2004)

The advancement of the Internet and more specifically the social media sites has become a global phenomenon; that have attracted different individuals from across the world with different ages, cultures and genders. These sites have provided scholars with new platforms to study and examine the nature of gender differences and whether there are differences in men’s and women’s behaviours online. Different genders’ online behaviours that might be reflected in male and female behaviours have lead several researchers to apply social role theory to social media. They consider social role theory a suitable approach for understanding gender differences (e.g., Chesley and Fox 2012; Chakraborty, Vishik, and Rao 2013; Fawzi and Szymkowiak 2014). Thus, this research argues that applying social role theory provides a suitable framework to investigate the performance of Iraqi Facebook users in an online environment and how Iraqi ‘males’ and ‘females’ expected offline roles are mirrored online when using Facebook. It also argues the confrontation of these roles in the online environment can be seen in the users’ performances and interactions on Facebook.
5.6 SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social capital is one of the most important theoretical concepts in sociology. In this section I want to concentrate on the work of Bourdieu, Putnam, and Coleman in explaining the concept of social capital. The theory of social capital is traced to back to French sociologist, anthropologist, philosopher, and public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1985) produced the first contemporary perspective of social capital and defined ‘the concept as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.’ (1985: p.248). He stated that social capital describes individuals’ ability to capture both the potential and actual resources embedded in their social network. Despite influential research on social capital by Bourdieu, political scientist Robert Putnam considered as another most influential social capital theorist within community (Macinko & Starfield, 2001; Fassin, 2003). Putnam (2000) defines social capital as a concept that ‘refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (p.19). Social capital is also defined by Lin et al (2001) as ‘investment in social relations with expected returns in the market place.’ (p.19). His treatment considers the creation of social capital as being done through social interactions and the expectations of social resources that would be produced in future. According to Alejandro Portes (1998) ‘Social networks are not a natural given and must be constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations, usable as a reliable source of other benefits.’ (p.4).

For Bourdieu, social capital can be perceived as a metaphor for advantage. Bourdieu views social capital primarily as a resource for individuals which represents a more sociological view of social capital:

‘Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (‘connections’) which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital.’(1986: p. 243)
He treated the concept from an instrumental point of view which focused on the benefit that individuals gain by virtue of participation in groups and on the sociability created by them for the purpose of creating this resource. According to Goffman (1967) self presentation and impression management takes place any time a person is interacting or communicating with others. Following this logic and extending it to the social presence afforded by social networks, thus assuming that as users communicate information about themselves within social networks, they are implicitly engaging in impression management. Framed in this way, intentions to use a social network can be at least partially explained by the traditional predictors of impression management behaviour. Leary and Kowalski (1990) suggest that people are motivated to engage in impression management in order to derive social benefits. Social benefits derived from self-presentation of identities. Social benefits for projecting one’s identity can include certain form of social capital such as friendship, relationships as well as assistance, power, and so forth (Leary and Kowalski 1990). In the context of social networks use, one can easily see how perceived social benefits constitute a primary motivation for use of these networks.

Bourdieu’s work on social capital was based on collective behaviour and analysed the social structure as a group of cultural sets of values and ideologies that may serve as ‘currency’, providing individuals with opportunities that would otherwise not have been possible (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, social capital becomes operational through social connections (networks) and obligations that are ‘constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations’ (Portes, 1998: p.3). He asserts that the profits an individual can gain from his/her membership in a group represents the shared aim that makes them possible (Bourdieu, 1985). Despite the fact, that Bourdieu was criticized for his approach that looks at all capital from a normal economic sense of physical economic capitals (see Tzanakis, 2013), his theories on social relationships and their social resources and the benefits individuals can gain represent the important element for this research study, rather than the ones that focus on economic consequences and power resources. Putnam (1993) work on regional differences in social capital indicated that social capital represents a positive resource. His work also criticized by Portes and Landolt (1996) whom suggested that in some cases, individuals’ actions and choices may be constrained by social capital. However, by making distinction
between bonding (exclusive) and bridging (inclusive) social capital in his later work, Putnam addresses the criticism of the concept of social capital as a positive resource that may have only partial benefits (2000: p.22).

James Coleman provided a more refined analysis of social capital notion. His initial definition of the concept was based on its function as ‘a variety of entities with two elements in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors whether persons or corporate actors within the structure’ (Coleman 1988a: p.98, 1990, p.302). Coleman was able to identify another sort of benefit embedded in social capital for marginalized (powerless) communities, where the construction of relationships resulting from common interest and values as well as the mutual trust produce social capital based on reciprocity and expectations (Field, 2003).

For Coleman, social capital is a crucial part of the social structure which allows movements between individuals (Lin et al, 2001). He explains social capital as “the resources accumulated through the relationships among people” (Ellison et al., 2007 p.1145). Coleman’s formulation of the social capital concept is helpful in understanding the type of social relationships that platforms such as Facebook can produce. This benefit of the site can be seen clearly in the ability of the users to establish a new relationship on Facebook.

The present study aims to address number of limitations in previous studies by examining this area through its consideration of how users’ construction and presentation of their identities and strategies they adopt to manage self-presentation could have an impact on social capital. These studies have limited examinations of the relationship between the aspect of constructing the self in online environments and its role in producing social capital. For example, Ellison et al.’s (2006b) study ‘Managing Impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment’ addresses self-presentation strategies adopted by online dating participants to explore how they manage their online presentation of self for the purpose of finding a romantic partner. Their study related producing social capital to identity information as a reason for using Facebook without examining any of the identity elements to measure social capital in their study. Ellison et al.’s (2011) study: ‘Connection Strategies: Social capital implications of Facebook’ enabled communication practices, aimed to explore the relationship between connection strategies and social capital but has also ignored important aspects related to identity such
as strategies related to self-presentation, to impression management, management of audience that is thought to have a significant effect on the process of social capital. Another limitation is that earlier research findings suggest that on Facebook people use online channels to intensify offline relationships and less to construct relationships and build wide social ties by meeting new people (Lampe et.al, 2006). This can be seen to improve both ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital, bonding social capital by supporting tight-knit relationships, and bridging social capital by providing an easy and cheap way to maintain “weak ties” (Putnam, 2000; and Donath and Boyd, 2004).

The concept of social capital discussed in this section represents another central feature of the framework of theoretical methods that guided my analysis in this research. This section presented an outline of social capital theory, to explain what it means and to identify its relevance to my study, rather than presenting extensive details of the concept and the work about it. Social capital as a concept focuses on relationships as another dimension to examine the social nature of identity. The concept addresses the social phenomena of human capital in online environments to study how my participants utilize Facebook to form new types of relationships that are impossible to create offline as well as the resources that they can gain from such relationships. The main concern of this study is to reveal the strategies used in constructing and managing individual’s identities based on Goffman work and concept of self-presentation and impression management and their interaction with their audience and the type of issues discussed and shared with them. Understanding these processes have a significant importance regarding the forms of social capital that their interactions produce by showing how managing the self-online enable them to enact certain performances that can result in building certain type of relationships not possible in offline life as they consider not in line with societal and cultural norms. I’m attempting to integrate these theories to explain behaviours in the domain of social networking sites (SNS). SNSs are an extremely hot topic in academia and in the popular press. It is my argument that the strategies Iraqi users of Facebook used represent the starting points for establishing relationships. From this perspective, users’ strategies of self-presentation on Facebook profiles can be significantly linked to the construction of social capital. Bourdieu supported such a claim, he stated that behaviours made by individuals play a role in gaining profit from others (1991).
5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a thorough description of the theoretical approach of this research, describing the main theories utilized in this research project as well as discussing the reasons behind using Goffman’s dramaturgical framework of self-presentation, Goffman’s notion of face, Social Capital Theory and Social Role Theory. Goffman’s dramaturgical framework of self-presentation and impression management theory employed in this research was important in understanding how the users construct their identities and their audience and how they present these identities on Facebook. This theory represents a suitable framework for understanding the users’ strategic impression management, self-presentation and audience management on Facebook. Gender differences in the use of social media are also investigated by scholars who have been attracted by this topic. Social role theory originated as a method to investigate and understand the gender similarities and differences in offline behaviour that stems from individuals’ roles enacted in their offline social contexts. Social role theory represents part of the theoretical framework of this research that is utilized to explain the online behaviours that both males and females enacted in the online world, mainly on Facebook. As social media represents a new tool for constructing or maintaining interpersonal relationships, social capital theory is utilized as an important part of the research framework. Existing research indicates the suitability of social capital theory to understand users’ interactions in social network sites to develop and maintain social relationships as well as establishing ties (Lin and Lu, 2011). As a result, the theory was found to be of great benefit in investigating the extent to which users in Iraq from both genders utilize the site to form new relationships that cannot be shaped in their offline life.
CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to present the methodological approach adopted in the present research study. It will also outline the scientific processes followed and the data collection methods utilized in gathering the research data. Also, it will expound the approaches for analysing and interpreting the collected data. The chapter consists of several sections that will start with briefly reviewing the methodological research approach (qualitative) and the rationale for using a qualitative approach. Then, the procedures of data collection and methods implemented will be discussed in details focusing on the methods used in this study which is: interviews both in offline (Offline Interviews: In-depth Semi-structured Interviews (SSI)) and Online interviews (e-mail Interviews) and pilot study of the interviews. According to Ratislavova & Ratislav (2014), ‘The asynchronous email interview will never fully replace traditional face-to-face interviews, but it could gain a solid position as a qualitative research method thanks to its unique benefits.’ (p.1). Next, the procedure of data collection is ethnography that utilizes one form which is the observation (online) as a means to collect the data. Then, the process of how to answer the research questions by the methods adopted are discussed. The coding scheme analysis with some samples of the data collected are provided to show how the study conducted. Finally, the trustworthiness of the research data collected will be discussed and explained.

6.2 A QUALITATIVE APPROACH OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK SITES USAGE IN IRAQ

Qualitative research methods of data collection which rely on the inductive approach that is sensitive to the social context in which the focus is on words and meanings rather than numbers. As Gay (1996) states,

Qualitative researchers are not just concerned with describing the way things are, but also with gaining insights into how things got to be the way they are, how people feel about the way things are, what they believe, what meanings they attach to various activities, and so forth (p. 13).
The qualitative researcher is concerned not only with contexts and action of specific individuals but also aims at exploring their experience and the importance they gain from them. Amatarunga et al. (2002) stated that the qualitative method represents the best approach to explore and investigate new fields, and has the primary aim of ‘understanding the meaning of human action’ (Schwandt, 2001: p.213).

In this study, I have tried to understand the Iraqi users’ performance and use of social media sites mainly on Facebook in the case of body absence and nonphysical audience presence. Their identity construction, presentation, interactions and the use of different tactics, when they log in into Facebook, raise various questions about how they manage such performance. The lack of adequate research in the past left the field open for investigation. As a result, this research simultaneously begins to identify the specific characteristics of identity performance online and offline in the Iraqi context to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. Despite the fact that the research is concerned with investigating the Facebook use found in an enormous body in the West, there is a prominent lack in the existing qualitative research related with social media use particularly Facebook within the Iraqi context. These methodological limitations are apparent in the qualitative study that is closest to my work. As a result, qualitative approaches as a research design are adopted in this study.

The use of a blend of multiple research approaches and qualitative data collection methods across online and offline settings adopted in this research such as interviews and ethnographic method of Facebook entries made the present study distinctive. These practices served as essential factors for finding and producing the necessary qualitative data for analysis purposes. As stated by Krathwohl (1997) the fundamental activity in a research project is the data collection. The researcher needs to immerse himself with the participants’ experience and ‘The closer the researcher gets to the phenomenon, the clearer it is understood’ (Carson& Coviello, 1996: p.55). Accordingly, the research objectives should control this activity which has to be influenced by the environmental factors that the study aims to explore. The literature review was a crucial part of this study functioning as a documentary tool regarding the information related to the research topic. Sources from well-known scholars have been reviewed such as Goffman (1959); Butler
Following the literature review, the second stage of the study consisted of interviews which were the primary technique to investigate and answer the leading research questions. This method was used in this study as a technique for data collection through setting up a particular condition (the interview) where the participants were able to discuss their own opinions and experience regarding the specific topic. Then, ethnographic observation is another crucial research tool used in this research. It implies studying participants’ Facebook accounts through the use of a Snipping Tool to capture screenshots. Snipping Tool is a screen shoot utility included in Windows OS that enables users to take a screenshot of an open window (Kozinets, et al., 2014). Ramakrishnan and Joe (2014) stated that the ‘advanced version of windows OS has the special feature known as snipping tool. This tool can be used to cut and store any image which is visible on the screen of the system. Hence, this tool can be used to cut and store the images posted on the social media’ (p. 13). This method to record online data from participants Facebook accounts. Particular Facebook entries were observed recorded for the study and analytical process. Four Facebook entries such as wall posts, hyperlinks, images, and status update were included in the analysis. Since the focus was on Arabic language material as the study was directed to Iraqi participants where the Arabic language is their mother tongue. Another essential research tool used in this study was a translation, since most of the data was in Arabic; therefore, all the materials were required to be translated into English for analysis. Also, a verification method for the translated contents of the Arabic language was adopted by engaging two academic scholars who speak both Arabic and English languages fluently.

The primary consideration that lies behind the selection of such qualitative techniques in designing this project is the ability of simply ‘‘giving voice” to the participants and to avoid the apparent data structured in quantitative studies of Facebook use. According to Fine (2002), the ‘‘giving voice” approach ‘‘involves carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments’ (p.218). It helps in exploring the participants’ attitudes and interpretations regarding particular subjects and in some cases sensitive issues. This type of research structure was adopted
in favour of being more liberated and to offer the participants the opportunity to talk about their ‘views’ and ‘attitudes’ and everyday experience of reality as well as how they transgress the limitations of their specific Iraqi contexts. Even though the generalization issue is linked to quantification and in this case it might be more applicable to findings of the quantitative approach (Flick, 2014), the qualitative approach adopted in this research is structured to explore the specifics of particular case with the aim of developing new insights and theories (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Figure 6-1: Snipping Tool utility included in Windows OS to make screenshots

6.3 QUALITATIVE APPROACH VS. QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

The distinctions between these two forms of research require direct consideration to different ontological and epistemological aspects linked to positivism, interpretivism and critical paradigms (Hughes, 2012). The qualitative approach is mainly concerned with the subjectivity of social phenomena with an intention to assess attitudes, opinions, and behaviour and focus on whole collected facts and interpretive approaches (Husen, 1994), while quantitative approaches are derived from the school of positivism that views the world as made up of counts, measures, and quantified facts (Glense, 2015) based on objectivity and neutrality (Thompson, 1995). The organization of the qualitative method is defined as a research approach that aims at emphasizing words, in the data collected
and analysed, rather than quantification (Bryman, 2008). Regarding the quantitative approach researchers such as Bryman (2008) considered it as ‘a research strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data.’ (p. 22). Creswell (1994) described the structure of the quantitative approach is as ‘a type of research that explains phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed by using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics).’ (p.12).

Epistemological foundations are considered to be an essential base for discussing issues of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches consist of different research methods that are based on separate philosophical assumptions, different principles, and knowledge about social life. For example, qualitative research is appropriate for answering why and how questions which represent kinds of process-oriented questions. Marshall (1996) stated that ‘Qualitative studies aim to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues and are most useful for answering humanistic ‘why?’ and 'how?' questions.’ (p. 522). Researchers who use qualitative approaches aim at obtaining information about participants’ views and experience, such as a researcher who adopts a structured or semi-structured procedure to ask ‘participants’ for their views or opinions which in turn is used in clarifying facts (Ahmed, 2017). In contrast, the quantitative research method is most helpful and useful when ‘answering questions of who, where, how many, how much, and what is the relationship between specific variables’ (Adler, 1996, p. 5) as well as to test pre-determined hypotheses and produce generalizable results’ (Marshall, 1996: p. 522). The number of participants is another factor related to conducting qualitative and quantitative research studies. In conducting quantitative research, a researcher should acquire sufficient numbers of respondents to find particular predictions and explanations that can be generalized from a sample to the larger community (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2000 & Glense and Peshkin, 1992). Qualitative research informants’ numbers tend to be far smaller because it gives more emphasis to the holistic information of the subjects rather than the generalization of the results (Sahragard, 2004). It is important to note that the choice of a qualitative or quantitative research paradigm depends mainly on the primary purpose of the research and nature, and focus of the research questions of any research study.
6.4 RATIONALE TO ADOPT A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In this research, qualitative research methods were utilized to examine how Iraqi users of social media create, perform and present their identity online when they use the Facebook platform. What are the tactics they employ to present their identity in the online world and more importantly why are they adopted? How do their online and offline characters correlate and why? According to David Silverman (1993), qualitative researchers can use four essential methods of investigation: observation, analysing texts and documents, interviews, and recording and transcribing (Silverman 1993: p.9). Further, Statem Barbour (2000) stated that the exploration ability and guidance of the qualitative method for future research is acknowledged as an essential feature (Barbour, 2000). The qualitative approach helps with understanding issues which are not yet understood or adequately identified as well as exploring people’s experience or views regarding particular situations. According to Hancock (2007), qualitative methods 'focus on description and interpretation and might lead to the development of new concepts or theory, or to an evaluation of an organizational process.’ (p.34). They effectively characterized by their ability to obtain precise cultural information about views, norms, habits, and attitudes, as well as social milieus of certain living groups (A Data Collector’s Field Guide). Unlike quantitative research methods, qualitative methods allow the specific area of flexibility when gathering data and exploring particular issues from a smaller number of participants within a semi-structured format (De Ruyter & Scholl, 1998). Qualitative research retains an emphasis on interpreting the social world. This is mainly exemplified within qualitative research by focusing on the individual role and the creation of social reality. Qualitative data will provide depth and detail of information about complex phenomena which requires a psychological immersion to be understood.

Due to the nature of phenomena under study, there is a requirement for including the induction characteristic of qualitative methods for two reasons. First, the subject area of the gender performance through self-presentation and identity construction in social media particularly Facebook in Iraq is relatively new in academic literature. Second, the nature of the research study which is characterized by being exploratory as well as the type of information that the research intended to gather from participants. Single approach
methods might not be able to expand the research as much as mixed methods can. The methods used help to gain more information from the users regarding their behaviours and attitudes on Facebook. Also, it helps understanding the reasons behind acting in such manners which are not commonly used by the users of this site. Additionally, the process of analysing collected data, along with virtual ethnography that adopt an observation technique helped to provide a broader understanding of the research. There was just more information about the participants’ activities in their offline and online environments such as the ways and tactics they assumed to present and construct identities while interacting with social media sites. This, in fact, made the study more comprehensive.

6.5 PHASE 1: SAMPLING: THE PARTICIPANTS RECRUITMENT

The research samples comprised a group of 30 Iraqi Facebook users from both genders male and female living in the south-central region of Iraq which includes five provinces (Najaf, Karbala, Babel, AdDiwaniya, and Wasit), who are aged between 18 and 45. The interviews took place between August 2015 and December 2016. The participants’ samples include 12 men and 18 women. The unequal number of participants was because the nature of the data collection methods used in the research which were time-consuming as well as the social network and the level of activity of the first group of interviewees who helped to encourage more individuals to participate in the research study. However, this difference in number did not affect the overall data reliability and results consistency. Participants found the research a good way to deliver their voice and make heard by people. Participants are proved to be active users of Facebook. They indicated creating their Facebook accounts between 2009 and 2011. The research participants assured that they are constant Facebook users. They are logging on the site at least once a day. However, their use of Facebook is more frequent than this, they log into Facebook several times a day to check their news feed and update their status. The nature of the phenomena under investigation in the research has led me to purposefully recruit my samples on the base of different demographic backgrounds, including age, sex, education level, marital status, occupation, income level, and size of a family.

The participants recruited in the present study are of two groups: The first group is Iraqi Arabic women. This group consists of 18 participants. The second group is Iraqi Arabic
men and this group involves 12 men. Both gender groups recruited for the semi-structured interview and virtual ethnography. It is worth mentioning that both groups of participants are living in the south central region (SCR) of Iraq. All the research participants are from the city centres of these provinces that represent urban areas. The SCR is considered as a Muslim and Shia majority area. It includes five provinces with two of them (Karbala and Najaf) that are regarded as Shia holy cities. They are home to some of the most magnificent and sacred shrines of the Shia branch of Islam and are leading centres for scholars of Islamic theology. These provinces are highly religious in nature, and the quality of life is more restricted in comparison to other provinces in the country. The other three-province (Babel, AdDiwaniya, and Wasit) are characterized being tribal areas. Tribes appear to have limited influence in Baghdad. In smaller cities and rural areas, however--especially in the Shiite-dominated, they played essential rules. The tribal system and tribal law linked directly to people daily lives. The tribe is an extremely important factor in Iraq, even in a republic. The vast majority of Iraqi people identify themselves as members of one of the country's 150 tribes. Even those Iraqi citizens without a tribal background often turn to a neighbourhood sheikh for representation or assistance with the government. All the research participants are belonged to these five provinces. Additionally, they are all having an academic qualification such as Bachelor, Master and PhD. Their primary language is Arabic, but some of them have excellent knowledge of English. Number of the participants recruited in this study are graduated from UK universities. They were either Master or PhD students and they examined living for a period of time in the UK. Their staying in the UK is limited from one year to five years. However, their knowledge of English is excellent, and the experience of studying abroad has had a significant impact on their interaction and the construction of their identity. In terms of education in Iraq there are 22% of adult women have reached a secondary or higher level of education compared with 42.7% of men. Additionally, Women's participation in the labor market is 14.5% compared with 69.3% for men (BBC, 2018). Most of the research participants belonged to the middle class and maintained a reasonable economic level of life. The main reason behind such process of sampling selection is that such factors and backgrounds might have a particular influence on the participants’ activities and behaviour in Facebook which represent the primary interest of exploration in the present study. The recruitment process of the sample of the study might
reflect the impact of their education qualification, class and gender on their lives and interactions especially when they constructed their identities on Facebook. However, this issues might be different with other groups of people if we applied the same methodology adopted in this research.

The sample frame selected for this research was small because the data collection and analytical methods of this research study required extensive interviews and virtual ethnographic analytical procedures. According to Jones (2001), the process of generating profound and meaningful understanding from a small amount of data collection methods can compensate what may achieve from using a technique aimed for a higher proportion of contents. Mason (2010) stated that 'because qualitative research is very labour intensive, analysing a large sample can be time-consuming and often simply impractical.’ (p.1). Although, that there is a lot of argument about the sample size in qualitative research. The use of small number of participants in such research is common and a lot of scholars conducted their research based on a small size of participants such as (Al-Sagga, 2004; Yurchisin, et al., 2005; Wirastuti, 2012; Zhao et al., 2013; Lambert, 2013; and Guta and Karolak, 2015). Bertaux (1981) indicated that for ‘all qualitative research fifteen is the smallest acceptable sample.’ (p.35). Therefore, we can conclude that the use small sample size of the research participants wouldn’t be problematic in its essence and affect the credibility of the study. The researcher treated the limitation of the participants’ number through applying a mix of qualitative research methods in an attempt to focus on the depth rather than breadth of the data. As a result, the investigation tends to favour for the richness of the data rather than on the desire to produce generalizable claims. A total of 30 informants volunteered to participate in the study. The number of participants was considered to be sufficient for qualitative research due to the significant amount of data gained from the interviews. Green and Thorogood (2009) stated that conducting 20 interviews is common in qualitative research and is considered a sufficient number. More specifically, in Grounded Theory research several researchers such as Creswell (2007); Denzin and Lincoln, (1994); and Morse (2000) recommended 20 to 30 interviewees. For phenomenological studies sample sizes of interviewees require are range from 1 to 10 respondents Kuzel (1999); Denzin and Lincoln, (1994); and Trinidad (2007)). Thus, the sample size was considered to be adequate. Additionally, it might be worth to say that applying this study may have had different results with participants who are less well
educated, or from more tribal parts of the country which will be vital to be investigated in future studies.

6.5.1 PARTICIPANTS SELECTION

Interview participants recruited based on their fitting a purposive-typical requirement. The participants targeted in this study are those who use different strategies to negotiate the cultural and social limitations and constraints through the use of different identities when they log in to Facebook or those who sometimes swap their gender in this virtual environment. Since the interaction of the individuals that the research aims to investigate are not validated by society, the recruiting process can be problematic, due to that fact that such users are often ‘hidden’ and might be identifying with a specific performance that can be described as being unacceptable in Iraqi culture and could cause a harmful reaction. Faugier and Sargeant (1997) debate the process of recruiting participants of non-validated issues. They stated that the ‘more sensitive or threatening the phenomenon under study.’ (p. 791), the harder will be the process of recruiting research participants. As a result, an affirmative decision was made to adopt the snowballing technique to identify Facebook users who use different identities on this site.

The use of a sampling method known as snowball sampling was used because of the difficulty of finding Facebook users who login into Facebook by using different names or gender such as family names, pseudonyms or nicknames other than their real names. Focusing upon particular issues about experiences or individuals might be in some cases problematic regarding finding and recruiting participants who could participate in the study because the research focus areas are not considered to be as a commonly discussed issue among populations in everyday social interactions in Iraq. Faugier and Sargeant (1997) debate that the ‘more sensitive or threatening the phenomenon under study’ (p. 791), is the more challenging to recruit samples. So that using snowball sampling technique might be an appropriate method to find those specific participants.
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Table 6-1: participants’ information sheet
6.5.2 SNOWBALL SAMPLING METHOD

Snowball sampling method (SSM) means ‘contacting one participant via the other’ (Valentine, 1993c: p.114). SSM is ‘also known as chain referral sampling.’ This technique is used to identify contributors whereby initial respondents have been used to recruit additional research participants. No incentives are offered to the participants. Snowball sampling and personal social networks have been employed to enable the researcher to gain access to hidden populations individuals’ social networks and to recruit participants.

Sydor and BMid RN (2013) proposed that ‘SSM is probably the most effective method to access populations that are hidden or hard to reach.’ (p.1) Studying inaccessible communities and individuals with specific features or characteristics might be problematic in the case of recruiting a large number of individuals to be participating in the study. Cohen & Arieli (2011) observed that research samples are usually small when the researcher aims to target a particular group of individuals in hidden communities or issues which are not validated by society. This technique is highly dependent upon the interpersonal relations as a way for recruitment participants of the study. Browne (2005) indicated that ‘social networks can be an important aspect of the research topic.’ (p. 52). This method was used in this research as a technique to encourage new participants whose part in social networks was already known people to participate in the study. Previous contacts made with those already known informants were used to recruit new participants on their suggestions. Diagram below shows the recruitment process and the chain of participants.
6.6 PHASE 2: DATA COLLECTION METHODS ADOPTED

6.6.1 PART 1: INTERVIEWS

The interviews method is considered to be one of the most important tools of data producing in qualitative research. McNamara (1999) defines the value of interviews:

*Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind participant’s experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information on the topic. Interviews may be useful as a follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses. (McNamara, 1999)*

The use of interviews as a research method is an essential element for this study as it helped significantly in generating qualitative data not otherwise available. The exploring ability of interviews made it a vital method for this study due to its ability to contribute to and to find participants’ intentions for using different strategies when they login into Facebook which is rarely used. This technique, in fact, expanded the researcher’s understanding of the nature of the phenomenon under investigation among Iraqi users. Additionally, this method helped in providing information about the issue that the study aims to tackle as the interviewees disclosed more information which is not discovered before through the interviews.

According to Barrie Gunter (2000), there are two main types of interviews “structured and unstructured”: In a structured interview, the interviewer generally works from a
questionnaire or interview schedule in which questions are asked in a predetermined order, and most questions supply respondents with a range of possible answers. In an unstructured interview, broader, open-ended questions are asked to which respondents provide explanations in their own words. These are either written down verbatim or audio recorded for later transcription and interpretation. There is also a degree of freedom accorded to the interviewer to introduce new, previously unscheduled, questions to follow up on specific remarks made by the respondent (Gunter 2000: 26).

Since the need for discovering full views was essential to understand the reasons standing behind specific methods of constructions, performances, use or behaviours, the use of structured interviews was not conducted. Instead of that, the in-depth interviews method was adopted using a semi-structured approach. Conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews considerably facilitated the process of gathering the narrative element required, in which the participants were able to disclose their perspectives and experiences. Many vital features that characterize semi-structured interviews made it an essential method in this study such as the possibility of preparing the questions in advance, providing the participants with enough space of freedom to express their views in their own words and finally, offer reliable qualitative data. It was important for me to know the perception and experience of my participants in regard to number of important issues that might be acted online because they are not possible to be performed in offline life. For example, asking about the freedom that users gained in online environment in terms of interacting with opposite gender and creating a cross gender relationships. Participants were also asked about the extent that Facebook allows them to talk of discuss issues that might not be possible in their physical life especially for women such as calling for their rights, equality with men, criticizing certain social, religious topics and talking about politics or sport.

6.6.2 TYPES OF INTERVIEW
6.6.3 OFFLINE INTERVIEWS: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study as a technique for data collection through setting up a condition (the interview) where the participants were able to talk about their own opinions and experience regarding the specific topic. According to
Carolyn and Neale (2006), the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews is beneficial in the case of aiming to get detailed information about individuals’ opinions and attitudes or when you tend to examine new concerns profoundly. Johnson (2001) stated that ‘scholars who use in-depth interviewing are usually looking for detailed information which is typically available through interviews and focus groups rather than found in surveys.’ (p. 104).

‘This information usually concerns very personal matters, such as an individual’s self, lived experience, values, and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge or perspective’ (ibid).

As a result, semi-structured interviews have a substantial benefit which is the ability to provide exhaustive information that is not available in case of using the survey research method (Johnson, 2001). Further, Wimmer and Dominick (2006) point out that the affluent details provided by interviews are considered as a significant advantage of the in-depth interview. The unique characteristics of this method could be listed as the following: ‘They use smaller samples. They provide detailed background about reasons why respondents give specific answers. Elaborate data concerning respondents’ opinions, values, motivation, recollections, experiences, and feelings are obtained. They allow for long observation of respondents’ nonverbal responses.’ (Wimmer and Dominick 2006: p. 135). According to Alasuutari (1998), the difference between the in-depth interview method and the survey interview method can be recognized as the following:

‘The main difference is of course that in qualitative interviews the questions are open-ended, and they have not been formulated before the interview session. The interviewer does normally have a check-list of themes to be covered in the interviews, but a great deal of the conversation consists of follow-up questions to what the interviewees say in the first place’ (Alasuutari, 1998: p. 144).

The primary consideration in the selection of such techniques is the ability for exploring the participants’ attitudes and interpretations regarding particular subjects and in some case sensitive issues. This technique might be seen as more relevant to the research study, since understanding the respondent's perspective is the essential aim of the researcher rather than generalizing certain actions or behaviours. Also, interviewees were able to
talk about their performance in a deep and detailed manner. Participants had the opportunity to think and discuss answers with themselves with little direction from the interviewer. Furthermore, such method is considered as a simple and useful way of gaining information about particular issues which are not easily observed such as attitudes, emotions, and feelings as well as contributing to building a positive relationship between the interviewer and interviewees. Bill Gillham (2005) stated that the flexibility of the structure and the worthiness of data so gained by the semi-structured interview method could make it one of the important techniques of conducting research interviews (Gillham, 2005: p. 70). Edwin Teijlingen (2014) indicated that in-depth semi-structured interviews have certain strengths:

• Well suited for exploring attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives could be good in sensitive areas.

• Non-verbal indicators assist in evaluating truthfulness/validity and urgency.

• Facilitates getting every question answered

• Ensures the respondent is working on his/her own

• Can potentially increase response rate

For my research study, adopting a semi-structured interview technique contributed considerably to the whole process of collecting qualitative data. Crucial areas of research concentration were covered in the questions employed through the interviews such as interpersonal relationships, activities that challenging the social and cultural roles of the community. The 18 participants for the face-to-face interview met in different settings based on their preference whether private or public. For example, some of the participants preferred to meet in private places away from their community mainly women to avoid any consequences of misunderstanding of meeting with non-relative man such as (meeting in a friend’s house). Other participants prefer to meet in public spaces (e.g., work places, Cafes, and restaurants). Participants’ interviews covered similar issues according to the research questions that aim at investigating their performance and use of Facebook. They were also given the opportunity to talk about issues raised through the interview. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes (excluding any time of interruption and
paused for general discussion, introduction, and hosting). The variation in the length of the interviews is due to several reasons: Firstly, the gender of the participant in which women seem to have less time to give due to the social and cultural issues that prevent them from staying a long time with a male stranger. Secondly, experience that participants have on Facebook and their active presence on the platform. Participants experience vary based on their interactions and communications. Some of them were willing to talk about these experiences and refer to various information such as their online activities, communication and interactions with other users, relationships construction, and tactics they adopted in their construction of their Facebook profile and performances. While other seemed to have not a lot of to mention in terms of such topics or they have one of two subjects to focus on (e.g., cross gender relationship. As a result, the time of the interview was affected by different factors and not limited to one. Finally, the extent to which participants were willing to talk about their experience and activities on Facebook. Some of the informants were talkative while others had little to say and gave only short answers.

6.6.4 ONLINE INTERVIEWS: E-MAIL INTERVIEWS

The online interview was the second method for carrying out qualitative research. The suitability of e-mail for qualitative interviewing was checked by several studies especially the ones conducted before 2003 which were methodological in nature. Several scholars adopted using, an e-mail interviews method in their research such as Kennedy (2000) who interviewed 17 women via e-mail, Karchmer (2001) used e-mail interviewing to explore 13 K–12 teachers; Meho and Tibbo (2003), interviewed 60 scholars; Lehu (2004), who interviews 53 top-level managers and advertising executives; Murray (2004), 35 prosthesis users by e-mail; and Olivero and Lunt(2004), who conducted e-mail and face-to-face interviews with 28 adult Internet users, Campbell et al., 2001; Nicholas et al., 2010; Synnot et al., 2014 Deakin & Wakefield, 2014. Most studies conducted since 2003 suggest that this method of collecting data is a viable tool for qualitative research (Meho, 2006). There are several advantages that can justify the viability of the use of e-mail for conducting qualitative interviews. For example, participants have the opportunity to avoid the need for immediate answer, having enough time to think and consider their answers,
feeling comfortable while describing their experiences, answers are more structured, participants can review their responses and reflect on them. The textual data collected online is more succinct than data that is collected verbally and the researcher has time to formulate additional follow up questions based on the richness of the data obtained via this method (Meho, 2006; East et al. 2008, Kateřina Ratislavová and Jakub Ratislav, 2014; Abrams et al. 2014; Dimond et al., 2012; Nicholas et al., 2010; Synnot et al., 2014; Cook, 2012; Synnot et al. 2014; Bowden, & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015).

This option for interviewing participants in Iraq was made from the very beginning for several reasons. Firstly, it offered an alternative way for people who don’t want to be interviewed in a face-to-face manner especially women. It helps in avoiding many problems especially the security situation and traveling between provinces in Iraq and avoiding the limits of cultural norms. Participants were given a choice that made them feel comfortable to conduct an interview and it was explained via email when they were offered full information about the study as well as being given the right to ask any questions they would like to ask about the study. Meho (2006) stated that this method ‘could be particularly useful to those who study people who prefer to be interviewed online rather than face-to-face, as well as people who are not easily accessible or are geographically far apart what follows is a review.’ (p.1285).

The researcher was acutely aware of conducting a useful email interview with participants. The main aim was to ensure the data quality and to establish accurate results. Thus, the suggestions presented by Meho (2006) were adopted which include the findings and the personal experiences of several scholars who use e-mail interviews in qualitative research. These recommendations consist of the following points; Invitations; Subject line; Self-disclosure; Interview request; Be open about the study; Research ethics and informed consent; Interview questions; Instructions Deadlines and reminders; Follow-up questions; and Participants and data quality.

The process of conducting well-organized e-mail interviews helped in ensuring the data quality that is similar to the traditional way. According to Denscombe (2003), ‘the quality of responses gained through online research is much the same as responses produced by more conventional methods.’ (p. 51). This conclusion was reached by several researchers such as (Curasi, 2001; Meho & Tibbo, 2003; Murray, 2004; Murray & Harrison, 2004)
who compared or conducted in their studies both e-mail and face-to-face interviews. They found that participants interviewed via e-mail provided more reflectively dense accounts than their face-to-face counterparts because they were more focused on the interview questions. Despite the fact that email-interview has several advantages that make it for conducting qualitative interviews. Number of scholars indicated that there are many challenges could arise from using this method (see Egan et al., 2006; Jowett, Peel, & Shaw, 2011; Barratt, 2012; Fontes & O’Mahoney, 2008; James & Busher, 2009). Email interview is asynchronous and might not be synchronous enough because of the breaks in the interviews that might be too long and the loss of spontaneity. As a result, a number of limitations can hinder adopting this method such as ‘does not allow direct probing, requires that questions be more self-explanatory than those posed face-to-face or by telephone, to avoid miscommunication and misinterpretation, loses visual and nonverbal cues due to inability to read facial expressions or body languages or hear the voice tones of each other, Requires meticulous attention to detail, and Participants may lose focus.’ (Meho, 2006: p.1292). However, I made sure to eliminate this issue by employing number of tactics to achieve the maximum benefits from this method. The synchronicity achieved by dividing interview questions into several sections and asking them in sequence by sending certain number of questions at one time rather than sending all of them all at once(Bampton & Cowton, 2002). This strategy was important to give participants the opportunity to understand and comprehend the research questions.

6.6.5 THE PRACTICAL STEPS TO E-MAIL INTERVIEW

1- This research data collection method involved the same interview program designed for face-to-face interviews.

2- The researcher set up a separate email account from the usual every day one.

3- The researcher used an email account that contained all the information about the researcher. The data took the shape of the email signature, and it included (real researcher name, university name and address, phone number and alternative email).

4- The researcher provided e-mail interviewing participants with informed consent as with the face-to-face interviewees.
5- The researcher provided e-mail interviewees with detailed information about the research in which they are asked to participate and ensuring that they understand fully what participation would entail as the with face-to-face interviewees.

6- The researcher ensured that the e-mail interviews started after receiving consent from the participants who asked to take part in a study. This consent can be sent to the researcher in different ways as an e-mail attachment-mailing back a signed form, or simply replying via e-mail affirmatively to an invitation to participate by stating in the message that the consent form was read and agreed to.

7- As in the case of face-to-face interviews, the researcher ensured that adequate provisions are taken to protect the privacy of participants and to maintain the confidentiality of data in the context of e-mail interviews.

8- Anonymising qualitative data by removing all identifying details, i.e., first names, street names, and other real names and replacing these details with pseudonyms

9- Removing all received e-mails after gathering the research data sent by participants.

10- Adopting all the procedure agreed upon in the approved ethical approval form regarding data storage, data security, and confidentiality.

6.6.6 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The construction of the efficient interview questions design was one of the most crucial components of the research study and particular care for this factor was taken because of its importance in gaining rich information and detailed understanding of Iraqis’ Facebook use, performance, and interaction in the online environment. According to Turner (2010), ‘researchers desiring to conduct such an investigation should be careful that each of the questions will allow the examiner to dig dip into the experiences and/or knowledge of the participants to gain maximum data from the interviews.’(p.757). Thus, the interviews were designed to cover the central issues that the study aims to explore and investigate.

The preparation of useful research questions for interviews require the researcher to build their question considering several points related to the nature and structure of the Iraqi
context as well as the purpose of the research. As a result, the interview questions designed in three sets. The first set included a group of questions that aim to build rapport with the participants by allowing and giving them the opportunity to talk about themselves and reflect briefly on their experience on the use of the internet and social media. Participants started the interview with self-description of identity followed by background information about them which include information such as age, academic qualification, employment, and resident place. They also were asked to provide a brief description of their place of residency (e.g., province, city). Finally, the participants were asked to give information on the degree of comfort they feel when they use social media sites particularly Facebook.

The second set of questions mainly focused on the purpose of the study and the construction of identity in their account(s) on Facebook. They also aimed at exploring participants’ account information to measure their perceptions of Facebook’s compatibility with their context and culture. The findings from the second phase of the research had revealed the tactics and strategies that the participants used in constructing and building their identity and presented them in their account online. The manipulation of personal information on Facebook in relation to the amount and the degree of disclosure was a crucial point in explaining the way that the participants shape their identity online in comparison with their offline self. Furthermore, these questions shed light on the users’ strategies in organizing their audience in online platforms. Therefore, the second set of questions was more focused on understanding participants’ identity construction and performance(s) as well as the strategies and tactics leading for such enactments for identity and whether they had privacy concerns.

The last set of research questions was about exploring the correlation between the on/offline identities and the relationships between them. It also was directed to investigate the impact of using Facebook on the social life of the participants which disclose how they perform, use and construct their identity on Facebook as well as to identify how others influence users’ self-presentation on Facebook. This set of interview questions also aimed at investigating the role of other factor played in the use of Facebook and identity construction. It also discussed how the platform was essential for informants to discuss a set of issues such as political, social, moral, religious and sport. Finally, it probes the
performances in two different contexts on/offline and the awareness of research participants to protect themselves by saving their face on Facebook platform. Thus, the third part of the interview sought to understand the role of Facebook in enabling such relationships, issues discussions and self-protection.

6.6.7 TRANSLATING THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN ARABIC
This study conducted in Iraq, and being an Arab country, the research questions were translated into Arabic. The researcher translated the interview questions using a ‘translation’ and ‘back-translation’ technique to ensure the accuracy of the translation (Su & Parham, 2002 and Cha, Kim, & Erlen, 2007). Also, to ensure the accuracy of the translated questions, the researcher relied on experts from Iraq in both languages English/Arabic to offer their feedback on the Arabic version. As a result, their comments and recommendations implemented where appropriate. For example, literal translation was one of the issues recommended to avoid because this choice in most cases is accompanied with explanations. I adopted this comment and started using my sense and what is more acceptable among my people (e.g., the word platforms ‘منصات’, changed it into sites ‘مواقع’, City centre ‘وسط المدينه’, I changed into ‘مركز المدينه’) to avoid adding any explanations or misunderstandings.

6.6.8 ADMINISTRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTUAL INTERVIEWS
Several steps were used before starting conducting interviews both in online and offline settings. The primary intention was to ensure the suitability of measures adopted for conducting interviews as well as the level of comfort that such measures provide for each informant’s participation in the study. As a result, special care has been given to the administration stage in which the process of interviewing participants was started by sending them an official email inviting them to participate in the study. Individuals were contacted via the snowballing technique and social connections who showed interest in participating in the research involved in the formal process of interview. They were asked to volunteer to participate in audio-recorded interviews to talk about their views and
opinions about their performances and uses on the Facebook platform. Research documents such as consent forms, participant information sheets, and a copy of research questions were sent to all informants to have an initial idea about the research that they were going to take part in after their agreement.

Time and place were among the notable aspects that the researcher paid unique awareness to due to the nature of the issue under investigation as well as the community and culture context. Time and location chosen for conducting the interviews were convenient for the participants, especially for women. As a result, all interviews were performed based on the suitable place (private or public) and time and by the informant's request and comfort. Females’ interviews were typically conducted during the day and took place in a private area chosen by them (friends or relatives’ house). All the interviewees signed a consent form confirming their agreement to take part in both parts of the study (the pilot and main study). The Arabic language was used in conducting all the interviews because it is the mother tongue of the interviewees and the interviewer. The use of the Arabic language was important in the process of interviewing individuals because it allowed them to feel relaxed and comfortable when giving their responses.

Interviews conducted face to face were tape-recorded based on participants’ agreement and acceptance. Thirteen interviewees from both men and women accepted to be voice recorded. However, in some cases especially with women, they were unwilling to allow the researcher to tape-record the interviews due to social and religious reasons. Five participants did not allow me to record their interviews and prefer other methods. Therefore, notes alone were taken. The researcher started all interviews by introducing himself and describing the importance of the participants’ involvement and their contribution to this study with regard to the identification of the key factors in investigating the issue of Iraqis’ Facebook users’ identity presentation and performance and how that might help in supporting any strategies and steps that might be taken in future by the government for enhancing individuals’ freedom and men and women rights and position in society.
A pilot study is an essential element of the interview preparation. Beebe (2007) defined pilot studies as ‘small-scale versions of larger proposed studies or trial runs of methods and measures’ (p.213). The important reason for conducting a pilot study can be seen in the words of De Vaus (1993) who said ‘Do not take the risk. Pilot test first.’ (p. 54). It also could be a useful method for pre-testing or ‘trying out’ researcher proposed instruments or methods that are going to be used in a particular research project. According to Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) a ‘Pilot study might give advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated.’(p. 35). Thus, the pilot study can be conducted for a range of advantages and reasons.

The pilot test can assist the researcher in determining the weakness and the limitation in the interview design as well as contributing to the refinement of research questions. Kvale (2007) stated that the pilot test assists the researcher to identify any deficiencies in the interview design and allow him/her to take the necessary steps and revisions prior to the implementation of the study. It also offers the researcher the opportunity to recognize new ideas, approaches, aspects that might not observe before conducting the pilot study. That is, such new ideas, strategies, issues could significantly impact the primary research and add more strength to the findings and results. Gass and Mackey (2000) stated that the value of the pilot study could be noted regarding ‘avoiding the loss of valuable, potentially useful, and often irreplaceable data.’ (p. 57)

Accordingly, in the present study a decision was made to conduct a pilot study for different reasons; firstly, to ascertain the reliability of the data collection methods, secondly, identifying any potential practical problems about the data collection procedure before using them in the central research. The pilot study was also important in identifying and avoiding any risk the participants might experience such as the wording, incomprehension, the order of the questions or cultural disorientation. The process of the data collection mainly conducted in Iraq, and the pilot study started directly after gaining the university ethical approval and participants’ consent form. There was the opportunity to check the interview design and questions by testing it with a small group of
participants, who are as similar to the target population. Four Iraqi people in the UK (two males and two females) were involved in the pilot study. They were active users of Facebook and engaged in different interactions and performances online. The data collected from the conducted interviews were rated and checked by the researcher and the supervisor to review the clarity and reliability of the interview protocol and questions.

Changes were made to the interview protocol based on suggestions from the qualitative pilot study participants. The pilot study uncovered some linguistic, organizational and format issues that necessitated revisions and modifications to ensure a high level of applicability for the data collection methods in the primary research. For instance, the research questions were translated and written in the Iraqi Arabic dialect rather than the Iraqi Arabic standard language ("Fus'ha," the language of Holy Qur’an). The researcher read them in the interviews, but the questions were not obvious enough for interviewees because of the difference in dialects and some words used in different parts of Iraq. As a result, it was decided to write and read them in the Iraqi Arabic standard language. Organizational and format issues were also revealed through the pilot study that required specific modification to enable the participant’s involvement in the interview and building rapport with them. The pilot research interviews were not based on a sense of intimacy because they included only direct questions. Thus, it was decided to restructure the research interview design and make it more dependable and engaging. The new format was divided into two parts and the first part mainly dedicated to the issue of building a relaxing sense of comfort. It provided the participants with the opportunity to talk about themselves and describe their identity as well as delivering some demographic information.

The last issue exposed by the pilot study was the need for improving and adding more questions. For example, the question about the place of residence (Which city do you live in Iraq? How could you describe your city? (Religious, secular, conservative or tribal), is considered vital because it provides information about the nature of the city or province participants live in whether it is religious, tribal, liberal and conservative. Another example is adding questions that aim to measure the degree of comfort when using Facebook (How would you describe how you feel when you use Facebook?) and also some exploratory questions about privacy in terms of activities and relationships (What
do you keep private about yourself in real world and you disclose online?). These questions were not mentioned in the pilot interview, and so it added to the new structure. The changes had a significant impact in clarifying different issues regarding the space of liberty that Facebook offers to the users as well as several facts about informants’ online and offline activities and life.

To conclude, the suggestions from the qualitative pilot study participants were significant in enabling the researcher to make some changes to the interview protocol. These suggestions helped in identifying the limitations of the interview design as well as in refining the interview process. They also directed the researcher to determine whether any further adjustments were necessary prior to the study’s implementation. To that extent, such suggestions were significantly crucial in enhancing the research and impacted the results and findings.

6.6.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE INTERVIEWS

Various kinds of challenges were confronted during the periods of collecting the data of the study in Iraq. For instance, some constraints were mainly related to the field work connected with conducting interviews in Iraq mostly offline face-to-face interviews. The nature of the Iraqi community, religion, social and cultural norms and security situation were among the most apparent restrictions that face the data collection procedure of the study:

-In Iraq, it is common to meet, and conduct interviews with males. However, this process might not be easy for females. Gender issues was another challenge that was faced while doing the interviews. Conducting interviews with women in a conservative society such as Iraq has specific implications due to the role of religion and culture norms in such society (women are not allowed to meet with non-relative men or sitting with them). So, it was decided to discuss that issue with female interviewees via email several days before the exact dates of the interviews to define the best way, place and time appropriate to them.

-Another obstacle encountered was the security situation faced while traveling between different provinces to meet the participants and interview them. Security is not stable in
Iraq and problems might happen anywhere and anytime. For example, demonstrations, protests, explosions, and clashes are common and expected to happen in any province in Iraq.

-Although using the interviews as the main method of data collection could provide a better understanding of the research issue under investigation, the process proved time and cost consuming because it required preparation and money to carry out field trips to Iraq without sponsorship for a field trip.

-Despite the fact that most of the interviews went relatively smoothly, an additional constraint experienced was the particular difficulty in creating a rapport with some participants especially with women. Establishing rapport between the researcher and participant is an essential basis for successful communication. This particular issue with female participants is mainly because of the Iraqi social norms and traditions. As a result, there was an obligation to exert more efforts to find common ground to allow an excellent rapport to be built and developed with them.

-The interviewee’s assumptions about the researcher were also among the challenges faced in Iraq while attempting to find participants and conduct interviews. The years of war and sanctions under the rule of the previous regime before 2003 and an unstable security situation were enough to create a sense of insecurity, uncomfortable feelings or fear from such interviews.

-The tape-recording of the interview was another issue in which some female participants were not convinced with the idea of recording their voice because of several religious and cultural implications that prevent them from doing so. This issue required the researcher in some case to explain to the participants the reason for voice recording and in some cases, they changed their mind but other participants insisted on not recording their voice. The researcher respected the interviewees’ choice and their full rights in refusing that.

-The researcher faced another difficulty in keeping up a conversation with some participants. Managing interviews with some informants was challenging because they were not willing to talk a lot and they give short answers.
6.7 PHASE 3: DATA COLLECTION METHODS ADOPTED (ETHNOGRAPHY)

6.7.1 ETHNOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

Ethnography is the second phase of the research methodological approach involved in this study. It is known to be another qualitative method of research that requires active participation and engagement of the researcher to create an in-depth understanding of individuals’ daily interactions. (Spradley, 1979; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995; and Fetterman, 1998). The ethnographical approach comes from anthropology and it has a direct relation to the work of Malinowski (1922) and Mead (1943) (see Denscombe, 2007). Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) define Ethnography ‘as an integration of both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organization and culture.’ (p.1). To study a specific group of community, the researchers immerse him/herself in their culture for a particular period and employ a variety of methods for the purpose of collecting data (Schensul et al., 1999; Tedlock, 2000). In anthropology, the perspective of the participants that can be gained through direct experience of social phenomena can elicit knowledge and understanding (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999). To achieve this understanding, several ethnographic fieldwork methods can be used such as interviewing, participant observation (covert and overt) and documentary analysis. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995)’In its most characteristic form [ethnography] involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.’ (p.1).

6.7.2 VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Since the aim of this study is to explore the interaction process between the users and online social spheres (mainly Facebook), ethnography was adopted for researching this phenomenon. The type of ethnography utilized in this research is termed virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000), also known as digital ethnography (Murthy, 2008) and netnography (Xun and Reynolds, 2010). As noted by Jeffrey et al. (2010): ‘ethnography, in its broadest terms, and qualitative research are now the preferred forms for research of online social groups’ (p. 2). According to Crichton, S., & Kinash, S. (2003) and virtual
ethnography is a method in which one actively engages with people in online spaces to write the story of their situated context informed by social interaction. Miller and Slater (2000) write that the term virtuality ‘suggests that media can provide both the means of interaction and modes of representation that add up to `spaces' or `places' that participants can treat as if they were real.’ (p.4). The interpretation of that definition suggests that even though the geographical location is not concrete, they are real.

Virtual ethnography can be conducted via multiple computer-based methods of data collection to gather the necessary data that can be employed in the process of building the ethnographic profile of particular groups or individuals. The form of participant observation considered part of this process remains the critical element of it, however there is a slight difference in the role of the researcher to the traditional anthropological, ethnographic role. Miller and Slater (2000: pp. 21-22) stated that the methods such as participant observation or specific familiarity methods used for engagement in a particular situation still represent the bases of ethnographic research, even when researching online environment, though the offline and online fields are profoundly altered because of their nature. For example, in the online environment or field people, various parts of the world can gather and share issues and interact in the same platform. Additionally, the internet world does not necessitate the researcher to embed himself in the field as in the traditional way for the offline area.

In order to integrate into the field, it was decided to trace data from virtual arenas (participants’ Facebook accounts) through conducting distanced ethnography based on evaluating the textual and visual sources instead of being involved in a discursive and communicative interaction with the participants (Schwara, 1999). According to Morton (2001) conducting ethnography on the internet can be done via two ways, either distanced or involved. He stated that 'Distanced research might be constituted by the evaluation of sources such as texts, images, or emoticons and the observation (but not participation in) of social interactions in online spaces’ (p. 48), while, involved research (Discursive or communicative) requires active engagements of the researcher in the field being researched (Schwara, 1999).

The popularity of Facebook has significantly developed in recent years; it has become one of the most common sites in the world. Such popularity has become the focus of
social research. For instance, Orr et al., (2009) studied the influence of shyness on the use of Facebook in an undergraduate sample. Raynes-Goldie (2010) studied Facebook users’ understanding and negotiation of privacy concerns while using the site. With the purpose of understanding how Iraqis use social media sites, participate, perform their identities in online social spaces, and negotiate the cultural and social constraints, information from user’s Facebook accounts were collected for analysis. The collection process was achieved by using the ‘Snipping Tool’, to capture screen images and stored digitally. Twenty-five participants out of thirty permitted the researcher to add them as friends to observe their accounts for a limited time that started from February 2017 to December 2017. Participants’ accounts were visited on weekly base to check for any new contents posted. The process of analysing textual and visual contents such as texts, posts, interactions was the primary aim of using this technique. For each of those users, particular Facebook entries were subjected to Textual Analysis. This part examined how these people present their identity beyond the display of their necessary personal information. Consequently, the discussion excludes any information that did not pertain to the online performance of identity. The Textual Analysis focused on the use of both textual and visual contents that include posts, comments, images, the use of hyperlinks, choice of topics and language use, including the use of emoticons.

These four aspects function as different dimensions in which the presentation of identity can occur. In addition to focusing on the discursive performance of gender identity, the present study emphasizes the possibilities of performing identity through technical features like the display of images and the inclusion of hyperlinks. Each aspect was analysed to examine how it contributed to the users’ presentation of the self-online. Thus, the images used were examined and in relation to the performance of virtual identity. Also, the selection of topics were analysed for gender cues, and finally, language was checked to evaluate the users’ writing style.

6.8 PHASE 4: TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION OF DATA

6.8.1 TRANSCRIPTION OF THE DATA

Transcription refers to the ‘process of reproducing spoken words, such as those from an audiotaped interview, into written text’ (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006: p. 21). Poland
(2001) stated that the transcription process is a way of transforming the audiotaped interviews into texts to make it available for the following procedures of coding and analyses which are central parts in qualitative research (Poland 2001: p. 629). It could be noted that adopting such methods will generate another form of data which is necessary for the analysis process and then provides an additional contribution to the study. A number of researchers have asserted the importance of the transcription process as a part of the project methodology. For example, Wellard & McKenna (2001) affirmed that the transcription process should noticeably be acknowledged in the methodology of the study as part of the data analysis process.

Crabtree and Miller (1999) stated that rendering verbal or visual discourse into written text through the transcription method is a complicated process (Crabtree and Miller 1999: 106). As a result, it is essential in the transcription process to choose a particular style which should be in correlation with a research question. The choice of the transcription method adopted in the present study for all interviews was a verbatim technique which was selected as a suitable one because it offered a deep understanding of the participants’ perception of their experiences in acting with different identities. Poland (1995) stated that verbatim transcription is the process of exact reproducing of verbal recorded data into word for word written text. Thus, a verbatim process is valuable as it results in a close understanding between the researcher and the data through the process of analysis. Furthermore, since the interviews were conducted in Arabic, a verbatim method of transcription might be the best source for the translation of the collected data into English.

After finishing the fieldwork and collecting data from the participants via face-to-face interviews, time was spent transcribing each interview utilizing the verbatim transcription method to transfer the verbal recorded data into written texts. Participants’ body language and movements such as gestures and expressions were important elements that were recorded and utilized in understating the users’ perception. The significance of these aspects lies in the fact that they contributed to understanding a number of cultural elements concerning online use. For example, women participants’ way of talking, looking, sitting, words and expressions and tone of voice were among elements that I used to benefit from in comparing between participants behaviour online and offline. Using certain expressions such as sex, nudity, filtering men were among such stuff escaped by
participants in offline interviews. I paid close attention to paralinguistic cues such as tone, pauses and laughter. Letters were used to indicate specific moves or acts conducted by the interviewee. For example, using ummm refers to the time that the participants take thinking before answering the question, while uooo refers to long sighs. Another example is the use of aaa for short pausing and hhhhh for laughter. In addition, when Arabic was spoken, I took context into consideration, i.e. I was careful to preserve the meaning, not simply the syntax of the interview. Several scholars such as MacLean, Meyer, & Estable (2004); Wellard & McKenna (2001) debated on the extent to which nonverbal cues (e.g., silences and body language) and emotional aspects (e.g., crying, coughs, and sighs) should be incorporated into transcribed text in addition to spoken words reproducing from an audiotaped interview and transcribed into written text.

6.8.2 TRANSLATION OF THE DATA

As indicated in the introduction, the study was conducted in Iraq and with Iraqi Facebook users; the primary research material gathered for the study was in Arabic. Thus, there was a necessity for translating all the collected data into English. Translation is defined as a process where ‘the meaning and expression in one language (source) is tuned with the meaning of another (target) whether the medium is spoken, written or signed’ (Crystal, 1991: p.346). In the qualitative research method, all transcriptions of the audiotaped recordings of the gathered information from interviews and observations of Facebook entries including both textual and visual contents (e.g., posts, the use of hyperlinks, choice of topics language use and images) were all translated into Arabic. So that translation could be claimed as an important element and a part of the methodology at certain levels. Temple and Young (2004) argue that ‘translators [...] also form part of the process of knowledge production’ (p. 164)

According to Larkin et al., (2007) ‘It can be argued that qualitative researchers need to justify their use of positivist ascribed methods of translation, particularly if the language is a major component of their research study.’ (p. 474). The process of translating the transcribed data collected from either interviews or user Facebook accounts was considered as a facilitating process in the study rather than as an independent research method. The data produced as a result of the translation process represented a significant
part of the analysing procedure. Furthermore, the value that the translation process added to the materials collected from the participants that disclosed various perceptions and views about the subject of the research.

In this study, the object of the research study were Iraqis for whom Arabic is their first language. Most of the data collected is in the form of a transcription of interviews and participants’ Facebook posts and comments mainly written in Arabic. Prior to the analysis stage, the researcher translated the whole data gathered from Arabic into English because it makes the research process more solidly valid. Translating the entire data before commencing the analysis stage is suggested by several researchers (Regmi, Naidoo, and Pilkington, 2010) because although the translation of the whole data before starting the process of analysis is time-consuming, it adds rigour and accuracy to the research process.

Every effort was made to construct an English version that faithfully represented the Arabic text. For translation and accuracy, the task of translation was given to a certified English translator with an excellent sociolinguistic competence and professional experience, whereas the researcher took the role of editing the transcripts and translations concerning the original recording tapes and the field notes. Then the researcher forwarded the translated transcripts to reviewers. Sperber (2004) stated that validation of translation could be achieved by using several methods; one of them is an evaluation by teams of bilinguals. The reviewers were two Iraqi holders of UK Ph.Ds. who are bilingual in English and Arabic native speakers of Arabic and fluent speakers of English, and excellent cultural knowledge. According to Emmel (1998) using different researchers is the only way to ensure accuracy in the translation process. Also, the researcher makes sure to avoid any misleading Arabic data that might not produce precise and exact meaning if it is translated into English such as old or informal Arabic words and proverbs used by Arab people to describe particular events or situations in their daily life. The diversity and availability of the data related to a specific topic allowed the researcher to choose the one that has the most straightforward meaning to translate and convey. Based on these steps that include translation, researcher verification and external review of the translation, the final English version was then prepared for use in the analysis stage of the study of the Iraqi participants’ data.
6.9 PHASE 5: ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

6.9.1 THE PROCEDURE OF QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative nature of the research study is mainly concerned with enhancing understanding and portraying the reality of the individual construction of online identity, experiences, and interactions in a particular environment of Facebook. As a result, the process of data analysis required a systematic examination of the data to be able to decide what ideas and patterns could be identified. This systematic examination demanded following specific steps regarding how to work with data, determine its parts, organizing it, finding relationships and patterns with past research, and new knowledge. The combination of the data collection methods and the nature of the environments (offline/online worlds) from which the data gathered dictated the employment of different methods of analysis. Interview transcripts, data collected from participants’ Facebook accounts and profiles and online visual and textual contents require a particular procedure of investigation. As a result, the study considered two different methods of analysis, those of constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and Qualitative Textual Analysis. By combining these two approaches, the intention is to present rich and detailed explanations that provide an opportunity to make ample contextual judgments about the issue under investigation.

The data analysis procedure was an ongoing process that was adopted from the very beginning along with the transcribing process of participants’ interviews, and the digitalization of online ethnographic notes. Despite the availability of several qualitative analysis programs that can carry out common qualitative analysis tasks such as Tams Analyser, Dedoose, and NVIVO, the researcher adopted manual analysis for ethical reasons. The first reason for not using NVIVO, was to avoid bringing the data collected from interviews to the university and work on it due to its sensitivity. The second reason was that bring all the data collected and start the process of uploading it to the program consider problematic. These data include a lot of identifiable personal information of the interviewees which represent a huge threat to them. I was dealt with these data very carefully and vast efforts put to avoid using into different computers or uploading it into different programs. Also, uploading the interviews transcripts raise a lot concerns as they might be located or hacked. The main concern that I kept in mind is to protect my
interviews and their information against any possible threat. The process of transcription, analysis and utilization were conducted on my personal computer.

As a starting point and for data management, organization, and analysis, specified profiles for each informant were created that include the background interviews and their online data (their Facebook profile investigations, their Facebook wall both textual and visual contents). According to Merriam (1998) conducting initial data analysis along with the data collection process is beneficial because it will help to frame the study through a consistent reflection based on the perceptions gained from the data. Also, a careful examination of both offline and online data directly after the consent forms received from the informants was conducted. Memos and notes regarding the informants’ perceptions, feelings and thoughts were recorded so that they could be utilized for the theoretical analysis of their experiences.

Constant comparative method of grounded theory approach was the first technique of analysis performed. The continuous comparative process was selected for this research study because it provides the opportunity to work with data. According to Glaser and Strauss, grounded theory is constructed as a practical method to study research that focuses on the interpretive process by analysing the ‘the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings’ (Gephart and Sara, 2004: p.457 and Suddaby, 2006: p.633). As the aim of study is to investigate the gender performance on Facebook through exploring participants from both genders male and female tactics of the identity construction and self-presentation. The study considered both concepts ‘performance’ and ‘performative’ very carefully. Butler introduced the idea of performativity in the first chapter of Gender Trouble when she states that ‘gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed’ (GT: 25). The performative produces certain impacts that can lead to consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman. However, I was more concerned with role individuals have taken on or they are acting in some way and that their acting or their role played are crucial to perform being a person and shape the identity presents to the world. This idea is more linked with performance that certain individual put or act for audience which is the aim of the research rather than performativity that aim
to focus on certain acts to emphasize the sense of being man or women (see chapter two). As a result, the use of this approach. The use of constant comparative method of grounded theory approach allows me to study and investigate the participants’ experiences, perceptions, and views and reflect on these elements fairly and without pre-conceived ideas (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Throughout the research process, a systematic coding of the data was conducted using written analytical and reflexive memos.

Preliminary codes emerged from the data and the raw material recorded which have significantly informed the analysis stage. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) stated that the analysis of the field data with theoretical and practical sensitivity represents the beginning of the challenge. Mixing between several elements such as the research process, the personal researcher perspectives regarding the research topic, and constant reflection on the data enabled the identification of the possible themes and categories as well as shaping the analysis procedure and direction of attention (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This procedure indicates that the research is following an inductive style of theorizing as it mainly depends on the themes and categories that emerged from the raw material and in some cases a deductive one, to frame the analysis (Dye et al., 2000).

The data collected was also approached via online ethnographical observation regarding how informants manage their Facebook profiles and their Facebook wall posts, comments, and share contents. The virtual ethnography process for the users Facebook accounts focused on two periods, the period before and after interviews to examine users’ performance online. Additionally, an initial process of analysis was conducted regarding Facebook profile data related to names, profile picture, personal information, and posted pictures, and observation of the informants’ Facebook wall contextual and visual posts. This type of social data is an important element that can explain the relationship between users’ online identity, culture, and their audiences. According to Bauer et al., (2014) ’Qualitative researchers also observe and personally witness what people are doing, how they deal with themselves, things and other people. These observations often transformed into text formats.’ (p. 4). The word text was related to all the online data including textual posts, comments, images and audio hyperlinks. Still and moving images can also be considered as a form of text that can interpret and provide meaning. Bainbridge (2008) stated that ’we can read image texts just as we would a written text. This shouldn’t be that
surprising, for, after all, the literal definition of photography is ‘writing with light’” (p. 232). As a result, it can be noted that there is a different form of texts. According to McKee (2003:4) that ‘the word ‘text’ has poststructuralist implications about the production of meaning’ and could refer to a book, a TV programme, film, magazine, T-shirt, or anything that anyone derives meaning from. Textual analysis, therefore, ‘is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world’ (McKee, 2003: p. 1).

Using texts was a way for understanding issues outside the text itself. For example, things related to cultural or social structure. ’Text elements are treated as if they were symptoms of hidden processes like a fever is the symptom of the body fighting an infection. We might compare the vocabulary of different texts as indicators of social class positions, or grammatical feature changes as indicators of social change.’ (Bauer et al. 2014: p.9). Both the epistemological nature of the research and the textual interaction through users’ online contents posted on Facebook wall gave the reason for employing a Qualitative Textual Analysis approach as another method of analysis of online data. As media theorist McKee (2003) puts it’ Qualitative Textual Analysis is a methodology a data-gathering process— for those researchers who want to understand how members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live.’ (p.1). Qualitative Textual Analysis used in this study is concerned with written language of the posts and comments participants use about certain topics on their Facebook wall. The main aim of using the Qualitative Textual Analysis method was to study the meaning that such participants’ utterances or posts generate in particular context and interaction within the site and their benefit from the affordances of the platform. According to Bauer et.al (2014) QTA perspective is ‘emic’; tries to understand intentions of the author, the text itself, and of the reader/audience from their perspectives. QTA is a more bottom up, heuristic analysis, supporting an interpretative process rather than revealing ‘facts’ of the text. QTA is more concerned with the symbolic than the conceptual meaning of texts (15). By using QTA, an inductive logic is followed in which the primary concern and focus was on the connotative meaning relating more to practical aspects of texts than their content.
The purpose of this study was to investigate the range of claimed identities that men and women created on Facebook by looking at the process of identity consecution and self-presentation to identify how they negotiate the cultural constraints in their environment. Identify these issues was significant since there were not many studies investigated users’ performance and identity consecution in Iraq. Interviews and ethnography methodologies were deemed the best choice for this study because they are effectively captures the lived experience of my research participants and it also serves as a means by giving voice to those who are chained by social and cultural norms, marginalized groups or whose stories never told. As a qualitative researcher, I simply believed that my belonging to the Iraqi Arab culture would help significantly in reducing the challenge of understanding my participants’ experiences, as well as the meanings they assigned to those experiences. I did not, however, expect that the process will be as personally challenging as they turned out to be. As a researcher I experienced an amount of tension stemmed from the insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives. Olive (2014) argued that ‘given the inescapable subjectivity that every researcher brings to a study through his or her past experiences, ideas and perspectives, a solely emic perspective is impossible to achieve. Conversely, if a researcher takes a purely etic perspective or approach to a study, he or she risks the possibility of overlooking the hidden nuances, meanings and concepts within culture that can only be gleaned through interviews and observations.’ (p.4). Being an Iraqi researcher and member of the culture under study required me to move between emic and etic perspectives. The emic perspective originated from my familiarity with Iraqi culture as well as having details of practices and beliefs of the society as well as a member of my culture that positioned me as an insider who is living in the same society and subject to the same social norms and code of behaviours. Number of educational scholars perceived the emic as being more relevant to understand the cultural experiences of a particular group and in the interpretation of a culture (Saville-Troike, 1989; Garcia, 1992; Godina & Mccoy, 2000;). Olive (2014) stated that ‘the basis behind the thought that the emic perspective is more relevant is that it is impossible to truly comprehend and appreciate the nuances of a particular culture unless one resides within that culture.’ (p.3). Emic viewpoints are always the result of having an ‘insider’ perspective of a certain community or culture which can provide better explanation regarding the relationship between
circumstances and outcomes that outside experts are unable to offer because they lack the knowledge to offer such perspective (Gaber and Gaber, 2010; Pike, 1967; Raymond et al., 2010). As an insider in this study, it helped me significantly in avoiding the need for any efforts to establish even the basic knowledge about the culture in regard to several issues such as relationships, interaction and communication between men and women, and social behavioural codes. Furthermore, being an active user of Facebook, for me was another positive factor due to the wide social networks I have on the site and the experience I gained from my exposition to various situations regarding the use of social media in Iraq. It also enabled me to understand and explain all the nuances of my participants’ performances on Facebook. According to Yin (2010), "an emic perspective attempts to capture participants’ indigenous meanings of real-world events" (p.11) and "look at things through the eyes of members of the culture being studied" (Willis, 2007, p.100). Despite the advantages that I gained from being an insider, there were certain disadvantages that arose in the study because of this position. What I failed to account for at the beginning of my study were the myriad sublevels that may exist within each environment and the fact that, like cultures, humans’ interactions and conceptions evolve with time. Thus, number of disadvantages emerged as a result of this position such as leaving parts of the participants experience and words without explanation because of my understanding of their experience or the words they said. Moreover, through the interview and in listening to my participants' comments and because of my familiarity with and position of being part of the culture that I was studying, this made me feel related to my participants which in turn led me to narrow some of my questioning which consequently limited the interaction with the participants of the study. Therefore, an etic perspective was also required to avoid any issues that might affect this aspect of my research.

As a researcher, I took an etic approach to the study because it helped me to reflect on the interview data from an "outsiders" view. Lett (1990) defines etic constructs as "accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed regarding the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers" (p.130). By positing myself as an outsider, I become a detached, and more objective observer of my culture and was able to avoid any disadvantages such as an ethnocentric perspective or interpretations that might emerge from considering my data too much in light of my own culture. Being able to distance myself provided me with the opportunity
to look and analyse my data from the eye of an outsider. Shook (1985) stated that ‘to gain an etic perspective on culture, your own or someone else’s requires even more work. Not only do you need to understand the emic perspective of the culture in question, but you must also be able to emotionally detach yourself from that culture, to arrive at objective, testable hypothesis to explain observed behaviour and beliefs.’ (p. 68).

As a qualitative researcher, both perspectives were used throughout the study. It was possible to maintain a balance between emic and etic views which was a crucial part of the depiction of the participants. Although maintaining a particular level of balance between emic and etic perspectives was challenging, it provided me with the ability to play both roles as an insider who can give an emic perspective about the culture and participants under study and outsider who can preserve the distance needed when analysing the data. For example, as an insider I understand men and women status in Iraqi community and how I should deal with them and how their performance and interaction should be in line with cultural rules and norms in offline life. On the other hand, and as an outsider I was able to build an etic perspective when I looked at their interactions in online environment and analyse them out of these norms. Being able to position myself outside this situation enable me to avoid misinterpret of these interactions from being considered as a breach to code of behaviour. I was also able to configure the reasons for such interactions and performances online and linked them with purpose of Facebook use and identity consecution in online environment. As a qualitative researcher, I did not perceive the difference between emic and etic perspectives as a limitation, but as an opportunity to build and wider understanding of what is happening in the Iraqi community. AGAR (2011) argued that, ‘etic and emic, the universal and the historical particular, are not separate kinds of understanding when one person makes sense of another. They are both part of any understanding’ (p.39). In this way, the divergence between these two perspectives can prove fruitful as YIN (2010) has explained that ‘a common theme underlying many qualitative studies is to demonstrate how participants’ perspectives may diverge dramatically from those held by outsiders’ (p.13).
6.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The rigour of the data in qualitative research is considered an essential element for ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative findings and the study’s quality. According to Padgett (2008) rigour can be achieved via using specific criteria and strategies specified for assessing credibility in qualitative research and inquiry. Scholars have suggested number techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of the data gathered such as dependability, confirmability, transferability, and credibility in qualitative research that are in a place of traditional practices of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Merriam, 2009). Credibility presents the degree of the consistency between the findings with reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The key element to the internal validity of a study is the credibility of the data and findings. Morse (2015) suggested several strategies to achieve rigour such as persistent observation, reliability, prolonged engagement, debriefing; negative case analysis; member checking; external audits; triangulation and clarifying researcher bias. (See also Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The researcher utilized three strategies were used in the present study - member checking, peer-debriefing and adequate engagement with the data - to provide an assurance of quality and establish rigour.

6.11.1 MEMBER CHECKING

Member checking is one of the means utilized in the present research study to assure the trustworthiness of qualitative data. Several scholars such as Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1995, Creswell & Clark, 2007, and Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, refer to this method of as one of the most valuable ways of checking data. The involvement of this method helped to eliminate any possible injection of personal perception, misinterpretation, and biases into the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After finishing the transcription stage of the written interviews, the participants were sent a written copy of their transcriptions via email, to provide them with a chance to look over their transcribed interviews for review and comments as well as to inform the researcher about any mistakes or ambiguous parts that need more clarification. This step helped the researcher to employ the participants’ comments and views for accuracy and, therefore, their credibility and trustworthiness. All participants approved their transcribed interviews sent
to them as a confirmation of the credibility of their data. The participants were contacted for a second time after finishing the initial analysis of the interviews to ask them to check the data sent to them regarding any incorrect perceptions of their perspectives or any misinterpretations. Participants’ notes were considered, and any data requiring amendment was reanalysed.

6.11.2 PEER DEBRIEFING

Peer debriefing is another technique utilized in the present study to ensure data credibility. Creswell & Miller (2000) defined peer debriefing as a process in which the qualitative data and its analysis procedure are reviewed by another individual who is familiar with the research problem. According to Guba (1981), peer debriefing “provides inquirers with the opportunity to test their growing insights and to expose themselves to searching questions” (p. 85). During the research process and the course of data collection, seek support was sought from another professional. The researcher used to organize regular meetings with Dr. Ayad Hammood who has professional experience in qualitative research, for support, feedback and to debrief over each stage. Throughout the entire study, the researcher used this procedure, as suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000). Many suggested ideas and feedback were provided by Dr. Hammood that reflect significantly on the processing of the data and enhance the research credibility. For example, one way of establishing the ‘credibility’ is by what we called code revision by testing the coding process. I coded one of transcripts and asked him to code the same transcript and then checking any similarities and differences in both versions of resulted sets of codes. This process was helpful in clarifying and confirming the research findings.

6.11.3 ADEQUATE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DATA

Adequate engagement with data is the third strategy that was used to get closer to the participants’ perceptions regarding the phenomena under investigation. The Adequate Engagement technique requires the researcher to make judgments about several elements including how many people need to be interviewed, the number of questions the researcher should include in the interview and the adequate length of interviews
(Merriam, 2009). This process starts in the research process from the initial stage of data collection until no new information surfaces with new data and repetition are occurring (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This method was used from the initial stages of the data collection till the point of saturation reached in the research study. A careful and adequate procedure was adopted during the research so that every detail was noted and every step in the research procedure described. A log was kept to include all the information about how a decision was made throughout the research process and how the data was gathered and analysed as well as reflections and insights included for data credibility.

6.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues were an important part of, and it is formulated for, the research study due to the sensitive nature of the phenomena under investigation. As the nature of the research is sensitive, an ethical approval was attained from De Montfort University- Faculty of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee before the gathering process of primary research data. An ethical request form was submitted and, with a few minor adjustments, the request approved and permissions to conduct primary research via interviews were accepted. It was the researcher’s responsibility to tackle any ethical issues that might arise throughout this study. Merriam & Tisdell (2015) stated that ensuring the moral rigour of any research is mostly the researcher’s responsibility even with the availability of the ethical guidelines for the researchers. Several ethical considerations for this study were taken. For example, providing full information about the research study via a participant information sheet about the purpose of the study, participants’ consent form, limiting researcher bias, the process of conducting the study, the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part, and participants and data confidentiality.

For the researcher, having plans to deal with ethical issues planned was an important part of the research study because of the ethical issues that might arise during the investigation. Both methods of collecting data (interviews online and offline, ethnography) as well as the data itself were carefully tackled and handled for participants’ security. Before the offline interview (face-to-face interview) the participants were contacted and provided with a brief description about the study, duration of the interview, the rights of the interviewee and the method of recording for collecting data. Then, interviewees agreed
upon the location for conducting the interview. Signed consent was received from each informant before commencing the interview. The same procedure was applied to the online interviews in which participants received the same documents and information regarding the research study.

Due to the nature of the study, several important issues arose during the interview. Participants talked about the type of experience they had on both online and offline life and compared them, they raised or discussed several stories, painful memories, and feelings. This risk was mitigated by offering the participants the chance to talk about their feelings and emotions. The interview in this sense might work as a vent where they can disclose their feelings and deep feelings. Another issue was the identity they put online which is unknown and created as well as the nature of the topics they discuss especially women, and that might be problematic for them. For this reason, the researcher followed specific measures to mitigate this risk and to minimize any potential harm, for example, reducing the amount of data presented in the study as well as avoiding mention of any personal information that might lead to disclosing the real identity of the participant.

The researcher also guaranteed the anonymity of the participants and the data put in their account or the topics discussed. Online data and friends' lists were dealt with carefully due to the social and cultural restriction imposed and the nature of the society regarding the relationships. Finally, ethical issues might arise regarding a bias that restricted the understanding of the participants’ interviews and interactions in any stage in the course of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher aimed to limit bias by distancing himself and acting like an outsider. This position helped the researcher and gave the opportunity to perceive the data of each of participant’s culture more objectively. It also was beneficial to avoid imposing subjective cultural knowledge creating bias or misinterpreting pieces of the data.

6.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has described research methodologies relevant in social sciences in general and media in particular. It also outlined the principal method used in the process of collecting the primary data. A rationale for utilizing specific techniques and methods for
managing data regarding construction and performance of users’ identity on the Facebook platform has been provided. The chapter began with an introduction and a brief description of its parts. The research has four phases that consist of methods and techniques to collect and analyse the data. The use of each method is complementary. The first phase discussed the participants’ recruitment, the target population, and the sample size which consisted of respondents from both genders in Iraq. The second phase includes information about the data collection methods adopted in the study which were interview method that comes in the form of (face-to-face interview and internet interview) with Iraqi female and male users and virtual ethnography (online ethnographic observation). Transcription and translation of data is the third phase. The last stage focused on the methods used in the process of analysing the data collected from the participants. Techniques employed in this study are appropriate for collecting the data in both online and offline settings.
CHAPTER 7: CREATING AND PERFORMING ALTERNATIVE PERSONA ON FACEBOOK

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the important role that social media sites in general, and Facebook in particular, plays in everyday lives of users in Iraq. The main focus of this part is to examine how identity is performed on the Facebook profile which represents an affinity space (see Gee, 2003, 2004, 2012), where individuals are afforded by spaces that allow them certain interactions that are not available to them in offline life. This point is achieved by looking at the way in which the self is managed and presented to the audience, without paying any attention to the fact that this will be a true (real) or a false self, because this question is beyond the scope of the study. The main aim that the research wants to achieve is to find how Iraqi users of Facebook utilize the sites to perform certain roles through their performed identities and what they say about themselves and how they behave to convey that. The benefit gained from online anonymous communication seems to be different between males and females as it is claimed to lead to greater gender equality especially for women who usually have been described as politically, socially, and economically less powerful gender. This is happened as a result of the ability that technological environments have in removing the barriers to participation. Several scholars such as (Palmer, 2012; Belk 2013; and Chen, 2014) indicate that millions of individuals are using their digital devices in a way that they never experienced before. However, most of these studies conducted in the West or in the Middle East (but none about Iraq) do not consider how the media could be utilized as a device that enable the users to participate in different activities not allowed to the them in their offline life.

Performing alternative persona is possible in digital milieu if it is seen as playful or considered as a potentially liberated environment in which individuals become able to break down the social and cultural barriers of offline life. This performance is facilitated by the affordances of the digital environment mainly through anonymous interaction. Hiding real identity is reported to be one of the strategies to achieve anonymity. This kind of anonymous interaction allows the users to separate their online and offline lives. Maintaining different identities in to different worlds seems to be in line with Goffman’s
Goffman’s (1959) dramatic metaphor which considers the social interaction as a form of theoretical play, offers a good way to explain why users in Iraq adopt alternative persona when interacting in Facebook. These findings affirm the applicability of Goffman approach in offline life to online. Separating between different performances and roles can be done online according to what the research participants stated in the interviews.

The idea of frontstage and backstage is all about where people can do their roles and where they do their performances. For example, frontstage is the playing area where individuals can show different content and interact with different people, while keeping the backstage area for their offline connections such as family, friends, relatives and acquaintances. According to Zhoa et.al (2013) ‘The performance region is where users make decisions about creating and managing content for current self-presentation needs. The content is usually targeted to, or associated with contexts and audiences relevant to the moment.’ (p.4). Simply put, Facebook with all its technological facilities creates a performative space for trying new identity and playing different roles as the user who they act to be. Participants in the research study reported creating separated identities in the same platform (Facebook) to enable them to interact freely and overcome the cultural and social barriers as well as to perform different gender roles. Their decision to seek anonymity on Facebook was influenced by their desire to manage boundaries between their environments and to liberate themselves from offline restrictions.

This chapter consists of two main phases: the first phase discusses the findings regarding the voice that the participants gain on Facebook as an ‘affinity space’ by performing in different identity. This space allows for more new interactions and communication which participants lack in their offline life. It focuses on their social and political engagement that is not available for them online especially women due to cultural and social norms that prevent them from having that role. The second phase concentrates on the benefit the participants acquire from Facebook in terms of constructing personal relationships and social capital. Individuals were able to build new relationships and expand their social networks online which in turn enhanced their social capital. The types of the relationships achieved online are the ones our users cannot form in their offline life because they consider against the rules of culture and the behavioural code of conduct of the society.
These relationships represent important resources for the participants as they offered economic, social and health benefits.

7.2 SECTION 1: THE PUBLIC DIGITAL SELF: GAINING VOICE ON FACEBOOK

7.2.1 FACEBOOK AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIALISATION

There have been several uprisings that swept across the Middle East and North Africa in early 2011 (Bruns, et al., 2013), to call for reform or bring down long-standing regimes, many in close proximity to Iraq. Social media and the Internet played a significant role in fostering these revolutions (Hermida, 2010). This role was really prominent due to the capabilities provided to people, especially those who were considered weak or subordinate, such as women in Arab culture. Iraq was not isolated from this situation and Iraqi male users found Facebook to be a liberated environment where they could express themselves and call for change and reform (Al-rawi, 2014). However, women participation in the political sphere was not clear and their roles seem to be restricted to certain extent. This fact is due to the restriction imposed on women in comparison to men in the context of Iraq.

This section examines the utilization of Facebook as a platform for political engagement by the female participants of the study. The analysis of the data collected from the interviews gathered clearly reflects the participation of females in political issues. I first provide extracts from their interviews to provide an example of their intention to participate in discussions over several local and regional political issues, and also to demonstrate how participants address different audiences (at both the national and international level). The second step includes an overview of how participants’ accounts of Facebook, via wall posts, used the comments section as a platform for political expression. The examples presented in this section shed light on the way that benefits from Facebook express their opinions and ideas about offline political news or events on their Facebook wall. Additionally, it illuminates how Facebook enables individuals to ‘escape’ from offline social restrictions and navigate them, and create their own virtual communities where they can freely express their political identity and attitudes. They also
seek to perform alternative persona, for political reasons, hiding their personal identity on Facebook from everyone they know in their offline life, such as family members, friends, and relatives. They consider that move as an important tactic to protect their existence in reality as well as their personal information when they wish to use the Facebook medium to criticise the existing government or regime.

7.2.1.1 FACEBOOK AS A PLATFORM FOR POLITICAL COMMENTS

One of the issues that most of the participants from both genders in this study discussed was the value of Facebook use as a liberated space for expression and communication as well as an opportunity to informally post a political comment (Bruns, et al. 2013). They express their opinion by posting their comments either by written language or by using visual content which comes in the form of pictures related to particular events in Iraq. Some of these comments or visual content come in both languages Arabic and English especially by the bilingual users who act as ‘boundary riders’ who aim to facilitate the information flows to different language communities and connecting between them. A number of previous studies about blogging noted such a situation within the MENA region in which bloggers start writing wiring their blogs in both language Arabic and English. This new case lead Zuckerman (2008) to consider these sites as ‘bridgeblogs’, intended to inform readers ‘from a different nation, religion, or culture’ (p. 48). Their network comprises a variety people, who hold different nationalities and religious, ethnic backgrounds. However, most of the people in their friend lists are those who share similar views and opinions. Several participants stated in their interviews that the role Facebook played in their social and political life was significant. For example, Facebook female participant (SS) reported the importance of using the Facebook platform to allow her to post her comments and views regarding certain political events. She considered the site as an outlet where she can express her views and opinions without being criticized. She stated:

'Iraqi women find in these networks an outlet to publish and post their views on political, social and cultural events in their own countries and the world, but they still impose on themselves a great deal of self-censorship to avoid being criticized by their of society.’ (SS, female, Iraq)
Another female participant (SM) described a similar sentiment, when she said:

'The virtual environment is an appropriate shelter for us as girls to practice activities that are denied by our community for various pretexts, including social, political and religious reality.’ (SM, female, Iraq)

Several Iraqi females who participated in the research study reported using Facebook by updating their account and posted several status updates a day as the way to comment on different issues relating to political topics during the period of online observation. SM made her political engagement clear during that period by using visual content. She posted comments on several issues on her Facebook profile such as the issue of sectarianism which is considered one of the most controversial topics among the local political issues that affect the social structure in Iraq. She called people through her posts to reunite as Iraqis, rather than along sectarian divisions.

Figure 7-1: People from different religions and ethnicities holding banners against sectarianism
It is clear from the picture posted by SM in (Figure 1) that she wants to disseminate her call for all sects of the Iraqi community to unite and show the people inside and outside Iraq that there is no real difference between Iraqis.

Similarly, Female participant DK also posted material about this controversial topic by using visual content to describe a new kind of drug (that affects the younger generation in Iraq.

![Figure 7-2: The most dangerous type of drugs](image)

She tried to show the consequences of this negative issue on Iraqi community and compare its danger with the drugs and how it destroys the person(s) addicted to it.

Female participants also stated the different benefits to be gained from using an alternative persona on Facebook. They stated how Facebook became the avenue to post their views and express themselves without fear. For example, SI reported that the capabilities of Facebook allowed her to post things completely different from what she is doing in her real account especially in talking about a political situation in the country and how the politicians have taken the situation from bad to worse:
'The created account helps me to post whatever I want of posts which are totally different of what I post in my real accounts. I do post my anger against the politicians who destroy the country.’ (SI, female, Iraq)

HM, another female participant, reported that Facebook was useful as a tool that enabled her to avoid the restrictions and negative responses that might affect her offline life, but at the same time it also offered her the opportunity to shed light on, and to criticize, the situation in Iraq. She stated that:

’On Facebook I can post every subject without care or fear from harsh reactions. It represents to me the way that I can address my society with no limits or restrictions. Now I criticize, comment and analysis Iraqi situation, there are posts and comments obtained big interests and admiration of many people.’ (HM, female, Iraq)

Another female informant, AS posted a picture criticizing the situation in the country and presenting it as a war zone that is at once its past, its present, and the future that will be built on it. In the picture posted in (September 2017) by AS to convey her political concern about the situation in Iraq, she uses different semiotic resources that represent one of the distinctive aspects of her activities to convey that concern, focused mainly on the use of visual content. The sarcastic manner she commented on the picture she posted was one way of expressing her anger against the misguided policy adopted by the government, which left the country without a future. Here are two examples (translated) from May and September 2017 that she posted on her wall as a part of her posting activity.
The examples shown above from September (2017) (Figure 3) demonstrate AS’s concern about the future and the fate of the new Iraqi generation. The picture shows several children sitting while several bullets are seen scattered everywhere around them on the ground. She just tried to convey the sense of danger that surrounds the children of Iraq.
While in (Figure 4) from May (2017) she showed a child covered with blood after an explosion, being treated by a nurse in a hospital. Both posts received several likes and comments, which appeared to demonstrate agreement and support of people who shared the same concerns and views about the future of their children. The posts appeared on AS’s wall through visual observation indicates her constant concerns related to specific issues in Iraq, such as the future of the children, their suffering and deaths, and the need to protect children.

All examples presented above show the type of political engagement through the testimonies that the participants reported in the interviews and what was shared on their Facebook walls. They indicated in their conversation how, as a platform, Facebook became a place where they could feel free to express opinions which might be difficult or in some cases dangerous to do in the offline life, especially for women. For most of them, it is a good way to spread awareness and gain support from friends, and the friends of friends. The turn to online political engagement was a way to make their voices heard, and their actions matter.

7.2.1.2 FACEBOOK AS A PLATFORM FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM

In this section, I examine how participants seize the presence of Facebook in Iraq as an organizational tool that allows them to participate in social movement and political activities and address a wide range of people. Facebook plays a significant role in the social movement as it turned to become the new catalyst tool in the formation of such movements (Harlow, 2012). The presence of such new media allows ordinary people to conduct a series of contentious performances, displays, campaigns, and protests (Hensby, 2017). People utilised a tool in order to make collective claims on others, and utilize social media in their performances and campaigns regarding social, economic and political issues. Participants in the research study reported using social media sites mainly Facebook as a tool to organize their online campaigns. They stated that factors like censorship, repression, and real-life threats, that might hinder them from participating in mass mobilization, are absent online. The lack of these influences in online life represents to them motives and conditions for social movements and political participation.
Individuals and especially women feel more liberated on Facebook to use it for political actions that come in different forms as it will be discussed in this section.

Participants indicated the ease of ‘gathering’ on Facebook and finding people who share similar opinions, and who can address government officials or raise awareness regarding a certain case. Many female participants consider Facebook as an opportunity that allows them to play their real role and participants in making the change as their male counterparts do. For them, such opportunities in real life are rare or absent, due to the nature of life and the restrictions imposed on women’s lives in general and their political contributions in particular.

Several female participants discussed these issues such as TS and DN, and show the changes in their lives since they began to use Facebook. For example, female informant TS reported that her second account allows her to discuss several topics and participate in different events which in real life were limited to men. She said that:

’It has allowed (means the created account of Facebook) me to raise topics that were limited only to males and even participating in different events such as social and political ones. These new spaces ensured me freedom, power, and strengthen in my social relationships.’ (TS, female, Iraq)

TS participant’s informant’s posts in Facebook can be seen as a clear indication of her participation in the collective actions that are intended as a way of dealing with certain political issues. She makes posts shaped to address political and economic reform. The following post is an example of her posts, and a clear invitation to people to participate in facing the new project of monitoring the increase in electricity prices, because this allows the politicians to make money, but will affect the economic situation of the common people and intensify their suffering.
Her posts represent a campaign intended to oppose the politicians who want to pass the order that would increase electricity bills. She believed that the campaign was a way of influencing political opinions and policy decisions because government officials do not consider the situation of the people and their deteriorating economic situation.

**DN**, another female participant, conveyed her impression of the situation in the country and that it might contradict a prominent trend in her life. She said that:

‘Using a nickname has much to do with what I am willing to deliver of views that interfere often with the nature and the laws of the state where I live, so the political reasons, intellectual or social are key factors in this matter.’ (DN, female, Iraq)

In this extract, DN showed how her participation and views on her Facebook wall are affected by the situation in her country. She considered these situations as a key player that governed her presentation and participation in discussing various issues. DN also showed her participation in the central social movement and campaigns by sharing the important issues in the country. She involved herself in such issues by sharing and posting visual content related to them. In the following example, DN showed her disapproval of
the demand to remove the condition that required a suitable academic level for people who want to nominate themselves for governmental posts or parliamentary elections. She participated in a campaign named ‘don’t steal my voice’ as a part of her political engagement that supports the right of qualified young people to participate in national elections.

SS and NZ, both female informants, also reported the use of the Facebook platform as an organizational tool for political activism, to compensate the lack of such opportunities in physical life. They discussed the efficient use of social media networks particularly Facebook as a form of organizational infrastructure for activism that began with online environment and was transposed to the offline environment. Their aim was to make improvements in society as well as promote efforts for social, political, economic, or environmental reform. I will focus on two participants, who are (SS & NZ), due to their activist presence online.

‘In real life meetings people are limited because of our life and status of women, while in the virtual world of Facebook you can do that with hundreds of people. You are able to have discussions, views and knowledge of the best and raise

Figure 7-6: ‘‘don’t steal my voice’’ campaign, August 2017
several political topics in the country and gather people around you that can provide more support for your issue.’ (SS, female, Iraq)

SS’s Facebook interaction can clearly show her social and political activism as she always uses the platform to express her views and call for reform and encourage people to continue working on that and never give up. The following post is an example of her interaction on a Facebook account.

Figure 7-7: Soon…. Reform will not and never end, SS, Sept, 2017

NZ, a female participant, stated a similar reason in her interview regarding the use of her created Facebook account as a venue for activism which enables her to avoid any social or legal consequences. She mentioned that social media tools helped her to criticize or discuss any topic without fear. The virtual environment offered her the opportunity to circumvent the restrictions of the offline life and she said:

‘The freedom to act, write or criticize or discuss any topic is available on Facebook through the use of created character more than the real one. And this is the reason to use another account to get away from social and legal questions and to discuss different political issues especially in the environment where the state
is in the process of passing a law that may limit a lot of public freedoms through the Internet.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

For NZ, a Facebook account represents a method of direct interaction with her audience who share the same interests and views through different means whether they are written texts or visual contents. Her interaction and political engagement on her Facebook page when addressing her audience showed her willingness to utilize social media sites as an organizational tool in her performances and campaigns to raise awareness and concern regarding different political subjects in her community. NZ, in her posts and Figure 8 below, tries to mobilize public opinion to question the Iraqi politicians about what the government is doing to her people and community. She talked about the deteriorating security situation and the death that surrounded people everywhere.

NZ: ‘only in my country death is laughing to us and life is crying. Ooh Iraq’

Friend 1: It’s our destiny that we need to change by ourselves.

Friend 2: nothing left to us only tears and missing those people we love.

NZ: Yes, we need to change that fate; otherwise we will suffer the whole life.
NZ participant tried by posting such contents to bring attention to the importance of making change by addressing her audience because people are the only power that can achieve that change. Her posts represent a clear invitation for people to start questioning their government to stop the misery and troubled life in which they live.

In the above examples, participants tried to address their Facebook audience by sharing a message with different individuals inside and outside their community. They post their content in Arabic and English. Their aim is to form public opinion that can attract the attention of the national and international community, which might be considered as a power able to influence and make the required change, not only on the personal level but also on the national level. This kind of activism might reach the wide range of audiences as long as participants’ networks are public and comprise the different type of people and not only immediate or close friends. As a result of this interaction online can be regarded as an opportunity for the participants to express themselves and show their concerns, emotions, views, and opinions regarding certain issues and subjects on Facebook that might or might not create any changes in their country situation. Social media were important mostly as a tool for accelerating and facilitating.
Despite the fact that the uncertainty among TS, DN, SS and NZ female participants because they were hiding behind their created virtual identities while interacting on Facebook. Here, Facebook can be seen as a way that has enabled them to explicitly resist such a situation and express a critical view of the political setting in the country. According to Tufekci and Wilson (2012) ‘Political content online increased, with multiple campaigns by citizen journalists and online activists exposing poverty, corruption, and human rights abuses, including torture.’ (p. 364). The online environment impacts their behaviour and attitudes through changing and influencing the construction of themselves.

7.2.1.3 FACEBOOK AS A PLATFORM FOR CITIZEN JOURNALISM

In this section, I shed light on the way that participants in Iraq have harnessed social media platforms to facilitate producing and disseminating their journalism and opinions in a way that transgress the social and governmental control and censor. Social media tools and low entry barriers provide an accessible platform for citizen journalism where people can raise such issues with less or no concern by common people especially women in new democratic countries. Khamis & Vaughn (2011) define Citizen Journalism as the use of digital media tools to ‘report on events on the ground, uploading text and videos directly to the Internet or feeding the information and videos to media outlets.’ (p. 57). The dialogue took place via Facebook was used by participants as a source to bring public and the government attention to take actions, impose rules and regulations to prevent such acts. They benefited from the use of personalized digital technologies to produce raw materials and monitor events, express their opinions and create news content topics that were often considered taboo in their areas. Bruns et al., (2012) stated that 'Indeed, the emergence of these latter social networking spaces during the second half of the 2000s has yet again served to expand the range of participants available to engage in news dissemination, curation, and commentary.' (p. 9). They disclose several important issues such as corruptions, elections, and political issues and separation of powers in the country.

With their bold approach, participants have dealt with issues in the Iraqi context that mainstream media have ignored. In order to explore the role of social media in spreading information related to certain acts in Iraq. Most notable examples among the participants, who utilized the Facebook platform for citizen journalism, were female participants (FJ
and DK). Their method to act as citizen reporters through the type of citizen participation while dealing with national news stories such as security issues, postponing in the governmental project implementation in their areas because of politicians’ corruption, lack of services and health and life situation in the camps of displacement people whom fled from the war with ISIS in different parts of Iraq. Such citizen news and comments were especially important in – filling the gap created in the news industry because of its political parties’ manipulation, and acting as an alternative news media for some sensitive issues.

For example, female informant FJ, talked about security issues and the importance of reporting such news to help people and protecting them from being in certain areas in terms of danger. FJ talked about this issue and gave example about how she reported on of the explosion happened in her province and using Facebook as means to send awareness message to her people to report that situation. She said:

‘For me, Facebook is the important tool for disseminating news especially the security news, which is related to the life and security of my citizen........ especially as you know Iraq, the security situation is the unstable and possible risk to danger is possible at any moment.’

Researcher: can you give us an example?

‘One day I was in the city centre and an explosion happened in one of the local markets. I decided quickly to document the event and post it on Facebook for fear of the lives of people and persons I know from coming to the scene. So that I posted the news for its importance.’

Another example is DK female participant who stated in her interview the importance of Facebook in providing her space that she needs to report several issues related to her people’s lives. She reported the lack of services in different areas in her province which impacted negatively on the quality of life. She was asked to give an example of the issues that she reported on her Facebook wall. She talked about her experience in reporting the problem of trash in her neighbourhood and other areas in her city because of the corruption and how the city council did not take any measure in dealing with such problem. She said:
DK: ‘One of the most important uses of Facebook for me is my ability to convey the facts and address the topics that concern the life of the individual Iraq, especially with regard to his daily life and the quality of services provided.’

Researcher: can you explain more, please?

‘For example, the accumulation of waste in the neighbourhoods of the province and the failure of the municipal departments in turn and the local governments prompted me to publish this issue on Facebook and trying to convey it to the public opinion in order to draw the attention of the public opinion and central government to take the necessary measures.’

Both examples from FJ and DK illustrate the utilization of Facebook platform for the purpose of reporting certain issues and news in their community. Both female participants FJ and DK encouraged by the new space (Facebook) provided to them and support their position to communicate different topics that are not possible to disseminate and share in offline world.

7.2.1.4 FACEBOOK AS A VENUE FOR ENGAGING IN POLITICAL DISCUSSION

This section of the research presents and discusses the perceptions of the Iraqi interviewees of the freedom that Facebook offers them to discuss political issues as well as provides further insights into what they posted on their Facebook walls. Participants consider Facebook as the venue to raise their concerns and discuss political issues. When respondents were asked about the extent to which they freely discuss political issues, they indicated that the Facebook platform provides them with more opportunities to show and express their views and opinions freely regarding issues that they were concerned about. However, they stressed especially women that such freedom is limited in their real account due to the lines that are drawn by their cultural norms or the state. Some informants such as (RK, HM) described that situation and stated:

‘Facebook has contributed to strengthening my confidence and allowed me to express my opinion such social and political and in a different manner unlike that
one existed in real life. It also enabled me to overcome a lot of social and religious barriers and strengthened the way of dealing with others. Facebook is an open world more than the real life.’ (RK, female, Iraq)

‘Yes, it is, it helped me to participate in several activities that weren’t possible in my offline life without certain offensive. The simplest example of this is the possibility of expressing my opinion about political, social and even women rights without fear of criticism or sharp response that reminds me of being the woman and has no right to participate in such discussions and show any opinion in a society dominated by masculinity.’ (HM, female, Iraq)

Several informants especially women reported using the site for expressing and discussing political issues with people hold the same views and opinions. According to Harlow (2012) ‘users created Facebook Fan Pages and Groups, popular applications allowing anyone with shared interests to become a ‘fan,’ or join a ‘group,’ and participate in discussion forums and threads.’ (p. 226). Opportunities provided by Facebook enable participants to involve in political discussions the matter that is difficult to achieve in offline life due to restrictions and nature of gender roles in Iraqi society. For example, both female informants (FJ and RF) reported that fact in the extracts below and said:

FJ: 'The use of this site becomes a habit and we addicted to use it because we discover that it offers us a psychological comfort.’ (FJ, female, Iraq)

Researcher: what do mean by comfort?

FJ: ‘Over time, this episode becomes spontaneous more and more as it rooted in our nerve paths. As I a user, I became able to participate in various activities with greater freedom. Also discuss issues that are related to things that I love such as political subjects the matters that I really concern about in my country.’ (FJ, female, Iraq)

RF discussed this issue and said:

'I began using them to question many issues in Iraq and also in the exchange of views and disseminating the demands that call for better social, economic and political situation. Facebook represents an outlet to put all of these things without
fear of rejection because of the patriarchal nature of our society.’ (RF, female, Iraq)

NA female participant discussed how she is encouraged in the online environment to report and raise corruption issues that are difficult to bring up in offline life especially because of her situation as a woman in that she is prevented to a certain extent from raising such issues.

‘I can post my ideas and my orientations and urge the public opinion to face the corrupters not only on the political arena but also the social one, I can post everything without fear, many things I have posted through this created account that stimulate the public opinion.’ (NA, female, Iraq)

NA posts on her Facebook wall support clearly what is stated in the interview extract above in which she shares stuff that deals with such issues. She posted the following contents.

‘The war on corruption begins with removing the effects of the occupation, ending the legislations and foreign agendas, building the concepts of citizenship 100% percent, and eliminating the oppressors who managed in a historic moment to deceive the Iraqis.’ (Translated)

Figure 7-9: ‘’NO’’ for corruption, NA, May, 2017
SS, another female participant, reported using a Facebook platform to reveal her political concerns and to blame the politicians for such concerns. She expressed her opposition to the sectarian quotas and considers such matters as the negative factor that can weaken the government and reinforce sectarianism among people in Iraq. She reinforces her own views and works hard through her posts and comments to highlight the danger of sectarian quotas on the future of the country. Her posts were directed to the wide range of audience found in her Facebook friends’ list. She said:

’Sectarian quota that forms the government in Iraq is the biggest threat to the country and cannot get rid of participation and quotas and democratic consensus ... etc, only after the Iraqi parties change and exist from their religious and sectarian clique, and turn into national parties secular public and inclusive, each party includes members of all the components of the Iraqi people and their regions, without religious and ethnic entrenchments, or any discrimination, as in the political parties in mature democratic states.’ (SS, female, Iraq)

Female informant NT also posted several visual contents that call for change and to stop forming the government on the basis of sectarian quota. She refused to share the government between different religious and ethnic groups that form the Iraqi community. Below is an example of her posts on her Facebook wall that call and encourage her people to not give their voice in election for certain ethnic or religious groups but for people work for Iraq despite their religion or ethnicity

NT: ’my voice is not for sectarian quota.’

Friend 1: ‘We should end this play and call for change.’

Friend 2: ‘Political stability will not be achieved in Iraq without the elimination of sectarianism and sectarian discrimination and the building of a stable and prosperous new democratic Iraq.’

NT: ‘I hope people recognize that truth because the end of the real tragedy in Mesopotamia can only end with the end of sectarian quotas and the establishment of a modern democratic civilian state.’
Although the political issues raised on the Facebook site covered a wide range of subjects in the country as well as offering a space for discussions and support, the extracts of the research respondents were as critical of the state as those in other Arab countries have been. Several scholars stated that the use of social media in neighbouring countries has been used more directly to attack government officials and to blame the regimes for corruption (e.g. Alhammash 2012; Marzouki et al. 2012; Mansour 2012; and Khamis, Gold, and Vaughn 2012). The extracts demonstrate that they are not supporting offline political actions. Facebook is valued as a space for realizing personal anger and negativity to get support where the individual can act away from their social commitments as well as reveal the interest in creating revolutionary change and call for reforming policies. These findings are consistent with the work of scholars such as Wisniewski, (2013). Wisniewski’s argument about the internet and political engagements demonstrates that individuals offered opportunities through internet capabilities to expose their political opinions to diverse viewpoints and not be aiming for political action (Wisniewski, 2013). While study conducted by Wolfsfeld et al., emphasizes the use of Facebook in the Arab world which for political action (2013). In summary, we can say that social media as a new tool that allows freer political expression aimed at being more civically engaged where participation in offline political action is limited to certain group of people (males only).
7.2.2 USE OF FACEBOOK TO DISCUSS SOCIAL ISSUES

In the previous section, the idea of participants’ perceptions discussed regarding the use of Facebook and identified the serious issues that concern them, especially relating to the reactions of their community. Participants reported using the Facebook platform to express and present anger and negativity through text and visual content. They engaged with different audiences in an attempt to disseminate, share and discuss their views and raise awareness of several important political issues in the country. In this section, I move beyond the consideration of political issues to discuss interviewees’ perceptions about using Facebook to address a number of social and public issues plaguing Iraqi society.

According to McGrath (1980), social issues are aspects that are involved in the structure of society. He divided social issues into three proposed key categories: (1) Population (e.g., matters related to age, sex, nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and disability), (2) Settings (e.g., matters concerning health, family, culture, and social change), and (3) Processes or behaviours (e.g., matters related to human rights, bias, prejudice, cruelty, fairness, attitude change, social mobility, morals, and the influence of these organisational procedures on the social lives of people).

This section focuses on participants’ online engagement of the use of semi-public privacy and privately public zones that are considered as a relatively new experience for Iraqis. Iraqi participants in this study utilize this new sphere, which is open to strangers, to involve themselves with society and focus on social issues covering a wide range of topics, ranging from criticising some social norms to discussions and interactions about daily topics in their offline lives. The issues covered reflect individual attitudes which might be in the form of supporting or opposing, or in some cases, documenting the news in an unbiased manner and waiting for the reactions of others. The aim of the participants was to improve awareness of these issues as well as to use Facebook to send direct pleas to their audiences to address several issues in an attempt to improve their offline social behaviour. Here, the Facebook platform is used to engage in discussions of issues related to social reform, individuals’ rights, and gender equality issues in society and social criticism, which are mostly in-line with McGrath’s third category. For example, NA, a
female interviewee stated that her posts and interactions on her Facebook wall always dealt with social, moral and public issues that concern her about Iraqi society. She said:

“The nature of the topics posted is always conservative and are closely related to moral and social matters; issues that are of great interest to our community and society and that have an educational role to encourage good behaviour and the importance of morals.” (NA, female, Iraq)

7.2.2.1 ISSUES OF SOCIAL REFORM

Participants posted several textual and visual contents about important social issues in Iraq in general, and in their community in particular (e.g. NA, SS, and RI). They think about the Iraqi dilemma in a different way, that is not in-line with the prevailing thought among most Iraqis. The participants attributed these problems to social, rather than political factors. They believe that the problems in Iraq are purely social. As a result, they utilize their private public profiles to discuss these issues and concerns because they are of great importance to not only to their lives but also to those of most of their friends. Participants use their Facebook wall to report on these issues and discuss them with their audience. For example, NA raised the issue of disseminating information about education and educational curricula in Iraq as a means of remedying social disintegration among Iraqis. She criticizes the educational curriculum, especially at primary level, because they miss many of the important issues about educating children about the principles of citizenship and the definition of the homeland, while highlighting the contentious issues, such as religion and religious topics. She posted:

‘Towards a better educational level in Iraq

The advancement of education in Iraq starts by offering the students the curriculum that is in their best interests and deal with important issues, especially those related to the love of their country and the principles of citizenship, and they should avoid the controversial issues that cause an increase in the social divide between generations, especially topics of a religious nature.’ (NA, female, translated)
Here, she is not only criticizing the educational curriculum in Iraq but is also encouraging decision makers to produce a unified child-oriented rhetoric. She called for removing all misinformation related to education, based on flawed foundations that might cause social polarization. For her, this a particular issue that will require extensive effort to raise the level of educational performance and address the flaws that will have serious consequences. This, in-turn, will ensure social integration among Iraqis.

Furthermore, NA discussed the issue of Iraqi media outlets and the importance of supporting an independent media and helping reporters and journalists to commit to ethical standards. NA discussed the issue of an independent media and stated its importance to confront the manipulated media that contributes to broadcasting and intensifying the rhetoric of hate and violence in the country, resulting in social disintegration. Regarding this, she posted:

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

**Figure 7-11: Free and Responsible media, NA, July, 2017**

‘The importance of the existence of an independent media lies in its ability to confront the manipulated media, which produces material that contributes to the dissemination of hatred, violence and separation among the Iraqi people, and therefore independent media institutions that do not belong to any party or political fictions and that are completely
independent should be supported. This will help to convey the true and actual news without falsification, which then serves the unity of the Iraqi people and does not harm any of its components.’ (NA, female, participant, Translated)

NA calls for the existence of responsible and independent media organization in Iraq. She highlights the significant role the independent media outlets play in supporting the unity of people in Iraq and confronting hate speech. Her posts and comments received support from her friends who agree with what she proposed. They particularly welcome the proposal to establish independent media organizations to stop the dissemination of ‘fake news’ and lies that result in creating an unhealthy atmosphere when it comes to the dissemination of news and rumours. NA believed that the focus of some Iraqi media outlets on political disputes has fed and exaggerated social differences. Such topics have various social effects which are carried-over into various religious beliefs, and national viewpoints.

7.2.2.2 ISSUES OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

Issues of individual rights were also reported by the participants in their interviews and discussed on their wall posts on Facebook. Participants stated that discussing such topics were a part of their individual rights and also their role and responsibility towards their own people. This section focuses on RF’s online engagements. She is a participant who has a profile page that is open to strangers and the topics she discusses on her wall are mainly about issues that are linked to her offline daily life, e.g., issues regarding poverty and children’s rights in society. RF discussed the issue of poverty in Iraq and its inherent dangers. She posted about this issue on her wall and led a discussion following the years of wars and poor planning that underlie the spread of poverty. She aims to bring attention to the issue and push the government to plan and work towards a solution. She posted:

RF: ‘The high rates of poverty in Iraq that were caused by the years of war could be dramatically improved.’

Friend 1: ‘The government should take immediate action to combat poverty in Iraq because it is increasing dramatically, and this could lead to a catastrophe.’
She also focused on the humanitarian aspects and the importance of taking measures that will help people to face the threat of poverty and provide them with good living conditions. RF aims to bring attention to such issues by sharing them with her audience.

RF also raises issues about children’s rights in society. Using Facebook, she discussed the impact of the conflict on children in Iraq. She talked about one of the most serious issues faced by children in post-war Iraq, which is the issue of child labour. She expressed her concern regarding the difficulty of dealing with child labour in Iraq without collaboration between communities, governmental authorities and humanitarian organisations. She posted content that encourages all those responsible in the country to work on this issue and to protect Iraqi children. She said:

RF: ‘Child labour threatens a complete generation in Iraq.’

‘Child labour in Iraq is an extremely serious issue that requires extensive effort and collaboration between families and the government …. The efforts of the state institutions and politicians fall short when it comes to dealing with this social
RF not only criticizes the situation regarding Iraqi children, but also calls for the government to protect children’s rights and provide them with security. She delivers her message through her posts in an attempt to raise awareness among the ordinary people and government institutions about the importance of getting working children back to school and supporting them to ensure they do not become the victims of abduction, sexual violence, or are recruited into military groups.

7.2.2.3 ISSUES OF GENDER RIGHTS AND EQUALITY IN SOCIETY

This section presents and discusses interviewees’ perceptions of the opportunities that Facebook offers them to discuss issues related to women in Iraqi society and provides further insights into what they discuss on the Facebook platform. Participants indicated that Facebook provides them with opportunities to express their opinions freely regarding issues of gender rights and equality in society. They referred to the use of Facebook as a platform to raise awareness about important subjects related to women in Iraqi society, such as violence against women and sexual harassment. For example, ZH, a female

Figure 7-13: child labour [The image shows a child working in a Forge and doing hard job by cutting Iron], RF, June, 2015
interviewee was clear in the way she discussed her concerns about women’s rights in Iraq. She expressed her views and opinions on topics such as violence against women in Iraq. She criticized this violence and considers it as socially unacceptable behaviour that should be confronted and eradicated. She posts both text and visual content on her Facebook wall about this subject and expresses her opinions on the situation of women:

ZH: ‘Violence against women.’

‘The harsh circumstances experienced by Iraqi society during the past era have affected Iraqi citizens in general and Iraqi woman in particular. The various forms of violence witnessed by Iraqis have a significant impact on the increase of violence and violent behaviour, which is the result of three devastating wars and the severe economic siege, with horrific daily events that are at the basis of the feelings of some of the men towards women. The presence unjustified violence is evident in Iraqi society. The violent behaviour of some men towards women can be seen in various forms (verbal, physical or other), and can occur in the home, at work and in the streets. It is therefore necessary to find solutions that can help limit and eliminate this phenomenon of violence.’ (ZH, female, translated)

Figure 7-14: Say No to violence against women, ZH, Jan, 2016

ZH not only criticizes the phenomenon of violence against women in Iraq but also aims to generate awareness of this important issue, and to engage her audience in discussing it
and finding solutions that can help to limit and eliminate the phenomenon. She wants to help Iraqi women and girls by making sure they are fully aware of and understand their rights.

ZH also raises the issue of sexual harassment as a violation of human rights, causing Iraqi women physical and psychological suffering. On her Facebook wall she discusses the issue of sexual harassment as a type of violence against women and girls. She described how she felt it was her responsibility to raise awareness of this worrying trend in Iraqi society. Her post on her Facebook account also aims to deal with this issue, which is contrary to the ethics and religious rules of Iraqi society. ZH posted:

‘Say no to the harassment of women.’

The harassment of girls in Iraq is a serious issue and reflects a negative side of Iraqi society. The situation is especially rampant in many markets and public places across the country. Harassment of women takes different forms, such as verbal harassment and the use of foul language. Harassment took place in public streets where harassers attacked victims without any fear of social or legal action.’ (Translated)

Figure 7-15: A study about the harassment of women in Iraqi society which took place in 2016 by Shahrazad which is a civil society who support and protect the rights of women
Number of men participants (e.g., SJ, AB and YS) discussed the issue doing some women roles as a matter of spreading a sense of equality between men and women. They stated they support their wives by doing some domestic affairs. They indicated that they challenge the reality of their community and the norms because they live in Manish society. For example, SJ said that he always cooks for his family especially on holidays and sometime post on Facebook what he cooked to show his capabilities and share that with Facebook friends. He added that he cannot do that in his real account but he does it in his created account. He did not want to be mocked or criticized by his people.

‘I do cook to my family especially on holidays which is something not acceptable in our society that considers cocking women role and responsibility. I like helping my wife and show my friends my capacities in cooking. Frankly, I do that in my created account not in my real account and with showing my picture.’ (SJ, male, Iraq)

YS another male participant stated that he is professional hair dresser and he likes to show different haircuts and giving advices about hair caring. But, he said that he cannot do that neither in offline life nor in his real account on Facebook because it is something not validated by his people and community. It might affect his reputation as he does something that women should make for other women. He said:

‘I am a professional hairdresser, and I used to do haircuts for men in my city, I have a great passion for providing women hairdressing, but I cannot do that because of the social and cultural norms. I decided to go online and create a Facebook account where I can show my talents and give advice to women. I don’t want to ruin my reputation and shamed my family by doing something my society consider as women affair.’ (YS, male, Iraq)

The issues discussed above represent an example of those related to gender rights, roles and equality that were discussed by our participants on their Facebook walls. Facebook provides them with the opportunity to discuss sensitive issues and express their opinions.
and views freely. Also, they are freed from the offline constraints that prevent them from participating and sharing important issues in their community because of the gender roles and the position of women in Iraqi society. ZH aims to deliver and share her message with her Facebook audience worldwide to generate awareness that will motivate several individuals (such as community leaders, teachers, students and local communities) and entities (national and international organizations) to develop national plans and programmes to combat and end violence against women in Iraq.

7.2.3 USE OF FACEBOOK TO DISCUSS RELIGIOUS ISSUES

The use of Facebook to post and share faith-based content is common among the research participants. Several scholars (e.g., Miller, Mundey & Hill, 2013; Pew Research Centre: Religion & Public Life, 2014) indicate that religious ideals and activities online proliferate, particularly with the emergence of social media sites. The technological affordances of Facebook help facilitate the sharing of one’s own faith online or engaging with faith-based content. In this section I focus on religious issues that are ranked among the more important issues reported and discussed by Iraqi participants of the study, especially by the female participants. These issues reflect the significance of religion in our participants’ lives. Mishra and Semaan (2010) stated that research on online religious writing in the virtual world is rare, and even less so for the Islamic religion. A previous study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2012) indicated that religion is very important to up to 69% of Middle Eastern citizens.

The participants’ religious messages are directed to Facebook audiences both within and outside of their social networks. These messages include attempts to affirm and confirm their beliefs. They covered issues such as religious rituals, life after death, prayers through the use of Quran verses and quotes of the Prophet Mohamed, as well as of other famous religious advocates who have an important role in influencing people’s behaviour in Arabic countries. According to Campbell and Lövheim (2011), religious messages on the internet tend to reflect users’ personal missions; they provide a prophetic voice, define their faith, introduce others to the relevance of their faith, and engage friends and strangers in religious discussions. The role of women in delivering these types of messages to their audiences in a community such as Iraq is limited because of the status...
of women and traditional gender roles. Social barriers prevent them from being part of the societal system and have a reforming influence. However, Facebook provides women with a space where they can reach mass audiences through initiating wide social networks with similar and also different faith systems and beliefs, and deliver religious messages that are both educational and inspirational. For example, NA, a female participant reported that she used her Facebook account to deliver messages about Islam that were attributed to her alternative Facebook identity. The majority of Facebook friends in her created account are strangers and from different religions, mostly Christians. Her aim is to deliver a real message that can help to enhance the image of Islam. She said:

‘Most of the things posted on Facebook include religious content, some of which is in English, and the purpose of which is to direct a message that would improve the image of Islam to those that adhere to other religions, and at the same time, convey a true image of the reality of Islam that is contrary to the false images presented to the world.’

Figure 7-16: NA [A video clip posted talked about the real essence of Islam as a religion calling for peace and should be respected as other religions.], NA, April, 2015

The video she posted on her Facebook wall is in English and it talks about Islam and is a call for people from other religions to respect Islam as a sacred religion, as well as to
reflect on the real essence and rules of Islam. The video carried two important messages for her audience; Islam should be respected the same as other religions, and the dominant message in the Quran is that Islam is all about peace, care, loving God, and justice and respect for our neighbours. NA only uses online resources (videos) in an apparent attempt to ‘educate’ non-Muslims as well as the Muslim members of her audience.

Another example, SI, a female informant used her Facebook account to deliver messages to the Muslim members of her audience about women’s rights and how they should be treated by men according to Islamic rules and teachings. She posted content that deals with different religious issues and asked that Islam focuses on them and on respect for women. She described how she used the Facebook platform to deliver, in an indirect way, and especially to men, about respect, care and equality, which represent the core teachings of Islam. She delivered her message by posting a quotation from one of the main Islamic sources, the Prophet Mohamed. She also delivered that message by using one the most influential and famous religious advocates Ahmed alshuqari. Her message was about men showing respect for women, and dealing with them in the manner that they have learned from their Islam teachings, and not only using the teaches that allow men to marry four women, for example.

SI indicated her stand about women’s rights that in her post on Facebook wall and said:

‘European man goes with his wife to restaurant and feed her with his hand by cutting the meat and putting it in her mouth which is identical with what or prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) saying: (The greatest virtue of that man doing is a bite of food the he offered to his wife)’ (translated)
Participants NA and SI both used shared texts and visual posts to educate their audience and to deliver different messages. Their aim was to perform their role and be advocates for certain issues in their community. The contents posted by both participants were educational and suggested an attempt to send messages that related to topics that people should learn about when they interact with others.

7.2.4 USE OF FACEBOOK TO DISCUSS SPORT

This section sheds some light on participants’ views, regarding the use of the Facebook platform to obtain more social and cultural freedoms, especially to discuss traditional ‘male’ topics. Women in sport are a contentious topic in Muslim culture due to theological and cultural constraints. Theologically, for Muslims, the female body is the key concern.
with regards to women participating in sporting activities because it is regarded as sacred and holy (Hargreaves, 2007). Woman should be modest and hide their bodies from the eyes of men. Culturally, women in Muslim society are more acceptable if they show heterosexual femininity compared to the women who are perceived to be masculine (Krane, 2001: p. 155). Women are considered culturally deviant or labelled as a ‘tomboy’ if they display traditional masculine traits, and that is what hinders their participation in sport (Cooky & McDonald, 2005). This view about women and sport gives the impression that sports hold no interest in women in a Muslim culture, not only in terms of participation but also in relation to discussing or expressing any views on sporting topics. The participants stated that they have much more space to post their perspectives and talk about their opinions on various sporting topics. They indicate that they act differently and can move away from the traditional offline life that gives more freedom to men than women.

‘The virtual environment, where I have a different identity, affords much more freedom through which I can express everything that goes on inside my head. The most prominent example of that is my love of sport, and all of my family and friends knows that. However, I could not talk about or discuss any issues regarding this subject in front of them because they start to mock me and consider me as a ‘silly girl’. However, I can raise any subject on my created account and discuss it without fear or hesitance. I can find a lot of people who are happy to discuss these topics with me without worrying about my gender, which is different from reality. But at least I can prove to myself that I am important and not a ‘silly girl’, and I can discuss issues that people really like.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

Participants reported using social media, and particularly Facebook, to express ideas and opinions that are banned in the real world. Sporting topics are among those that are gender divided because they are normally considered solely as a topic for men. NZ found her experience of using Facebook to discuss sport was both remarkable and encouraging. In her interview, she mentioned that she used to post content about sports and supported all the sporting activities that she liked, such as football and basketball. She said:
‘Of course, sport is one of the most important things that I love in my life. I love football and basketball, but we are not allowed to talk about them because of our beliefs and traditions. In my society, sports are associated with men more than women, and if women express their liking for- and opinions on sport, they are considered to be abnormal. The emergence of Facebook has made things much easier, and I have been able to introduce sporting topics that I love and discuss them. I urge people, and especially women, to join in with sport and encourage them to do so.’

This shows how NZ enjoyed the freedom that Facebook gave her as a woman in Iraqi society to get involved in topics that are culturally difficult to discuss in real life. NZ also highlights her opinion of Facebook and the positive use of this medium to bring changes to her community and to individuals. She became something of an example for her audience and has pushed them to discuss things and bring such important issues to the forefront of their conservative society. Her answer was clear when I asked her about how her interactions impact on her Facebook friends.

R: Do you feel that your post has any impact on your audience?

NZ: ‘Yes of course, I can feel the impact that my interactions in the online world have through the interaction of the people and the quality of posts and comments they make about sport topics and the right of women to participate in these kinds of activities.’

Another aspect was highlighted by NA, another female participant. NA’s use of Facebook was not only dedicated to engaging people with discussions about sporting issues, but also to deliver messages to her audience (and especially the women) to encourage them to get involved in sporting activities and confront the traditions that restrain them.

‘I am always asking myself why there are no sports projects for women in our city. At a time when men are so overwhelmed, women lack the most basic rights to practice any kind of sport ... everything is ‘haraam’, (forbidden) and it is not
allowed even to talk about sport. So, I decided to launch a call to action in some of my Facebook posts for the need to find sports projects dedicated to women, and that women should have a clear voice in demanding access to sports, and to confront the customs and traditions that hinder this.’

It is clear that NA wishes to change people’s expectations of the traditional gender roles in Iraqi society. Her use of the Facebook platform took a different tack, as she not only aims to engage in discussions and talk about sporting topics, but she also wants to raise awareness about the lack of sport projects for women, and the necessity of having such places in her area. She also directs her messages to women especially, to encourage them to take the part in this process by demanding these rights through the use of social media and to confront the old traditions that prevent them from accessing these rights.

7.3 SECTION 2: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ON FACEBOOK
7.3.1 INTRODUCTION: ENHANCING SOCIAL CAPITAL

In this section, I discuss how Facebook allows people to form affinity identities that let them to develop relationships from a very weak ties and to make that kind of stronger ties. People use Facebook as virtual space to find groups of a particular interest which allow them to develop relationships. Affinity space allow people to form affinity identities and apply that to social capital. According to Gee (2007) Affinity space theory ‘focuses on the idea of a space in which people interact, rather than on membership in a community.’ (p. 87). The way that Facebook allows people to create this affinity space where they can safely be using either anonymity or different accounts attempting to connect with other people can be linked with what Turkle suggested about using anonymity to avoid certain issues that users might face in online world and cause distraction to his/her interaction. Participants hide their true identity and gender and use a created identity to facilitate building new and different kinds of relationships. The ability to remain anonymous on online social networks (OSNs) increases the opportunity to form new relationships that might not be possible in offline settings where their real identity is exposed. According to Bourdeloi et al., (2017: p.10), ‘Anonymity creates new identities,
which are fake but ‘active,’ or in other words, offer the freedom to express personal
opinions and explore forbidden subjects.’ Based on data collected from participant
interviews, the Facebook platform became an important arena for Iraqi users of both
genders to form and establish different kinds of social connections. For all participants,
the impact of social media sites, and particularly Facebook, was valued as a platform that
played a significant role in increasing their online social networks. Qualitative analysis
showed that initiating new relationships with very weak ties on Facebook by Iraqi
participants was significantly more important in addition to bonding social networks by
maintain traditional forms of social capital through family, kinship and community
(homogenous group) or bridging connections with people from different walks of life as
keeping in touch with their already known connection in their offline life (heterogeneous
group). Their aim is to find opportunities to connect to very weak ties where likes to find
like and form what I called ‘bounding’ relationship through the use of the affinity space.

7.3.1.1 BUILDING NEW SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS USING FACEBOOK

Facebook is a known platform and has contributed a great deal to enabling existing
relationships. Previous research has examined the relationship between social networking
sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and social capital. Social capital is “the actual or potential
resources which are linked to a durable network of more-or-less institutionalized
relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985: pp. 241-258). The
results documented the impact of the Facebook platform in increasing the levels of
relationships (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011; Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Ellison,
Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007, 2011; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Valenzuela, Park,
& Kee, 2009).

Research suggests that Facebook enables people to engage in maintaining and bonding
social capital with strong ties or close personal relationships, such as those with family
members and relatives (Putnam, 2000). The various Facebook activities also enable
individuals to use it to create bridge social capital, including weak relationships with
casual acquaintances and connections such as those with neighbours and friends (Putnam,
2000). A great deal of literature has been published suggesting that Facebook is more
commonly used for communication with offline contacts and casual acquaintances than
it is for connecting with strangers (Ellison et al., 2007; Lampe et al., 2006) and that this represents most of the Facebook ‘Friend’ connections on the site (Mayer and Puller, 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). However, our findings suggest that participants also sought new relationships through Facebook. This type of online interaction represents an obvious challenge to the norms of culture and religion that prevent males and females from creating any kind of relationships or being involved in direct contact if they are not blood relatives.

7.3.1.2 BEFRIENDING STRANGERS ON FACEBOOK

The results of our study differed from the findings of several scholars, including Lampe et al. (2006), Mayer and Puller (2008), and Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) who concluded that Facebook plays a significant role in supporting pre-existing social relationships. The results are in line with early Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) research on virtual communities which indicate that users in online communities are more willing to meet new people from outside of their pre-existing social groups or locations (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Yuan, & Gay, 2006). Research interview data showed that Iraqi participants, and especially females, also considered Facebook as an affinity space to seek and form new relationships. Fifteen female participants out of eighteen indicated that in their interviews. My findings run contrary to what Ellison et al (2007) indicated in their study regarding the fact that users have less intention to form new relationships. Ellison et al. (2007: p.876) stated that, ‘In addition to supporting existing social relationships, Facebook contains many features that could be used to create new connections, although this seems to be a less common use.’ Participants indicated that they welcomed appropriate random relationships on Facebook. This tendency is in line with the Pew Internet and American Life Project Report (Lenhart & Madden, 2007) which indicates that 49% of SNS users (27% of online teens) use these sites to make new friends. This view was acknowledged by most Iraqi Facebook users of both genders, as they befriended users on Facebook whom they did not know offline. HA is a female participant who established new relationships with both genders on Facebook. When asked if she was willing to add new people to her second Facebook account she answered:
‘I get a great deal of enjoyment from using Facebook, such as the pleasure of self-expression, knowledge and forming virtual friendships, which I have failed to achieve in my real life because of the many restrictions imposed by parents, family and friends. I usually accept new friendship requests on Facebook because I like making new friends. The only thing that I always try to be aware of is impolite people whose profiles contain unacceptable content.’ (HA, female, Iraq)

HA’s statement demonstrates how she is willing to add people to her Facebook account. She expresses her happiness to do so without any regard concerning the gender of the person requesting her friendship. The most important thing for her is that the person is respectable. She also considers this platform as some form of compensation for the reality in her offline life which is restricted by several social norms and behavioural codes that consider such friendships unacceptable.

RI expressed a similar sentiment:

‘I was able to get to know a lot of new friends and join different groups. I joined groups of people comprised of both genders, people who work in the same specialty areas, such as social studies teachers in Karbala, and was able to exchange information.’ (RI, female, Iraq)

She adds: ‘this kind of relations offer me a psychological comfort.’

Another postgraduate female participant (DK) echoed this sentiment regarding the process of adding new friends and the feelings she has as a result. She stated that since she had arrived in the UK and started studying, she got to know several people from different universities as they shared a scientific background and similar interests.

‘The scientific life in the UK leads me to form a lot of friendships with new colleagues and scholars from the same field of study. I am really happy to have them in my social network.’ (DK, female, Iraq)
DK: ‘Such relations helped me to avoid feel lioness and join the community much easier.’

Participants also reported that the technological capabilities of Facebook have enabled them to connect with new people, and especially those individuals of whom they had heard offline but had no chance to meet physically. The affordance of social media enabled them to make these electronic friendships by searching for people and becoming friends at the click of a button. For example, ZH and RS stated that how they were lucky to have Facebook accounts that enabled them able to add people they liked and said:

‘Many things have become possible on Facebook, the best of which is the ability to communicate and form friendships with people you hear a lot about in your offline life for their active role in society. In fact, my account includes many friends who are active in society.’ (ZH, female, Iraq)

RS said:

‘For me, Facebook makes it easy to find people whom I have wanted to befriend for a long time. One person that I am proud of having as a Facebook friend is the writer and journalist Falah Al-mashal who is revered in Iraqi society for his valuable cultural ideas.’ (RS, female, Iraq)

HA, another female participant stated that Facebook opened the gates for her to befriend important people in the community and interact with them.

‘Through Facebook, I have become friends with important people. Physically, they are quite far away from us and are also removed from us with regards to the type of work they do, but through Facebook they are closer to us and we are able to learn about their ideas, writings and views, and vice versa.’ (HA, female, Iraq)
DN discussed the effect of social network sites in increasing her social network by adding new people through joining Facebook groups:

‘For me these sites, and specifically Facebook, enhanced my networking opportunities, and increased my communication skills and dialogue. They also had an effect on my social development through supporting my involvement with many different groups in the virtual community through social networking sites.’

(DN, female, Iraq)

NA discussed another important fact regarding Facebook and how the platform had given her an opportunity to befriend and establish new relationships with strangers through her offline connections and via people she already knows. She described her friendship with a stranger she had not met in real life as something that comforted her and brought happiness:

Researcher: Do you add new friends even though you haven’t met them in real life?
NA: ‘Yes certainly, one of the benefits of using Facebook is that I can add new friends to my friends list.’

Researcher: Do you have any prior knowledge of them?
NA: ‘No, only through Facebook and their friendship. I add them after I get to know the person through their posts (which must be appropriate) and identify that he (or she) is fine to be added to my friends list.’

Researcher: Do you add people of a specific gender to your friend list?
NA: ‘No, not every suitable person is added immediately, irrespective of whether they are male or female, they are only added after I have communicated with them properly.’

(NA, female, Iraq)
These views expressed by our participants showed how Facebook helped them to circumvent certain social and cultural restrictions that usually hinder their ability to form offline relationships. They also emphasised the social rules that governed their relationship formation with new friends in their network. These rules play significant roles in shaping the impressions that are conveyed through Facebook activities to other users and showed their connectedness and adherence to their cultural norms. In doing so, they can construct their own reality and the impression they have on others. The results also indicate that participants also willing to add new friends and are not only communicating people they know offline. According to Joinson (2008: p.1034) ‘the use of Facebook to search for new people loaded on the same factor as the use of Facebook to research offline contacts.’

7.3.1.3 OPPOSITE GENDER RELATIONSHIPS ON FACEBOOK

Engaging in friendship relationships with the opposite gender in a non-mixed gender environment raised some concerns and hesitations for both genders. This kind of relationship between males and females in a cultural context like Iraq is considered to be a highly sensitive issue due to the fact that it is attached to social values and religious beliefs. Such relationships are seen to be incompatible with cultural and religious norms. Same-sex friendships in real life are considered the norm in Iraq, and this is also reflected in the virtual world. However, the Iraqi participants in this research project demonstrated that having opposite gender relationships was prominent.

Participants admitted hiding their real identity for the purpose of forming new relationships on Facebook, and had not befriended people from within their offline social networks (family members, friends and relatives). They identified having such relationships either within separate closed groups on Facebook or in newly-created accounts which were possible due to the lack of physical interactions on Facebook, and which in-turn made it easier, more comfortable, secure, and acceptable, as reported by many Iraqi participants. For example, RK said:
‘Communication with the opposite gender using Facebook was much easier since it was impossible in offline life [physically]. I have a lot of male friends in my friend list on Facebook.’ (RK, female, Iraq)

Another female participant, RI, also referred to the affordance of the Facebook platform to provide her with the opportunity to connect with different people, especially men, and to create friendships with them, which is something that cannot be done in offline life.

‘I was able to communicate with various groups and people on many different levels. This enabled me to communicate with males and add them to my list. Males are difficult to communicate with in our real and everyday lives because of traditions and customs that prevent this communication and consider interactions between males and females as a breach of the social rules.’ (RI, female, Iraq)

Participants also discussed how Facebook helps them to create virtual communities where they can freely self-disclose, interact, share and receive feedback from men. In other words, it enables individuals to ‘escape’ from the offline restrictions because their online life does not share the same expectations as their offline contacts. For example, NA reported how she was able to post her poems to her online account and receives feedback from men who interact with her and appreciate her works. This would not happen offline because of the nature of the environment she lives in.

‘I decided to post my poems in my anonymous account to avoid these restrictions and to interact with different users and receive their feedback, especially men. They always interact with my poems and express their appreciation.’ (NA, female, Iraq)

HA discussed how Facebook helped her to build a virtual community that offered her the opportunity to be liberated and interact without the restriction of offline life.
‘I believe many Facebook users create a virtual community that excludes all their offline connections to escape their real communities and to be able to freely share, and interact, to get to know male viewpoints, and to disclose things about themselves. Creating a different account with a different identity helped me to achieve that aim.’ (HA, female, Iraq)

HM (female) and BA (male) talked about relationships with the opposite gender and reported how this interaction enhanced their understanding of the different ways of thinking between the genders.

‘The freedom I got from Facebook taught me a lot of things about them. ….. How to deal with males in the real world and to know many things about their perceptions, habits and ways of thinking.’ (HM, female, Iraq)

‘Facebook is a way to get closer to the other gender, especially using my second account where I used a pseudonym, which gave me the opportunity to enter the world of girls and interact with them.’ (BA, male, Iraq)

Despite the fact Facebook is able to facilitate these kinds of relationships; our participants did have some reservations. They discussed how certain restrictions are imposed in their offline lives when it comes to meeting or interacting physically with members of the opposite gender, especially non-Mahram (marriageable kin), even if he or she is a close relative. They reported a range of views and manners in relation to cross-gender friendships on Facebook. Having male relatives as Facebook friends is also challenging because it could be a source of jealousy and create problems. When I asked SH whether she adds male relatives who are non-Mahram to her network, for example, she said that she is wary of adding relatives.

Researcher: Do you have any friend’s relatives in your accounts?

SH: ‘No, I don’t in both my accounts.’
Researcher: Can you tell us the reason for this?

SH: ‘I don’t want add any male relatives because this will cause problems with my father and brothers.’

Researcher: What is the reason for such problem?

SH: ‘It is due to the norms of our community and how they impose many restrictions on such interactions. I want to avoid these issues.’

In general, the ability to interact anonymously on Facebook helps Iraqi participants of both genders to overcome sociocultural restrictions to form relationships with the opposite gender. Facebook enables many Iraqi females, whose families don’t allow them to use the site to interact with the opposite gender, to join the platform and create online relationships with a low risk of any consequences. It is also obvious that having anonymous accounts played a significant role in the decision to have male friends. For example, some participants indicated that their account is primarily for the purpose of adding male strangers (i.e., RK and RI), while other accounts are used for offline connections without any male relatives to avoid family problems.

7.3.1.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WITH MUTUAL INTERESTS ON FACEBOOK

The results collected from many Iraqi participants indicated that they are more likely to have friendships with individuals sharing similar interests/activities. Chaffey et al. (2009) stated that there is a constant growth in the numbers of users of social networking sites as individuals search to become part of a virtual community in order to share and meet individuals with similar interests. The participants talked about their intention to find such people. They stated that Facebook offers them the opportunity to form relationships with individuals who share mutual interests. As a result, mutual interest can be seen as one of the main motivations for forming new online relationships. The absence of specific restrictions imposed on forming relationships based on mutual interests in real life (i.e., to form only same gender relationships) represent an important factor in enhancing the ability of users to overcome these obstacles in the online environment. This is illustrated
in the response of female participant SS to the question about the impact of Facebook on her social life:

‘It is very important to keep me in constant contact with friends and to form different relationships that cross the borders and limits formed by my community. I now have a large number of friends and most of them are men who also joined the various groups, and we share hobbies and things that I love.’ (SS, female, Iraq)

NZ explained how Facebook provided her with the space to participate in different activities with different people, and that it brought her entertainment and joy.

‘Facebook has become new world of communication through which I can participate in different activities that are not open to me in real life. These activities involve both genders and include competitions and games, which would not be possible in real life due to the restrictions imposed by Iraqi Muslim society norms.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

Participants such as DN and NT also talked about finding people who share their hobbies. They referred to the importance of such friendships as they can keep these hobbies alive. Correspondingly, they gave an example of how these relationships can develop these hobbies based on their interactions with other users and their feedback.

‘I mainly use Facebook to find people who are interested in writing poetry. I have a lot of writing and I would like to share it with other people as well as receive feedback from them. I have an ambition to build an effective group of poets for our home city on Facebook.’ (DN, female, Iraq)

‘I made a lot of new friends on Facebook and most of them belong to the same groups, with shared interests and activities. I became friends with them because
we shared the same interests and passions, and we used to join these groups and interact a lot with other users and discuss several topics. Now our relationships have moved on from just being in the same groups and we have become friends on Facebook and are used to interacting on a daily basis.’ (NT, female, Iraq)

Other participants stated their willingness to connect with unknown contacts based on content similarity, and they found this was more conducive to discovering new friends. They stated that finding people who share similar views and opinions is important. Participants discussed this and showed their willingness to find people with similar ideas as their own and discuss these issues in the virtual world because it is problematic to find people who hold similar views in the real world due to the complicated social situation in Iraq. For example, TS reported how Facebook helped her to meet people with shared interests as she belongs to several online groups.

‘The internet helps you to meet people with shared interests, because you able to choose to befriend them. In real life, many of us find ourselves in an environment where we feel we do not belong and the ideas we raise and wish to share are viewed in a negative light.’ (TS, female, Iraq)

NA felt similarly:

‘It is an important platform to find people who share ideas and are willing to discuss them with you and defend them. This helps significantly in raising topics and spreading ideas throughout a community in which it is difficult to find people in real life due to society complexities.’ (NA, male, Iraq)

BA seemed to consider Facebook an important venue where he could find people who shared his interests without being encumbered by his offline connections (i.e., family, friends, and relatives) or who were in the same physical location.

‘The effect is not great, but it helped me find friends outside of my community and even outside the country. I really enjoy these friendships, especially those
with women because we share a lot of interests and get to know about each other’s cultures.’ (BA, male, Iraq)

ZH reported a similar thing after adding a male friend to her friend list on Facebook and starting to interact with him because they have similar interests.

‘I added a male friend to my Facebook friend list because he has the same interest as me. He was interested in drawing [drawings] like me… we became friends and our relationship developed significantly and we have started working together on developing our skills.’ (ZH, female, Iraq)

In general, participants considered the Facebook platform as a virtual space where they could overcome the constraints of real life in terms of finding people who share interests and activities. This is particularly true for women due to the social norms that impose more limits on them because of their status in Iraqi community. According to the literature, people in real life might not be able to find individuals with whom they share common interests and attitudes, whereas such relationships can be formed effortlessly in a virtual context (Barnes, 2003; Baym, 2010). Thus, it can be argued that Facebook provides people who are restricted in their real lives with the opportunity to form cross-gender relationships with strangers who share similar interests.

7.3.1.5 INITIATE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS ON FACEBOOK

In addition to the benefits of making it easier to befriend strangers, form opposite gender relationships, and relationships with people with mutual interests on Facebook, participants reported that the Facebook platform was not only for virtual communication with people of the opposite gender, but also provided them with an opportunity to initiate and develop romantic relationships and enhance their social networks online. According to Tosun (2012: p.1151), ‘Facebook can be used not only for friendship formation and maintenance, but also for romantic purposes.’ Romantic relationships were the fourth type of relationship formed by Iraqi Facebook users. The results of this study are in line
with those of Tosun (2012) showing the use of Facebook for forming new friendships and romantic relationships.

During the interview meetings, participants discussed how Facebook was a space that facilitated initiating and developing these types of interactions. Whitty (2008: p.15) stated, ‘These days of course, online dating sites and social networking sites continue to increase in popularity as a way to form new friendships and seek out new romantic relationships and sexual encounters.’ Participants stated that as a result of the conservative nature of their society and the gender segregation issues in Iraq, it is difficult for individuals to form such romantic relationships in real life as they are regarded with suspicion, but they are able to initiate such romantic relationships in cyberspace. They were even able to share romantic quotations from poetry, sayings, and songs that matched their romantic experiences.

‘I can confirm that through Facebook, a lot of women in Iraq found a way to express their feelings and romantic inclinations about whether they were in love with somebody, engaged or found companionship using poetry, songs or even romantic quotations that matched their romantic experiences. These things are not possible in real life because it is considered immodest behaviour that might bring a lot of problems for the woman doing so.’ (SM, female, Iraq)

YS had a similar sentiment:

‘For me as an Iraqi user of social media, I can tell you that many Iraqis (both men and women) use Facebook to form romantic relationships. This is simply because they have fewer opportunities in real life to meet face to face or interact with people in other countries.’ (YS, male, Iraq)

Participants also stated that with fewer social restrictions, they consider Facebook as an alternative place for meeting and forming such relationships and connecting with the opposite gender. For example, HA stated:
'A lot of my real life is hidden, but to a certain extent I was able to reveal it in a virtual environment, especially with regard to being open to the world and the opposite sex. I do not find it a problem to interact with men and do not consider that it might affect the honour and chastity of the women since they handle themselves correctly. This behaviour alone is considered as a breach of the rules and customs that largely restrict the way in which women should behave. This is due to the fact that our society is under the control of religious parties and militias.' (HA, female, Iraq)

AH described how Facebook has become a virtual dating space where a lot of men and women in Iraq can meet and express their romantic feelings and get to know each other because they lack that chance in real life. He mentioned that this virtual environment has become a place where individuals can find people to date.

‘Facebook provided me with the opportunity to talk with various groups of women, speaking freely and discovering many secrets as well as discussing many subjects openly. For me, communicating with the opposite sex is a big deal because of the restrictions imposed by real life, which I am not able to ignore. In brief, it just like a dating platform where people can meet and get to know each other to decide on whether to continue with the relationship or break up.’ (AH, male, Iraq)

RK discussed how cyberspace is a potentially beneficial space for people who are looking for partners. She discussed how the Facebook platform has become a space for finding a suitable partner. Many users befriend each other and their relationships develop to the level of love and can end in marriage. She cited a famous example of two young Iraqi individuals who got to know each other on Facebook and their friendship ended with marriage. This was considered as an act of rebellion against traditional marriage in Iraq because it happened via social media and this provided a new route for young people to choose their own partners.
‘This case concerns the story of two young Iraqis, Haidar Hamzouz and Dina Najmuddin, who met on Facebook three years ago, fell in love and it ended in marriage …. It was the strangest case of its kind in Iraq where people are accustomed to traditional marriages.’ (RK, female, Iraq)

Another example stated by RK also discussed this issue and how it could be more common in their community to find a partner with less social risks.

‘I have a female friend who befriended a young man (on Facebook). She interacted with him for a long time. They fell in love and their relationship developed and they got married. People finding their partner via Facebook has become more common in Iraqi society because it overcomes many of the social risks and gives people the opportunity to get to know each other very well in a calm and secure environment.’ (RK, female, Iraq)

On the whole, it can be said that Facebook has allowed many participants in Iraq to mitigate the pressures of real life by joining a social network and creating desirable connections that have a low offline risk. The participants stated that there are several sociocultural constraints and limitations that hinder the formation of any desirable offline relationships in Iraq. Thus, the online environment, and mainly Facebook, is perceived as a platform that enables Iraqis to avoid of all of these restrictions and can compensate for that which is lost in real life social relationships.

7.4 FACEBOOK AS A SPACE FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS AND COMMUNICATION

This section demonstrates the malleability of the Facebook platform to be used as space for virtual communication. Facebook was integrated into the daily activities of users in Iraq, and our participants reported that they were able to transgress the restrictions imposed on them in the real world, enabling them to reach beyond their physical capacities. Participants stated that their new Facebook-based practices gave them the ability to cope with the lack of security and the state of war in their country. Facebook
enabled the participants to create and experience the virtual world and meet people they liked. This world represents an ideal version of society that they wished for and was very unlike their reality. This was reported by participants NK and HA, who stated that Facebook served their needs and became an alternative world to compensate for what they lacked in their real lives.

NK (female) reported that Facebook became a tool that compensated for the limitations of the physical world that came about after the war and the conservative environment. She believed that it served as an important factor in the process of creating a new structure in their society. The lack of physical interactions on Facebook made this type of communication and interaction more common and acceptable.

‘This new structure helped them to re-invent the social norms of how women socialize with men and to avoid certain offline restrictions, especially those that emerged after the war with regards to meeting and interacting physically with a member of the opposite gender.’ (NK, female, Iraq)

As can be seen from the extract above, NK discussed the malleability of platforms such as Facebook which helped to overcome the strict gender segregation and facilitated interactions between members of the opposite sex, making interactions between them more common than in the physical world.

Another female participant (HA) also described how Iraqis are constrained by the newly emerging sharia laws and social norms that have emerged as a result of the war. She mentioned how women enjoyed relative equality in society with their male counterparts before the war. Their situation changed after the war because of the new sharia laws which forced women to adopt conservative Islamic dress and made public interactions with members of the opposite sex more risky. NA explained how the use of Facebook helped her to challenge these new norms and said that women can now go online and socialize with anybody.

‘My current situation is similar to that of many Iraqis who are looking for more freedom in the online world. It is difficult for them to bear the restrictions imposed in our country, which is considered to be a conservative country, as well as the customs and traditions that have emerged after the war. These have placed more
constrains on Iraqis, and especially on women, and have made their interactions and even their dress more conservative. Facebook represents an outlet for me as well as for them.’ (NA, female, Iraq)

The male participants also described a similar situation with regards to how Iraq has changed and become more conservative, and how that has placed additional constraints on people. The conservative Islamic rules that increased as a result of the new Islamic political parties and the change in regime that happened in Iraq affected different aspects of their offline lives, which was also reflected online. As a result, they reinvented their lives online to meet their needs. This is explained by two male participants (MR and SA).

‘Facebook has had a remarkable effect on my personality through the ability to meet different people, and especially women, or to raise topics that are difficult to discuss in real life, especially romantic ideas, that young people really like but are unable to raise because they live in a world which is governed by religious and social traditions.’ (MR, male, Iraq)

SA went on to state the following:

Researcher: To what extent does social media use, and particularly Facebook, help you to behave online in ways you cannot in everyday life?

Participant: ‘Well, I think it has done so to a satisfactory level, especially in terms of communicating with the opposite sex. ‘

Researcher: What do you mean by a satisfactory level? Can you explain in more detail?

SA: ‘For me, pretending to be a girl (hiding behind my name) has made it easier to communicate and talk to girls, which is something that cannot be done in my everyday life, for example, at work or university.’ (SA, male, Iraq)
We can see from the above examples that Facebook is used as a means to transgress the limitations of the physical world and the environment in which a lack of security is in reality described as a war zone. The participants use Facebook as a means to act outside of their social obligations. Facebook has become the medium that facilitates communication between different individuals and between the sexes. The participants on Facebook are not completely bound by their societal norms and they can gain a certain level of freedom to interact and meet with people virtually without any fear.

7.5 THE ROLE OF PRODUCED RELATIONSHIPS ON FACEBOOK IN PROVIDING MULTIPLE RESOURCES

The analysis of the findings suggest that the Facebook platform provided the participants with an opportunity to connect with strangers, to form relationships based on mutual interests with people of the opposite sex, to have online relationships with members of the opposite sex and to initiate romantic relationships. The findings are in line with those of Bessiere et al (2008), who identified that the online environment helped participants to create new relationships with people they had not previously met in their offline lives. Another important issue raised is the use of Facebook as an alternative space for virtual meetings and communication that can form mixed-mode relationships, which is in line with the findings of Walther and Parks (2002). They suggested that social networking sites (SNSs) are primarily used to form online relationships which then extended to offline settings.

The positive benefit gained by the participants’ use of Facebook was that it enabled them to achieve changes in their interpersonal relationships, which is known as ‘social capital’. The findings of the study indicated that social capital has role to play in terms of cooperation between individuals in Iraqi society. Firstly, Facebook was significantly important in enabling the participants to form different social networks. Secondly, they were also able to transfer these relationships into their offline lives. Finally, the potential benefits of the social capital gained by the users from the different resources available to them online, which differed greatly from those in their physical lives, can be seen in the interpersonal relationships they formed. New connections created with people who share mutual internets, with strangers and with new friends can provide a great deal of
emotional, social, economic, and health support. In Iraq, for example, and as indicated by participants, users can gain support from the exchange of opinions with people in a certain profession (e.g., artists or poets) which can help them to develop their own skills and talents. Other users indicated the importance of these extended social connections in helping them to acquire jobs through their personal contacts. These positive findings show how the technical affordances of SNSs such as Facebook support the development of relationships, which in turn, affirms the existence of the social capital of the site, and shows that people benefit from this in a specific context.

7.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The findings of this chapter explained the type of performances adopted by the participants while they interacted with other users on Facebook. The chapter focused on two important issues that were identified from the primary findings regarding the voice gained by users from using the affinity space on the Facebook platform through their created identity. Affinity spaces on Facebook enable interactions that can overcome inequalities because the idea of belonging that is found in communities of practice is often absent in the fluid and unbounded digital spaces of social media sites. The findings disclosed the type of interactions and activities that participants performed in their created Facebook accounts. Importantly, the findings demonstrated the usage differences between Iraqi males and females in the way they negotiate the social and cultural constraints. In their use of Facebook, the women were more likely to use the platform to serve different purposes, especially with regards to topics and areas that are not available to them in their offline lives due to the social and cultural norms and the conservative nature of Iraq that prevents them from raising certain topics.

The women’s use of Facebook is considered as multidimensional as it enables them to interact and enact different performances, and more so than the men. Women interacted more than the men on Facebook, and they used their created accounts for different purposes. For example, regarding women’s political engagement, Facebook enabled them to discuss and participate in different political arenas. The female participants also used Facebook to express their opinions and views and to share information about other topics, such as social, sport and religion. Participants were able to talk freely about such topics
in the online world, which compensates to some extent for the lack of opportunity to do so in their offline lives. The ability for women to discuss these topics such as social, sport, politics and religion in their offline lives is rare due to the culture that considers them as being in the male domain only, and therefore off-limits to women. For the women, the space afforded by Facebook is an important issue, because they are able to use it to highlight and defend their stance regarding social issues that are mainly related to women’s rights. However, the situation regarding the male use of Facebook is very different. They typically use their created Facebook accounts to raise and discuss issues that might otherwise bring shame or dishonour on them, such as topics that are normally considered to be ‘unacceptable by society’ or ‘women’s issues’. For a man, discussing these issues is not in line with the social and cultural norms and behavioural codes.

The second important issue demonstrated by the findings concerns relationship construction such as befriending strangers on Facebook, creating relationships with people with shared interests, cross-gender relationships and forming intimate relationships. The results showed different levels of use, related to the way in which participants can extend their social networks with people from different groups and genders and who they have not met in their offline life. The significant issue regarding these type of relationships is that they also transgress several religious and cultural restrictions because they enabled interactions between the sexes, which is unacceptable according to the religious and cultural codes of behaviour. These relationships stepped outside of the stages of bonding and bridging relationships and added a new level of relationship created in the virtual environment by individuals, based on weak ties, or what I have termed ‘bounding relationships’. Overall the concept of an affinity space enabled me to explain the way in which Iraqi users of both genders interact and perform online. A fuller understanding of how individual identities are performed in this type of space will enable researchers to create experiences that reach a broader range of users, and not just those who fit with the dominant assumed culture of a given space.
CHAPTER 8: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTING ‘FACE’ ON FACEBOOK

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to show how Iraqi participants’ interactions and expressions on Facebook are modified to prevent unintended audiences from viewing these interactions and expressions of identity in order to avoid negative comments and to save face. Users’ desire to save face is considered as an essential element that affects their behaviours in online environments. Their aim is not to create a good impression, but rather to avoid creating a bad one to protect the social order. According to Goffman (1959), individuals tailor their behaviour in specific contexts when they are performing for certain audiences. The performance or interaction variation affected the process of impression management (self-presentation) that individuals are involved in while projecting themselves on Facebook. This variation is mainly based on the apparent discrepancy between the image projected online and the one found in the offline life. This discrepancy is led by audience perception, or more importantly, the multiple audiences that make up their friendship lists on their Facebook accounts.

Each user’s presentation of their identity is heavily influenced by their interactions with others. Erickson (1959) discussed how interaction processes and peer perception is heavily influenced by behaviour and this has led them to develop their concept of identity. Identity in a virtual environment is primarily created through social interactions (Gergen, 1991 and Surratt, 1998). The creation of that online identity in any online platform is heavily influenced by the perceptions of others, and this is known as a ‘reflexive evaluation’ (Solomon, 1983: p.321). Internet users, therefore, would strongly consider how they are perceived online when constructing their identity.

The users’ varied behaviours through impression management are not only to display their desired identities as shown in Chapter 7, but also to protect themselves. In fact, their behaviours on Facebook while interacting with others are guided by the need to save face and not embarrass themselves. According to Ben Marder (2012: p.30), ‘Protective
presentation is aimed not at creating a good impression but at avoiding a bad one. Thus, actions are not made to display desired identities but to circumvent those which are undesirable. Protective behaviours aim to carefully avoid ‘social disapproval’ that would result in ‘specific and rather immediate loss or punishment’ (Arkin and Sheppard, 1990: pp.181-2).

Participants in this particular context, in a community like Iraq, where people strictly adhere to the norms of culture and religion, are interacting in a way that is not in line with these norms, and in a way, that is considered inappropriate or as a breach. Users are very careful when interacting with others online because such interactions are more likely to be negative (e.g., loss of reputation, honour or result in physical or mental harm) if the community does not validate them. This can be seen clearly in the way that our participants explain their use of Facebook and their behaviour which is aimed at not losing face.

In this study, the notion of face is highly connected with a person’s honour and their standing within his/her social circle. Their interactions via Facebook require effort to save face and show an idealized online reputation. According to Sassi and Gharbi (2015: p.6) this ‘confirms Goffman’s perception of face to face interaction and idealized image concern’. Therefore, for our participants, the best way to achieve that was through maintaining two accounts or varying their performance in the online environment by applying several self-presentation techniques. Users try to ensure that they project a good personal image with a good e-reputation in their real account, providing real information that is meant to be compatible with his/her present implicit reality. Their interpretation variation during their interactions via Facebook can be explained by their intention to avoid dangerous and serious situations, especially for women in Iraq, which are due to the nature of the society and the role of the cultural norms. Furthermore, this study shows that this situation not only applies to females, but also males, as both are very aware of how many of these situations might cause problems for them in real life, and as a result this has led them to change their behaviour on Facebook. Finally, the chapter discusses the finding regarding performing online persona in terms of the purpose of face maintaining and self-protection in regard to their social and professional lives. Informants have concerns about their interaction and audience impact their self-presentation online and lead them to adopt certain tactics to save their social and professional lives while interacting on Facebook.
8.2 AVOIDING VIOLATIONS OF THE NORM

8.2.1 CONCERNS ABOUT SOCIAL REJECTION (DISAPPROVAL)

One of the main concerns voiced by participants regarding their interactions with others on Facebook was social rejection. This rejection might be due to many different reasons, such as political, religious or personal beliefs that are in inconsistent with those of others. A number of participants indicated that the changes in the political situation in Iraq that occurred after 2003, have placed them in critical position whilst interacting with the people they know in their offline lives. There are many limits imposed on life, and ignoring them might cause real problems and lead to the breakdown of relationships. They reported that such concerns made them generally mindful of their responses and perceptions when they interact with their friends on Facebook, and this means that they avoid such issues on their real accounts. This complicated situation has obliged several users to create additional accounts on Facebook or control their content posts in the same account by separating their audiences.

For example, a number of participants discussed how they don’t like to share their religious opinions on Facebook. They explain this by respecting discretion; they are concerned not to create any social conflict, misunderstanding, or disagreement, and their desire to avoid the disapproval of their Facebook friends who might have a different religious background, or be from a different branch of Islam. They stated that the results of posting content that is inconsistent with other’s beliefs or views might be problematic and cause a great deal of dispute, especially in a community like Iraq which is highly diverse and complex. The ethnic and religious diversity and the presence of sectarian conflicts significantly impacted on their use of Facebook. MR, a male interviewee stated:

‘I consider my religious beliefs and views as something personal which I never discuss on Facebook. This is because of the diversity of my Facebook friends, which includes friends from other branches of Islam. They might get annoyed if I share my religious beliefs and views.’ (MR, male, Iraq)
Others also believe that disclosing their opinions to people who do not share the same beliefs could be annoying. In a country like Iraq, people debate many different things, especially issues of an ethnic or sectarian nature. Sharing personal views on Facebook was suggested as being possible grounds for deleting friends from Facebook (e.g. SJ, AH, MR, YS, AB). This was the case of one participant (AB) who said:

‘Political, religious and even social issues are present in the country and they might result in conflict with others and can even end relationships. For example, The Shi’ite forces who fight against ISIS in Mosul are a source of a large area of dispute among Iraqis, as Shia people support them, and several Sunnis consider them a threat. I remember that I posted something to support them and that caused trouble with several friends who reacted negatively to my post.’ (AB, male, Iraq)

While NA, a female interviewee, indicated that issues related to any discussion about religious institutions in Iraq or religious beliefs might be another source for rejection. Users who have different views or any critique of the religious institutions might be socially unacceptable and could lead to social issues, even resulting in social disapproval and rejection.

‘The subject of marriage below the legal age of consent is considered a difficult subject due to its relationship with religious and social issues, and discussing it is considered to be crossing a red line despite the importance of the topic.’ (NA, female, Iraq)

SI, a female interviewee, believed that people’s argumentative nature makes it difficult to discuss any topics without ending up in trouble.

‘Iraq is a controversial society and people can make a big deal of any subject, even if it is simple. The nature of people is very difficult and often they refuse to accept other’s opinions. Frankly, if I mentioned my real name and information, I would not be able to use Facebook and post topics that may be considered exclusive for men, whether they be about politics, sports or even religion.’ (SI, female, Iraq)
HM, a female participant, indicated that women’s ability to interact in Iraqi society has certain limits and crossing over the line could cause real problems, as they would be considered as being too bold and open. The result of such inappropriate behaviour, according to the popular view, is rejection. One of these limits is disclosing any personal information. Such a step might have a real negative impact on a woman’s life, and also on that of her family.

‘I am a woman living in a social reality that is governed by religious and social rules, and with a difficult tradition of behaviour where any moves or disclosure of personal information may have negative consequences for my life and on that of my family, as we are part of this large conservative community.’ (HM, female, Iraq).

8.2.2 SOCIAL STIGMA

As Goffman (2005) noted, context and audience are the basis of the behavioural norms, and people use a range of cues to determine acceptable behaviour. The process of presenting one’s self in collective cultures is highly influenced by others. As a result, users are usually engaged in selective self-presentation as well as taking collapsed audiences into account to avoid being involved in publicly inappropriate behaviour. Spottswood et al., (2014: pp. 449 - 460) noted that, ‘People may engage in behaviour that would be considered inappropriate or counter-normative in public or with varying audiences’, due to diverse audiences with varying norms or standards.’ Here I discuss the fear of social shame that most of the participants expressed while discussing the reasons for changing their behaviour on Facebook and why they use anonymous accounts online.

Many participants of both genders were concerned about being identified offline by their family, friends and relatives, who might see their private Facebook content and find it socially unacceptable, which might cause them social shame. The participants’ main concerns were to hide such unacceptable content to avoid any problematic situations that might cause them to lose face in front of others. This undesirable or questionable content varies from pictures of themselves mixing with the opposite sex to wall posts and comments. For example, NT (female) stated that she has created another account to avoid letting the people in her offline life seeing her pictures in which she associates with males.
at her university because she comes from one of the sacred provinces in the south-central region of Iraq and lives in a conservative society that does not validate such behaviours. She said:

‘I am a student in Britain and the nature of communication and interactions differ in terms of non-Muslim colleagues and friends and the nature of the life etc…. for example, I cannot post a picture of me with my colleagues in my original account because this will cause me a problem, especially in my conservative community, however, I can do so freely in my other account. I work hard to completely separate the lines between my two lives; the one in Iraq and the one in the UK. I remember one day I posted a picture with my colleagues here at the university in the UK and this was a huge mistake because I received a large amount of negative comments that really affected me personally.’ (NT, female, Iraq)

Participants also considered the reaction of the people in their friends list with regard to any content that they might post on their Facebook wall. For example, AS a female participant described such a situation when she posted a picture and commented about women’s rights. She explained how she received many harsh reactions from her audience. She said:

‘One day I posted a picture and commented on the importance of giving women a role in political life. After posting that picture and comment I received a great deal of scornful comments and mockery, such as ‘finish washing the dishes and don’t meddle with politics, your place is inside the house and not outside, and take care of your domestic affairs rather than meddle in politics’. These comments were a big shock and embarrassing to me and made me very sad, so I decided to create my second account.’ (AS, female, Iraq)

Another participant had a different reason. AB, a male participant, said that Iraqi society is very strict and people might blame you for things that you haven’t even done. For example, AB said, being in bars with friends is not acceptable in our society and it might cause the person to lose face and his reputation, and for me that is my major concern. He stated:
‘I remember that one day I was invited by university colleagues in the UK to join them while they were sitting in a bar. I shared a photo on my real Facebook account sitting with them while others were drinking alcohol. This situation caused me a great deal of harm as I was strongly criticized by people in my offline life, especially my parents and other relatives.’ (AB, male, Iraq)

He preferred to avoid posting content that was not in line with his community rules and norms. He described his life as being different from that in Iraq due to the cultural norms there. His protective strategy was to separate his life out and post content only in the relevant Facebook account.

Participants’ concern regarding the reactions of people towards certain moves or actions is present on several levels. This situation might extend to include issues that could relate to publishing highly contentious content due to the social conduct norms or sharing pornographic content. MH, a male participant, explained how he avoids using his real account to share pornographic content and why he prefers to use this created account for such activities to avoid problems with people in his own country.

‘Well….. As I told you, I use Facebook to browse pornographic pages and join some sites, as well as share some nude pictures through the use of my alias in my created account. Some of these things are normal in western cultures, such as half naked girls, topless girls or girls wearing bikinis. This cannot be done using my real account because it is forbidden and against the religious and social norms. If people know my real identity and see this behaviour, I would definitely lose my reputation with my family and friends in real life. So, I avoid doing such things in my real account.’ (MH, male, Iraq)

Issues relating to criticism and harsh responses were acknowledged by many participants (both males and females) who claimed to receive such reactions that affected their interactions with people they knew on Facebook, and this had a psychological impact on them. These reactions have embarrassed them in front of other users and they were the main factor in the decision to separate their contents on Facebook and the intended audiences.
SJ, a male participant, said that he created his second account to liberate himself and remove himself from criticism and harsh responses:

‘The best thing I achieved by creating another account on Facebook is that I freed myself from criticism, harsh responses and reactions that I used to receive from people I know, by the family members, close friends or relatives. Every time they see something in my posts that is not in line with the social and ethical codes of our community, they start criticizing me. I cannot beat that anymore.’ (SJ, male, Iraq)

Another male participant, AH noted the same issue and said:

‘People in the real world, whether in your community or a family member, always give me the sense of being criticized, which prevents me from achieving anything, however simple.’ (AH, male, Iraq)

Researcher: can you give us example?

‘One day I put a post one my Facebook wall while I am helping my wife doing some domestic affairs. It was the worst day in my life as I received a pile of critics and people made fun of me’ (AH, male, Iraq)

Female participants RK and RS indicated that any participation in discussions on many issues on Facebook might lead to criticism. This was particularly the case for political and economic issues that are traditionally raised and discussed by men in real life. Having such topics discussed by women in a virtual environment could also be a source of criticism that can lead to humiliation.

‘Economic, political and social issues are not possible for me to discuss on my real account on Facebook or in real life due to reasons such as fear of criticism, being mocked and non-acceptance of my opinions as a woman.’ (RK, female, Iraq)

‘Despite the fact that Iraqi women find an outlet to publish and post their views on political, social and cultural matters in their own countries and the rest of the world using these networks, they still impose a great deal of self-censorship on themselves to avoid being criticized by their own society.’ (RS, female, Iraq)
Participants of both genders indicated how social judgments impacted on their public interactions on social networking sites and led them to construct another identity to avoid having to face any problems they might encounter if they interacted in this way on their real Facebook accounts. The extracts above show how users were very aware of their use of Facebook and they tried to circumvent any actions that might be misinterpreted by their peers, in order to avoid any kind of social shame.

### 8.2.3 HONOUR AND REPUTATION DAMAGE

The most serious issues that affected users’ participation in the online environment (such as Facebook) were honour and reputation. Iraqi society is one of the Middle East and North Africa regions (MENA) that maintains an honour culture (e.g., Gregg, 2005). These traditional honour societies put a great deal of emphasis on social respect (e.g., Gregg, 2005; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). In these cultures, a person’s honour is determined by other people’s opinions rather than solely his own perception of esteem (Bagli & Sev’er, 2003; Peristiany, 1965). Furthermore, religion is a comprehensive system that lists detailed prescriptions for their entire way of life. The religion in Iraq is Islam, which plays a major role in outlining the culture and determining the social norms and practices.

Participants indicated that any act which might be perceived as improper by members of the society, such as women displaying personal information (e.g., their names or family) or a picture of a woman mixing with her male friends, may threaten her honour and even a person’s social reputation. According to Stewart (1994) the honour concept in traditional honour cultures has a defining feature which indicates that honour can be lost easily but it is difficult to regain. The result of losing honour brings a bad social reputation and shame, not only to the person, but also to his/her family (Bagli & Sev’er, 2003). According to the results of our research study, Iraqi women are more cautious about this issue than men. For example, SH indicated that Iraqi society holds women to account more strictly, and relates it to several aspects. She said:

‘Facebook is not the best way for me to express myself, but it is a means through which I have the ability to overcome some of the obstacles and achieve a degree of safety that protects me as a woman from getting into trouble in a society that
places the honour of women paramount, and this relates to many things regarding her position in life.’ (SH, female, Iraq)

Honour cultures such as that in Iraq require women to be honourable, and as a result she must be sexually modest or chaste (e.g., Pope, 2012). So that, ‘when a woman engages in potentially improper behaviours, it implies that her husband or male relatives have failed to “control” her. As a result, not only the woman, but her whole family loses honour.’ (Gunsoy et al., 2015: p.6). RS, a female participant, referred to the effort she makes to protect her honour by applying privacy controls to her information.

‘All the profile information in my created account is not real, and neither are the pictures. Nothing can be linked to my real life. Also, the information in my second account is not open and there are no real pictures. I used to adopt privacy controls on the information in my real account. I did not display any personal information such as my email address, telephone number or marriage status.’

Researcher: can you explain why?

‘I consider it important information because of its direct link to my social status and privacy, which I work very hard to protect and preserve in order to avoid any problems. The nature of my society is such that it considers women and their honour a bit like a cup full of water, and whenever that water is spilt it is not possible to gather it back up and put back in that cup.’ (RS, female, Iraq)

Another female participant, HM, stated that she prefers not to disclose her real personal information, such as real pictures, age and family name if she wants to act or behave in a way that might be interpreted as improper. According to HM, any misinterpretation might have negative consequences or even destroy her reputation and cause her to lose her honour. She said:

‘Being a woman living in a conservative society, I prefer not to disclose any personal information. This is because of my acts such as open posts or interactions with male friends that might be misinterpreted by people, and as a result will have negative impacts on me as well as for my family due to the conservative nature of our community. It could not only destroy my reputation but also that of my family.'
Therefore, my virtual identity bears no relation or connection to my real name or character. I have not disclosed my real age, any real images, my location, or any personal information indicating my tribe or my family.’ (HM, female, Iraq)

AS, a female participant, stated that offline life required women in Iraq to behave in a responsible way that shows modesty and is honourable because she is responsible to preserve the honour of her family. The same obligations are valid for a woman’s online life on Facebook in which she should not act in any way that would bring shame or damage her reputation. She said:

‘The luckiest woman is the one that has the opportunity to get a job and go to work. However, she will be subject to more restrictions due the responsibly to save the family's honour and that of her husband. She is not allowed to cross several societal lines and she should take into account several matters, such her manner of speech, the way she walks and what she wears. The same rules are implied on Facebook in which she should behave very carefully, and any wrongdoing could affect the honour of her family and the family name, which would be a disaster for the woman and could lead to divorce, and the total destruction of her way of life.’ (AS, female, Iraq)

This study also revealed that male participants were cautious about their reputation. They were less likely to post pictures with their wives, sisters, or any female members. In an honour culture, posting or adding pictures on Facebook may be perceived by people of their community as potentially improper. SJ, a male participant said how he was aware of his family’s reputation. He also stated that he did not want to give people any reason to gossip:

‘I avoid posting any pictures that have any connection with my family life, and especially women. I don’t want to be seen to be an open-minded man that displays dishonourable behaviour or as inappropriate and thus damaging my family’s reputation. I don’t want to provide people with the opportunity for gossip.’ (SJ, male, Iraq)
8.2.4 VIOLATIONS OF MODESTY EXPECTATIONS

Modesty is an important aspect for users in the research regarding their use of Facebook. Iraqi society greatly values personal modesty. Individuals are expected to continually manage the reputation of their family. When in public, they should behave in a manner that complies with the established social behavioural codes. Females, in particular, are under great pressure to maintaining the good name of their families as the “cultural and symbolic bearers of community identity” that Islamic culture has placed upon them. Thus, the modesty expectations as a part of the overall behavioural expectations, especially in public, are relatively high. Women’s behavioural codes mean that they must adhere to the modesty rules and behave in a manner to avoid any actions that might bring shame to the family, or embarrassment, as their personal honour reflects upon the rest of their family members (Baldry et al., 2013; Van Eck, 2003; Vandello and Cohen, 2003). Chastity is the most important aspect of a women’s behavioural code, which is equivalent to the Arabic word ‘namus’, meaning chastity, but with implications that also include public decency (Van Eck, 2003; Van Osch et al., 2013).

Participants spoke about modest behaviour in real life that might take several forms, and women are especially encouraged to exhibit shyness, speak in a quiet voice, be reserved, and wear the hijab. “The hijab is the traditional head covering worn by many Muslim females. Likewise, wearing the ‘abaya’ and ‘shayla’ are forms of doing hijab in that they indicate proper modesty” (Vieweg and Hodges, 2016: p. 30) They also spoke about the constant need to monitor their public behaviour in a variety of contexts, such as walking in the streets or doing the shopping. In other words, women must assert themselves as “respectable” by practising modesty through these displays while going about their daily lives in public places.

This practice of modesty extended to the use of social media sites where users participate in interactions using such platforms. Participants stated that if an individual was seen to step outside of these behavioural norms, whether in their real live or online, the negative consequences would likely make their way back to his/her family. Beyond their actions, speech or dress in their offline lives, the modest practices are extended to include the actions and behaviours of Iraqis as they interact in a social media context. Several Iraqi females use discretionary methods to protect themselves from unwanted attention while
still actively participating on Facebook. For example, Iraqi females adopted a number of strategies on Facebook to allow them to display modesty while still expressing their individual identities, such as wearing the hijab in public.

One way of practising modesty on Facebook which is similar to wearing the hijab in their offline life was through avoiding posting personal photos or photos of their entire face on Facebook in order to avoid any negative attention. Posting their personal image on Facebook might be viewed by strangers, male non-relatives or even by male relatives and that would bring shame to the women and their families due to the value placed on the social norms that require females to keep themselves away from males. For example, our male and female participants discussed how several women did not display any personal pictures in their Facebook profiles as they wished to adhere to societal norms. As explained by one female informant, DN, a female university graduate:

‘…most of the girls in my city who use Facebook don’t have a profile picture on their account... Even if they wear the hijab, they prefer to not post their pictures…there are a lot of risks… people in Iraq, especially men, still hold to the traditional perspectives about women in that they should adhere to the social behavioural rules, and one of these is not to show herself to strangers ... so, if the girl displays a personal picture or her face on her Facebook profile, that is a bad thing and is not in line with what Islam and sharia require from them.’ (DN, female, Iraq)

Participants talk about the practice of avoiding putting photos of their entire face but instead they show other types of pictures on their profiles. SM talked about how females in Iraq do not post personal pictures but instead they post pictures of parts of their body, such as hands or fingers, and only show them to certain groups that do not include their family members or relatives. She said:

‘Those girls who are active users of Facebook usually don’t post their personal pictures on their accounts but are more willing to post pictures of babies, flowers, trips ... or even parts of their bodies such as hands or fingers, but only to certain groups’ (SM, female, Iraq)
Figure 8-1: The image shows three girls showing their hands only while they are celebrating a birthday party. SM, October, 2016

SM discussed how some Iraqi women manage the use of photos in their accounts on Facebook as a tactic in order not to post any personal pictures of themselves, then on a separate Facebook account they will post pictures that show parts of their bodies. By doing so, they express their individualities while still being careful to express an appropriate sense of modesty.

Personal photos or ‘selfies’ dominate the use of social media sites in Western cultures and this Western tendency of posting personal pictures that show faces of friends and family members is in contrast to the women in Iraq. Women adopting this type of interaction on Facebook demonstrate a different way of using social media. In other words, social media is used in way that appears to be appropriate to Iraqi culture and fits with needs and expectations of the local Iraqi context.

In addition to the creative tactics employed by Iraqi females in their use of photos, another practice adopted by some involves maintaining two accounts on the same social media platform to have a more liberal space in which post the things they like but which might be considered inappropriate for women in Iraq. For example, NZ says:
‘Like many other women in Iraq and a lot of my friends, the tactic we adopt is to maintain two accounts; one for family members and one for ourselves …. The second account is for posting things we like, photos, songs or even pictures of ourselves, taken from a distance so that nobody can recognize us. These acts might be considered as inappropriate and not in line with our cultural norms but in my opinion, it is normal and has nothing to do with that.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

Participants described how this new tactic enabled them to present themselves as being mindful of their status and family reputation, and which family members such as parents, brothers and uncles considered acceptable.

Separately, a number of female interviewees described how Iraq is now constrained by newly-emerging Sharia laws and other social norms that have come about because of the conditions after the war in 2003. They explain how it became difficult for individuals to interact with members of the opposite sex in public without any risks. In many areas, women are required to adhere to the conservative Islamic rules, especially when interacting with males. However, social media technology has challenged these Islamic relationship rules by allowing users to interact with members of the opposite sex while enabling them to protect their privacy and avoid any risks. I found many instances in which the research participants used Facebook to circumvent these new societal norms by using creative tactics. For example, RI and RS explained the difficulties they face in interacting with non-family males, and how these difficulties extended to their online lives, but also how they were successfully able to overcome these issues through the creative use of their accounts.

‘The changes that happened in Iraq after the 2003 war enhanced the cultural and social traditions in our communities, especially those of a tribal and religious nature, because they are descended from the same roots, and they are predominantly masculine in nature.’ (RI, female, Iraq)

‘In Iraq, using my real name on any social network sites would force me to adhere to my public image by which I am known, i.e., a polite, modest Iraqi woman. Therefore, I prefer to use different accounts, one for family and other for myself where I can interact with new friends and even men.’ (RS, female, Iraq)
In summary, similarly to how women behave in their offline life in which they wear the hijab as a way to depict a persona that shows adherence to the social norms to maintain modesty and avoid any violation of the community expectations, they also do so in their online lives by employing certain tactics to communicate the expectations of modesty for their potential audiences. As described by our participants (DN, SM, RI, RS, and NZ), the use of these tactics has enabled many female users of Facebook in Iraq to interact freely while being able to maintain a certain level of modesty. Managing the privacy settings, as in the case of DN and SM, and setting up two different accounts, such as RI, RS, and NZ, are among the most visible tactics adopted by our participants which gives them the opportunity to engage with others as they construct their individual identities. Interviewee excerpts indicate how Iraqi females find creative ways to express their individualities and manage their audiences as they act in-line with the expectations of their social and cultural traditions. The reason for such performance is to protect them from and to avoid any negative consequences.

8.3 ONLINE AWARENESS OF CONSEQUENCES

8.3.1 PROTECTING EMPLOYMENT

Issues relating to Facebook use and employment were acknowledged by many participants of both genders. They discussed how the social, political and religious situation created certain tensions between segments of Iraqi society. People come from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, and any misinterpretations might cause unforeseen problems. As a result, different views and perspectives might be misinterpreted and could cause a huge problem between individuals’ employment and their community. NJ indicated how the new circumstances in Iraq made things more complicated and any act that might be seen as a wrong-doing could damage a person a great deal. He said:

‘When you live in a social environment such as that in Iraq, you have to be careful of your personal views and perspectives as they might not be agreeable to a lot of people.’ (NJ, male, Iraq)
A number of interviewees discussed how the content posted, shared and communicated on Facebook might be searched or checked by their current or future employers, or even by their work colleagues. They claimed that their internet presence and interactions might be checked by their current employer and any content that might be interpreted as inappropriate could cost them their jobs. CH is one participant who regrets the issues caused by posting negatively about his work. He said:

‘I do remember that one day I posted some negative comments about the company I work for, thinking that it was nothing out of the ordinary. I made some comments criticizing the company processes and their ability to provide an adequate service. Unfortunately, it was seen by my manager and I got into a lot of trouble and it was a big mistake that almost cost me my job. I was lucky not to lose it.’ (CH, male, Iraq)

CH recounted another story of three workers in Nassiryah province in the south of Iraq who posted comments on their Facebook accounts showing opposition to a decision to cut their salaries. He said:

‘One of the municipal departments of Dhi Qar province terminated three employees because of their comments on social networking sites (i.e., on their personal Facebook pages), after reducing the wages of daily workers.’ (CH, male, Iraq)

SI, a female participant, stated her fear at being identified by her colleagues in her workplace and expressed how she felt safer using her second Facebook account to behave as she pleased with regards to commenting or criticizing colleagues, without any repercussions. She said:

‘My real account contains a lot of my work colleagues and I don’t like to post any stuff that might be negative towards them or my company. If I have something to say, I can do so safely using my created account where nobody knows my real identify and none of my offline connections are added.’ (SI, female, Iraq)
Participants prefer to create new identities using different accounts, which is an important solution for these types of problems and helps significantly in allowing them to express their opinions while protecting their status and profession. MR indicated how his created account helped him to express his views, which is not possible to do in his real life and on his public account. He wrote:

‘This account [created account] affords me the possibility of commenting and criticizing sensitive topics, especially those that concern with my press work, enabling me to comment and give my opinions freely and frankly, as well as to refer plainly to corruption issues, corrupted people inside the government or uncover false truths. This I could not do using my real account.’ (MR, male, Iraq)

Our participants also reported concerns about their future employment. They claimed that a future employer might come across their data online, especially on Facebook, and check their content. They might be not happy with some of this content and this would possible cost them a job opportunity. For example, BA, a male informant said:

‘I don't post or share a lot of information that might make me look very open minded or disrespectful towards my culture or the social norms. Our community is very complicated and content that might not be in line with the norms could be problematic. I do realize that bad outcomes are possible due to its content, such as a potential new employer making the decision not to employ you due to the information they found on your Facebook page.’ (BA, male, Iraq)

As can be seen, the interviewee excerpts above indicate the importance of being mindful of their interactions on Facebook to protect their employment. Frampton and Child (2013: p. 2262) stated that, ‘more common today is the cautious social media user who returns to their posted content on a consistent basis and asks themselves if anything posted compromises their own privacy and needs deleting.’ Individuals are often obliged to amend their interactions to achieve a certain level of protection. Such concerns lead them to control their privacy more actively by controlling the visibility of their profiles and
making them visible to friends only, or by maintaining more than one account. The results of this section of our study are in line with those of Child & Petronio (2011) who stated that there are challenges in blogging and relational communication on the internet, and today’s social media users have learned to be more cautious after they have seen several examples of people who lost their jobs because they were too open on Facebook.

8.3.2 PROTECTING SOCIAL LIFE

Participants expressed a high level of concern about their social life in the online environment. They stated that any misuse regarding their personal information or content communicated on their Facebook account might ruin their lives. They expressed the importance of protecting their private information in order for this not to be used against them or their families. They indicated the importance of careful interactions and being aware of the information they shared. They did not want to be accused of violating the behavioural code of honour because this might result in punishment. An individual’s misuse of information or their interactions could result in some sort of punishment, such as the opportunity to get married due to losing their personal or familial honour. For example, NT discussed the issue of the probable punishments if she violates the behavioural code of honour. She said that behaving openly might be misinterpreted by her people and could cause her to lose a potential marriage:

‘I avoid posting any personal information in my real account and even in my created account. I care about my life and my family life. I try my best to be very careful when I use my Facebook account. Any act that might be misinterpreted could cause violation to my personal and even familial honour and reputation, and as a result I might not ever be able to get married.’ (NT, female, Iraq)

NZ discussed how the different levels of awareness of her social life related to the type of the content she posted in her Facebook account, and how she works hard to ensure it is restricted in terms of disclosing any personal or familial information, as well as not to harm her reputation. NZ indicated that she does not want to be perceived as very open or careless regarding her religious or social beliefs because this would bring her shame or exclusion. She said:
‘I don’t want to bring shame to myself or any member of my family. Everything I post on Facebook should be very carefully considered. The people in our community will seize any opportunity to grasp any piece of information about you and then they will use it against you. For all users, but especially women, the use of Facebook is not that easy because they should be aware of their lives and reputations and interact in way that is in line with their social norms, even they are anonymised.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

Male participants also expressed concerns about their social lives through discussions of the concept of ‘hurma’ and how they are responsible for protecting their family’s hurma, which relates to reputation, and in this case the reputation of their mother and sisters. For example, AB, a male participant, described how he preferred having a different account because of these issues. He was not too concerned by issues arising in his created account because no one knows him or anybody else in the pictures and he said:

‘One of my little brothers used my account and posted a group picture of the family while we were on vacation. The picture of my mother and sisters received several likes from my friends. This really caused me severe embarrassment and upset me because others could see that picture of my mother and sisters. Frankly, I would not have been so upset if that had happened in my second account where no one offline could see them.’ (AB, male, Iraq)

This extract indicates the responsibility the participant feels to protect his own social life from any shame. He considered the ability to see a photo of his mother and sisters by non-mahram as an exposure of their ‘awara’ (in this case pictures of the faces and bodies of his mother and sisters). This brought embarrassment not only to him but also to his family.

The contents communicated on Facebook by users are not their only concern, as they are also worried about how this information could be misused by others. This can be seen in an extract by DK, a female participant who studied at a foreign university. She shows her concern about her personal information and how it could be used by some people if they find it on Facebook. She discussed the idea of studying abroad and how this gives her permission to interact with non-family members, and especially with males via Facebook. Despite the fact that her interaction is accepted and permitted by her parents because they
trust her, she is doing so as a result of joining a new educational establishment. She stated that this practice might not be approved by her extended family members, such as cousins and uncles. As a result, she chose to open an additional Facebook account in order to avoid familial issues and to maintain an acceptable image back home.

‘I am careful about the information I post on Facebook because I don’t want others to misuse it…. This will have a huge impact on my offline social life. Here in Iraq most families don’t accept friendships between a woman and a man. I am studying in the UK and I have many friends and colleagues which are males… and this is ok with my parents. Two cousins, who are part of my extended family said to me during one of my trips back home to Iraq to visit my parents, ‘you have a lot of male friends why do you have them?’ They are a bit closed and they don’t like the fact that I have male colleagues despite it being ok with my parents and that nothing is wrong with it. This has caused problems for me with them and so I decided to open a different account to avoid these issues.’ (DK, female, Iraq)

These concerns have led many participants, both males and females, to change their online habits in an attempt to make it more acceptable to their social and cultural norms and to avoid any consequences that might affect their current and future social lives. The participants’ descriptions of their social media use reflect the constraints of their culture on their self-expression and the management of their identity, which requires them to adopt different roles for different audiences in order to avoid interactions that would likely result in punishment for violation of the ‘rules’. This supports the view that many individuals show a certain level of concern regarding their personal information and how it might be misused, and as a result they act appropriately to protect this information (Dinev & Hart, 2006; Smith et al., 2011).

8.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY
The findings of this chapter indicate the link between their varying use of Facebook and the participants’ willingness to save face among their community in this novel and problematic environment. According to Goffman (1959), the audience is the key element that leads individuals to alter their performance. Individual performance varies from
audience to audience based on the impression they wish to engender on them. The chapter has explored how the users on Facebook who present to multiple audiences belong to different social spheres (e.g., family, work, and university) that have different expectations of them, and how they manage their impressions by modifying their behaviour in order not to influence the observations and opinions of others about them but to create a particular impression for the purpose of saving face. The outcomes suggest that users amend their interactions and performances in their real accounts and present the self they like in their created accounts to protect their real identities. On the other hand, they avoid certain acts that might result in the destruction of that perceived image (Vitak, 2015). It showed how important it is for the informants to manage their viewers’ impression to avoid any negative consequences that might be a result of certain invalidated performances. The findings have a significant implication regarding the way that people in Iraq use Facebook platform to compensate the limitations found in their offline life and to manage their audience impressions they form of them. Participants’ main purpose was not within the component model related to impression management which comprises two processes the impression construction and impression motivation (see Leary and Kowalski, 1990), but it involves a new process which is impression protection- the degree to which participants control how other people see them to protect themselves and their face from any negative consequences in the online world.
CHAPTER 9: THE PERFORMANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF SELF ONLINE

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will cover the wide range of data collected during interviews, both face-to-face and online interviews and observation, including the opinions and views of Facebook users in Iraq. This data is vital to answer one of the research questions about the kind of ‘tactics’ employed by Iraqi users of social network to construct, perform, and present their gender identities on Facebook. It will shed light on how these sites are used to establish, present and negotiate identity. Data gathered from the participants enabled a sophisticated understanding of the gender identity phenomenon and Facebook use in a conservative society. Two methods of data collection were employed; the first was interviews via qualitative face-to-face and in-depth interviews that followed a semi-structured format with a number of Iraqi participants of both genders, and also via online email interviews with participants who preferred this method for identity protection reasons. The second method was virtual ethnography that followed the form of observation. This qualitative mixed method design of data collection via interview was vital in offering the participants a choice about how they would like to be interviewed and at the same time, provided a rich source of data that to enable the research questions to be answered.

Goffman’s self-presentation and impression management theory (1959) was adopted to investigate the nature of identity construction in the online environment. This chapter also examines the techniques utilized by participants during social interactions to express themselves and convey the desired impression. Self-presentation is ‘the process of controlling how one is perceived by other people’ (Leary, 1995: p.2). The evolution of internet-based communication provides new opportunities for presenting the self, especially via ‘social networking sites (SNSs) which allow users to strategically create custom profile pages.’ (Rui and Stefanone, 2012). Several scholars, including Manago et al. (2008) refer to the fact that the motivation for using SNSs is self-presentation and state that users display their desirable or idealized selves. The research study is in line with other studies in which participants strategically construct, manage, and present their identities on Facebook, not only for the purpose of managing their public images, but also
because they live in a particular context where the cultural norms and expectations impose tight constraints on aspects of their online activities and performances. Examining the use of technology vis-à-vis Iraqi Arab culture is important to provide a clear picture of the adoption of technology and SNS use in such an environment. The conservative nature of Iraqi society due to the religious and cultural implications, have necessitated the adoption of certain methods as tools to maintain and regulate participants’ online selves in Facebook. This chapter will also explain in detail how the participants, and especially the women, use Facebook and will focus on their online actions on Facebook, and especially how they protect themselves via the use of several defensive tactics.

The sections in this chapter discuss the actions adopted by users in their online interactions and activities. The initial focus is the process of managing private and public faces on Facebook. This is examined by investigating how the users constructed their profiles in terms of dividing them into two faces sections; one private and one public. It also will focus on the information discussed in both of these two sections, such as name, address, status, and image and other personally identifiable information and non-identifiable information. The anonymity level of the profiles (None, semi- or completely anonymous) is also discussed, as is the use of this feature as device to enable their interactions on Facebook. We go on to discuss how strategic our participants were in presenting their disparate identities in various Facebook domains. The action of self-presentation and how it is implemented by the participants to reflect the way they wish to be perceived by their audiences to convey the desirable version of themselves is discussed. The research further proposes suggestions to add to the existing theories on self-presentation, by referring to the creative use of participants of the online sphere and their ability to construct both online private and public domains on Facebook. Facebook has provided people with the opportunity to present themselves positively. However, doing so in their public account may be hazardous due to the fact that ‘Facebook user’s real identity is often known by the user’s friends (Ellison et.al, 2007) poses a limitation on the extent of a deception.’ The worry of appearing too pretentious may lead to more awareness in their online interactions, which results in the failure of self-presentation. To avoid this occurring, participants detached themselves from their real and offline audiences in the private areas and created their own public zones. This validates the application of Goffman’s concept of backstage on Facebook in this study. According to
Goffman (1959) the ‘concept of a backstage is simply a place where differences (or “contradictions”, as he calls them) to the front region self-presentations can occur without consequences.’ (Zarghooni, 2007: p. 7). Therefore, by having two accounts or profiles or dividing their profile on Facebook, participants gain permission to vary their interactions in both the back and front stages.

9.2 IDENTITY PERFORMANCE IN PERSONAL ACCOUNTS

The emergence of profile-based social networking sites, including social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace, has widened the scope of online self-presentation and it is no longer limited to text-based descriptions. People can create online profiles using a variety of digital devices, such as images, nicknames, fonts, music, and video to represent themselves. They can customize and configure their page to present their identity on social media sites. We will first look at the way in which the participants set up their Facebook accounts through the use of Facebook profiles or stages. According to Boyd (2010), ‘Profiles are a place where people gather to converse and share. Conversations happen on profiles and a person’s profile reflect their engagement with the site’ (pp.39-58).

This chapter focusses on the decisions taken by the participants to construct their profile(s) and the extent to which they interact with their audience on these profiles. Several elements will be investigated, such as the type of personal information mentioned in their account(s) and how they are able to construct their audiences and enable them to access the information on their profile(s). Participants have managed their presence through controlling what is included or excluded, audience segregation, and audience access, which taken together, enable us to understand the participants’ awareness of their audience. However, the main focus will be on the participants’ actions to construct their profiles.

The degree of anonymity used in the construction of the participants’ profile(s) or image(s) on Facebook will be investigated. This is fundamental to the approach adopted in this thesis as I define these constructed profiles and the choices and degrees of anonymity employed by the participants, is in line with the constructionist approach. The
presentation of the self on Facebook to a certain extent, requires the disclosure of personal information such as a person’s name, age and location. This information indicates the relationship between the online and offline identity that the user wishes to present to his/her audience and forms a degree of authenticity as to what is real or false. However, this not the aim of this current research, as the focus is profile construction.

9.3 STRATEGIES FOR CONSTRUCTING FACEBOOK ACCOUNTS (FACES)

9.3.1 ANONYMITY

Communicating anonymously online is found to be a common behavior among the research participants. They discussed their construction of online identity and participation on the Facebook platform under the cloak of anonymity. As in the offline world, informants reported that this method enables them to control what information can be shared with other users, and also can be a way of separating the personal information that they might share with new people or stranger from the information they might share with close people such as family, relatives or friends. According to Project–Childnet International (2013) ‘As we share more and more information online, anonymity can be a way of protecting personal information and exploring sensitive topics, friendships and identities without the risk of these actions being linked back to them – or indeed it can help people escape prejudices that can come into play.’ (p. 9).

Following research into participant’s Facebook behavior, the study identified two different types of anonymous profiles that were constructed on Facebook. The first are partial anonymous profiles, and the second are totally anonymous profiles. There is a clear difference between these two types of the profiles based on the degree of anonymity. The major elements that shape these differences are; 1) the names used in the profile, 2) the profile image and 3) the identifiable personal information. Participants use this feature as one of the strategies in their self-presentation process which is influenced by the structure of the application and the influence of the participant’s social group.
9.3.1.1 CONSTRUCTING SEMI-ANONYMOUS ACCOUNTS

In semi-anonymous profiles, individuals usually partially hide their personal identifiable information, such as names, photos, location, address etc., from public view. This type of anonymity was more frequently discussed by female Iraqi participants than by the male participants. Five women reported using this type of Facebook profile, while none of the men reported using it. This type of profile is the main one used by the study’s female participants on Facebook. Iraqi women avoid being identified on social media, especially Facebook, as a strategy to avoid negative consequences and unwanted audiences. A study of college students by Tufekci (2008) found that their profile visibility was adjusted to manage unwanted contact and that students did not use their actual full names. Those that created these types of profiles in the present study used nicknames such as “Red Flower” ‘‘Moon Light’’ or “Claire de Lune” instead of their real names. Many respondents mentioned this several times, for example SM, a female participant said:

‘I use the name ‘Claire de Lune’ which I love as it means the light of the moon. I borrowed this name from French culture because it is different and unfamiliar and has not been used before among the people in Iraq.’ (SM, female, Iraq)

Another female user stated:

‘The name I use in this account is close to my character which is (almusamiah) and it means the (forgiver), actually it is one of my personal features.’ (RK, female, Iraq)

According to the study conducted by Shafie, et al. (2012: p.137), “Female users prefer to use catchy creative variations of their names such as MeERaaFilaa, Ms Fie Fie, Rose Cda and AnneCakura. Creative variations of their real names are perceived to be more playful as they shift between online and offline identities.’ However, the participants in this study created their profile names to serve a certain purpose. These types of names are based on the user’s desire about how they wish to present themselves to people in a non-identifiable way, while still being able to communicate and interact with offline social networks such as their real friends, relatives and family members, who know their identity behind this semi-anonymous profile.
‘I am a romantic person and the name I use is a passionate one that reflects many aspects of my personality and interests.’ (FJ, female, Iraq)

RI explains how she uses a different name while still being able to communicate with known people from her family, friends and relatives but also with unknown people from different groups:

‘I don’t use my real name in my account on Facebook; instead I use a name which is entirely different to my character. The name I use is masculine-sounding, in order to avoid being recognized by unwanted users. I am still able to communicate with people I know from my family and friends and even individuals I met online, but I like interacting with them.’ (RI, female, Iraq)

The main motivation for this type of profile naming is to be able to join and use Facebook and interact with particular groups of contacts without any risks for the users. Furthermore, it helps the user avoid being searched for, or found by unwelcome users who present a privacy risk.

The next issue to be discussed is the profile image used on the participant’s Facebook profiles. The profile image represents another level of identity construction and presentation on Facebook. Users do not use their personal pictures, but instead they have customized their pictures to display something different. Iraqi female users in the study employ abstract objects such as landscapes, babies, cartoon characters, flowers, actresses and religious greetings as their profile pictures. They also use this technique to exhibit interesting images. The selection of their profile image among participants is another method of information control. Their reasons for changing their profile photographs were varied. Tufekci (2008) states that profile images selected by users represent the desired images they wish to display to the public. A number of respondents reported that they change their profile image depending on their latest situation, such as a picture of the current season, for example FJ, a 39-year-old unemployed woman said:

‘I want a picture that is suitable for each season; I don’t want to display a winter image while we are in summer (ha ha ha) (Laughing).’ (FJ, female, Iraq)
Other respondent (ZH) commented that she chooses her profile image according to her mood, i.e., happy or sad. For example (ZH) said:

‘I always express my feelings on Facebook, and for me it is a matter of sharing my status and receiving support from my friends online when they are not there in my offline life.’ (ZH, female, Iraq)

Participants such as (RK and RI) indicated different reason for displaying their profile image, and that it depended on life events or special occasions, such as religious, social and current affairs. For example, RI used to display in her profile picture the words Eid al-Adha (in Arabic: عيد الأضحى, translation: ʿīd al-aḍḥā, 'Feast of the Sacrifice' greeting, which is the second of two Muslim holidays and represents one of the Muslims important religious occasions and celebrated worldwide each year).

Figure 9-1: RI profile image that representing congratulations for Muslims for Eid al-Adha

The use of the profile picture by the participants suggests that users conform to the social and cultural norms and traditions of their offline lives and that these dictate a particular behavior online. For example, it would be deemed inappropriate to use personal or
unsuitable picture on their profile. Nir (2012, p 40) referred to this situation by stating, ‘The changing function of photography is part of complex technological, social and cultural transformations, which means that the change from material to digital becomes a cultural rather than a purely technological process.’

Textual (username) and visual (profile images) are not only the personal data displayed and controlled by the users, it also includes personal information that participants share in their profile pages, such as age, education, date of birth, and contact details including phone number and email address. Such personal information is presented in a way that has, to a certain extent, variable control that reflects users’ awareness of information disclosure. This sense of awareness depends on the type of information and the level of privacy. According to Durante (2011: p.603), ‘People are thus likely to be more concerned with privacy when they disclose information about themselves rather than when they disclose information about others.’ As it was noted, the female participants were aware of disclosing their personal information in their first semi-public profiles, particularly their phone number and residential address. However, they were willing to disclose their age, education, gender and marital status.

Remarkably, the study found that Iraqi females do not use non-anonymous profiles, even if their audience consists of family members, such as husbands, brothers, sons and relatives who approve their use of Facebook. However, they do use semi-anonymous profiles and the reason behind this is to avoid being identified by friends of friends, who might not appreciate their use of Facebook and the cultural norms and traditions to which they must adhere, and thus be perceived negatively which would bring shame to their family. According to Ahmed et al. (2014), ‘The majority of online social networks offer second degree access which means a friend of a friend is able to access the user’s personal information.’ (pp.186 – 197). RK, a female participant, stated the reason behind obscuring her real identity even if the people she has in her friending list are her family and close friends:

‘Women in Iraq usually don’t disclose their real identity or names on Facebook even if she befriends only her family (husband or sons), they adhere to this as a precautionary step in order not to be identified or recognized by the friends of her friends.’ (RK, female, Iraq)
This study found that the twelve male users don’t have this type of profile on the sites; instead they use non-anonymous profiles in which their real names and personal pictures in their main profiles are real in order to be identified by their social networks and by others outside of their network. Looking at their practices, it is possible to make a number of distinctions between male and female users of Facebook in terms of how they construct their main profiles on the site. These practices indicate the variation in the performances that reflect the users’ desires and tendencies regarding how to present themselves online and to whom they want to be disclosed and known. As the interviewees stated in their replies which represented a reflection of how they wished to be perceived, the setup of the first semi-anonymous profile for females can be considered as an extension to their offline lives and as a back stage where only people they know are present. This is unlike the men, who were happy to disclose their personal identity and information in their main account. They had no need to set up a semi-anonymous profile.

9.3.1.2 CONSTRUCTING FULLY ANONYMOUS ACCOUNTS
The second type of profile constructed by the participants on Facebook was the fully anonymous profile. Users of this type of profile intend to hide their real identity from everyone, even people they know in their offline lives, such as family members, close friends, colleagues, partners, neighbors and relatives. This type of profile is used by both males and females in Iraqi society, but it is preferentially used by female participants who try to hide their real identities from everyone, but especially from their community. Respect for their society plays a significant role in this type of profile due to the influence of social relationships and cultural norms. Female participants stated that if their real identity were to be discovered and they were considered to be acting in a way that violating the behavioral codes of their community, this might cause them major family and social problems. These problems can lead to severe consequences that might result in damage to their personal reputation, punishment from their family members (fathers or brothers), and social rejection which would impact on their marriage as being rejected by the men. This can be seen in the extract below from NZ, a female participant who describes the situation:
‘Girls in our community should be very careful [hide their real identity] if they interact freely and in an unexpected way that does not confirm to the rules and norms of society, otherwise they will be in difficult situation which will lead to a bad reputation, physical punishment inflicted by their family members (fathers or brothers) and the loss of all the wonderful things in their lives forever.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

A similar sentiment was expressed by NA:

‘If a girl acts in a way that can be interpreted as a violation of the norms and traditions of her community [if her real identity is discovered] this will destroy her reputation and she might not be able to get married because no man will accept her as a wife.’ (NA, female, Iraq)

All anonymous female participants reported that they were very careful when they use Facebook. Many Iraqi females join Facebook by hiding personal identifiable information from others. As a result, the textual and visual representations of the users’ profile name and image in their second Facebook profiles are produced for- and consumed by a particular group of people. Many respondents reported that their screen names include the use of pseudonyms that take the form of created names, and in most cases, are male names (e.g., TS, RF, HA and DN). The utilization of these names is often employed by users to distance themselves from their real identities.

‘I use a nickname in my first account and a different name and identity in my second one which is completely different from my real name, as I use a male name.’ (TS, female, Iraq)

These male names have nothing to do with their real offline names, but they have been used as a way to gain equality:

‘When you are anonymous you are completely equal, so that when anybody replies to you they will so without any prior opinions about your gender.’ (RF, female, Iraq)

Another participant, HA who is female and married stated that the use of this tactic is considered as a new layer of privacy protection online.
‘I used to mention my real gender in my first account, but my other account is not real. The name gives no clear indication to the gender of the user and this is used as a protection strategy. The name I use has mainly a male connotation.’ (HA, female, Iraq)

However, for DN the reason was different, she used a male name to avoid any restrictions and to gain a certain level of freedom.

‘The reason for doing so was mainly to create a new identity through which I could avoid the restrictions that prevent me from doing a lot of things that I would like to do. These things might be seen in our society as being unacceptable and contrary to the customs and traditions of my religion.’ (DN, female, Iraq)

This was the same for NT, another female participant who said:

‘I use an alias, like many other women in our society who often do not disclose their gender. This opens up many possibilities, such as breaking social restrictions, giving them the freedom to express themselves, and communicating with the opposite sex. They can communicate with men in the virtual world quite easily but not in reality because of social constraints.’ (NT, female, Iraq)

Male participants also reported using the same strategy in their second accounts. They tended to use a different name internationally, either to protect their identity or to post whatever they wanted and to form relationships with women. For example, MR said:

‘I use a girl’s name in my second account. I just set it up to make new friends as well as to establishing relationships with girls so that I can express my inner romantic feelings and to be in the female world so that I can learn more about them.’ (MR, male, Iraq)

AH had a different reason and stated how the name he created has no relationship with his personality and that he uses a fake name created for self-protection.

‘I use a girl’s name for my second account. There is no relationship between me and the name, but it is a means of providing a way to hide. It allows me the freedom to be myself without it being considered a psychological problem or
disorder. It helps others to be more open-minded in their dealings with me via social media, and also is more secure and helps maintain my privacy.’ (AH, male, Iraq)

Participants also made choices regarding their profile images in their second accounts (anonymous accounts). Female participants stated that they don’t use any personal pictures for their profile images (e.g., NZ).

‘I do not post any personal pictures on this account (second account), instead I use something related to the character that I wish to present.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

Many female participants indicated that their profile images were chosen carefully to communicate certain messages and that they had no connection with the users’ real identity. For example, interests, hobbies, or issues supported by the participants were the most common things that were used as their profile images.

‘I usually use my profile image to communicate a message that I wish to deliver to people and in most cases, it is a positive message.’ (HM, female, Iraq)

Images presented in these accounts strongly indicate their willingness to reflect the positives and strengths of their personalities that they are not able to show in their offline lives. The social norms and traditions, and the collective nature of Iraqi society prevents women from showing off their intellect, attractiveness and their abilities as active members of society, and not only a subordinate citizen.

‘I discuss several topics that might be difficult to debate in reality.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

It appears that the use of these profile images is almost always used to tell a story that makes a clear connection with text or quotations included in the profile picture. Users utilize images that often display social, political, religious and personal perspectives. Participants’ use of different visual expressions to illustrate these four affiliations that underlying the narrative of their personal profile identities. This type of profile includes symbolic pictures/pictures with a message which are used by both males and females to convey certain messages. For example, RF profile image aims at communicating certain message that call for social, economic and political reform.
‘Exchanging views and disseminating demands that call for a better social, economic and political situation….’ (RF, female, Iraq)

Figure 9-2: RF profile picture that calls for justice and faire in Iraq

The concept of being acceptable and effective extends too many aspects of life, such as showing better jobs, better social skills, and higher achievements. For example, one participant (NZ, female, Iraq) preferred to use a profile image that showed her profession as a doctor, which is a high-level job in Iraq. NZ wanted to present herself as a talented and high-status individual which reflects the desired self-image that she wishes to convey to people.
A number of male users with this type of profile preferred to use non-realistic images that expressed certain features of their personalities, such as smartness, capability and talent. Their use of the image differed to some extent from the females in terms of the purpose and the message that they wished to communicate with their audience.

“In fact, I don’t use my personal picture in this account, but I use an image of the latest laptop and communication technologies.” (NJ, male, Iraq)
NJ uses a picture of the latest computers to communicate that he is technologically-minded and that he knows about the latest equipment. Another example of profile pictures used by males in their anonymous Facebook profiles is used by AB. He displays a picture of a group of people to show that he is open-minded and likes to interact with others. He said:

‘I try to put up pictures that make me feel acceptable to others, for example a picture of a group of people showing social cooperation and harmony, and thus give the impression that the person behind this picture is a friendly person and sociable. I give this impression through this picture, which shows many people, but none are clearly identifiable.’ (AB, male, Iraq)
Goffman, a performance is “all activity on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (1959: p.15).

The other important element in setting up these pages was the personal information. Users intended to control their personal information by showing the information that reflected and conveyed a positive picture of themselves, such as having social networks, social skills, hobbies, and partaking in other activities. This tactic is adopted by both males and females in Iraq and is used a means of self-idealization by showing a positive image of the person. In the personal arena, self-presentation through physical attractiveness in Iraqi society is not validated according to the norms and traditions. As a result, both men and women are obliged to engaged in the manipulation of their profiles and utilize other means to present a desirable image of themselves as well as an attractive side of his/her character.

9.3.2 REGIONS MANAGEMENT TO AVOID CONTEXT COLLAPSE: ONE PLATFORM AND SEVERAL STAGES

Social media sites are created to serve many purposes, of which one of the most unknown is related to communication and social correctness (Schoenebeck et al., 2016). These are defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007: p.211) and are based on three system capabilities. The systems are: ‘allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.’ These capabilities have enabled these platforms to be considered as sites for selective performances, which is in line with Goffman’s dramaturgical approach of a ‘front stage / back stage’ metaphor for managing impressions and performing different social roles. Facebook is one of these important platforms and research concerning its use has focused on the social interaction process and the issues that arise in this context, such as how the platform supports the issue of identity presentation and building relationships that help to shape the social capital. According to Zhoa et al., (2013: p.4), ‘although Facebook is a single platform, it provides multiple regions of activity including performances, exhibitions, and personal regions.’
The research data from the study provide strong evidence of how people experience using Facebook from the analytical perspectives identified in the literature review and theoretical framework chapters, around performances and regions. The majority of Facebook users who participated in the research had multiple accounts to manage different contexts. The results showed that participants’ experience of the Facebook platform included two different functional regions; the public performance region and the personal private region. The public region is used for data and impression management while the personal region is for communicating other facets of life, such as familial personal relationships, ties and events. The study showed how the practice of online self-presentation entitled the performers (users) to include different activities that contrast or align with each other to manage their performances and data on Facebook, as well as to avoid context collapse. Schoenebeck et al., (2016: p.1483) state that ‘in prior work, scholars have drawn on the idea of context collapse to describe the challenges associated with managing multiple audiences online.’

A number of scholars have examined context collapse (e.g., Boyd, 2008; Vitak et al., 2012 and Marwick and Boyd, 2011). According to Boyd (2008), context collapse is a direct result of having a variety of friends from different contexts coming together in a single location. His study shows three dynamic properties that lead teenagers to navigate the online spaces that are made of invisible audiences, collapsed context and the blurring of public and private spaces (Boyd, 2008). Other scholars such as Vitak et al., (2012) examined context collapse in terms of work and personal life boundaries. They identified three different strategies followed by users to manage context collapse: the first was by refusing friend requests from people from their workplace on their personal account, the second was by creating multiple Facebook accounts, one for personal contacts and the other for professional activities, and the third strategy was to avoid controversial topics altogether.

Below, are presented the themes that emerged from the interview data using direct representative quotes from the participants that show how these regions are formed, and how they manage these profiles across multiple regions to avoid context collapse. The public region (the performance region) is consistent with Goffman’s ideas where a users’ current self-presentation needs underlie their decisions for creating and managing the
content. Both contexts and audiences are considered as key players that affect the process of creating these regions and managing the data. Two factors have been identified that have relationships with region management on Facebook: the first is ‘friending’ decisions and the second one is content dissemination.

Participants’ ‘friending’ decision in the public and personal regions is one of the most important factors in creating these regions. Contexts and audiences influence participants’ behaviours and as a result, they make ‘friending’ on the Facebook account a type of performance act. Constraints that might be present in their personal account represent important factors that predicted friendships in this region. For example, SI a female respondent, expressed how she was not able to befriend strangers on her personal account because she was afraid of being seen doing so by her parents or brothers. She prefers to befriend male strangers using her second account, which represents her public region which she created using a false name and another identity that was unlike her real character. She said:

‘I don’t add non-relative males as friends on my first Facebook account because I created it to interact only with family members, close friends and acquaintances. I share and post personal stuff with them that I do not want strangers to know about. I prefer to befriend males in my created account as it contains no family members or offline friends. I created it to interact freely without any restrictions or fears.’ (SI, female, Iraq)

DN, another female respondent shared similar sentiments:

‘No way, I do not add male friends on my personal account. This would cause big problems with my family and relatives or it could even destroy my reputation.’
(DN, female, Iraq)

RF, a female respondent reported that her created Facebook account is for intimate relationships:

‘Well, my created second Facebook account is for making new friendships and creating new intimate relationships.’ (RF, female, Iraq)
Similarly, SJ, a male respondent reported that he does not add or interact with females on his personal account, as he would be questioned by family or friends.

‘If my parents or friends see me interacting with women or girls it will be a big issue. They will start asking about how I know them. I do not want to be in trouble with them, especially with my parents as they consider it (Haram) forbidden and against our behavioral rules.’ (SJ, male, Iraq)

The second decision that the participants made in managing multiple accounts (regions) on Facebook is about content. Limiting posts to specific users or categories in different regions can help to control the content dissemination, which in turn leads to avoiding context collapse. Context matters in the issue of context collapse on Facebook. According to Zhoa et al., (2013: p. 4) ‘the content is usually targeted to, or associated with contexts and audiences relevant to the moment.’ The majority of respondents in the study held strong views on polarizing topics such as politics and religion and felt that would be difficult to reach an agreement between friends who hold strong opposing views. They reported the explicit fear that their topics and posts might cause trouble if they are misinterpreted by other users.

‘Did you know that it is difficult for me to talk about some religious or political topics in my real account on Facebook because it leads to a lot of problems with friends, and I may lose them?’ (AB, male, Iraq)

DK, a female informant said:

‘The current situation in Iraq regarding the sectarian and ethnic problems in our country have led me to avoid talking about topics or issues related to a particular sect or race in my real account on Facebook for fear of causing problems with friends or other user with whom I have a relationship.’ (DK, female, Iraq)

One way of managing context collapse is by categorizing posts and contents for different audiences in different regions. This strategy can help users to avoid many problems with family and friends. RS, a female respondent said that she had a second account using a different name and identity to remove herself from any problems with people in her community and to be able to discuss various topics. She said:
‘You will be able to discuss any topics, even those that you cannot debate using your real identity, such as religion, issues about the state or even sex.’ (RS, female, Iraq)

SH, another female participant said:

‘Having a new identity enables me to interact with- and handle different issues honestly, and to express my views on various topics, and to discuss political and religious issues. This has enabled me to overcome many obstacles imposed by society, as well as some customs and traditions. Additionally, it helped me to avoid problem with other users on Facebook.’ (SH, female, Iraq)

One female participant, HA, discussed how certain content on her personal account caused problems with one of her family members because her behaviour was considered inappropriate. She decided to change that account and create a different one to avoid such problems. She said:

‘I remember that one day I added a well-known young poet to my real Facebook account. I loved his poetry but the result of adding and following him was terrifying as I faced a wave of anger from my brother who threatened me and asked me to delete this person. He did not want to tarnish the image of our family with an immoral act. He considered what I did as immoral and contrary to the customs of our society.’ (HA, female, Iraq)

AA, a male respondent reported different reason for managing multiple regions by relating it to the current chaotic situation in Iraq. He discussed how talking about religious or political issues in Iraq is hazardous because any misinterpretation of the content could cause a lot of issues for the person, or even cost him his life.

‘Religious and political ideas specifically, and if you asked me why these ideas in particular, I would say that it is because of situation I live in, in which it is difficult to express your views and opinions freely. The difficulty lies in the fact that any invalidated act or view may be misinterpreted and the result would be fatal.’ (AA, male, Iraq)
The data shows that Facebook is considered to offer a platform that serves as an important region for communicating different content with various audiences. This helps users to avoid context collapse by being able to manage several accounts (regions) and set up particular content for each of them. The respondents discussed two key decisions in managing these separate regions. First of these were the friending decisions and the second concerns the content and posts. Both these factors played significant roles in showing how Facebook is considered to be a part of the participants’ culture, and as a result led them to amend their behaviour on Facebook. In conclusion, the process of integrating social media into everyday lives has lead Iraqi users of both genders to display usage patterns that reproduce the long-standing boundaries between the different social contexts of the offline world and local interpretations of private and public. As a result, separating regions has become the normal way of using social network sites, and particularly Facebook in Iraq. “Public by default and private through effort” (Boyd 2014: p.12) is not the case for the most users of social media in the research study, and this is due to the fact that the participants are public only through a large effort and private by default.

9.4 MANAGING THE SELF IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT: APPROACHES OF SELF-REPRESENTATION ON FACEBOOK

9.4.1 INTRODUCTION

The practice of self-representation in the context of the digital and social space of Facebook is a collective process which involves interaction processes between the user and his/her audience. As the focus of the first section was on the participants’ efforts to create and build their accounts that represent the stages, or the front regions, where they will enact their performances, it also demonstrated the extent to which the participants were more focused on the process of how they managed and controlled their profiles and audiences in terms of anonymity, befriending and allowing access to their content. In this section the discussion is more focused on self-presentation and how the participants devoted a great deal of effort to construct their identities and play different roles to different audiences.
The current section deals with the process of managing and creating different selves for his/her audience and the notion of self-idealization. Participants’ performance is a type of ‘self-presentation’ that is always targeted-to and associated with contexts and audiences in specific situations. It highlights the control participants have over their own representation and how the user manipulates this to customize their self-presentation and provides them with a way to form a new identity and play different roles. Users are able to enact different roles and show other parts of their personality to convey different messages to multiple audiences. According to Goffman (1959), ‘the performer has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups…We do not show ourselves to our own masters and employers as to our intimate friends.’ (p. 57).

Based on this, participants’ performances of their networked selves and their representations to diverse audiences were examined. Opportunities provided by the various tools available through Facebook for greater self-expression of several components of identity that are utilized to present the self in a desired way were also explored. This separates the presentation of the online identity and sheds light on the way the participants adapt to present the idealized version of the self for their audiences. This raises issues regarding the way that participants express various types of identities and how the self is fragmented in Iraqi users when it is presented in the online world of Facebook.

9.4.2 PRESENTATIONS OF THE SELF ON FACEBOOK

In the study, Facebook users present various facets of themselves through the use of multiple user profiles and anonymous profiles. This method helps the users to manage their online identities and enact different roles that are not possible to perform in real life or in the backstage region. This section sheds light on the strategies adopted by the study participants showing their efforts to construct and present the favourable version of the self in the online environment. These strategies are mainly based on separating the online and offline stages to create detached versions of the self. This form of self-presentation clearly indicates the efforts the participants have devoted to performing different roles.
and to showing another facet of their identity. Participants create anonymous profiles to manage the boundaries between their online and offline worlds, which in turn enable them and avoid problems as a result of practicing online what is considered inappropriate offline. Kim and Papacharissi (2003) noted that online spheres, unlike face-to-face interactions, enable users to emphasize salient identities that possibly are not appropriate or desirable to display in offline world contexts. Their desire to keep firm boundaries between these diverse spheres leads them to conceal the self from a specific audience on the one hand, and to maintain multiple social networks on the other hand. According to Cho (2010: p.43), ‘Users have more options regarding what types of personal information that they conceal or reveal and to what degree they do so.’

Participants indicated a number of reasons that led them to create and maintain different types of profiles on Facebook (e.g. anonymous profiles). According to the data, one of the major reasons was to escape the cultural restrictions imposed by their culture.

‘I want to avoid the restrictions that prevent me of doing a lot of things that I wish to do, but which might be interpreted in our society as unacceptable and contrary to the customs, traditions and the provisions of our religion.’ (DN female, Iraq)

RS, another female participant said:

‘[Creating anonymous profiles] gets rid of a lot of social, family and religious obstacles.’ (RS female, Iraq)

The use of anonymous profiles as indicated by the research participants from both genders females (e.g., RS and AS) and males (SJ and YS), is for the purpose of joining shared interest groups and to express the self within these groups. Anonymity also encourages them to transgress gender boundaries outside of the family and their marriage by interacting and forming relationships with the opposite gender, which is not allowed in real life. This can be illustrated by what RS & SS stated in their interviews:

‘Communicating with various groups without letting this cause disruption to my private and public social life….’ (RS, female, Iraq)

While AS female participant pointed out that:
‘Facebook is one way to communicate with relatives and friends using my real account while in the other account I can create new friends and enjoy the freedom of communicating with men.’ (AS, female, Iraq)

SJ and YS male participants stated that:

‘For me…. Facebook just like a new world where I can interact and communicate with different people even women and create new friendships.’ (SJ, male, Iraq)

‘Since the presence of Facebook in my life I become able to separate between my connection and things I am doing…. I am now having two different worlds with different connections and relationships’ (YS, male, Iraq)

Participants also indicated that by using anonymous profiles, they gain the opportunity to show off their skills, express their creativity such as the skill to write romantic poetry), and receive feedback from friends. For example, NZ stated that she is not able to show her poems on her private account that is dedicated to her family members and friends as this type of activity is not validated by them because of the social and cultural norms. It also provides her with the opportunity to interact with other people and especially male users who appreciate her poems and writing skills:

‘I like writing romantic poems and to express various feelings and emotions, but writing this form of poetry is not acceptable for women because of the restrictions imposed by the cultural and societal norms and traditions. I decided to post my poems on my anonymous account to avoid these restrictions and to interact with different users and receive their feedback, especially that from men. They always interact with my poems and express their appreciation.’ (NZ female, Iraq)

For SH it was important to compensate for others’ ignorance of her talent. She was willing to publicize her drawings and to obtain the views and opinions of people other than her family members and acquaintances, who did not always support her. She posted these in her anonymous profile, which includes more than 650 Facebook ‘friends’, most of whom are writers, doctors, and journalists and they do not really know who she is. She created her professional artist account to let others know what she is capable of.
‘I was able show my talent in caricature art and obtain the views and encouragement from various people. I never heard any words of support or encouragement from my family or friends.’ (SH, female, Iraq)

Figure 9-6: One of the SH posts on her Facebook wall to show her talent in caricature art. SH, Feb, 2014

The other approach adopted by participants to express their desired self was through choosing different styles of self-presentation which they could show in private and public spaces. They intentionally separated these two spaces in order to navigate between them and to escape certain cultural constraints imposed on them due to the nature of their community. The difference between their private and public personas is an attempt to conceal parts of their offline identities. Uski and Lampinen (2016) indicated that, ‘when the self is presented to others in a social context, some aspects are emphasized, and others concealed’ (p.450). According to the study conducted by Ellison et al. (2006), participants described how they or others created profiles that reflected an ideal as opposed to actual self: ‘Many people describe themselves the way they want [to be] . . . their ideal themselves’ (p.426). Users of dating sites devote efforts in an attempt to idealise their self
to find their matching partner. They achieve that by amending their profiles through showing their merits and omitting undesirable personal characteristics.

Similarly, but for a different purpose, in the study participants intend to show their desired identity by concealing part of their characteristics based on the context and addressees or viewers that this identity was constructed for. This strategy is illustrated by HA, a female participant who works as a teacher in one of the holy cities in Iraq. She constructed her Facebook identity by playing different roles based on the context and the audience. She intentionally separated her private professional personality in the offline world (as a teacher) and her public (online) self where she constructed an identity unlike her professional one, and she frees herself from all the offline restrictions. She concealed her private life (her profession) from her Facebook profile and decided to keep it off her public profile online. She believed that this should not be disclosed online to the public in an effort to maintain her ideal image. HA’s interview suggested a sense of separating the self in the offline and online worlds.

‘… On Facebook I have different characters; one in my real account which is dedicated for those people I know offline. This persona reflects my character as a teacher, known by many people including family and friends, and I do my best to maintain the ideal image of myself in everything I do on my Facebook account. People know me as having a particular personality as a teacher, which I do not want to change. However, in my second account, I am a very different person who loves to interact with and reply to informal comments. I have different connections and I added several groups of who share my interests. I have two different personalities; one that I use for my family and friends that shows much adherence to the cultural and social norms that I don’t want to upset, and the other one in which I express myself freely away from all these restrictions.’ (HA female, Iraq)

This extract shows how HA created two different identities based on the context and the audience where her online/informal identity is very different from her offline professional/formal self. She considers Facebook as a breathing space where she can
express her relaxed identity and play her desired role online. It is clear that in the Iraqi context, these different roles (performances) played by the participants in the online environments demonstrate how the identities they have constructed are subject to change and inconsistency.

The use of anonymous profiles by a number of the participants represents their willingness to behave in a way that is consistent with the norms and conditions of the culture of their society. This anonymity helps them to maintain face and does not affect their public image of the self (breaching the social norms and traditions through behaving in a way that is considered against these norms). Individuals’ behaviour in different contexts and in front of different audiences, as well as their adherence to the social norms and traditions, is considered as a pure example of their commitment to represent an ideal version of themselves. Furthermore, these findings are not in line with and are contrary to the received view of several scholars such as Back et. al., (2008), Bessière et al. (2008), Zhao (2008) and Dijck (2013) who claimed that identities constructed on Facebook reflect the true identity and personality of the users in their offline life (this is based on the view that Facebook users tend to disclose and reveal more about themselves and their personal information).

9.4.3 EXPRESSING DESIRED FACE ON FACEBOOK

This section is mainly concerned with exploring how participants in this study employ strategies to express their idealized version of the self to their audience. Women appear to be more interested in this idea than men, who did not use their Facebook accounts for such reason. For example, two male participants BA and YS, stated that their main aim was to have separate regions that enable them to interact freely using two different profiles. SJ, another male contributor, indicated a different reason when the researcher asked him about whether he used his Facebook account(s) for the purpose of self-idealization. He said that his main drive was to create a safe environment for his interactions and that would protect him.

The idea of presenting ‘idealized self-image’ is emphasised mainly by young women in Iraq to challenge the traditional perception of them. Sibak’s research (2009: p.15)
showed that the idea of the ‘ideal self’ was ‘performed in order to challenge the expectations of the society and their important others seen through the lenses of the traditional women’s role’. She claimed that users’ reflections on the gap between their ideal and real selves is encouraged by the use of social networking sites through enacting the ‘self’ they feel their audience thinks they ought to be. Participants emphasise this sense by talking about their online activities and how they relate to notions of femininity and intellectual identity. Goffman (1959: p.44) observed a ‘tendency for performers to offer their observers an impression that is idealised in several different ways.’

Several studies have emphasised that social networking sites encourage users to employ several tactics that enable them to create and communicate the ideal version of their profile (see Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Ellison, et al., 2006a). Such online sites encourage users to present a sexualised self-representation through photographs (see Boyd 2007, 2008; Mango et al., 2008; Sessions, 2009, and Siibak, 2009). According to Kirsti McGregor (2015: p.19), ‘The display of photographs of the self is one aspect of these sites’ focus on documenting and displaying aspects of everyday life that has transformed self-presentation online.’ However, the analysis of idealised expressions in this study showed that the tactics employed by the participants in the current study differ from those argued by scholars such as Ellison et al., (2006) and Manago et al., (2008).

The analysis of the ideal image of the self in this study indicates the important factors considered by the participants while conveying this self-image as well as a ‘desired image’. These images are formed in respect to cultural and gender norms, as well as the expectations of the audience. ‘Because the images, narratives and styles come from a broader culture, and many are linked to specific identifications- for example, women and men cannot draw in the same way on the same sets of ideas and narratives in self-presentation there is a limited set of possibilities.’ (McGregor, 2015: p.257). Below are examples that indicate the various methods sought by the participants to idealise the self in their profiles.
9.4.3.1 AVOIDING FOOLISH COMMENTS AND PUBLISHING POSITIVE CONTENT

Respondents declared that they carefully considered the contents shared and communicated on Facebook. They worked hard to express interesting parts of their lives to share with their audiences. The content that they shared was dominated by serious information that contained no foolish or ‘silly’ comments because they were aware of the way in which they wanted to be perceived. They defined the information that they shared on their Facebook account as ‘positive talk’. One participant, RF, an unemployed female emphasised the importance of avoiding silly comments because as a person interacting on Facebook you are always being evaluated and any trivial content could ruin your reputation.

RF: ‘The time I spend on this site always makes me feel like I am under a microscope and I always attempt to show myself perfectly and display myself to the world in a way that is different to reality. I achieve that through posting different topics and news, as well as what is happening in our lives; particularly the important events and I avoid silly content.’

Researcher: What do you mean by silly content?

RF: ‘Look, [Ummm] [long time of thinking] I try my best to avoid talking about subjects that might give the impression that the person behind this account is careless and has no sense of humanity, for example I don’t talk about luxurious things I bought or places I visited aboard, instead I discuss topics that show my awareness of my people and the Iraqi situation in general.’ (RF, female, Iraq)

Another female respondent, DN, stated how the positive posts and comments dominated her Facebook profile because she wanted to show and reflect her real essence. She depends on these elements as an indicator to express the kind of person she is.

‘The positive nature of the discussions and topics I choose normally reflect my real essence to the receiver. This works as an indicator of the type of person I am. They are just like clothes that might reflect things about your personality. So that the nature of the subjects and issues I use can reflect my interests and my character.’ (DN, female, Iraq)
In general, the common themes generated from the empirical material were that the comments should show some respect to others on Facebook. Female participants in this study believed that serious posts serve as an important method to achieve personal satisfaction and to convey the idealized version of the self.

9.4.3.2 CONVEY INTELLIGENCE AND ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION

Research participants indicated another strategy to idealize themselves on Facebook by showing their intelligence. For example, SM used the Facebook platform to show her intelligence by showing her home library and the books she read.

![SM’s home library and books she has read. SM, March, 2017](image)

SM showed her scientific ability through the development of an educational method for children to facilitate the process of learning scientific subjects and make them easy to understand. She initially discussed the topic with several people and the result of these discussions fuelled her idea. She stated:
‘The subjects that we used to discuss on Facebook sparked an idea in my mind about how to help children with their education and provide them with a way to facilitate understanding of scientific subjects and make them easy to understand. Therefore, I called on the people in my Facebook account for physical interactions and asked them to try out my method on their children. I was very proud that I got hundreds of positive reactions and likes.’ (SM, female, Iraq)

Another example of how participants idealize themselves on Facebook is by showing their level of education, qualifications and professional status. Previously, we saw how research participant NZ used elements of her profile, especially her profile picture, to highlight her qualification and professional identity. She showed her educational level as a doctor to her Facebook friends. She did so by uploading a photo of herself without showing her face, but only the lower part of her body, while she appeared to be wearing her uniform and a stethoscope. Her profile photo is used to maintain a professional impression and to express an important element of her personality which indicates that she is an educated woman. She intentionally did not mention anything on her profile about her private life. Everything in her profile was public and she used this space to discuss issues related to her society and to try to give general advice and participate in constructive discussion that could lead to a better community. The situation of the country is the main factor that drives her to raise several issues and call for reforms regarding social health and environmental issues, both of which require real reform, as seen in chapter 8.

9.5 ‘OTHER’ REACTIONS IN MIND

This part of the chapter will show the extent to which the participants think about their audience and how that impacts on their interactions on Facebook. Many people carefully consider their networks because they think of them as an audience who will review their performance. In this study, participants showed a great deal of concern about their audience’s impressions and the reaction that they might have towards their online performances. They work hard to present themselves appropriately within the social
context of their imagined audience and the impressions they will have formed. The way that people consider their audiences indicates the extent to which those audiences impact on the participants’ performances, and how might feel differently about their audiences. Participants’ feelings are based on their expectations and often on real experiences. They are mindful of being judged by their imagined audiences, who represent an external network pressure, based on their activities (e.g. comments, posts, and sharing).

The following example demonstrates the importance of an audience reaction towards participants’ performance that is mainly based on the cultural and societal expectations and norms. Participants consider that their activities on Facebook are carried out based on the way in which they will be arbitrated. They aim to show interactions that reflect a true representation of themselves on Facebook by showing only what is acceptable and avoiding what might be considered not acceptable and that breaches the restrictions imposed by their communities. The cultural norms and restrictions have impacted on the participants’ behaviours and activities on Facebook. They are afraid of being perceived wrongly and misjudged by their virtual audiences. As a result, these norms play an important role in shaping their interactions and use on Facebook and have created an impression of how they are going to be judged by their audiences. According to Goffman (1959: p. 44) performance is ‘modified to fit into the understanding and the expectations of the society in which it is presented’, and in view of that, the behaviour of the participants’ is formed.

Several participants of both genders talked about how they interact on Facebook in a way that is appropriate and fits with the social norms and other people’s expectations. They show how they have managed their performance on Facebook to be presentable to the people within their communities. In other words, concern about other users’ reactions in the online environment is used as a tool to create a positive reaction.

9.5.1 SHOWING SOCIAL NORMS ADHERENCE

Participants of both genders referred to their efforts to adhere to the social norms by avoiding inappropriate Facebook activities, such as posting open posts that include personal photos, for example. DK, a female participant recounted an example of this by
stating her efforts to avoid anything that might cause personal and social distress. She stated that there was a general fear among Iraqi women about posting their personal photos and this is because of the Iraq culture that prevents women from doing so as it is considered forbidden.

DK: ‘I do not post my personal pictures, because you know it is forbidden and women are not allowed to show their faces to non-relatives and strangers.’

Researcher: What do you mean by personal pictures?

DK: ‘Well, any picture of me or even with other members of my family, especially women, I do not want to ruin my reputation of that of the women with me because the picture is going to be seen by men, even if they are relatives.’ (DK, female, Iraq)

For DK, avoiding posting her personal pictures is a way of protecting herself from any negative reactions or attention. The situation is to some extent similar to male participants who discussed how they avoided posting pictures of themselves doing something that is not in line with Iraqi behavioural codes of conduct. For example, YS, a male participant, stated that he hides much of his personal life to protect himself from any unexpected reactions. He stated that showing a picture of himself drinking alcohol with friends, despite it being personal choice, might cause huge problems for him if people he knows come cross it. As a result, he has distanced himself from posting this type of thing on Facebook to avoid any undesired consequences.

‘Look…(short pause), dirking alcohol is a personal thing, but posting a picture while doing so with friends is really problematic in a community such as Iraq because you will be heavily criticized for violating the cultural norms by your friends also by unknown people. I do not want to be in trouble. Therefore, I do not post any pictures like that on my real account.’ (YS, male, Iraq)

Separately, and in addition to the careful use of personal photos, SM, a female participant, discussed a different aspect of how she interacted carefully to express an appropriate level of adherence to the Iraqi culture and meet with the expectations of the local context in Iraq. She explained how the Iraqi community is very complicated and how she accounts
for every word she utters to avoid posting open content in her real account that might misinterpreted by her people. She stated:

‘Talking about love on Facebook is just like talking about it in public offline. It is not acceptable and girls who talk about it or even hint about it might be considered as being disrespectful and behaving in an impolite way.’ (SM, female, Iraq)

This clearly shows that every move or action on Facebook should be carefully considered so that it cannot be used against the person who posted it.

Another area of Facebook use that the participants are very careful about showing was anything concerning their relationships or interactions with the opposite sex. Participants of both genders explained how they were very careful to not display their relationships with the opposite gender on Facebook to avoid any negative reactions. For example, NA, a female participant discussed how she was very careful about displaying any relationships with males in her first account which is for her family and relatives, while she was happy to do so in her created account, and she stated:

‘Like many females in Iraq, I cannot form relationships with males as friends and interact with them on my account that is seen by my family, friends and relatives, without it causing a problem, but I can do so using the account that I created for myself. I can conduct such relationships and interactions in my second account as this is easier and safer than doing so using my first account.’ (NA, female, Iraq)

The results also showed that not only females, but also males expressed the same concerns about showing their relationships with girls on Facebook. For example, AA, a male participant indicated how he was careful about openly showing any relationships with girls on his real Facebook account. He is aware that such behaviour is not acceptable and that he has to protect himself and even the girl he is friending from the reactions and attitudes of other people. He said:

‘Well, it is difficult, and even dangerous to have a relationship with a girl on your known Facebook account because you are going to be criticised and may even be punished for violating the norms. I prefer to use a different account for such things to protect both my girlfriend and myself.’ (AA, male, Iraq)
The extracts above demonstrate the high importance of other people’s reactions and the extent to which these reactions affected our users’ performance(s) on Facebook. They were obliged to amend their interactions with other users to protect their image and show adherence to the rules of their society.

9.5.2 VOICING LANGUAGE ABILITY AND LANGUAGE ACCURACY

The study shows a significant variation between gender and the use of language on social media sites. The research participants’ use of language on Facebook showed differences between the males and the females in the way they employed language in a particular context. Unlike the males the female interviewees showed a significant awareness in language use, style and accuracy while interacting with other users online. Their intention to use better language originates from their wish to show a better image of themselves and to avoid any reactions that might harm them. They adopted certain preventive practices to avoid portraying a negative image of themselves, such as, for example, any grammatical or typo errors. They are also very aware of suing the perfect language. It is ‘good practice’ to write things using standard language because this presents the person in a positive light. For example, FJ, a female participant discussed how language accuracy was important to her because avoids any negative reactions from other users. She used standard language whenever she posted something. It was about the impact and importance of her posts on Facebook. She said:

‘If I want to post something on my Facebook account, I think a lot before doing so, and the most important thing is my use of language. I want it to be accurate and at a high level, and so I use standard language. This use of standard language makes my post looks stronger and more important.’ (FJ, female, Iraq)

Another female participant, HA, discussed a different issue in which she aimed not to use any colloquial language in her posts. She intentionally was avoiding using these terms so as not to be judged as being of a lower class or an uneducated person.

‘I do not post things using informal language. I do my best to avoid this because I don’t want to look as if I come from a lower class or that I am an uneducated
person. I use language that shows my reality as highly-educated person.’ (HA, female, Iraq)

The last tactic employed by the female participants in their use of language to avoid unwanted attention from other Facebook users, was by avoiding making any grammatical errors. TS was very aware of the language used, in terms of spelling and order:

‘Before I post something on my Facebook account I look at every single word, I do not want to make any spelling mistakes that would cause people to laugh at me or criticize me. So, I am very careful about everything I post.’ (TS, female, Iraq)

However, the majority of the male participants showed different intentions when they posted on their Facebook accounts (e.g., SY, AH, MR, SJ, YS, SA, CH, and NJ). According to Scott, et al., (2014) ‘While the type of language used to convey information on SNS profiles did not affect perceived social, physical, or task attractiveness, targets who used correct language were judged as being more intelligent, competent, and employable than those who used incorrect language, and more intelligent and employable than those using text speak. Female targets were rated more competent and employable than male targets’ (p.564). They were less aware of these aspects. Their interactions on Facebook were easier than those of the women in terms of language-use. For example, SJ and YS stated:

‘I don’t think too much when I want to add a post on Facebook because it is a free zone, and no one is going to prevent you from posting whatever you want.’ (SJ, male, Iraq)

‘If I want to post something on Facebook I do so directly without thinking about it, and just post it.’ (YS, male, Iraq)

The results indicate that language-use by the participants on Facebook highlight an important fact about gender language variation and how the importance of language-use varies between the males and females. This plays a significant role in supporting the position of the women while interacting on Facebook, as well as affecting those interactions. Female users show careful use of language to avoid any reactions from other users that might cause them psychological harm.
9.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The findings shown in this chapter indicate how the users strategically construct and present their identities in which they are able to conceal certain aspects of their personalities and highlight others in which they have made Facebook a goal-oriented space in which they wish to achieve their preferred presentation and performance of themselves. According to Farnham and Churchill (2011), ‘in reality, people’s lives are ‘faceted’; that is, people maintain social boundaries and show different facets or sides of their character according to the demands of the current social situation’ (pp. 359-368). Facebook is considered as a space for free performance as it enables participants to negotiate cultural norms and gender expectations. The research findings also showed how the participants strategically constructed their gender identities through their use of Facebook, and in doing so, expanded their social lives. The multiplicity of identities revealed by the participants on their profiles indicates a large degree of fluidity, but they are not totally free as they remain to some extent, constrained by their social norms. However, users succeeded in navigating these limitations and constraints relating to their cultural norms and gender roles in their real lives and that made Facebook a unique space for them to experiment with their real and created identities.
CHAPTER 10: APPLYING AUDIENCE SEGREGATION MECHANISMS TO MANAGING AUDIENCES IN FACEBOOK

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the audience segregation mechanisms adopted by the participants to manage their audience on Facebook. Audience segregation is a useful concept to air our understanding of the relationship between the performers (participants) and their audiences, and how this relationship can affect the process of online identity construction. This concept was widely utilized in this study in which users from both genders were very creative in using audience segregation as method to present different roles to different groups of people. In other words, once an audience has been shown a particular role, they will not be able to see any other roles portrayed by the same person. According to Goffman (1959) this is known as ‘front region control’. ‘By keeping different targets away from one another, people can avoid the awkwardness of trying to present disparate images of themselves to two or more targets simultaneously.’ (Leary, 1996: p.109). The relationship between the performers and the audiences, and how the former construct their audience based on their interactions is an important element that affects users’ performance on Facebook in Iraq.

This section differentiates between three types of audience zones (the user public private audience zone, the user semi-public private audience zone and the user private public audience zone). Additionally, I will describe how the participants use this action as a strategy to allow users some level of control over the audience access to their information. In the last section I discuss how the participants employed strategies to present disparate identities in various Facebook domains by applying content classification control. Self-presentation is implemented by the participants to reflect the way they want their audiences to see them and to convey the desirable version of themselves. The research proposes suggestions that add to the existing theories on self-presentation, by referring to the creative use of participants of the online zone and their ability to construct both online private and public domains on Facebook. Facebook has enabled people to present themselves positively. However, doing so in their public account may be hazardous due to the fact that, Facebook user’s real identity is often known by the user’s friends and
poses a limitation on the extent of the deception (Ellison et. al, 2007). The worry of appearing too pretentious may lead to more awareness of their interactions online which may result in failure of self-presentation. Therefore, people have successfully avoided this situation by detaching themselves from their real and offline audiences in the private sphere and have created their own public image. This validates the applicability of Goffman’s ‘backstage’ concept on Facebook. According to Zarghooni (2007: p.7) and based on Goffman (1959) ‘a concept of a backstage is simply a place where differences (or “contradictions”, as he calls them) to the front region self-presentations can occur without consequences.’ So that by having two accounts (or faces) on Facebook, participants gain the permission to vary their interactions in both the back and front stages (see chapter 9).

10.2 MANAGING FACEBOOK AUDIENCES: APPLYING AUDIENCE SEGREGATION MECHANISMS

Following the process of profile creation and the construction of their public faces and profiles’ front pages, this section will now discuss how participants manage their audiences. The participants also employed a technique that involved making decisions regarding the types of information they wished to communicate and share with their audience. The distinctions they made between the different categories of connections that they wished to exchange this information with, and allowing different people to access to different content is what we have termed ‘audience segregation’. This section focuses on the decisions made about audience segregation. The concept of separation has been realized from a different principle. The first principle of realizing audience segregation in Facebook is by distinguishing between viewers (friends) of different profiles, or what we have categorized as a public face audience and private face audience. The second principle is contact management, in which friends are segregated and listed into groups. Finally, there is an examination of setting the visibility rights by controlling the amount of information/content they wish to reveal and give access accordingly.
10.3 MULTIPLE PROFILES AS A CONTROL: CREATING SEPARATE AUDIENCE ZONES ON FACEBOOK

The level of engagement with social network sites requires the participants to employ serious discretion regarding the amount and type of information that they want to share, as well as a nuanced understanding of who their audience is. Facebook provided participants with multiple ways to control their Facebook profiles. They also must make decisions regarding the content of their profiles, such as the way they chose their profile names and pictures and personal information displayed. Participants vary in the level of apprehension as well as the extent to which they restrict their personal information from being viewed by their audience. Access to this content and the level of visibility of their information that can be viewed by their Facebook friends, is also a key means by which participants manage their public face on Facebook.

Social networking sites such as Facebook collapse the entire social relationships of any individual into a single space and identify it under a single category, that of ‘Friend’, which is problematic. According to Robards (2010: p.20) ‘This creates an awkward social space for users, and this tension has given rise to an online version of what Goffman referred to as ‘audience segregation […] a device for protecting fostered impressions’ (1959: p.57). The process of adding ‘friends’ is considered as an initial step adopted by the research participants to manage the audiences in their Facebook profiles. Users are very cautious when they add people to their friends list. This caution is due to the role the participants wish to perform to certain audiences and the personality they are willing to present.

Another strategy adopted by participants to control others viewing their personal information is the use of multiple accounts. It was an additional tactic implemented by the participants in this study to regulate their information. The construction of two different accounts on Facebook indicates that there are different groups of contacts, who will be able to see the content and the type of information posted. Data collected from off-line face to face interviews and online interviews, as well as analysis of participants’ profiles show the techniques applied by the participants to manage their online presence. Managing their audience starts by creating and using multiple profiles on one platform (Facebook). This tactic shows how each user has two different profiles by setting their
accounts to ‘public’ and ‘private’ and thus separating their audiences. According to Pitkin (1981: p.328), the private is ‘in here’, personal, intimate, closest to the self, secluded from unwanted others, where we have ‘privacy’ and are free to be ourselves’. By way of contrast the public is ‘out there’, impersonal, distant, formal’ (p. 328). The purpose of creating these two different zones and separating them is often for many different reasons. According to Lampinen (2011: p. 5), ‘Participants apply a range of preventive strategies for balancing privacy and publicness, to avoid causing problematic situations for themselves or others.’ I use these terms to show the two methods utilized by participants to distinguish between their profiles and how they manage access to them. Landes (2003: p.35) stated that the terms ‘private’ and ‘public’ could be interpreted as closed and open.

This interpretation leads us to discuss how the participants want to implement the revelation of the content and information on their sites without impacting on any roles performed to their audiences in both accounts. A semi-private account or zone is also utilized by the participants to interact with both well-known people (e.g. parents, family members and friends) and other new friends. Access to a user’s profile and content is tailored to be limited to certain Facebook friends, such as well-known people only, while access is blocked to others, such as new friends. The process of ‘audience segregation’ according to Goffman relates to the efforts of the performer to ‘ensure […] that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting’ (1959: p.57). Here, in the context of Facebook, applying Goffman’s concept of ‘audience segregation’ has become a necessity. The reason behind this is due to the complexity faced by participants in managing multiple audiences within a specific context, as discussed previously. As a result, it is the main reason why the participants resort to managing their audience and placing them in two different accounts. This provides them with more control over their profiles, the information they present and to whom this information is available (e.g., participants GH, DW and HU). On the other hand, other participants have semi-private profiles which provide them with more control over the content of their profiles by managing the multiplicity of their audience (e.g., participants AY, LY, HW, and EL).
10.3.1 USER PUBLIC- PRIVATE AUDIENCE ZONE (PROFILE)

Participants construct this type of profile as a zone to interact with a particular set of people whom they feel comfortable enough with to share personal information. The focus of this type of profile is more specifically aimed at Facebook ‘friends’. Owners of this type of profile restrict them to people they know and are viewable only for specific connections such as family members, relatives and well-known friends. The profile is a kind of extension to the users’ offline life and social networks.

‘It is (i.e., my real Facebook account) dedicated to the people I know in my offline life such family members and relatives.’ (AS, female, Iraq)

HM, a female participant shows that she has an account on social networking sites devoted for family and relatives and acquaintances. She also uses it to discuss different general and familial issues.

‘I have two accounts, one of them is my real account and I use it for family members such as my brother, sister, relatives and my close friends. I also use it to publish public and family issues.’ (HM, female, Iraq)

Participants stated that this account contains no outsiders. They were not willing to add strangers to this profile because of the people in their friends list and their personal information. Adding unknown people to their friends list is considered as a source of potential danger that could cause serious issues for their private online/offline lives and reputations. When I asked them if they add strangers to this profile, participants AS and NT replied as follows:

Researcher: Do you add unknown people to this account?

AS: ‘Do you mean my real account, the first one?’

Researcher: Yes, the one you said was for family and acquaintances.

AS: ‘No, I never do that. I don’t want to be in trouble with my family or people I know because it might affect my reputation if I add strangers and also put me in a difficult situation due to the cultural and religious norms.’ (AS, female, Iraq)

Another female participant, NT, said:
‘No, no way, I don’t make new friendships with strangers here. I don’t want to create problems for myself.’ (NT, female, Iraq)

Respondents such as NT and NZ stated that they felt more comfortable when sharing their family news, adding posts and disclosing their personal information to their profiles on this account. Their interactions here could be described as having no restrictions due to the type of audience and the information that is directed to members of their family and close friends.

‘I kept my real account for my life in Iraq with my family, friends and my relatives. It is reserved and adapted to the customs and traditions imposed by my society. So, I post and share news that is limited because it will be seen by people who are well-known to me only.’ (NT, Female, Iraq)

NT also claimed that she set up this account for emotional communication and greater intimacy between herself and her family and her close friends, and also to avoid being misjudged. The key idea here is that she considers having her parents or her close friends in this account as an extension to her family and those in her offline social life, and sees it as a good opportunity to keep her intimate feelings to herself so that her family would be less likely to misjudge her.

‘Having my family, such as my dad, mum, brothers and sisters in this account was a really good way to keep in touch with them and keep them up to date with my news, either good or bad. Whatever happens, they will understand me.’ (NT, Female, Iraq)

Here is another example in which NZ explains that she added close friends only so that she could feel safe and secure when interacting and sharing:

‘I do write and post things on this Facebook account that I want to be viewed mainly by close friends and people who are known to me. I am not worried about their reactions or comments because they know me and understand my intentions.’ (NZ, Female, Iraq)

One female interviewee referred to the importance of the notion of privacy that excludes the outsiders. She stated that having ‘separate worlds’ is essential. Aspects of the
individual’s own personal or family life and their wider social world are represented through having this private account.

‘My own social life represented in my personal or family life is a closed world that I don’t want anybody intervene in, or know. For me keeping my social life private is a necessity.’ (FJ, Female, Iraq)

Participants are more open to sharing personal information because their network is closed. For example, when I asked RF if she used her real gender, added her mobile phone number and email address on her front page, she replied;

‘Yes, of course I use my real gender in my account as well as information such as my telephone number and e-mail address because this account is dedicated to family members and close friends. These are only people I have on my profile.’ (RF, Female, Iraq)

The use of this type of zones are also acknowledged by male research participants. Twelve men demonstrated using public-private audience profiles which dedicated to their real-life connections such as family members, relatives, and friends. Participants stated their need to interact in a certain way that might be different in what is found in their real life, and as a result, they need to separate between their audiences and interactions. For example, SJ a male participant shows that he has an account on Facebook devoted to family and relatives and friend. He mentioned that all the contents found in this account are in line with his people social and cultural norms.

‘I do have a Facebook account in my real name which represents a real reflection of my offline life and all friends in this account are mainly my family members, friends, relatives. Every move and interaction is considered carefully and kept appropriate to my offline behavioral codes and norms.’ (SJ, male, Iraq)

Another male participant, CH, said:

‘In my first Facebook account, there are family, friends, old colleagues, and relatives. If you compare it with my second account, you find that as if I am a different person. In reality, I am calm and avoid discussions, debates and posting stuff that might annoy my people and make me problems, but on my second
account I am a totally outgoing person who likes getting into different issues and discuss it extensively.’ (CH, male, Iraq)

According to CH participant having this account is one way of keeping in touch with his offline people in the way they like and at the same time avoiding problems that might result of any misinterpreted actions or moves. He stated separating between different personas and different activities in the accounts that he already has on Facebook.

The creation of these kinds of profiles and their audiences represents an obvious strategy to address users’ privacy concerns. Users having only known people in their friend list have little to do with any measures taken to set the privacy level of their online profiles.

10.3.2 USER SEMI-PUBLIC PRIVATE AUDIENCE ZONE (PROFILE)

Facebook users who set their profiles as semi-private are partially hiding. This type of profile mixes private and public information on the same platform. Facebook participants achieved this by using a technique of separating their audiences. They were able to do this by categorizing their audiences into identified/named groups and using the privacy controls. For instance, they have their family and friends in one profile and provide them with access to all their personal information, but they also have unknown people on the same profile but in different groups which have no access to their information (e.g., ZH and RJ). This method provides them with ability to present different identities for different uses. According to North (2009: p.298), ‘The savviest of Facebook users can practically fashion two identities from one profile by carefully determining which users could see certain photo albums and profile information.’

In the sample, individuals were using the strategy of categorizing their networks into groups within one service, with the aim of sharing specific information with different audiences. They adopted this as a preventive strategy, achieved with the help of privacy settings and by sending private messages. Participants who adopt this tactic can avoid the danger of context collapse. Kramer-Duffield (2010) found that students combat the collapse of contexts in social networking sites (SNSs) by separating interaction with different audiences to different communication media. Five participants said that they had established different audience zones within Facebook by using the privacy settings. For
example, RI formed a group called ‘Teacher zone’ for her male coworkers to discuss issues regarding the educational system and students. The members of this group are excluded from viewing certain posts and shares.

‘In my account I have a dedicated group of male teachers, and this group is excluded from viewing all my posts and information through the application of the privacy settings. This group is dedicated to discussions about work and teaching. In fact, this has enabled me to communicate with males, who are difficult to communicate with in everyday life because of the traditions and customs that prevent us from communicating with males.’ (RI, Female, Iraq)

For some participants creating different social circles was not the only way of grouping Facebook friends. Closeness was another important factor in their audience categorization process. For example, ZH stated that friends from hobby and interest groups were also categorized on the base of who could and couldn’t see certain contents and there was a degree of awareness in doing so.

‘In fact, I have different groups in the same account, the first is a group that contains my family and friends, and the second are groups of people with whom I share hobbies and interests. Each group contains specific information and performs certain roles.’ (ZH, Female, Iraq)

The context of communication in this type of profile is divided into two areas based on access to certain personal information and shared posts. The first area is one that is allocated for private interactions where information posted or shared is directed to known people only. For example, SM said:

‘My interaction is based on my participants, i.e., those with whom I am interacting. The type of posts, what I share, and the communicated material depend on my audience. What I share with my family and friends is different from what I share with my newly added friends online.’ (SM, Female, Iraq)

The second context is for information that participants wish to communicate with people outside of their existing real-life social networks, such as new friends and users of newly-
joined groups. Participant-enacted roles differ from those performed for their private encounters (e.g. RK).

‘I present myself differently here when I interact with those people in terms of posts, topics and the things I do or share. Restrictions are limited to a certain extent. I feel myself more liberated to present whatever I want.’ (RK, Female, Iraq)

Categorizing one’s network into suitable groups by participants through the use of privacy settings within a service to create different audience zones was a more common strategy for keeping different audiences separate from one another. To create this type of profile involved some effort that the interviewees considered was a useful strategy. Facebook users can have static rules regarding who has access to what type of data, or they can limit access to specific content on a case-by-case basis.

10.3.3 USER PRIVATE PUBLIC AUDIENCE ZONE (PROFILE)

The private public zone or profile constructed by the participants is used as a public face that is open to the public audience (strangers and unknown people). The main idea of creating these kinds of profiles according to the participants, is to be independent and to distance themselves from the influences of people in their offline lives, such as parents, siblings, and friends. It is used by both men and women in Iraq. For example, AS, a female participant said:

‘The other account has a created identity which is private, and I usually use it for adding people I don’t know and new friends who I don’t know in my offline life.’

(AS, Female, Iraq)

Information found in these type of Facebook profiles is accessible and available to all account ‘friends’. Participants feel comfortable displaying personal attributes such as their religious, social and political views, and sharing hobbies and interests.

‘The nature of the subjects and issues can reflect my interests and my character as well as the places where I like to spare time, books I have read, my real voice that I use to speak, in and the way that I talk with others.’ (DN, Female, Iraq)
The public nature of this account made our participants very aware of the issues involved and they were very creative regarding the type of information displayed in this profile, such as their name, family, and contact details. They invented a new identity that enabled them to avoid any problems and disconnected themselves from their offline lives. This can be seen from NZ’s statement;

‘Well, my second virtual identity is not recognizable and has nothing to do with my real identity. I do not mention any personal information regarding my family, city, or any other details that could lead anyone to recognize my tribe or family.’ (NZ, Female, Iraq)

Participants also stated that they become more concerned about what was revealed about them. They don’t talk about their personal lives directly by disclosing any life events openly, and this known according to Goffman as ‘given’ information. As mentioned by one of our participants:

‘Because of the nature of this Facebook account being an open account; it contains a lot of unknown people. I don’t talk about my personal life, for example, I don’t mention any information about places my family and I used to visit or people I meet in my daily life. I definitely would not do that on Facebook…’ (HA, female, Iraq)

DN, another female participant stated that ‘given’ expressions were not the only points of concern for her regarding her use of Facebook. She was also concerned about the type of impression she might convey in her use of Facebook:

‘I tried to avoid acting negatively on my Facebook profile by posting pictures or comments that might attract negative attention. Every move I make on this Facebook profile is considered carefully.’ (DN, Female, Iraq)

Some participants reported using multiple accounts on the same SNS platform to separate audiences based on their relationship (e.g., social vs. professional), for disclosure purposes, and other related reasons. For example, AB, a male interviewee and PhD researcher in the UK used two Facebook accounts: one for a professional audience (which included people from his university and international and native colleagues and
professors), while he used the other account for personal audiences, and most of the people added to this account were family, friends and relatives from Iraq.

‘I created two accounts to avoid any problems and to separate the people I know in Iraq from those I know in the UK, and especially at university. I don’t want to mix them, and I try my best to separate my personal life from my professional life. Each world has its own people and activities which are completely different.’

(AB, male, Iraq)

Another male participant, YS, said:

‘Some individuals try to free themselves from their real personalities of their physical life. The real identities that are watched by everyone who knows them to practice an act that he/she sees as more of liberated than he has experienced. It is not a lack of confidence or problem with the trust or faith that you have in yourself. However, it is an escape from a whole society that collides with the user. So that as a person he/she chooses to create a second account on Facebook....to be the person he/she likes and to do whatever he/she wants in the online world. To be frank, presenting him/herself as an ideal person is an intention that everybody has in the life. Everyone is keen to highlight the beautiful side of his/her character, although some claimed otherwise.’

(YS, male, Iraq)

NT, a female participant, is a PhD researcher in a UK university. She also has two separate Facebook accounts. The first one is dedicated to her life in Iraq and the second one is for her life in the UK. She justifies the use of her second account by saying that she comes from a different culture and what is acceptable here might not be in her own country. She prefers to separate her two worlds:

‘I am studying in the UK which has a different culture to my home country. I decided to have another account to separate my two lives; the one I have here and my life in Iraq. I don’t want to be attacked by my family or community for not observing the behavioral code. For example, sitting with colleagues (males) or going to parties is normal in the UK but it would cause me big problems with my family and friends in Iraq.’

(NT, female, Iraq)
The nature of the participants’ encounters on Facebook was one of the significant factors that led them to apply certain strategies when they created their profiles through the application of controls over the friending process by categorizing their networks into suitable groups. In other words, controlling their audiences enabled them not to have to exert additional effort to control the information disclosed to those audiences. In short, it seems that audience size and diversity had an impact on the participants’ interactions and the creation of their profiles on Facebook. They were more cautious about managing audience access to their personal content, and as a result they were more willing to create different profiles using the same platform (i.e., Facebook). This method has enabled them to disclose personal information and photos to a particular group of people, primarily those in their private audience profile (such as family members, friends and well-known people), while having a different open/public audience profile which has nothing to do with their real offline life. The latter has been created for interactions with unknown people. This excludes those who adopted different tactics, such as categorizing their network, like SM, ZH and RI, who were prepared to mix their public and private contacts regardless of the closeness or openness of their profiles. They utilize Facebook privacy settings by figuring out how much of their Facebook info other users or audiences are allowed to see.

The way that research participants chose to construct their profile or zone represents a clear picture of their social and cultural life impact on them. The participants’ choice between the three different audience zones is regulated by several factors such as the impression to perform what is suitable for each environment, the audience and the type of contents presented and roles enacted. Each zone denotes the certain environment which inquires the participants to adhere to its rules and restrictions. The boundaries also are impacted by the quality of the audiences present their, and what kind of personal information they might expect to have access to and performances expect to see. As a result, participants work hard to prevent themselves from being trapped in any issue that might affect their life or shake their picture in front of any viewers. For examples, behaviors that are not in line with their culture or behavioral code of conduct and might be interpreted by particular audiences as a breach of the rules of the society. These behaviors are avoided in the user public-private audience zone where are people there are close to the participants (e.g., family, friends, and relative). However, such performances
and activities are possible to be enacted in other zones because they are regulated, and users’ identity is covered and not recognized by their audiences found there.

The findings of this section are supporting the presence of the architectures that demonstrate the separation between the front and the back regions. This can be seen clearly from the way that our participants construct their zone and their intentions to manage impressions for others found in each of these regions. As a result, the study results displayed in this section is not in line with what Papacharissi (2010) notes:

‘SNSs potentially collapse front and backstage into a single space, by allowing privately intended information to be broadcast to multiple public audiences, and delivering publicly produced information to private and intimately known audiences. Moreover, the individual must assess not one situation, but potentially an infinite number, in which the same self–performance must maintain authenticity, coherence, and relevance.’(p. 142)

What is distinctive and novel about that use of Facebook in Iraqi contexts is the regional (zones) separation of particular communications. The invisibility and variability of the architectures used by users in each zone, make it clear when interacting with others whether they are in front or back regions (or both simultaneously) in their self–performance.

10.4 APPLYING AUDIENCE ACTIVITY CONTROLS
The process of managing their social network profiles which contain personal information and connections with others (audiences) as well as who has access to the content, represents the first stage of participants’ involvement in controlling their audiences. Beyond this, they also apply additional control through policing their audience activity with regards to what these friends can access, comment on or tag. Participants apply several strategies as prevention tactics to regulate what contributions these friends can make to their pages. To further examine this type of control applied by the participants in this study, several participants (HM, RS and ZH) have described applying audience activity control for different types of Facebook accounts for reasons by untagging and controlling images, removing photos, making befriending decisions, blocking and deleting friends, and deleting comments. According to the participants, such measures are
important to protect their reputations and to prevent them from being misjudged by their audience.

The most prevalent audience control strategy adopted by our participants on Facebook was to delete tags on photos. HM described how she untagged and removed photos posted by one of her friends of her attending a birthday party. She stated that even though the picture was ok and contained nothing that was deemed as unacceptable in relation to the norms of her society, she did not want it to be seen by people on her account, or even by her family and friends because she didn’t want to be misjudged at any level or considered to be an open-minded girl. So, she initially deleted the photo tag to ensure that the photo was removed from her own profile, and then she asked the person who posted it to remove the photo altogether. She explained:

‘I have a lot of family members, relatives and friends on my Facebook account and I do my best to avoid getting into trouble with them. So, when someone tags me on a picture that I’m not comfortable with, I immediately untagged myself and then, to make sure that this picture completely removed, I ask the person who posted it to remove it. I do remember one negative experience that happened to me when my brother came across a picture of me at a party and that was ‘bad news.’ (HM, female, Iraq)

The actions carried out by HM indicate the steps she took to impose control and address her audience by untagging herself and asking others to remove photos due to her concerns that they might look inappropriate to her well-known people and family members. Audience activity controls also influenced participants’ friending practices on Facebook. Participants’ decisions to friend someone is mainly depending on the requester’s identification status. They were more concerned about whether they knew the requesters offline, and whether to add them to their public-private or semi-public private audience zones. Most respondents with these types of profiles reported that friendship requests coming from individuals whom they did not know were either ignored or deleted. For example, one of our female respondents, SS, reported:

‘I would be happy to accept a friend request if the requester was someone I know or recognize.’ (SS, female, Iraq)
While another female respondent with semi-public private profiles (e.g., ZH) suggested:

‘Adding a friend depends on whether I have met him/her, or recognizes them in my daily life.’ (ZH, female, Iraq)

Same actions also acknowledged by number of male research participants (e.g., MR, SJ, YS, SA, and MH) in their public-private audience zones (accounts). For example, YS stated that he always careful about stuff he tagged on by friends on his real account where all his closed connections family members, and relatives are there in his friend lists and stated:

‘If one of my friends tags me on a picture or mentioned me in a post or contents that I’m not happy with, I immediately untagged myself or request him to delete mention. I don’t want to be in trouble with my people for something I did not do. I always work hard to keep my perfect image among people’ (YS, male, Iraq)

Even those participants who have public profiles and who are willing to add strangers, imposed certain rules on adding new connections to their account, and this was especially true for the women, whereas the men seemed less concerned about the situation. Several respondents (e.g. SH, TS and RF) who had open profiles referred to the importance of the validity and acceptability of any requesters’ actions on Facebook. They are cautious about the sender’s posts, comments and even which groups they have joined and what events they accepted. For example, SH expressed concern about adding strangers before checking their activities on Facebook and said:

‘I am very careful when I receive a friend request and try to be more cautious before accepting that request. I want to be sure that the person is worth adding and will never be a source of trouble. So, I take a quick look at their profile at their posts, comments and what kind of people they are befriending. I don’t want be misjudged because of what others are doing.’ (SH, female, Iraq)

Other participants reported blocking and deleting strangers from their friend list because of their behaviour or what that they post on their walls. TS described how she reacted to the behaviour of one of her male contacts in her personal account after he uploaded some material on his profile that was considered as inappropriate and not in line with her social norms (English songs with several scenes of half-naked girls). She deleted him instantly
from her list. She didn’t want this type of content to be seen by other contacts in her profile. She explained her reasons:

‘I know he is free to do whatever he likes, and I respect that, but not everything is acceptable on everybody’s walls. He has to be careful because we are living in a strict society with social and behavioural norms. My family members, parents and brothers would never accept such a thing if it appeared on my profile.’ (TS, female, Iraq)

Deleting comments (on their own profile and/or comments posted elsewhere) is a corrective strategy used by participants to police individuals in their friends’ lists and their activities. This kind of control was also used by the participants in our study. RF described how she deleted a comment from her account because she considered it impolite and it used culturally unacceptable words.

‘I do remember that I posted some pictures of beautiful lovers and I received a lot of comments on it, but some were really annoying. I had to erase them because they contained unacceptable words.’ (RF, female, Iraq)

These examples echo the findings of Lampinen et al., (2011) on the interpersonal process of boundary regulation and the corrective strategies in balancing privacy and publicness in SNSs. In our study, the participant’s decisions as to whether to accept a friendship requests or not depended on the application of a validation process. Participants adopted this process when they added new people to their Facebook profile who they only knew in an offline context, and decided whether they wanted to add them to their private or semi-private audience profiles. Thus, participants were cautious about the people they added to their Facebook profile, noting that it was important that they knew or recognized them to a certain extent in their offline life before they would accept their online friendship request (e.g., ZH). On the other hand, those with an open public profile (e.g., SH, TS and RF) adopted different strategies for checking the people who sent friendships requests before adding them to their profiles, and that involved checking the contents on their Facebook profiles.
10.5 SETTING CONTENT CLASSIFICATION CONTROLS

The results of this study also illustrate the performance of an active management of information-sharing and content classification control. Group content was considered and was managed by participants’ classification of the data sent to each group. This classified social network user’s content data. This data can also be divided into sub-classes, such as data related to hobbies, family, or work. By setting these controls, participants showed their concern over regulating other users’ access to their online data. This method was another strategy employed by participants in this study which was mainly linked to a desire to mitigate the threat of ‘context collapse’ (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). Participants adopted several strategies to achieve content classification, either by using the privacy functions provided by Facebook, and especially for those who used semi-private profiles or by using different profiles on the same platform (e.g., by having two profiles on Facebook).

This allowed users to separate the contents displayed on their Facebook profiles by dividing their Facebook account into separate spaces and having different ‘friends’ lists in different groups, e.g., work, close friends, family, acquaintances. In other word users tend to form two different groups of social connections by having two different spheres; one private and one public. Several of the participants in this study reported belonging to at least two different social networks within the same account (e.g., SM, RK, RI, FJ and ZH). This enabled the participants to have control over which information flowed to which group. ‘This includes the ability to determine whether certain groups are given access to posting on, or viewing, walls, uploaded photos, tagged photos, status updates, and check-ins.’ (Marder, 2012: p.100). For example, FJ indicated how she strategically split her friends in two groups based on how well she knew them, to what extent she trusts them and the type of the contents she wants them have access to. She said:

‘I have a large number of friends in my account. I have organized them into separate groups based on my relationship with them, the degree of trust I have in them and the type of content I want to display and share with them.’ (FJ, female, Iraq)

The data shows that participants divide their platforms into separate spaces and used this strategy to avoid conflicting situations and to protect their reputations and privacy. They
also used it to maintain their diverse social identities. As one participant explained, posting any content on her account, such as pictures or posts was not problematic because it would only be available to one group of members whom she wanted to post to. According to her, each group of members understood the contents within each context. She explained:

‘For me it was very important from the beginning to separate my participants into groups to enable me post and share content more easily. So, the contents in my Facebook account that can be seen by one group cannot be seen by any other groups. For example, if I post picture for members of a closed group whom I consider as close friends, this picture will only be able be viewed by those friends. They will be the only people who I would trust to understand it in the right context.’ (ZH, female, Iraq)

Another central aspect of the management of content classification is by conceptualizing Facebook members by organizing them into two different spheres. Participants reported having two Facebook accounts to share different types of content with different audiences. They indicated that content which is deemed as problematic cannot be shown to family or relatives. For example, hobbies or special interests that they want to share with strangers or new friends in their open profile might be culturally inappropriate. Therefore, separate groups have been created to enable more contextual sharing. According to Lampinen, et al. (2009) there is a ‘need of identity management through controlled information sharing in the face of potential privacy violation, losing of ’face’ and other anticipated social consequences’ (pp. 281-290). Several participants from both genders females (e.g DN, SS, TS and NZ) and males (e.g SY, AH, MR and SJ) reported adopting this way in their accounts of Facebook. For example, NZ, a female participant talked about her hobby which is not deemed acceptable for girls as it considered as being for boys only, said:

‘As you know, Facebook is much more than just a means of communication and interaction with others; it is also used to share different type’s information about hobbies that may be considered as normal as well as those considered as strange and unacceptable in our society. For example, I love video games, but this is not acceptable in our community because it is considered as being exclusively for
boys, and it is considered as an odd topic if it is raised by a girl. In fact, if a girl discusses video games and the latest versions of these games, she would be subject to ridicule and criticism in our male society. So, I find that Facebook is my only opportunity to discuss this topic with other people who share the same hobby.’ (NZ, female, Iraq)

One of our interviewees explained his point of view regarding sharing information with his audience and said:

‘Religious issues are one of the most important debated topics in our country. This is due to the social separation we have in our community after 2003 and the war in Iraq, and the emergence of an ethno-sectarian division. This made discussing this topic a source of disagreement and could lead to you losing friends, and even some others who are close to you. So, I avoid discussing these types of topics in my real life, as well as in my virtual life on my real Facebook account.’ (SJ, male, Iraq)

For SJ, the type of information he is willing to share on his Facebook account plays a significant role in limiting his interactions as well as the identification of the audience he wishes to share this type of content with. His decision to separate his audience and setting content controls is based on his intention to avoid any problems. Basically, the participants shared information based on a simple logic, which is the type of audience and the nature of information shared with them. They made sure to communicate the right contents to the right people. The interviewees understood that private, very delicate or culturally-inappropriate information and contents should be considered carefully. They recognized that they must be very aware and ready to utilize these strategies as a preventive action which is considered as either the monitoring of their behaviour or as common sense.

10.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The findings of this chapter have focused on how the participants manage their audiences in their Facebook account(s). The mechanism of managing and controlling their audience indicates not only the way in which our participants present themselves to others, but also informed the nature of their interactions with others. According to Van den Berg et.al,
(2010), ‘Audience segregation allows users to be ‘round characters’ in different roles, rather than ‘flat ones’ in a conflated context.’ (p.4). Participants consider both the audience and the context as key concepts governing the process of information disclosure. For them, what is appropriate in one context and for a particular group (account) may not be appropriate for another group. This idea is similar to the offline context where people employ these types of strategies in their everyday lives to perform different roles for different people, and to maintain their identity and take on different partial identities in different contexts. Van Der Velden and El Emam (2013) stated that people can play multiple roles in their everyday lives, considering both the audience they perform to and the location. Therefore, it has been shown that audience segregation is one of the core mechanisms adopted by our participants on online social networking sites (mainly Facebook) to exercise control over who can access which identity and view which data.
CHAPTER 11: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Given that the presence of SNSs in Iraq, and particularly Facebook, has provided opportunities for Iraqis to communicate and interact with others in ways that differ from their offline reality, this research explored how a number of Iraqi people use Facebook and negotiate the cultural constraints imposed on them in their offline lives. This study investigated this issue by examining how individuals construct, perform, and present their online selves in this digital world. This research investigated the use of social media in Iraq has been considered in relation to a wide range of views, thoughts, and perspectives about the adoption of these new communication technologies. The study demonstrates that social networking sites represent an essential part of Iraqi research participants’ daily lives, and especially for women because they consider the platform as an outlet where they can have a voice. Furthermore, many individuals use these sites as new venues for interactions and communication that can bypass a wide range of restrictions in their physical lives. Differences between men and women were evident in the way that they negotiate the cultural pressures and restraints imposed on them in their real life as well as in the way they use the online platform. Both men and women were very creative in utilizing Facebook to serve specific purposes and to circumvent certain restrictions, namely those that were not possible for them to overcome in their daily lives. Typically, they created Facebook accounts that represent two different personas and used these to show completely different aspects of their personalities online. As a result, this study has shown that women were more likely to use Facebook to negotiate social, religious and cultural limitations. Even though other parts of the world might consider Facebook as primarily a platform for entertainment and social interactions, it was used differently in Iraq by the participants in the study, and this was especially the case for women.

In this final chapter, the major findings and achievements of this research are discussed against the main research aims and objectives, as well as the central research question and four sub-questions set out in Chapter 1. These are as follows: The main research question was, how do Iraqi users of social media choose to present their identities in Facebook as
a new form of communication? The sub-questions were: 1) To what extent do Iraqi users’ digital identities on Facebook vary in comparison to their offline selves? 2) How do Iraqi users engage in impression management in response to ‘face’ threats that are encountered on Facebook? 3) How do Iraqi users construct and manage their identities on Facebook? 4) What kind of ‘tactics’ are employed by Iraqi users to manage their audience on Facebook? Finally, the chapter presents the contributions to knowledge of this research, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

11.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH

Self-construction is an essential part of the interactionist process (Leary and Tananey, 2005). Social constructionism considers the notions of interaction, communication, and identity, such as Goffman’s dramaturgical framework, as an essential factor of a constructed reality (Liampittong and Ezzy, 2005: p.34). This interaction occurs on social networking sites, such as Facebook. Through specific interactions individuals continuously engage in the communication of different messages and in performing various roles for different audiences, who interpret the meanings associated with these performances. Goffman noted, ‘the very structure of the self can be seen regarding how we arrange for such performances’ (Goffman, 1959: p.252). As a result, the performance on Facebook becomes a social requirement that necessitates users to utilize the platform in an organised manner. The current research study makes a number of contributions to this theoretical area. The key impact of the study is the application of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical framework to the study of online self-presentation and impression management on Facebook by users from a non-western culture.

The application of Goffman’s framework contributes to our understanding of people from this conservative Islamic culture during a time of change. Goffman’s dramaturgical approach was highly pertinent and relevant to this project. For example, the applicability of Goffman’s principles such as the separations of regions, impression management, audience segregation, an idealized version of the self, and the notion of the face makes this study follow previous studies (e.g., Marabelli et al., 2016; Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013; Lambert, 2013; Dijck, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2006; Donath, 1998; Boyd, 2004, 2007; Hogan, 2010; Miller and Arnold 2001; and Robinson, 2007). Goffman’s
(1959) dramaturgical framework corresponds well with the process for exploring interactions and investigating online social networking because it offers the idea of stages and how people perform on these spaces to their audience. Thus, dismissals or changes suggested by some scholars might not be justified, for example, Hogan (2010), who discusses the limitations of applying Goffman’s dramaturgical framework to examine the online environment. One possible constraint to applying Goffman’s symbolic interactionist framework is space. However, the research presented in Chapters 9 and 10, that participants were able to distinguish between different stages and construct different zones to avoid context collapse resulting from the collapse of several social contexts into one challenges the limitations identified by Goffman’s critics. The participants in the study were able to enact different performances on Facebook because they were able to feel that what could be seen by one group of audiences might not be seen by others. This tactic employed by the research participants is contrary to what Hogan considers as a hindrance to applying Goffman’s work to study Facebook. Hogan sees Facebook as a single stage where people can present and perform only for one audience due to a lack of audience segregation.

In the context of this study, the research findings extend the Social Role Theory (SRT) to SNSs to add value to the SRT in the context of information technology and gender behaviour differences. Such findings demonstrate the differences in gender roles regarding their use of Facebook. Facebook allows Iraqi users to use the platform in ways that reduce the gender differences in comparison with their physical lives. Previous studies utilized SRT to study different aspects of this phenomena, including the perception of avatars (Dewester et al., 2009), virtual collaboration (Schiller et al., 2011), and knowledge sharing (Chai et al., 2011). While meaningful, such studies focused on gender differences in IT usage that were limited to specific online environments and contexts. These studies did not focus on exploring gender differences in a Facebook-like environment in comparison with the users’ offline physical lives. Lin et al., (2013: p.691) stated that, ‘SRT posits that people conform to ‘social roles’ (i.e., one’s place in society) based on expectations about where one should fit and how one should behave in society.’ However, the present research findings show that Facebook was used by Iraqi participants (males and females) to construct their identities and perform in a way that showed differences in their gender roles when compared to the roles in physical lives. Facebook
offered the research participants a virtual space for interaction and communication where they could circumvent the cultural barriers of their society. The Iraqi male and female participants in this project stated that they were able to act and show behaviours that are not possible in the offline world. For example, men were able to show their abilities in the more traditional female roles such as posting pictures or comments about cooking, washing the dishes, child minding, or being passionate about and showing their support for women. Such acts are not acceptable among men in Iraqi Arab culture because they are considered as inappropriate. The patriarchal system of Iraqi society believes these types of issues are solely for women and any men taking part in these types of activities would be seen as bringing shame and disgrace to themselves. Furthermore, Facebook provided an empowering platform that allowed females to construct and present identities and perform activities that are considered to be more male. Female Iraqi participants indicated that Facebook enabled them to engage in such activities through discussing, documenting and sharing personal opinions and perspectives regarding local and global politics, and social, religious and sports affairs in semi-public and public spheres (see Chapter 3).

What this project’s findings further suggest is the plurality of identity. It challenges the previous conception of the singularity of identity (see Ellison et al., 2007; & Dijck, 2013). This finding also is not in line with the working theory presented by Mark Zuckerberg (the creator of Facebook), regarding the relationship between identity construction and technologically-mediated interaction. Zuckerberg’s perspective about identity construction on Facebook supports the movement towards the sharing of a singular ‘true’ self (see also, Back et al., 2010; Gosling et al., 2007; and Walther et al., 2009). He believes that the level of transparency will not allow for multiple identities or images to be presented on Facebook. The availability of digital information means, ‘The level of transparency the world has now won’t support having two identities for a person’ (Kirkpatrick, 2010: p.99).

The findings of this research confirm the creation of an idealized version in the online world (see Manago et al., 2008; & Salimkhan et al., 2010). The current study confronts the perspectives that deny the existence of an idealised self on Facebook (Young, 2013; Back et al., 2010). The research shows how people in conservative culture construct an
idealized version of the self. Interviewees expressed a need for presenting multiple representations of the self on Facebook and as a result, showed different identities. Participants exhibited a type of self on Facebook that was shaped explicitly by their choices of engagement and they rendered a personality that was culturally and socially suitable and fit for each platform and audience.

Furthermore, this project is contrary to other findings that suggest that Facebook lacks audience segregation (e.g., Villata et al. 2017; Governatori et al., 2014; Hogan, 2010; Van den Berg and Leenes, 2011) and thus mostly necessitates a singular presentation of identity and one performance for one group of people. According to those scholars, the Goffman perception of the availability of many stages in the offline life and the single stage afforded by Facebook made the applicability of Goffman’s approach problematic. As a result, users of Facebook are expected to choose one real social role and performance as they do offline because they have one stage and one audience group. However, the research results of the present study compete with this view and back up Goffman’s original framework and show its applicability because audience segregation is possible on Facebook. The results of this research study argue that audience segregation is applicable on Facebook and indeed is as important on the site as it is in everyday interactions between individuals offline. Participants were successfully able to manage several stages and enact different performances to a diverse audience. Examples provided in Chapter 10 from participants’ interviews and accounts showed how Facebook enabled users to segregate their audiences. Participants successfully managed to construct several stages and zones on Facebook and managed to separate groups of individuals into those that were close and secure connections, such as family members, close friends and relatives in one account, and then in a separate account they had new relationships with people who were not found in their offline life, often including strangers, new friends, and romantic interests.

Moreover, this project aimed to understand the way in which identity is constructed and self-presented on Facebook. Examples have been given in Chapters 9 and 10 and about the tactics adopted by the research participants while interacting with other users on Facebook. The study argues against those views that suggest that participants lack the ability to act differently on social networking sites (and especially Facebook) in ways that
are dissimilar to their offline lives, and that as a result they can adopt different identities and present various activities (see, e.g., Zhoe et al., 2008 and Van Dijck, 2013). The participants made a considerable effort to play different roles and present various identities. They constructed multiple accounts and apply privacy options to enable them to post content that conformed to the social and cultural norms and managed diverse social networks in each of their online profiles.

The study also found that users were acutely aware of the impressions they gave and those that were given by others on Facebook. This awareness can be seen clearly by the way they introduce themselves and their interactions, communications, and the contents presented to their audience. In these findings, the study is contrary to the ideas suggested by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013), who commented on the expressions given and those given off by users. They noted that individuals have less control over the expressions given off when interacting online unlike the expressions they control more tightly (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013).

This study provided a new reactive strategy to minimize the threat to those strategies categorized by Wohn and Spottswood (2016) in the context of social networking sites. This new strategy is an avoidance strategy that includes (1) avoiding violation of the social norms, (2) avoiding violations of modesty expectations, and (3) online awareness of current and future consequences. This strategy aims at minimizing the threat in the context of SNSs, particularly Facebook, when the platform is used in a relatively conservative culture such as Iraq. This strategy mapped individual Facebook-specific actions that can be employed in response to threats on Facebook.

Social relationships and their social resources, along with the benefits individuals can gain represent a vital aspect of the findings of this research, rather than those that focus on economic consequences and power. The study found that participants continually manage and present their identities on Facebook in a way that enables them to initiate relationships that can provide them with social, emotional, and economic resources and that can compensate for the lack of these resources in their offline lives (see Chapter 7). The findings of the study indicate new type of relationships where (like finds like) in which people are drawn to people like them by performing a kind of identity that allows them to form affinity identities and apply that to create social capital from the possibility
of very weak ties making stronger ties. Facebook provides participants with affinity spaces where they can create affinity identities and interact with other users with whom they share several aspects. Participants also indicated their ability to thicken their existing relationships through their real account by both bonding and bridging social capitals. These findings are in line with several previous studies (e.g., Lampe et al., 2014; Lambert, 2013), which demonstrated the benefit of examining the concept of social capital in the Facebook platform and assessed its appropriateness. However, the current study adds a new layer of social capital which is bounding relationships in which Facebook users use their created Facebook account(s) to connect with a network of very weak ties via these affinity spaces and form stronger ties.

The study also reveals the degree of control that the research participants imposed while using Facebook to enable them to deal with different groups of online viewers and how they set up clear divisions between their public and private regions, and identifies the restrictions imposed on the performance of the self in both of these regions, despite the interactions between these two domains and the difficulty in separating them. Research participants indicated their use of specific tactics to construct their identity (such as audience activity control, content access control, creating separate audience regions and using an anonymous profile with a different username). Shafie et al., (2012) studied the construction of identity and self-representation in virtual societies through the use of online nicknames. They stated that ‘A nickname introduces an identity a participant wants to present and gain access to other social networkers’. Research participants indicated having a certain level of control while using Facebook to configure their privacy settings which enabled them to perform and present different identities to different audiences. They also indicate the influences exerted by various external factors that impacted on the process of constructing identities on Facebook. The process of creating these divisions between these two regions contributes to our understanding of users’ privacy choices when using social networking sites, and it demonstrates the ability of users to create private and public audience zones where they can retain their privacy while interacting and communicating with their public audiences.
11.3 RESEARCH PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In addition to the theoretical contribution, this study also shows the practical outcomes regarding the use of social media sites, and particularly Facebook, in the context of Iraq. The qualitative findings provide information about the way that people use the platform to interact and communicate with other users, as well as their performance and self-presentation online. This research provides a basis for research into media and communications in Iraq, and expands the existing studies of usage patterns, online performance, interactions and generated content. The presence of the online world represents a clear outlet for Iraq users (and mainly women) to express themselves despite the cultural constraints imposed on their offline lives.

The study found that people in Iraq (and women especially) see Facebook as a place where they can circumvent the offline social restrictions. Interacting in an anonymous mode and creating an alternative online persona were among the essential tactics that both men and women adopted in the use of Facebook to circumvent the cultural restrictions of their offline lives. This perception is usually associated with conservative societies and would apply to Arabic communities. Therefore, constructing different identities on Facebook is one of the most important methods employed to enable Iraqi users to overcome certain offline social and cultural restrictions, despite the fact that Facebook is considered as one of the nonymous SNS applications where people present an identical version of their offline identity and reflect their actual personality (Zhao et al., 2008; Hyllegard et al., 2011; Marichal, 2013). The findings did not support these prior studies and indicated that people were able to remain anonymous (by providing false details) and present a version of themselves that differed from that in their offline lives. This is in line with the previous literature on online identity and indicates that the online self is characterized as anonymous and separate to their offline identity (Shafie et al., 2012).

The study also revealed that participants’ performances and their use of Facebook showed their ability to play different roles and that indicated gender behavioural differences. The study showed that they discussed and expressed their opinions and views regarding different social, political and religious topics. This was more prevalent in women than in the men because of their status and roles in Iraqi Arab society (see Chapter 3). Women gain more space and opportunities to express their views and opinions on Facebook,
which is one of the most important differences in the way they interact using this site. This is likely to be compensatory for the lack of these activities in their daily lives, unlike men, who can take part in these activities in their real lives. The study also showed that the ability to have their voices heard online led women to play different roles, especially in the context of Iraq, where several topics are considered as being suitable only for men (such as politics and social reform). Further research into these types of performances and activities could contribute to our knowledge of the increased use and importance of Facebook and how it is associated with the inconsistent performances and roles in the participant’s online and offline worlds.

The study also found that in the online world of mainly social networking sites, users exert enormous control over the way they present their identities on Facebook. This type of control goes beyond what Goffman believed about social interactions that people engaged in in real life and in face-to-face practices to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others. It was observed that participants were willing to create multiple identities. Their identity online was clearly different from the one in their offline life, and this was observed from the participants’ views and observations of them. Online identities were created using the multiple options provided by the online world, such as profile information, profile images, posts, photos, languages, and nicknames. Despite the clear link between the person and his/her profile on Facebook, this research demonstrated that in Iraq, the participants used their profiles to serve another function. The active users on Facebook have two accounts, one real and one that is fictional. They populate the fictional profile pages with different names and pictures that show no information or details that would make them recognizable in their offline lives. They are very creative in concealing their real identities and creating new personas with different personal information. For example, they do not use their real names in their profiles and use pseudonyms instead. They use various names, and these can be either Arabic or names derived from other languages. This level of control employed by users in the way they construct their profiles on Facebook and the way they interact with different audiences supports the previous literature regarding the ability of users of social networking sites to control their identity construction and self-presentation while interaction in the online world (Manago et al., 2008; Heivadi and Khajeheian, 2013; Brandes and Levin, 2013).
Furthermore, both my male and female research participants preferred to conceal their real identities and displayed different images. However, they put up all kinds images on their profiles which gave nothing away about their real identity. This technique was used by women in both of their Facebook accounts (the real and the fictional ones), unlike men who only used this strategy in their fictional accounts, or when they were interacting in ways that might be considered not in line with their cultural norms. Individuals displayed various pictures: some of them preferred to use images of their favourite actors or actresses, others displayed photos of the Iraqi national flag and some showed photos of their favourite flowers or pets, and so on. By adopting these techniques, the users ensured that nobody would be able to find out their real identity behind the Facebook persona unless they decided to tell them who they were, if they had any shared interests. The prevalence of this technique, in which users display different images on Facebook, which is considered as a less anonymous environment, is contradictory to the views that suggest that the intention of people is to be more real on this type of platform (Robinson, 2007; p. 94; Zoe et al., 2008; Back et al., 2010). This kind of performance is characterized by the use of creativity in projecting one’s self-online. The creation of a new persona which only exists online is a clear example of identity fragmentation and division, which is not in line with the essentialist view.

Another example of how participants addressed the notion of self-presentation and impression management was through the desirable self while interacting with other audiences online. The study showed that the women’s intention to present an idealized version of the self was more pronounced than men’s as far as showing off their abilities and image was concerned, which was unlike the conventional perspective of the male-dominated society. Participants presented their desired identity through interacting in a way that could be interpreted in line with Iraqi culture and gender. Participants, and especially the women, found a way to show the desired and idealized versions of their selves online, using unique and deliberate control of their presentations through constructing and building semi-anonymous or fully anonymous profiles, as well as controlling their virtual viewers by applying specific control over who could see them and what contents they could see. They found a way to practice online that which was not possible in their offline lives due to the cultural and societal norms (such as showing off their talents, sharing positive and constructive views, showing their professionalism and
expressing opinions). By interacting in such a way, women aim to differentiate themselves from specific audiences, especially those who share their cultural background but who behave differently. The performance and self-presentation of women tend to show a different image and they often display roles that are not available to them in their physical lives.

This study also has cultural implications. Protecting their reputation and avoiding any shame is one of the main aims that participants considered while interacting on Facebook. The findings have revealed the strong presence of cultural principles in participants’ use of Facebook. Research participants of both genders were mindful about how they acted, and any unacceptable behaviours were anonymized. While interacting with others on Facebook, their actions are guided by the need to maintain face (identity) and not embarrass themselves. Face is an important part of the identity in a cultural context such as Iraq where people adhere strictly to the norms of culture and religion, and any interaction that is not in line with these norms might be interpreted as a breach of conduct. Therefore, their performance can be considered as ‘Protective presentation is aimed not at creating a good impression but at avoiding a bad one. Thus, actions are not made to display desired identities only but to circumvent those which are undesirable’ (Marder, 2012: p.30). People alternate their performances and uses of Facebook to avoid any problems with their family and members of their community. Participants showed a desire to save face and devoted significant efforts to protect their reputations (self) from any negative reactions and to avoid any harmful consequences or judgment from their audiences, both real and virtual audiences, as discussed in (Chapter 9).

The findings of the study also reveal the role played by cultural values in affecting participants’ Facebook use regarding their audiences and the way in which those audiences were managed. Participants were cautious in managing their audiences by segregating them into different groups or zones according to the roles, performances, and contents they were allowed to see. They also restricted access to their private information and only made it available to close connections. Social norms have a tremendous influence on the way that the participants presented their private information online. According to the findings, the participants’ self-construction practices and their privacy decisions were profoundly influenced by how they were viewed in the online world due
to the conservative nature of the society and the presence of different audiences. This is line with what Goffman (1959) indicated in his study in which performances intended to be presented by performers in front of a particular targeted audience were previously prepared.

The study findings support the idea that Facebook can be utilized to form new relationships in conservative cultures, such as relationships with members of the opposite sex, strangers as well as intimate relationships. The site has enabled interactions with different connections that are not possible in the offline lives of the research participants. In other words, it can act as a dating site where individuals of both genders can communicate and form romantic relationships and find new romantic partners or even people of mutual interest. The formation of these new interpersonal relationships online (known as cross-gender relationships) is not possible offline due to the social norms and behavioural codes. By demonstrating this fact, the present study goes beyond previous views indicating that Facebook is primarily used to bond and bridge social relationships (Bessière et al., 2008; Donath and Boyd, 2004; Steinfield et al., 2008). Their studies of adolescent’s use of SNSs showed that they were mainly used to maintain existing relationships. The present study goes beyond these previous findings and indicates a new use of Facebook as affinity space. In Iraq, like-minded and not family or friend connected participants use Facebook to create new social relationships from very weak ties to form social capital.

In brief, it is important to mention that for many Iraqis, especially women, their online life has become a sort of substitute for their real life. It provides them with the means to transcend the physical and social barriers imposed by the political situation and daily challenges they face in Iraq. Social networking, such as SNSs in general and Facebook in particular, are not used by Iraqis as entertainment platforms and a means of communication, they have also created a safer virtual environment, where nobody knows them, that is used as a source for current news as well as identity expression and a means to express their views and form new relationships. As a virtual place where interactions take place, the internet and other social technologies have played crucial roles in giving men and women a voice to discuss subjects (political, religious and social) and even more sensitive issues that are not possible to be aired in a real-life setting.
11.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The process of collecting the research data via the mixed method strategy adopted in this study significantly impacted the analysis as it allowed the consideration of various types of information obtained during the interview and virtual ethnography phases. It also provided an opportunity to consider the inclusion of several research theories and approaches to offer a better interpretation and explanation of the findings. It was possible to approach the research questions in different ways and the methodological contributions that emerged from the research can be summarized as follows:

- Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical framework has been criticised for not being applicable in online contexts. This research counters this criticism, and the project findings contribute to the methodological knowledge by validating the use of such a framework, as it corresponds well with the interactions studied in online environments.

- Extended use of Social Role Theory (SRT) to examine gender roles and behaviour differences in SNSs, and mainly in the Facebook environment. Even though previous studies have employed SRT to study gender and social roles, virtual collaboration and perception of avatars, none have explored these phenomena (gender roles and behavioural differences) in the newly emerging environment of SNSs in the context of Iraq.

- The study extends the use of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical framework to the study of online self-presentation and impression management on Facebook by people from non-Western cultural contexts, and mainly from the conservative Islamic culture.

- The study utilized a mixed method approach of data collection which combines offline and online strategies. The offline and online face-to-face interviews enabled the capture of various views and perceptions regarding the performance and the construction of users’ identity in the online world that cannot be observed offline. Online virtual ethnography provided an insight into the use of online social networks and users’ real behaviours on these sites. This combination of views and observations provided a complete picture of the users’ lives and performances and enabled the formation of comparisons, to some extent, between their offline and online behaviours, performances and roles.
• The current research study utilized an inductive bottom-up approach to investigate the content generated on social media platforms as well as to analyse the research data. The use of this approach reduces bias as it based mainly on the data produced by participants and their experiences online and can be applied to other studies to provide a better understanding of the data generated from participants and the themes emerging from this data.

11.5 RESEARCH SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Culture plays a significant role in Iraqi society. It can be shaped by many factors including, but not limited to religion, social norms and environmental factors. These factors represent unique features of this society. The focus of this research study was on users’ identity construction and self-presentation on Facebook along with their use of the platform in the Iraqi context. This section covers the cultural, linguistic, and ethical issues that were considered during the study.

11.5.1 CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC AND SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

These issues below represent some of the cultural, linguistic and security considerations encountered by the researcher:

- Gender segregation is one of the most prominent cultural dimensions of Iraqi society considered by the researcher because it requires the involvement of both genders.

- There was difficulty in meeting women to participate in interviews due to the cultural and religious norms that prevent women from mixing or meeting males that are not relatives.

- As with most research, time constraints were a major factor affecting this study. The research study was conducted in Arabic, which is the native language of the researcher and the participants. All the data collected were translated into English. The process of translating the contents from Arabic into English was challenging because of the difficulties of translating jargon, idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms from Arabic, and the second issue concerned the linguistic devices and patterns of thought that are used
to express metaphors, humour, irony and symbolism which is difficult translate from source language SL to target language TL (Shiyab, 2006).

-The number of participants was also an issue with regards to the research sampling. This is due to their unique performance and suitability for the investigation process, making it difficult to generalize the results.

-The sensitive nature of the subject study prevented many participants from taking part for fear of the consequences.

-There is no place in Iraq that is risk-free. The political instability in the country affected the research process with regards to the number of participants and the location and time of the interviews. In such a challenging environment, it was difficult to avoid these constraints which did act to hinder the process of achieving the research aims.

11.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As the nature of the research is sensitive, one ethical codes were consulted; The UK Research Integrity Office’s Code of Practice for Research (UKRIO). Research also considered by De Montfort University’s Faculty of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee. Prior to gathering the primary research data, ethical approval was gained from De Montfort University’s Faculty of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee. An ethical request form was submitted and approved following a few minor adjustments, and permission was given to conduct the primary research via interviews. The approval gained covers all the documentation involved in the research, including the questions, instruments, consent forms and participant information sheets (Appendix B).

Furthermore, as the research study related mainly to the performance and interactions of Iraqi users on Facebook, some research questions might be of a sensitive nature for some of the participants, because they require the disclosure of information about political, social and religious issues, as well as self-disclosure of personal information and information about relationships with members of the opposite sex on Facebook. The researcher was very mindful of this situation and thus informed the potential participants
before each phase about the nature of the research, its objectives and its possible outcomes (Appendix C). The participants were asked to sign informed consent forms (Appendix D). They were also informed about the issue of anonymity for their personal security and protection. Additionally, the participants were informed that the results of the research would only be used for academic purposes, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher took the security of the data very seriously, and as a result, everything was anonymized and saved on a password-protected external hard disk and hard copies were stored in a locked cupboard. The data will be destroyed at the end of the research study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the informants’ personal identity when discussing and reporting the findings in this thesis.

11.7 RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research identified that Facebook represents an essential venue for individuals to negotiate their identities and circumvent several social and cultural constraints found in their offline lives and provided them with the opportunity to present an idealized version of themselves online. Facebook provides new virtual opportunities for both genders to construct, perform and act in ways that differ from their offline realities. A follow-up study could use the same methodological approach to investigate the impact of changes in online behaviour on the offline lives of Iraqis. For example, Iraqi women may move from engaging in online political discussions to becoming more politically active offline. The study also found that Facebook facilitates communication and interactions between different individuals of both genders (cross-gender communication). Future research could investigate this issue further and identify whether it will be a contributory factor in breaking down gender boundaries in the longer term. Additionally, the study could be expanded to look at how other Iraqi groups with different socio-demographic profiles use Facebook. For example, it could investigate how members of the LGBT community use the internet as a way to communicate with other (LGBT) people across the country without revealing their sexuality to people they know. It could also investigate how the use of Facebook among young people aged 15-17 years varies in terms of identity construction, performance, and self-presentation. What kind of tactics do these young people use to idealize their self-presented online in the conservative context of Iraq? On a cultural level, the results reveal that the performance of the Iraqi people in the study is
profoundly impacted by social and cultural norms, such as gaze and the reactions of other people towards them. Future studies with the same group of participants could investigate the relationship between performing alternative persona in SNSs and other cultural aspects, such as envy and social comparisons, which are very important in the context of Iraq. As the results have shown that Iraqi users use anonymity as a tool to protect the privacy of their personal information, it would be interesting to examine the impact of anonymity on the quality or quantity of participation on a particular site. Furthermore, the study found that users in southern Iraq were engaged in positive self-presentation. Further studies could investigate whether people in the central and northern parts of the country would participate in positive self-presentation to a greater or lesser extent than those in the south to consider factors such as regional cultural difference.

11.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research has demonstrated the importance of opportunities gained by a sample of Iraqis via the use of social media and its connection with their daily lives and activities. Gender performance on Facebook was investigated to explore how these particular Iraqis living in a conservative environment are using the opportunities offered by the Facebook platform to construct and present their identities online. It can be concluded that Facebook provided the research participants with a virtual space where they could overcome some of the social and cultural barriers found in their physical lives. Facebook also enables users, especially women, to engage in various activities where they can discuss, post and share personal opinions regarding local and global affairs in a public or semi-public sphere. Additionally, participants of both genders, but mainly women found Facebook a useful tool that could be used to swap gender roles and enact different performances. Facebook also represents a means for sharing ideas and views and creating relationships. One consequence of the internet has been the opening up of new opportunities for individuals of both genders to communicate with each other, irrespective of their societies, cultures and religious constraints. The internet and social media sites have enabled men and women to communicate virtually while maintaining their physical segregation. This new means of communication might enable the gender gap to be overridden to some extent. In this context, the use of virtual connections as a substitute
for face-to-face interactions and the contact between males and females is debatable, as it could still be considered as immoral. The broad significance of that use of Facebook is that it becomes a venue where individuals can create virtual representations of themselves that vary from their real offline identities, because it is freer and more liberated from the social and cultural norms. These Iraqi participants utilize this technology to produce and reproduce the society and culture around them in the way they would like it to be and relate it to their real lives.

ABBAS, T.M. (2011) Mapping Iraq’s institutional Internet use for informational transparency and bottom-up communication: A content analysis assessment: University of Westminster (United Kingdom).


HOWARD, P.N. et al. (2011) Opening closed regimes: what was the role of social media during the Arab Spring?


KIRKPATRICK, M. (2010) Facebook's Zuckerberg says the age of privacy is over.

KRAMER-DUFFIELD, J. (2010) *Beliefs and uses of tagging among undergraduates*: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.


MARDER, B. (2012). *Saving Face on Facebook: Managing Impressions in the Presence of Multiple Audiences on Social Network Sites,*.


MILLER, D. (2012) What is the relationship between identities that people construct, express and consume online and those offline?.


RASHID, S. Internet in Iraq.


SCHILLER, S. et al. (2011) Gender differences in virtual collaboration on a creative design task.


SITES, S.N. Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications.


YOUTH, I. Project–Childnet International 2013. *Global Perspectives on Online*.


APPENDICES
Appendix A
Ethics Approval Form
From: Anne Smith <AmSmith@dmu.ac.uk>
Date: 27 January 2016 at 13:16
Subject: 1415/291 Ethical approval form and supported documents
To: Ahmed Bahiya <p14018190@myemail.dmu.ac.uk>
Cc: Margaret Montgomerie <MMontgomerie@dmu.ac.uk>, Research Students <researchstudents@dmu.ac.uk>

Dear Ahmed

Ethical Application: 1415/291 - Gender performance and social media: an Iraqi study

Following receipt of the additional information requested from you by the Faculty Human Research Ethics Committee (FHREC), your application to gain ethical approval for research degree activities has been considered and APPROVED by Prof Bernd Stahl.

Please be aware that changes to the project plan or unforeseen circumstances may raise ethical issues. If this is the case it is the researcher’s duty to repeat the ethics approval process.

Kind regards

Anne

Anne Smith
Research & Innovation Coordinator
Research & Innovation Office (4.64)
Faculty of Technology

T: +44 (0)116 250 6519
E: amsmith@dmu.ac.uk
Appendix B

Participant Information Sheets

(English and Arabic Versions)
Participant Information Sheet

Study Title:
‘Gender’ performance and social media platforms: an Iraqi study

Introduction

I am researcher from De Montfort University which is a public research and teaching university situated in the city of Leicester, England. I am doing PhD study in Media Discourse and Gender.

Participants’ invitation.

Dear Participant, I would like to invite you to take part in our research study. Before making your decision it is important for you as participant to have an understanding of the research aims and what it will be about as well as the research objectives. Please could you take the time to read the information sheet provided to you. I will be glad to provide any further information and clarification in regard to the research project. Please take as long as you want to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this interview. Finally I would like to express my appreciation and thankfulness to you for taking part in this study.

What is the purpose of the study?

It is widely recognised that social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter have significantly impacted people's lives. The use of SMSs has brought a substantial shift in the process of distributing information, the cultural norms of social relationship, and establish and maintain societal relationships. This burgeoning influence of such media sites has also impacted the way that such new platforms users present or represent themselves while they are interacting with others in this virtual world. Users’ performances might be changed in a way that reflects a clear difference between their real and virtual identities. This research will investigate whether Iraqi men and women’s gender performance vary in social Media sites and how this relates to their performance of everyday off line life.
Why have I been chosen?

Because you fit the sampling criteria of the research study: you have expressed an interest in gender performance and are known to have multiple social media identities. A total of 8-10 users will participate.

How will the study be conducted?

If you agree to participate, you will initially be asked to attend an interview which will be conducted in the form of a face to face interview. It will take no more than an hour and it will be audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription. The researcher either will come to your premises or to a public place that will be agreed upon with you before conducting the interview.

After having a short break, you will then be asked to use the Dictaphone to record your dairy which is your daily activities you used to do to regularly. You will be provided with full instructions and shown how to use this device. Also your narratives will also be typed and returned to you, to check for accuracy.

If this mode of interview is not acceptable or convenient for you, you can opt to conduct the interview through Skype. You may choose to respond using both camera and microphone or just microphone. You will be able to see who the interviewer is and how they are responding to you even if you choose not to be seen.

Additionally if neither face-to-face nor Skype interview works for you the interview can proceed through email.

Who is funding the research project?

This research study is fully sponsored by the HCED (Higher committee for education development in Iraq). This committee is formed under the premiership of the Prime Minister in Iraq.

Who has reviewed the research project?

The research project has been reviewed by Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Technology, De Montfort University.
Do I have to take part in this research?

You are completely free to take part in this research project and there is no obligation to do that. You do not need to give a reason if you wish to withdraw at any point and there will be no adverse consequences if you decided to do so at any time.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Any possible risks or disadvantages of taking part in this study are not known or presented, as the information provided will be strictly confidential and we strive to protect that confidentiality. For the purpose of avoiding any misrepresentation, the transcript of the face-to-face interview will be sent to you before starting the process of analysing them to allow you ensuring the similarity of the data at this point you will see that your identity has been anonymised for all records.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Personal benefits that could be gaining from participating in this study might not be present, however, the results will be generated from the project will significantly contribute to the knowledge as it will affect the understanding of the gender performance in social media sites particularly in Iraq due to the poverty of the data and research on social media sites use and users there. Furthermore it is anticipated that your participation could assist in disclosing essential facts and particular attitudes in such a conservative country and society.

What happens when the research study stops?

When the research study is completed the results will be published and used by the researcher in his thesis. There will be no consequences or further investigation for any participant took part in this study.

What if something goes wrong?

There will be no special compensation measures to be taken in case of being harmed while you are taking part in this research project. If any harm happened to you as a result of someone’s negligence, then you have the right to take any legal action but you might be entitled to pay for it. Nevertheless, in case you have any concern or want to complain about any issue whether the way of how you being approached or treated during the period
of conducting the study, the university complaints procedure is available to all and you can use it to raise any issue.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes. All of the information gathered from you during the period of conducting the research study will be anonymised and will be kept strictly confidential. Your anonymity will be protected so that nobody will be able to recognize you. Also your name will be changed so whoever reads the research will not be able to identify you. Additionally the conclusion of the research will draw from all the participants and information gathered and there will be no discussion for any individual participant. The data collected will be computerized and securely stored and protected for 10 years in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the research study will be analysed and used for the purpose of answering the research question. Again all the interview information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to your details

**Contact for Further Information**

For any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact:

**Lead Researcher:**

Ahmed Bahiya, Faculty of Technology, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, LE1 9BH

Email: Appilelife0@gmail.com, Tel: Iraq. 00964 07472436572, UK. 0044 07472436572.

**Supervisors:**

**First supervisor: Dr Andrew Clay, Principal Lecturer**, Faculty of Technology, De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, UK, LE1 9BH, E: amclay@dmu.ac.uk, T: +44 (0)116 257 7079.
Second supervisor: Stuart Price, Professor of Media and Political Discourse, Faculty of Technology, De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, UK, LE1 9BH, E: sprice@dmu.ac.uk, T: +44 (0)116 207 8683.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Please if you feel that any part of the information sheet regarding the research project is not clear or you have further queries that are not answered in the information provided here then please do not hesitate to contact me (details above). If you wish to participate in the study please complete one of consent forms and return to me.

Ahmed Bahiya
بيانات توضيحية للمشتركين

عنوان البحث:

اداء الذكور والاناث في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي: دراسة بحثية في العراق

المقدمة

بداية أود التعريف بنفسنيييي أنا بنا بحثييييي من جامعة دي مونتفورت و هي مؤسسة بحثية وتعليمية عامة تقع في مدينة ليستر، في إنجلترا. و أنا الآن أجري بحثا بحثي حول استخدام كلا الجنسين لشبكات التواصل الاجتماعي وادائهم فيها.

دعوة المشتركين

عزيزي المشارك ودندعوكم للمشاركة في دراستي البحثية هذه متمنيا من شخصكم الكريم وقبل اتخاذ القرار المشاركة

ن يكون لك ادرك كامل حول ماهيه البحث و أهدافه. ونارهو شحاصكم الكريم اخذ الوقت الكافي لقراءة ورقة المعلومات المقدمة لكم والمتعلقة بموضوع الدراسة. وسوف تكون سعداء بتقديم مزيد من المعلومات والوضوح فيما يتعلق بهذا المشروع البحثي ليتسنى لكم بعد ذلك اتخاذ القرار ما إذا كنتم ترغبون في المشاركة في هذه المقابلة أو لا. وأخيرا أود أن أعرب عن تقديري والشكر لكم ولوقتكم.

الغرض من هذه الدراسة

لقد أصبح استخدام مواقع الشبكات الاجتماعية (SNSs) مثل الفيسبوك وتويتر وعلى نطاق واسع من الأعمار من المسلم به في العالم وتمايل كبار على حياة الأشخاص المستخدمين. فقد أدى استخدام هذه الوسائل إلى احداث تحليل كبرى في عملية توزيع المعلومات، والمعلومات الثقافية والعلاقات الاجتماعية ودما يتعلق بالله إنشاءها وحفظها عليها. كما أدى التأثير المتمامي لهذا للمواقع إلى تغيير اله نوع استخدام هذه المنصات الافتراضية الجديدة من قبل المستخدمين في عملية عرض أو إعادة عرض شخصياتهم أثناء التفاعل مع الآخرين في هذا العالم. ان التغيير الممكن في اداء المستخدمين في هذه مواقع وبهذه الطريقة قد يعكس اختلافا واضحا بين هويتهم الحقيقية والافتراضية ونذاك هذا البحث يهدف إلى الكشف عن إذا كان هناك أي اختلاف في اداء كلا الجنسين من المستخدمين العراقيين في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وماهي طبيعته هذا الاختلاف بالإضافة إلى دراسة العلاقة بين هذا الاداء ونمط حياتهم اليومي.

لماذا تم اختيارك?

تم اختيارك للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة وذلك لكونك تتناسب مع معايير أخذ العينات الخاصه بالبحث: فقد برز استخدامك لاداء مختلف في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بالإضافة إلى اختلاف عدد هويات في هذه الدراسات من الجدير بالذكر ان عدد المشتركين في هذه الدراسة سيكون ما بين 10 - 25 مشارك.
كيفية إجراء الدراسة

إذا وافقت على المشاركة، في البداية سوف يطلب منك لحضور مقابلة شخصية حيث ستكون مدتها ساعة أو أكثر، وسوف يكون استخدام جهاز تسجيل الصوت فيها لغرض تحويل المحتوى الصوتي إلى نصي فيما بعد. سيتم إجراء المقابلة الخاصه بالبحث في منزلك أو مكان عام حسب رغبتك وما سيتم الاتفاق عليه معك قبل إجراء المقابلة.

اما إذا كان نمط المقابلة هذا غير مقبول أو مريح بالنسبة لك، فهمكنا اجراء المقابلة من خلال استخدام تطبيق السكايب. كما يمكنك اختيار طريقة الرد اما باستخدام كل من الكاميرا والميكروفون أو الميكروفون فقط. حيث سيكون بإمكانك التعرف على الباحث حتى في حالة اختبار الرد عبر المباكيرون.

كما أوت الاضافة أنه في حالة عدم اختيار أي من الوسائلتين أعلاه أي مقابلة شخصية وجها لوجه أو مقابلة عبر السكايب فإنه بإمكاننا اجراء المقابلة وخصوصية بها قدما من خلال استخدام البريد الإلكتروني وذلك بارسال محتوى المقابلة لكم وللذين عليه.

جهة تمويل البحث

يعد هذا الدراسة البحثية بالكامل من قبل HCED (اللجنة العليا لتطوير التعليم في العراق) وهو لجنة مشكلة من قبل رئاسة الوزراء وتابعة لها بشكل مباشر وباشراف من قبل رئيس الوزراء في العراق.

التحقق من صلاحية مشروع البحث

تم التحقق من هذا المشروع البحثي من قبل لجنة أخلاقيات البحوث، في كلية تقنيه المعلومات في جامعة ديمونت فورت في بريطانيا.

هل المشاركة في هذا البحث إجباريه؟

 المشاركة في هذا المشروع البحثي طوعية وليس هناك أي الزام للقيام بذلك وفي حال رغبتك الانسحاب من المشاركة في أي وقت كان فإنك غير ملزم بتقديم أي علامة، وسوف لن تكون هناك عواقب إذا ما قررت أن تفعل ذلك في أي وقت من الأوقات.

المضار أو المخاطر المحتملة من المشاركة

لا توجد أي مخاطر محتملة أو مضار جراء المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، وذلك مع جميع المعلومات المقدمة سيتم التعامل معها بسرية كاملة، ونحن نسعى جاهدين لحماية تلك السرية، وللعلم تجنب أي تحرش، سيتم إرسال نسخة من المقابلة الشخصية لكم قبل البدء في عملية تحليلها وذلك لمنع أي فرص للتأكد من تنشيط البيانات، وعند هذه النقطة ستريق أن الهوية الخاصة بك تم التعامل معها بسرية كبيرة حيث ستكون المعلومات مجهولة المصدر وفي كافة السجلات.

ما هي الفوائد المحتملة من المشاركة
سوف لن يكون هناك أي مكافأة أو منافع شخصية يمكن للمشارك تحقيقها أو اكتسابها من المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. ما سيتم الحصول عليه من مشاركات تحقيقها في هذا المشروع البحثي تم تتبعه بشكل كبير في تعزيز المعرفة العلمية كونها ستغني الفهم المتعلق بأداء الجنسين في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي ولا سيما في العراق ذلك بسبب عدم توفر البيانات والبحوث المتعلقة بهذه الموضوعات. ستساهم بشكل كبير في تعزيز المعرفة العلمية كونها ستغني الفهم المتعلق بأداء الجنسين في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي ولا سيما في العراق وذلك بسبب عدم توفر البيانات والبحوث المتعلقة بهذه المواضيع. وليست هذا مجرد رجل أو براءة، بل ستكون هناك عواقب وإجراء المزيد من التحقيقات مع أي من المشاركين الذين شاركوا في هذه الدراسة.

إذا حدثت عندما تتوقف الدراسة البحثية في حالة حدوث أي أمر غير متوقع:

- ستكون هناك عواقب وإجراء المزيد من التحقيقات مع أي من المشاركين الذين شاركوا في هذه الدراسة.

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حفظ معلومات المشاركين:

سيتم احترام مشاريع جميع المعلومات التي يتم جمعها خلال فترة إجراء الدراسة البحثية وستكون محفوظة بشكل يتكفل بها بسيرة تامة. كما أن إجراءات الحماية ستكون مؤكدة بحيث لا تسمح بالكشف عن هوية مصاب به المعلومات إلى حد يمنع أي شخص من الفحص على التعرف على هوية المشترك الحقيقية. كما سيتم تهيير اسم المشترك بحيث يصعب على من يقرأ البحث التعرف عليه. بالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن بعد الانتهاء من البحث سوف يتضمن كافة المعلومات التي تم جمعها من المشاركين دون التركيز على شخصية واحدة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك فإننا سنشرف جميع البيانات التي تم جمعها كدرة على هوية المشترك الحقيقية. كما سيتم تهيير اسم المشترك بحيث يصعب على من يقرأ البحث التعرف عليه. بالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن بعد الانتهاء من البحث سوف يتضمن كافة المعلومات التي تم جمعها من المشاركين دون التركيز على شخصية واحدة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك فإننا سنشرف جميع البيانات التي تم جمعها كدرة على هوية المشترك الحقيقية. كما سيتم تهيير اسم المشترك بحيث يصعب على من يقرأ البحث التعرف عليه. بالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن بعد الانتهاء من البحث سوف يتضمن كافة المعلومات التي تم جمعها من المشاركين دون 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نتائج الدراسة البحثية:

سيتم تحليل نتائج الدراسة البحثية وستستخدم لغرض الإجابة على سوال البحث. مرة أخرى، الذاكر بان جميع المعلومات التي تم جمعها خلال المقابلات ستكون في غاية السرية وأن إمكانية الوصول إليها ستكون متاحة للباحث فقط.

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شكرا لكم على قراءة ورقة المعلومات هذه

في حال وجود أي جزء غامض في ورقة المعلومات المتعلقة بالمشروع البحثي هذا غير واضح أو كان لديك مزيد من الاهتمامات التي لم يتم الرد عليها في هذا الرجاء تقديم التساؤل في الاتصال بي (التفاصيل أدناه). إذا كنت ترغب في المشاركة في الدراسة يرجى إكمال الاستمارة المرفقة والمتعلقة بالموافقة على المشاركة في البحث.

مع فائق الشكر والتقدير

الباحث: أحمد بهيه

جامعة ديمونفورت – لستر – المملكة المتحدة
Appendix C
Informed Consent Form
(English and Arabic Versions)
Consent Form

Research Title: 'Gender' performance and the social media platforms: an Iraqi study
Researcher: Ahmed Bahiya
University: De Montfort

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I confirm that I have read and understood the information about the research purpose, as provided in the Information Sheet given by the researcher Ahmed Bahiya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I have been given the opportunity to inquire about the research purpose and my participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I understand and agree that my participation is completely voluntary and I can withdraw at any time without being questioned or penalised for withdrawing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I understand that any information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and that information will not be used for any other purposes outside of this research study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I agree that confidentiality procedure regarding the use of names, pseudonyms, and anonymization of data has been clearly explained to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I understand and agree that the outcome of this interview will be used and presented by the researcher in his PhD thesis and other academic presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I agree to give the researcher full consent to use the content of the interview in the research, publications, sharing and archiving which have been explained to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I acknowledge my full agreement to take part in the above research project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I agree that the researcher can use anonymised quotes from the content of the interview in his research for the purpose of clarification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I understand and agreed that the recording process of the content is adopted for the purpose of transcription.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I understand that the participants will not be compensated for their participation in this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I along with the Researcher, declared my agreement to all what have been mentioned above and for that I sign and date this informed consent form.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Researcher:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Researcher</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

344
نموذج الموافقة على المشاركة

عنوان البحث: إداء الذكور والإناث في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي: دراسة بحثية في العراق

اسم الباحث: أحمد بيه

اسم الجامعة: ديمونتفرت

أنا الموقع أدناه اوافق على ما يرد في كل من النقاط المؤشرها في هذا الاستمارة: (يرجى وضع علامة مربع حسب الأفتراض)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>نت</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>أؤكد على إطلاعي وفهمي لما ورد من معلومات حول هدف الدراسة وما هو منصوص عليه في ورقة المعلومات التي قدمها الباحث أحمد بيه</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>أؤكد منحي الفرصة من قبل الباحث للإنضمام للاستفادة عن غرض البحث وطبيعة مشروعه فيه</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>أؤكد إطلاعي ومواقفي على أن المشروع يتضمن شبكة طوعية تماما، وأن هناك الجنسيات المتعددة من المشاركون في الدراسة في أي وقت ومن دون أي مسألة أو عوقب لاحقة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>أؤكد على إطلاعي وفهمي أن أي معلومات يتم جمعها خلال الدراسة ستتم الاحتفاظ بها بسرية تامة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>أوافق على إجراءات حماية المعلومات المقدمة من قبل الباحث فيما يتعلق باليدين حفظ المعلومات واستخدام أسس الاستعارة، إخضوع الهوية الحقيقية لصاحب البيانات حيث يتم شرحها لي بوضوح</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>وأنا أتفق بذلك</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>أؤكد إطلاعي وفهمي ومواقفي على أن نتائج هذه المقابلة سوف تستخدم وتقدم من قبل الباحث في أطر واجبة لدراسة الدكتوراه وكذلك في المحال الأكاديمية الأخرى</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>أوافق على منح الباحث التصريح التام لاستخدام معلومات هذه المقابلة في البحث العلمي والدكتوراه واتباع المعلومات بالإضافة إلى الأرشيفية كما تم شرحها لي من قبل الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>أعلن موافقتي الكاملة للمشاركة في المشروع البحثي المذكور أعلاه ومنح الباحث الموافقة للإطلاع على محتوى حاسم في الفيس بوك</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>أوافق على استخدام الباحث لاتباعات من مضمون المقابلة وتضمينها في بحثه وذلك لغرض التوضيح</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>أتفقت وأوافق على أن عملية التسجيل الصوتي لمحتوى المقابلة باستخدام جهاز الريكرودر (المسجل الصوتي) هو غرض تحويل محتوى المقابلة من صوتي إلى محتوى نصي قابل للقراءة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>أتفقت وأوافق على أن المشاركون سوف لن يتم تعويضهم أو منحهم أي شيء لقاء مشاركتهم في هذه الدراسة</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

الباحث:

المشاركون

التاريخ:

الموقع أدناه: أ威名كائي على ما ورد أعلاه ولا إخلال ذلك وقت وارتباط استمارة
Appendix D
Participants Letter of invitation
(English and Arabic Versions)
Date……

Dear participant,

Greetings……

My name is Ahmed Bahiya; I am a doctoral candidate I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project I am currently undertaking as part of my Ph.D. research study at De Montfort University. The purpose of the study is to understand Iraqi men and women’s gender performance in Social Media Sites in case of body absence. The study will be conducted in Iraq as it will target Iraqi users mainly. As part of the study, you will be asked to discuss particular aspects of your own experience regarding such performance. Audio recorder will be used to record the interview.

Attached sheet of participant information will be available which will explain the study further, and if you are interested in taking part, then I would encourage you to read the information before replying to me. Before consenting to participate in the study, we can arrange a meeting at a time suitable to you to discuss the research further. If you are interested in taking part or have any further questions then please either email me on (P14018190@my365.dmu.ac.uk / applelife0@gmail.com) or call me on (00964 07709410011 or 0044 7472436572). Please note that you are under no obligation to participate in the study.

I look forward to hearing from you. Regards

Researcher
Ahmed Bahiya
De Montfort University
Leicester
UK
Participants letter of invitation to email Internet interview

Date…….

Dear participant,

Greetings…….

My name is Ahmed Bahiya; I am a doctoral candidate I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project I am currently undertaking as part of my Ph.D. research study at De Montfort University. The purpose of the study is to understand Iraqi men and women’s gender performance vary in Social Media sites in case of body absence.

I invite volunteers to participate in an online interview via email. Your contribution will assist the researcher to better understand the relationship between social network sites and gender performance on such sites.

This is an anonymous interview. Your participation will not include any identifiable or personal information.

Attached sheet of participant information will be available which will explain the study further, and if you are interested in taking part, then I would encourage you to read the information before replying to me. Before consenting to participate in the study, we can arrange a meeting at a time suitable to you to discuss the research further. If you are interested in taking part or have any further questions then please either email me on (P14018190@my365.dmu.ac.uk / applelife0@gmail.com) or call me on (00964 07709410011 or 0044 7472436572). Please note that you are under no obligation to participate in the study.

I look forward to hearing from you. Regards

Researcher

Ahmed Bahiya

De Montfort University

Leicester

UK
رسالة دعوة للمشاركه في دراسة بحثية

الاخوة الكرام

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ......وبعد

انا طالب الدكتوراه أحمد بيهية، أكتب إليكم لأدعوكم للمشاركة في مشروع بحثي الذي اجريه حاليا كجزء من دراستي في جامعة دي مونتفورت والذي يهدف لدراسة اداء مستخدمي مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وبالتحديد الفيسبوك في العراق ومن كلا الجنسين (الرجل والنساء). حيث تم دعوة عدد من المتطوعين للمشاركة في مقابلة شخصية. وتم اختياركم ضمن هذه المجموعة حيث سيكون لمساهمتكم دور بارز في مساعدة الباحث على فهم أفضل للعلاقة بين مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وتبادلة أداء الجنسين فيها كما ستكون مشاركتكم في هذه المقابلة مجهولة وغير معرفة الهوية علما ان الإجابات لن تتضمن ذكر أي معلومات معرفة أوشخصية تدل على هويتك الحقيقيه.

سيتم إجراء الدراسة في العراق كونها مستهدفة المستخدمين العراقيين بشكل اساسي. وجزء من الدراسة، سيطلب منك مناشره جوانب معينة من تجربتك الخاصة فيما يتعلق بهذا الاداء كما سيتم استخدام مسجل الصوت لتسجيل المقابلة.

كما سارفم اليكم وثيقة تتعلق بالمعلومات الخاصة بالمشارك والتي تتضمن شرح حول ماهية الدراسة واتمنى ان تاخذ الوقت الكافي لقراءة هذه المعلومات قبل الرد على رسالتي هذه وفي حال رغبتك لعمره المزيد من المعلومات حول طبيعة الدراسة يمكننا ترتيب لقاء في الوقت المناسب لكم. كما أود ان أتنبئ حضرتكم انه في حال وجود أي أسئلة أو استفسارات أخرى الرجاء الاتصال بي على العنوان الالكترونيه التالي (P14018190@my365.dmu.ac.uk applelife0@gmail.com) او الرجاء الاتصال على ارقام الهاتف المبينة هنا (00447472436572) أو (07709410011) الرجاء الانتباه الى ان مشاركتكم في هذه الدراسة هي مشاركة طوعية وليست جبرية.

مع فائق الشرح والتقدير مقدما لتعاونكم

اخوك : أحمد بيهية

جامعة ديمونتفورت – لستر – المملكة المتحدة
رسالة دعوة للمشاركه في دراسة بحثية

الأخوة الكرام

 السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ......

وأنا طالب الدكتوراه أحمد بهية، أكتب إليكم لأدعوكم للمشاركة في مشروع بحثي الذي أجريه حالياً كجزء من دراسيتي في جامعة دي مونتفورت والذي يهدف لدراسة أداء مستخدمي مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وبالتحديد الفيسبوك في العراق ومن كلا الجنسين (الرجل والنساء). حيث تم دعوة عدد من المتطوعين للمشاركة في مقابلة عبر الإنترنت من خلال استخدام البريد الإلكتروني. وتم اختياركم ضمن هذه المجموعة حيث سيكون لدينا

دور بارز في مساعدة الباحث على فهم أفضل للعلاقة بين مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وتبني أداء الجنسين فيها كما سنكون مشترككم في هذه المقابلة مجهولة وغير معرفة الهوية فاجابتك لن تتضمن ذكر أي معلومات معرفة

أوخصوصية تدل على هوسيك الحقيقية

كما سارفنا إليكم وثيقة تتعلق بالمعلومات الخاصة بالمشارك، والتي تتضمن شرح حول ماهية الدراسة وتمت ان تخاذ الوقت الكافي لقراءة هذه المعلومات قبل الرد على رسالتنا هذه، وفي حال رغبتكم لمعرفة المزيد من المعلومات حول طبيعة الدراسة يمكننا ترتيب لقاء في الوقت المناسب لكم. كما أود أن أتمنى حضارتك أن

في حال وجود أي أسئلة أو استفسارات أخرى الرجاء الكتابة لي علىعنايب الالكترونيه (P14018190@my365.dmu.ac.uk applelife0@gmail.com) أو الاتصال على ارقام الهواتف المبينة هنا (009647709141000) أو 270447472436572. الرجاء الانتباه إلى أن مشاكركم في هذه الدراسة هي مشاركة طوعية ولست جبرية.

مع فائق الشكر والتقدير مقدما لتعاونكم

اخوكم: أحمد بهية

جامعة ديمونتفورت – لستر – المملكة المتحدة
Appendix E

Confirmation Letter for Identical Translation
CONFIRMATION LETTER FOR IDENTICAL TRANSLATION

To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that Mr. Ahmed Bahiya, PhD researcher at De Montfort University, Leicester, in the UK, Faculty of Technology, Dept. Media Discourse Group, asked me to evaluate and check the transcribed and translated texts provided in his thesis. I performed this activity and can confirm that the Arabic and English versions have identical meaning.

Yours Faithfully,

First editor

Dhia Albusalah

Second editor

Nagham Shittagh
Appendix F

Semi-structured Interview Questions
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FORMAT

The Begin of the interview will be with introductions, an explanation of the project, and signing of the consent forms.

Self-description of Identity
Could you take a minute or two to describe yourself for me? (Or if someone else were to describe you, what would they say?)

Background information:

Write your answer in the blanks provided.

1. How old are you? __________
2. What is your gender? ______
3. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently student can you state level and degree? ______

Which city you live in Iraq?
How could you describe your city? (Religious, secular, conservative or tribal)

To start with:

4. Tell us about your internet use in general.
5. Do you use Facebook?
6. How long you have been using Facebook?
7. Do you know/use other SNSs? Why do you use that?

Degree of Comfort when you use social media sites particularly Facebook?

8. How would you describe how you feel when you use Facebook?

Account information

9. How many accounts do you have on Facebook? If more than one state why?
10. Do you use your real identity? If not state why?
11. What kind of identities do you use and why?
12. Do you like that identity? If yes can you state why did you choose it?
13. Do you use your real gender or another in that identity? If another why?
15. What kind of tactics do you use to create your account on Facebook?
16. What information you include on your social networking sites? Please indicate?
**Relationship with the virtual identity:**

17. How would you describe the relationship to your virtual identity?
18. How would you describe the relationship between your virtual and real life?
19. Which is the easiest way for you to express yourself in an online environment and why?

**Exploratory question:**

20. What do you keep private about yourself in real world and you disclose online?
21. Do you think opinions are more freely expressed in Facebook than in Physical life?

**Impact of using Facebook:**

22. What gratifications do you derive from the internet in general and from Facebook in particular?
23. How important is Facebook to your life?
24. Would you say that Facebook has had a profound influence in your life? What might this influence be?
25. Does acting out such scenarios in the virtual environment impact on your everyday behaviour?
26. Do you feel empowered by social media use particularly Facebook? If yes can you explain how?
27. Do you consider social media sites particularly Facebook as a typical way for creating a safe space? If yes state why?
28. Does the use of social media sites particularly Facebook enable you to participate in aspects of public life which would not be available to you otherwise?
29. To what extent does social media use, particularly Facebook, help you to act online in ways you cannot in everyday life?
30. To what extent does social media use particularly Facebook offer you the space to explore and experience liberty? If it does please indicate how?
31. To what extent audience on Facebook impact your interaction and communication?
32. How do you deal with your audience on Facebook?

**Is there anything you would like to add/say that I have not asked about?**

**Thank you!!!
Appendix G

Mono- Or Bi-Syllabic Sounds Used in Transcription
# MONO- OR BI-SYLLABIC SOUNDS USED IN TRANSCRIPTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>common mono- or bi-syllabic sounds</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ummmm</td>
<td>Refers to the long time that the participants take thinking before answering the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UOOO</td>
<td>Refers to long sighs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>Refers to short pausing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHHHHH</td>
<td>Refers to laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Um</td>
<td>Refers to the short time that the participants take thinking before answering the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahhhh</td>
<td>Refers to understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nooooo</td>
<td>Refers to complete disagreement and shows non-support of what the speaker has said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaaaaaa</td>
<td>Refers to complete agreement and shows full-support of what the speaker has said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha Ha</td>
<td>Refers to sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uh huh’</td>
<td>exhibits understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mm</td>
<td>Refers to comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeah</td>
<td>Refers to agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offff</td>
<td>Deep breath before talking to express the importance of the point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eham Eham</td>
<td>Clear throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UO</td>
<td>Refers to short sighs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>