

# **Female Saudi International Students Daily Practices on Social Media in Australia**

**Hanan Mohammed Alshehab**

School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures & Linguistics Monash University

## **Abstract**

The effect of Social Media (SM) technology on human life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be denied; the use of SM platforms can be seen in various fields, such as education, medicine, politics, social life, communication methods, and daily life. The research aimed to investigate SM's impact on Female Saudi International Students' (FSIS) English language learning and creation of identities. This study utilized a qualitative method to obtain in-depth knowledge of FSIS' practices on SM and the effects on their learning and identity. The semi-structured interview was used to collect the data from eight FSIS. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Three main themes were generated: FSIS' daily practices, FSIS' digital identity, and FSIS' languages on SM. The findings show that FSIS is active on SM, having accounts on different SM platforms. They communicate with people from Saudi Arabia and of different nationalities. Also, the findings assert that FSIS has a strong digital identity on SM. Moreover, the findings emphasized that using SM helps some of the FSIS to improve their English language proficiency. They use SM as a learning tool for English language acquisition. The limitations and the implications of the study are stated in the Conclusion. For further research, suggestions are made to investigate more phenomena regarding Saudis' using of SM.

## **Chapter one: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The effect of SM technology on human life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be denied; the use of SM platforms can be seen in various fields such as education, medicine, politics, social life, communication methods, and daily life. As a product, SM have advantages and disadvantages for their consumers. Many studies have been undertaken to examine the adverse effects; for example, Risto (2014) investigated the kinds of academic writing errors committed by the students who use SM platforms for communication. While much other research has considered the positive impact on people's lives of using SM, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Tango, and Soma. Mirkin (2017) examined the effect of implanting a social media literacy program for reducing levels of anxiety and self-esteem issues among SM platforms users, including helping them to explore the many facets of their identity. Also, another possible benefit of these platforms is the promotion of communication and the acquisition of English language skills. According to the fields of Education and Applied Linguistics in general, it is crucial to investigate the positive impact of using SM as a tool for learning and using the English language. FSIS have knowledge of how to use SM in their daily lives, but there is a need to explore how they use SM in their learning of the English language. Therefore, the findings

of this research will help educators to refine their educational programs by providing more information about how FSIS use SM in their lives to learn the English language.

### **1.2 Research aims**

The research seeks to investigate SM impact on FSIS' English language learning and creation of identities. Furthermore, the study presents findings that could help Australian educators, academic teachers, international students, and people to know more about FSIS and to produce better strategies for international education.

### **1.3 Research design**

This study utilises a qualitative method to obtain in-depth knowledge of FSIS' practices on SM, and the effect on their learning, and identity. In this research, the cultural and social backgrounds of the participants and how they influence participants' practices are presented. Qualitative research is ideal for providing clarity for the social, cultural, and situational factors that shape language acquisition and use. Interviews, especially semi-structured interviews, are a widely used and appropriate technique in qualitative research. A semi-structured interview provides a compromise between structured and unstructured interviews (Dörnyei, 2007). In the interview which is considered by Block (1995) as social interaction, the roles of interviewer and interviewee are changeable which provide different types of data at different times. Therefore, the semi-structured interview is used to gain more information about FSIS practices on SM.

### **1.4 Research questions**

This study answers the following issues:

1. How do FSIS interact on SM and what motivates those interactions?
2. Do the daily practices by Saudi women on SM create their digital identities?
3. What is the effect of using SM in their learning of the English language?

### **1.5 Organisation of the project**

This chapter has introduced the topic and given the outline of the study. It has presented the research questions and aims. The second chapter reviews literature related to the topic, such as SM, FSIS, identity. The third chapter states the methodology used to collect the data, and tools to analyse them. The next chapter analyses the results and discusses the findings. The last chapter concludes the study and suggests implications related to using SM in learning the English language.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

This chapter reviews some topics that have a relation with the study. First, there will be a brief introduction of SM, followed by the background of FSIS, then the digital identity.

### **2.2 SM**

It is crucial to introduce the term SM and what it implies. Dabbagh and Reo acknowledged that "Social media is a 21st century term used to broadly define a variety of networked tools or technologies that emphasize the social aspects of the Internet as a channel for communication, collaboration, and creative expression, and it is often interchangeable with the terms web 2.0 and social software" (2011, as cited in

Aifan, 2015, p. 2). Mondahl and Razmerita (2014) outline the function of SM as facilitating communication, delivering information and providing online socialisation. Interestingly, the communication on SM can happen between members of different societies in the world. Kietzmann et al. defined the function of SM as “Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011, p. 241).

All these definitions prove that SM includes all the applications and programs that enable people to find information, search for knowledge, enable knowledge sharing, have free video, and voice calls, and provide opportunities for social interaction, in an easy way. It is stated that “While there are dozens of social network sites, participation tends to follow cultural and linguistic lines”(Boyd, 2008, p. 123). Examples of SM include ( but are not limited to) Snap Chat, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Skype, Soma, Wiki, Second life, Wikipedia, YouTube, Blogger, Yahoo Messenger, and Google Talk. In this study, there is an investigation of the platforms that FSIS use in their daily lives.

There are many studies which investigate the effect of using SM for education. Lomicka and Lord (2016, p. 1) argued that “Our increasing dependence on and use of various technological tools has impacted every facet of our lives, and language teaching and learning are no exception”. SM can serve the learning process in many ways. Campbell (2015) claimed that informal interaction on SM would support learners’ acquisition of the language and social adaptation in the host country. Mondahl and Razmerita (2014) argued that SM make learning more amusing, and create a reflection- based type of knowledge that could be adopted in new contexts. Dogoriti, Pange, and S. Anderson (2014) argued that SM help teachers and students to upload files, photos, videos and other educational material that is relevant to their course and learning. It is claimed that SM have “the potential to transform language learning by offering synchronous and asynchronous interaction, and speaking, writing, reading and listening activities at a time and place of learners’ own choosing (McBride, 2009, as cited in Brick, 2011, p. 19). All these examples indicate that learning happens on SM, and the learners can improve their skills. From my own experience, two female Saudi students and I enjoyed preparing a video presenting our reflection on translation theories we had studied in the class. The information lasted in my memory because I engaged in deep preparation for the video, discussed the theories and gave examples. SM therefore facilitates learning, having both a direct or an indirect impact on the learners

There are theories which support that language learning is a social activity, with people learning from each other. For example, Siemens (2014, p. 7) affirmed that:

“Connectivism presents a model of learning that acknowledges the tectonic shifts in society where learning is no longer an internal, individualistic activity. .... Connectivism provides insight into learning skills and tasks needed for learners to flourish in a digital era”.

Alsaleem (2013) used connectivism as a framework theory for her research. The study revealed that using WhatsApp journaling enhanced female Saudi students’ voice and vocabulary choice of the writing activities which are already utilised in the writing class. Aifan (2015) agreed that SM impacted the

educational field and improved learning skills of students. This positive impact has occurred because the new tools allow learners to access information at any time, provide reflections, and share their information and experiences with others. Furthermore, Ortega (2009, p. 252) argued that language socialisation theory regards “language learning and social learning as constitutive of each other”. Ortega (2009) pointed out that this theory confirmed that through social activity, the participants gain a membership, legitimacy in a group, and language knowledge. Thus, SM offers the opportunity for language learning on platforms through participation and communication. Most of the platforms enable the creation of groups which allow members to share, comment, learn from each other, and feel a sense of belonging to that group.

SM could contribute to reducing the risk of the challenges that international students face in their learning. They need to use SM for personal communication and educational purposes (Sleeman, Lang, & Lemon, 2016). Some international students move from a place where English is taught as a foreign language to a country where English is taught as a second language. Thus, they might face difficulties in the adaptation of the new way of teaching. Indeed, SM can facilitate their learning and study through accessing the university’s web pages and the rich resources of libraries available online. Also, the students can find valuable information on their schools' accounts on SM. Moreover, it is argued that using technology in the education field can enhance learners’ skills and independence (Aifan, 2015). For FSIS, they are accustomed to a teacher-centred teaching style and studying in female-only classes. SM may help Saudi students to be more independent in searching the knowledge they need in their education.

### **2.3 FSIS**

Australian universities have attracted many international students. Australia is one of the countries which is accepted by King Abdullah scholarship program in Saudi Arabia. The growth of student number is 11.5% (January–December 2016) and among 554,179 international students from different nationalities studying in Australia, 6,500 are Saudi students (The Department of Education and Training, 2016). The increasing number of students indicates the excellent quality of tertiary education in Australian universities. Although Australia is so far from Saudi Arabia, many Saudi students prefer to come to Australia because of the excellent reputation of its education.

To gain better outcomes of education, Australian educators should know more about international students’ lives in Australia. There are many challenges to be faced by international students as they move to a country that is different from their home, including culture shock, homesickness, loneliness, and different education styles (Binsahl, Chang & Bosua, 2015). All these difficulties have their impact on the level of adaptation to Australian culture and the education system. This indicates that FSIS could face some challenges when living in a western country. Further research is needed to investigate their needs and how they overcome the difficulties. The FSIS who come to Australia with their nuclear families might experience homesickness and loneliness as they are used to living in an expanded family. The findings of a study conducted by Binsahl, Chang, and Bosua (2015) in Australia revealed that the FSIS utilise Facebook to communicate with their family and friends in Saudi, and to know more about what is happening around them in Australia.

So, SM enable the students to communicate with their relatives and friends at home and make new relations in the host country.

It is essential to review the religious and cultural background of FSIS. Saudi students come from a conservative country, where religion and culture play a great role in their lives. Alsaggaf and Williamson argue that “religion and culture in Saudi Arabia not only shape people's attitudes, practices and behaviours but also shape the way they see and do things and perceive their lives”(2004, as cited in Raddawi, 2014, p. 42). Islam is the official religion in Saudi Arabia; it is fair to say that the religion urges women to be educated. It is stated that “Islam granted women not only the right to education, but also the right to inherit, own property, and full participation in all aspects of life” (Hamdan, 2005, p. 55). FSIS are educated, and they come to Australia to complete their studies; Bachelor, Master, and/or PhD.

However, the cultural factor could prevent some women from practising on SM; some families are afraid of the consequences of engaging online with males in discussions and sharing opinions. Hamdan (2005, p. 48) reported the view of Fatina Shaker, a female Saudi anthropologist who “believes that denial of women’s rights is rooted in the hegemony of social practices, dubbed by Fatina as customary laws or traditions, rather than rooted in Islamic essence”. While there are some families who prevent their daughters from practising on SM, there are many families who do not mind their daughters having accounts on SM. It is noticed that “the blooming of the new communication technologies brought significant changes to women realities in these societies by providing new space for self – expression” (Guta & Karolak, 2015, p. 116). Two articles by Al-Saggaf and Weckert (2004); (Alsagoff, McKay, Hu, & Renandya, 2012) revealed that male and female Saudis become more flexible in their thinking, discussions, and expressions after they engage the online community. Also, the researchers noticed that the individuals learned critical thinking skills. They are less naive, more mindful, challenge ideas, and respect other people’s opinions. Fascinatingly, the female participants showed that there is an increase in their self- confidence, making them feel less inhibited about the opposite sex. The females stated that practising on SM made them outgoing, more talkative and less shy.

It can be argued that SM offers information, facilitating communication, and online socialisation for female Saudi without contradicting their religion. Guta and Karolak (2015) in their study of Saudi women on SM pointed that “the Internet creates thus a safe space where female body, predominant in daily life, is non-existent and only thoughts count”. For Lauritano-Werner (as mentioned in Boyd, 2007, p. 131), “privacy is not about structural limitations to access; it is about being able to limit access through social conventions”. Fortunately, the settings of the accounts on SM enable female Saudi to choose what is appropriate for them. For example, the privacy options for sharing (public, friends, followers) make them more comfortable to send their photos and videos to their personal networks, those people they have allowed in their networks. Most of the settings on SM are optional. Therefore, female Saudi can choose what is suitable for them. They can contact females and males on SM in general topics and engage in discussions and present opinions.

There is a limitation of research about Saudi students in general and Saudi females in particular (Binsahl & Chang, 2012, as cited in H. Binsahl et al., 2015). It is stated that "Despite the significant increase in the number of Saudi students enrolled in Australian universities, very little research has been done to understand their experiences and how they bridge the cultural differences"(Alsaahafi & Shin, 2017, p. 54). Alsaahafi and Shin (2017) found that Saudi students in Australia faced difficulties in making friends because of cultural differences and lack of English proficiency. There are few studies that showed up in the literature review about FSIS in Australia and their use of SM to reduce the difficulties they experience. Thus the purpose of this study is to highlight FSIS' utilisation of SM in Australia. Also, it aims to explore how using SM affects their learning of the English language. Moreover, FSIS adaptation to Australian education and strategies for making friends will be discussed. Last, but not the least, this research will seek to know how FSIS see themselves on SM.

## **2.4 The digital identity**

It is stated that "digital identity is an individual's identity which is composed of information stored and transmitted in digital form. Digital identity is all the information digitally recorded about an individual which is accessible under the scheme"(Sullivan, 2012, p. 225). This digital identity could be weak or strong, as defined by Maia and Valente (2013, p. 58):

"The weak digital identity is limited to virtual characters, avatars, or fakes, which play digital roles with no significant impact on the subjects' lives. The strong digital identity is constructed when subjects use digital technologies as a support to convey meanings that extend into the subjects' lives and reach beyond a virtual concept".

Therefore, it is inevitable to have a digital identity (weak, strong) if a user interacts on SM. It is stated that a user's identity can often be established through the conscious or unconscious presentation of thoughts, feelings, likes, and dislikes on online communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62). All the behaviours on SM can reveal users' identities to others. In this research, there will be an investigation of the similarities or differences between the online and offline identities of FSIS, and the effect of their online and offline identities on learning the English language.

It is significant to refer to the identity in this study because practising on SM leads to creating an online identity(ies) of the users. It is argued that "the Internet offers users the possibility to forge completely new online identities, which can be multiple, or to reshape their offline identity carefully choosing what information to put forward, thereby eliminating visceral reactions that might have seeped out in everyday communication" (Guta & Karolak, 2015, p. 118). It can be said that the digital identity of an individual could be all the explicit and implicit online information that people know about the individual who has accounts on SM and practices communication with others.

Identity has a vital role in human beings' lives. It is stated that identity is the mediator between the individual and the social world (Chryssochoou, 2003). People can be affected by other people, as they communicate with them. Existing social media research focuses on social interactions and identities on

social media. Chryssochoou (2003, p. 3) stated that “identity encapsulates simultaneously the way we think about ourselves and about the world in which we live”. Identity is dynamic; it can be changed in daily life. It is argued that “identity is not a property [...] of an individual, but [...] it is interactively initiated over and over (though with a degree of consistency), so that the same individual can literally have different identities in different contexts” (Zhou-min, 2013, p. 80). Having more than one identity is not a problem, it indicates the ability of adaptation. Social psychological research is concerned with identity, and the three stages of socialisation, communication, and social influence to formulate one’s identity (Chryssochoou, 2003). These three processes can occur easily through interacting on social media. Existing literature includes social media studies concerned about the interaction on social networking sites and the identities of their users (Beaver, 2016).

Identity from a sociolinguistic perspective is affected by language. It is argued that “language is then a ‘double- edge sword; constraining identity by erecting boundaries between ‘them and us’ be they geographical or sociocultural, and liberating identity by offering fresh opportunities to cross barriers and boundaries.”(Evans, 2014, p. 4). Interestingly, it is stated that language is a marker of identity and also contributes to shape our social perception of the self and others (Evans, 2014, p. 50). From these two quotations, it can be said that the identity of SM users is changed according to the language used. In the case of FSIS, if they speak Arabic and English on SM, this indicates that they have more than one digital identity. This explains identity on the level of type of languages. Also, identity could be affected on the level of standard and vernacular of a language. A study by Eckert (2012, p. 91) emphasised that although “the vernacular may be stigmatized on a global level, its association with local values and practices gives it positive value on the local level”. This assumes that using SM exposes the users to vernacular language which would be not used at the academic level. That may help the users to know more about local people’s lives. It appears that an SM user’s identity is shaped by the interlocutors’ interactions and their languages.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter introduces the qualitative study and discusses ethical considerations. Also, it presents the participants’ demographic information, the research design, and data collection instrument. Data analysis strategy will also be discussed.

### **3.2 The qualitative research**

This study aims to explore FSIS’interact on SM and what motivates those interactions. Importantly, it explore FSIS’ identities and how they are affected by using SM and. how using SM affects their English language learning. The research needs rich information to gain a better understanding of FSIS use of SM. Therefore, the qualitative approach is appropriate for this research. Merriam (2009, p. 14) stated that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world”. Dörnyei (2007) outlined the strengths of the qualitative research method. For example, the exploratory nature of qualitative research is

an effective strategy for exploring a new area. Qualitative research is concerned with participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to engage in participant responses and ask for further details at certain points straight away, which leads to broadening the understanding of the phenomena. The interview instrument helps the researcher to listen carefully to what emerges in the interview, and seek clarification. Thus, in this study, semi-structured interviews whether face to face or on mobile, were used with FSIS to explore their views of using SM as a way for communication and as a tool for learning the English language.

### **3.3 The recruitment of participants**

After receiving approval to commence the project, potential participants were contacted through the WhatsApp application. I am a member of a female Saudi group in Whatsapp, where sending an announcement about conducting research is permissible. Also, the recruitment message was sent via Whatsapp to some female Saudi students in Australia who I know. The explanatory statement ( see Appendix 2) and the aim of the research were posted. If they wished to participate, they were advised to send a message of agreement on Whatsapp and arrange a time and the place to conduct the interview. After that, consent to being interviewed was received from six female Saudis who agreed to do the interview on mobile phone, and two who preferred a face to face interview, so the total number of participants was eight FSIS. The two face to face interviews were conducted in a meeting room at the university library. My mobile recorded the interviews. The other participants did their interviews at times convenient for them, where the call was on speaker and another mobile used to record the interviews. In two weeks, the data were collected from all the participants. The consent form ( see Appendix 3) was sent via email to the participants who signed them and returned back to me.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) gave approval and all participants gave their consent. It was explained to participants that their participation is voluntary and their names would be anonymous in presenting the data (Allmark et al., 2009). Pseudonyms instead of real names were used.

### **3.5 Selection of participants**

Certain criteria were applied to selecting participants. They were required to be FSIS in Australia, aged over 18 and with experience learning English in Australia or through study in university. They needed to have an interest in SM to tell their experience.

### **3.6 Participants' description**

The sample size of the participants was small, which helped to gain the rich data that is needed to understand participants' experience. The interviews were conducted with eight FSIS in Australia. Most of them are current students undertaking Master or PhD studies, and some of them have finished a language program or have completed a Master degree. All of them are married, their ages ranged from 26-36 years.



They came from different places in Saudi Arabia. They live in Melbourne and are studying in various universities. They are English language speakers. Their language experience in Australia shows their history of learning English and how they use SM to improve their English skills. The full details are shown in (Table 1) below (pseudonyms are used).

**Table 1: Description of participants**

Participant	Age	Area in Saudi Arabia	No. of Children	Languages	language program	Last Level of Education	Current status	Length of Residence
Monerah	27	Riyadh	1	Arabic English	language program in Australia	Bachelor	Master in Education in early childhood	2 years
Sarah	27	Aseer	1	Arabic English Turkish	Not applicable	Master	housewife	One year, seven months
Norah	Approximately 30	Riyadh Born in Kuwait	2	Arabic English Turkish	language program in Australia	Bachelor	housewife	One year, seven months
Razan	34	Dammam	3	Arabic English	Not applicable	Master	PhD in Pharmacy	3 years
Lobnah	30	Jeddah Born in America	2	Arabic English	Not applicable	Master	PhD in Applied Linguistics	2 years
Lyla	31	Dammam	1	Arabic English	language program in Australia	Bachelor	housewife	6 years
Arwa	26	Riyadh	0	Arabic English	language program in Australia	Bachelor	Master in Applied Linguistics	2 years
Afnan	36	Jeddah	4	Arabic English	language program in Australia	Master	PhD in computer science	9 years

**3.7 Data collection instrument**

The semi-structured interview was used to find answers to the research questions about FSIS practices on SM and how SM affects their English language learning and their identities. This kind of interviews allows the interviewer to prepare a set of open-ended questions for guidance, and the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on certain issues (Dörnyei, 2007). The interview guide helped to focus on the domain of the study, and offered a list of useful questions to ask. Dörnyei (2007) suggested a variety of questions for the interview protocol, such as: (a) factual or personal questions ( age, area in Saudi Arabia where the participants live, current marital status, number of children, level of education, years of residency in Australia), (b) content questions, for example (“What is your favourite platform?,” “What is your goal in each platform that you have on SM?”), (c) clarification questions (why, how, what do you mean), and (d)

final closing questions (“Is there anything else you would like to add?”). All the participants were asked the 31 questions in the protocol (see appendix 1), and the researcher asked for clarification on any emerging points that participants raised. Follow-up interviews via WhatsApp were used for checking on some of the interview information.

For ensuring participant’ privacy, the interviewees chose the method for conducting the interview, either on mobile phone or face to face, and their preferred place and time. Most of the participants wanted the interview on mobile from their homes. Conducting the interview in a comfortable place is an important factor for making participants communicate freely (Allmark et al., 2009). The interviews were in the Arabic language and took around 30- 60 minutes. The conversation started by a greeting and thanking participants for their initiative for doing the interview. Some information is given prior to the researcher asking questions to elicit an accurate understanding of the question; for example, the definition of SM, digital identity, emotional energy. The definitions are added at the end of the interview protocol (see Appendix 1).

### **3.8 Data analysis**

This section introduces the research tools for analysing the qualitative data. The researcher examines and organises the obtained data according to “participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities”(Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013, p. 537).

The structured and the unstructured data are derived from the semi-structured interview which challenges the researchers to structure them (Kulatunga, Amaratunga, & Haigh, 2007). Content analysis is a suitable approach to analysis because it helps to organise and break down the large amounts of data into categories or codes (Kulatunga et al., 2007). According to Weber (1990 as cited in Kulatunga et al., 2007, p. 503) “category is a group of words with similar meanings or connotations”. I employed conceptual content analysis which is also known as thematic analysis. This kind of analysis “attempts to find similar cognitions under the same concept” (Kulatunga et al., 2007, p. 502). Also, it enables the researcher to deal with pre-established codes and emerged codes. According to Kulatunga et al. (2007), the researcher should be familiar with the text and the pre-testing coding to illustrate the implicit terms before beginning the data analysis procedures. Pre-established codes using theoretical background can help to reduce the researcher’s subjectivity.

Following Kulatunga et al. (2007), three main steps were involved in systematic procedures for thematic analysis. First, the transcript data was in Arabic for each interview. I repeatedly read the transcriptions and divided the data into meaningful categories related to a particular concept to generate initial codes. For example, I found that there was information about practices on SM, English language on SM, Arabic language, identity, online relations. Secondly, a middle range approach between deductive ( themes are theory-driven), and inductive ( themes are data -driven) coding processes was used for creating the pre-established codes and to generate new codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I conducted the coding based on

the research question then examined the emerged codes and undertook coding by using descriptive keywords derived from the transcript. Thirdly, the codes were revised and linked to the research questions to build up arguments and arrive at conclusions. The final themes were named to establish the main themes for the results. The themes for this study are FSIS’ daily practices, FSIS’ digital identity, and FSIS’languages on SM.

I then translated into English the sections that I used for presenting participant’s voices in my research, in order to support the main themes with quotes from the participants. The verbatim transcription helps the researcher to manage the data by including word by word and all the emotional expression of the informal conversation (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 166). I included the verbal and non- verbal features, such as laughter and pauses. Each version of the Arabic-to-English (forward translation) and English-to-Arabic (backwards translation) was revised and compared (Santos, Black, & Sandelowski, 2015).

**Chapter Four: Results and Discussion**

**4.1 Overview**

This chapter reports on the collected data from eight interviews of FSIS. Also, it discusses the results with respect to the literature review in chapter two and the research questions. From the process of coding the data, I extracted three main themes which will be discussed in this chapter:

- FSIS’ daily practices on SM
- FSIS’ digital identity
- FSIS’languages on SM

**4.2 Research results and discussion**

I would like to present each theme from the participants’ point of view, then my interpretation of their views. This will be followed by a discussion in relation to the literature review.

**4.2.1 FSIS’ daily practices on SM**

FSIS are fascinated by the facilities offered by SM platforms for users. Most of the participants expressed their opinions about the newest platforms. The communication with their relatives, and old and new friends are the main goal of their practice on SM, followed by their desire to know about other cultures, news, brands, fashion, food, academic trainers, and healthy lifestyle. All the participants are active on SM; they have many platforms where they communicate with others, whether Saudis or people from different nationalities. Information about their online practices is shown in ( Table 2), including details of their favourite platform, the number of accounts they have on SM, the used devices, the time in which they become active, and the approximate hours for their daily use of SM.

Table 2: FSIS' daily practices on SM

Participants’ Name	Favourite platform	Accounts on SM	Devices	Active time	Daily use approximate (hours)
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Monerah	Snapchat	two accounts on Facebook, one account on Instagram, Snapchat, Whatsapp	Mobile	morning, afternoon, evening	5
Sarah	Whatsapp	one account on Whatsapp, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook	mobile, laptop	Afternoon	3-4
Norah	Whatsapp	one account on Whatsapp, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Skype	Mobile	after 9 P.M	1
Razan	Whatsapp	two accounts on Instagram one account on Whatsapp, Facebook	mobile, laptop	Evening	1
Lobnah	Snapchat	one account on Whatsapp, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter	mobile, laptop	morning, evening in the car	3
Lyla	Whatsapp	two accounts on Instagram one account on Whatsapp, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Soma, Skype	lpad, tablet, laptop, mobile	morning, evening	6
Arwa	Snapchat	Snap chat, Instagram, Youtube, Whatsapp	Mobile	morning, evening	3-4
Afnan	Whatsapp	Whatsapp, Instagram, twitter, facebook, Telegram, Tango	Mobile, laptop	On the train	2-3

As shown in Table 2, there is a similarity of the applications used between the participants. This agrees with “While there are dozens of social network sites, participation tend to follow cultural and linguistic lines”(Boyd, 2008, p. 123). Some of the participants stated that they used an application because their relatives and friends have it. Lobnah said:

1a: “Snapchat is found when I was in Saudi Arabia, but I did not download it [ ...] why I downloaded it [ ... ] for mum [ ...] for siblings, [ ...] for uncles, all of them used it and stopped using Instagram, so it is the way of communication now”.

Alternatively, they use certain applications because people in Saudi Arabia use it. Lyla said:

2 a“ Whatsapp from the first. It means from the beginning of Whatsapp all people open it; I open it..that it is...I did not remember a specific reason”.

Lyla used WhatsApp because platform is used by most Saudis, having the feature of privacy which Saudis seek, and easy management and usability of the platform. From Table 2, it is apparent that WhatsApp and Snapchat are the most popular platforms for participants. When I asked them about their favourite platform they provided facts and reasons why they preferred them:

3a: Snapchat is more reliable, it shows the action directly. It is the newest platform for Saudis (Monerah).

3b: Snapchat is easy to use, private, to be yourself (Lobnah).

3c: Snapchat is for fun, it can take photos of everything, and it is very quick to send the messages, it is private (Arwa).

3 d: I preferred the groups on Whatsapp; it is practical, quick, and private (Razan).

Most of the participants asserted that the privacy of the platforms they use was important. The privacy options allowed FSIS to engage in SM in keeping with their conservative culture. FSIS' using of SM concord with the findings of Guta and Karolak (2015) in their study of Saudi women on SM, who pointed out that "the Internet creates thus a safe space where female body, predominant in daily life, is non-existent and only thoughts count". So Saudi women are active and communicate on SM which provides a safe place for them.

When I asked the participants if they could spend one day without participating on SM, they stated that:

4a: "While I am studying [...] yes [...] it means [...] but after graduation, no" (Sarah)

4b: No, never [...] I can not

Me: why?

4b: uh at least I communicate with my family through them as a daily news [...] Twitter honestly I know worlds' news, and I communicate with useful official accounts for research purposes (Afnan)

4c: Yeah I try to

Me: why?

4c: just to spend time with my family (Lobnah).

4d: No impossible

Me: why?

4d: [laughs] because I feel that social media is like addiction every day I should check to know what changes in the community, and what happens" ( Monerah).

4e: Up to now, no

Me: why?

4e: I do not know.. Addiction you can say [ laugh] honestly [...] here I need for communication with my family in Saudi Arabia [...] I can not close it, or spend one day without honestly I do not speak with my brothers and sisters via calls, most of our communication on Whatsapp you know (Lyla).

So their active time on SM is varied according to the priority for home responsibilities or study time. Also, these differences may be the result of different personality traits. In one of the studies, it is stated that “high extraversion people had longer Facebook experience, daily time use and weekly time use, and more number of friends, photos, and groups than low extraversion people”(Kuo & Tang, 2014, p. 16). Some of the Saudi women prefer to use SM every day, like Lyla and Monerah; they described their practices as addiction. They can not stop using SM because they want to be related to their families and communities. They spend around 5-6 hours in a day for communicating on SM. Some differences may be the result of personality traits, as levels of Facebook use have been linked to extraversion (Kuo & Tang, 2014). When she was studying, Sarah did not use SM every day, but her use became high after graduation when she used it almost every day. She prefers to be active in the afternoon because family responsibilities are less at this time. Lobnah tries to stop using SM to spend more time with the family. She stated that “ I prefer to be active in the car because I am not driving”. She is so organised, careful to spend time with family, to study, and to be active on SM. Also, Afnan has these characteristics; she prefers to practice on SM in the train. She has four children, so she is very busy, but she tries to find time to be active on SM.

I noticed their desire to stop using SM every day for entertainment and their curiosity for watching for all the newest things on the platforms, but they keep using SM for studying or learning every day. It is stated that:

5a: “ I downloaded Twitter from around 8-10 years, I was active at the beginning then I felt that it takes my time all people argue, argue, argue. I decided to stop it because it takes time more than any another application, now I returned again to use it for studying, there is many doctors who share many benefit materials about the research, what is the difference between the quantitative and qualitative methods, so I decided to use it for learning purpose. Also, I used WhatsApp for collecting the data for my research and for studying reason. I have a group of PhD students who are active and also share I used it for my work; there is a committee for developing the curriculum, they ask us for our opinions, so it is a way for communication and studying”(Lobnah).

5b: “in Twitter, I communicate with accounts that responsible, beneficial for research, for postgraduate students, for news, religious persons, also, I follow the account for my supervisor because sometimes, he notified for a near conference if someone like to participate, also if he likes a paper he write a note, so I follow him, in Instagram I follow accounts for health, exercises because I have pain in my back, family consultants, cooking”(Afnan)

Some participants reveal their opinions on having accounts on Snapchat:

6a: “in Snapchat just the girls on your contact [...] to be myself, because in Instagram you cannot be yourself, all these people are following you but in Snapchat, I can take photos all the

day long for everything, I can cook and take pictures of myself, it is ok, I feel comfortable with using it” (Lobnah).

6b: “Snapchat appears when I am here, I need to know my family news especially my siblings”(Lyla)

6c: “Snapchat I did not use because I should put a terminus [laugh] for this world because if I enter I will not finish. I asked a lot of female Saudis they said [...] it consumes their time so [...] honestly; I did not enter it up to now” (Razan)

6d: “No never, I do not have account on Snapchat, it takes time” (Afnan)

SM platforms’ creators are competitive, every platform appears with a distinctive feature, so some people prefer to use the newest platform that appears. It is stated: “What we have seen over the past ten years is that many platforms started out in one particular domain ( e.g., online search or social networking) and gradually encroached upon each other’s territory while trying to contain users inside their own fenced-off turf” (Van Dijk, 2013, p. 9). I think now most platforms have the feature which Snapchat has about “your story” which lasts for 24 hours. Lobnah and Lyla were active on Facebook and Twitter when they appeared; then they become more active on Whatsapp and Snapchat which are the most popular platforms nowadays among Saudis, but still, they use their accounts in other applications. This shows their readiness to try a new life on a new platform. They are open-minded to trying new platforms and communicating in new ways. However, Razan and Afnan revealed their fears about Snapchat because it takes most of the users’ time. This fear may be because they are PhD students who are busy, and they need the time to concentrate on their studies.

The participants reported their use of SM for personal purposes. None of the participants had the desire to be famous on SM by collecting the biggest number of followers on each platform. Some examples here:

7a: “at this moment no, but maybe next year when I finish my studying, I will open it and make it public account, but now I intend to make it private because if I open it, I will not concentrate”.(Razan)

7b: “I do not care”(Arwa)

7d: “I do not have the goal to collect followers.”

They use SM for communication and getting information. Most of them asserted that using SM relieves their homesickness for Saudi Arabia.

8a: “ I was in Australia in 2010 then I returned to Saudi, I don not know if this will be considered as a part of my living period now. At that time there was no SM, and these platforms like now, you know, it was new in Saudi Arabia, they were not available until at the beginning of 2010 or the end of 2009, I came to Australia and lived around one year then I returned. I felt homesickness. There was no communication. It was rare. I communicated through calls; I used international calls to contact my family. It costs, and the atmosphere was gloomy. If I did not go out and see for example and know an Australian woman who could speak and understand

me, I could adapt the Australian society and know what happened to me otherwise I will not be happy and that exactly what happened to me. I was not happy never. But now when I came back, there is a big difference honestly firstly I communicate easily on SM and searching easily, I find the information easily not like before when people were new and did not know where they go and from where they can buy things”(Norah).

8b: “When I came there were no SM except the Facebook [...] SM did not have any effect when I arrived because SM is not found [...] however, after that may be SM have an effect [...] When I came 2009 there is no Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, Snapchat, but now my using of SM helps me to know more about Australia that I did not know. Whether places, people. My life is changed now especially when I use Tango to communicate with my family”(Afnan).

8c: “Of course, honestly, it means, I expect that if there are no social media, it means not the homesickness will happen to me, may be more than homesickness, maybe I will return I will not complete. I feel that social media make me more close from my family when I call them a video rather than a voice, I know what the improvement happened to my country”(Monerah).

8d: “Yes like Snapchat [...] but [...] it means (*hesitation*) never I felt homesickness because I used to live in Jeddah and my family in Riyadh, so already I far from them”(Lobnah)

8e: “I do not know maybe I see videos for my family on Snapchat, it is fabulous that I feel that I am close from them, but it is not relief the homesickness, I feel that there is no relation” (Arwa)

Norah and Afnan expressed their feelings now because they tried the life without SM in 2009-2010. So they appreciated them as they became close to their families and helped them to adapted the Australian community. However, the history of the popularity of SM in Saudi Arabia began after 2009 when the Arabic language was added to the platforms. “Twitter, for example, until March 2012, did not have an Arabic language interface, and this fact seems to have inhibited the growth of its Arabic-speaking user base. Facebook experienced a massive increase in Arabic-speaking users after introducing its Arabic interface in February 2009”(Samin, 2012, p. 3). This indicates the importance of SM in FSIS’ life to help them continuing studying abroad far from their families.

The using of SM helps to make some of the FSIS feel more comfortable living in Australia far from relatives. Therefore SM helps to connect them with their families. As is seen in the example of Norah and Afnan, their lives changed after they started using SM. Their relations with their relatives on SM helped these students to continue living happily in the Australian community. Arwa did not feel that SM provides a way to relieve homesickness. This may be because she was always in touch with her family, and she did not experience life without SM like Norah and Afnan. The research findings show similarity in the purpose of using SM with other studies, but the platforms used are different. A study conducted by Binsahl et al. (2015) in Australia revealed that the FSIS utilise Facebook to communicate with their family and friends in Saudi and friends. My research results show that the most favourite application of participants is the one



to communicate with family, such as Whatsapp which is used by most Saudis. Also, they use those platforms which provide more privacy, such as Snapchat.

SM are appreciated because they offer the opportunity to discover the Australian community. It is found that:

9a: "I followed some Australian accounts on Snapchat, I learnt a lot about their daily life, culture, customs. Also, I knew halal restaurants and popular places to visit on Instagram (Monerah)

9b: "Using these platforms helps me to discover the community and the place where I live" (Norah).

9c: "I followed Australian accounts to know and share in the activities occurred in Melbourne (Razan).

9d: "I followed on Twitter the leader of Saudi club in Australia, who supported us in our settlement in Australia. I returned to be active on Facebook because most of my Australian, Chinese and Indian friends used it, so I wanted to be in touch with them" (Lobnah).

9e: "I prefer to use Instagram rather than Google to search for tourists places in Australia; I trusted the people who show their experiences with photos and videos" (Arwa)

The participants showed a positive attitude towards using SM, as a way to get to know the Australian community.

#### **4.2.2 FSIS' digital identity**

This theme informs about the nature of FSIS' digital identities and FSIS' online relationships.

##### **4.2.2.1 The nature of FSIS' digital identities**

For this point, I asked about having a digital identity that is different from the real identity. Some of the participants were not sure about the answer, some of them replied "no" directly (such as Norah), or described what a digital identity is; "it is a fake identity" (such as Lobnah). The definition of digital identity (See Appendix 1) was therefore explained to participants. I divided the results into two categories, the difference between the real and digital identities, and the different identities on the platforms. The participants stated that:

10a: "ever no [...] I will not declare my age even in the real identity, this is called discreetness, and it does not have relation with identity" (Norah)

10b: " No it is not different, the same name, but little information about me, all my accounts are private, I put my first name without the family name, for example, my living area in Australia and Saudi Arabia, simple information about me" (Arwa)

10c: " Nothing is different from my real identity, mostly I do not declare all the information about me, I am discreet, and these are private things" (Afnan)

10d: “No it is the same as my real identity, if some information I do not like to show publicly, I will not put them but if I put some information they are true. I do not like people who fake their identity. If you access my profile, you will not know 100% information about me”(Razan)

On SM profiles, it is not compulsory to fill all the information about the user. Some participants seemed unaware that they have a digital identity or what are the components of the digital identity. Norah did not see any relationship of digital identity with age. The age is a very sensitive topic, she declared, even in person, she will not say her age. She told me when I collected the data that her age was “approximately 30”. This is practice in daily conversation but for official communication, for example, at university, hospital or airport, the age is a part of identity. The participants declared that their digital identities are not fake, but they did not write all the information. They believe that privacy is more important than showing your full identity on SM. These findings agree with Lauritano-Werner (as mentioned in Boyd, 2007, p. 131), “privacy is not about structural limitations to access; it is about being able to limit access through social conventions”. The participants are aware of their privacy limitation, and they decide what to show or hide. They have the ability to manage levels of disclosure which can be interpreted as them having different identities.

FSIS’ digital identities are not fake, they share, communicate with their followers on SM. Lobnah stated that she feels it is her responsibility to correct most of the rumours posted on Whatsapp because this application is used by most Saudis. Sarah believes that SM helps her to send positive messages to her followers, such as a picture or poetry. So, they have strong digital identities, made up of multiple identities, levels of disclosure, and with tension between communication and cultural constraints.

When the participants were asked about having different online identities on the platforms, they answered:

11a: “ Maybe in Whatsapp groups, different groups, means different identities, with my family not like with my crazy friends, never the same in Monash group (*a group of Saudis in Australia* ) where I am formal. In my family group I am the youngest, so whatever I always said they look at me as the youngest, my personality is different, with my friends there are laughter, jokes, I will not send like these to Monash group. However, in general, I like to send benefit things I send things that increase the awareness of people. So people’s communicating determine how I behave”(Lobnah)

11b: “ My behaviour changes depend on where I am” (Arwa)

11c: “ The same identity on all the platforms, if I discreet for example I have certain level of privacy on Instagram, the same level is on Facebook, the same level is on Whatsapp” (Norah)

They showed that the difference is embodied in the behaviour on the platforms because it depends on the people they contact. Lobnah’s and Arwa’s answers are affirmed by what emerged in the literature review, “identity is not a property [...] of an individual, but [...] it is interactively initiated over and over (though with a degree of consistency), so that the same individual can literally have different identities in different contexts” (Zhou-min, 2013, p. 80). However, Norah contradicted that, and she insisted that there be no

differences between her digital and real identities and her identities on the different platforms. She declared that “ I am a human being feels that my privacy is my property, this has no relation to nationality, religion, age, this is my nature, my privacy will lose its pleasure if I am interested in putting a certain picture or writing certain comment ”. It is found that there is a connection between the sense of identity and the personality traits (Lounsbury, Levy, Leong, & Gibson, 2007). Conscientious people “were cautious and conservative about online activities and preferred not to tell others about their Facebook usages”(Kuo & Tang, 2014).

According to keeping the emotional energy on the platforms, the participants stated that:

12a: “In Whatsapp, there are family, friends groups, if there is a touch between two persons about a certain topic, we try to reform the matter”( Monerah)

12b: “ in Snapchat I care, and I think it depends on the newest platform, I was caring in Instagram then no. In Snapchat I care of the replies when I posted something funny, and all the followers comment I become happy, and it affects me I am feeling pleased”( Lobnah)

12c: “ in Whatsapp if there is a situation on SM, I control my temper vigorously and if there should be a reply I prefer to communicate privately” (Sarah)

12d: “If I like it, I will press like button in Instagram, If I like a statement, and it is beneficial, I press like button. In Whats app sometimes I communicate privately with the member who shares in the group to praise, at times I feel sad Why I did not to praise her in the group, she deserves it in the group. Sometimes I comment in the groups” (Afnan)

12e: “ in the small groups in Whatsapp, I feel that I should give care for the members who share their personal photos, pictures about their success, their children, their cooking, I care to comment. I have this principle as she cares and shares, so she cares to listen to our opinions. However, in the large groups, when I feel that my comment is late and does not affect and already there are many comments, I do not care to comment. In Facebook, I care if the situation is crucial like a wedding, a new baby, death”(Razan)

12f: “Mostly I criticised privately, I do not like to comment in the group, but in a situation like today, you write I need help to collect the data for my research, I able to send privately. I will participate with you without replying in the group, but my principle is to help each other, and I want to stir up some feelings in others to help” (Norah)

It is argued that “mediated sharing allows for personal expression, such that the memorability, salience and personal significance of the event can be enhanced. It also allows for enthusiastic feedback to be conveyed, and for a deepening of social relationships. Indeed, research finds that mediated communication and face-to-face communication are strikingly similar regarding their degree of emotional expression and social connectedness” (Choi & Toma, 2014, p. 533). The emotional energy is expressing the feelings towards the individual's sharings. It can be positive, like comment susing praise words, pressing the ‘like’ button on Facebook, retweeting on Twitter, and commenting in WhatsApp. Alternatively, it can be negative by

commenting with offensive words, making no comments or indicating the significance of posts. FSIS do not keep their emotional energy equally on all their platforms. They frequently comment on their preferred platform, and their interest in other posts. Some of them prefer to comment privately. Razan stated she appreciates and comments for someone who shares a photo or video.

Most of the participants have one account on the platforms, some of them have two accounts on a platform, for a purpose. They stated that:

13a: “I have two accounts on Facebook, one for formal use, the second is for fun”( Monerah).

13b: “I have two accounts on Instagram; one is personal, the second is for my hobbies”( Razan).

13c: “I have two accounts on Instagram, Melbourne Souq is for Saudi international students service (advertisement for selling used items ), the second is my personal use (Lyla ).

The participants stated that they have more than one digital identity. These findings agreed with Page (2013, p. 17) who describes identity in online interaction “ from a discursive perspective, identities are plural, constantly negotiated, and fluid, manifest and made meaningful through the participants’ discourse and enacted about localised contexts of interaction”. Lobnah has different identities on Whatsapp groups. She is the youngest participant, and states that she is more comforting and humorous in the family and friends group, but she is more formal in the international Saudi female group. Arwa also stated she is more comfortable when she sends temporary photos and videos on Snapchat because all the followers are family members and friends, but she is more careful on Instagram because the photos remain forever. Also, she pointed out that on Whatsapp there is a difference in the way of speech, communication, and level of respect. I can interpret their choice to put two accounts on one platform as a result of their identities and how they see themselves, and how they want people to see them.

It is noticed that their identities are not an obstruction for their communication on SM and their studying in Australia. The participants were asked about the impact of their identities (the real and online) on their attitudes of learning English in Australia.

14a: “ for me, the identity does not affect negatively, I am full covered ( wearing the burqa), and I communicate with others” (Afnan).

14b: “I am more enterprising to learn from SM because it is an opportunity, it exposes me to all languages and cultures, I can learn English even if it is not academic, I acquire new words, and this encourages me” (Arwa).

14c: “ I am open-minded”(Lyla).

14d: “Mother’s identity is different from the study mood, I use English more in mother’s identity because my children speak English”( Lobnah).

14e: “ This is my language, and I loved it, I learned it in the school and whole of my life, I feel that I am counter a change, I was not open at the beginning then gradually I accept the status”( Razan).

Lyla pointed out that learning English makes her able to communicate with people and participate in activities; using SM increases her knowledge because she searches in English resources on SM. Interestingly, Lobnah reported that her identity as a mother encourages her to speak English with her children who talk English. Razan used to follow the American system she learned in Saudi Arabia; she pointed out that everything is different in Australia, the system, the language, teaching methodology, and number of assignments. She declared that she was angry when she came to Australia, and then she gradually became used to the new system.

All the participants confirmed that their identities are not an obstruction for their communication on SM and their study in Australia. Even Razan, who stated that she faced difficulties in adapting to Australia in the beginning, managed her situation. This agrees with the findings that international students need to use SM for personal communication and educational purposes (Sleeman et al., 2016) to reduce the difficulties they face. Razan stated that:

15a: “I join a Saudi group for females on WhatsApp, honestly I felt that I communicated, my life changed. When I came, I felt alienation, loneliness. I am an outgoing person, I love people, but in the first year I felt that I isolated from the people. I felt that I did not want to go out or see anybody. Then I knew a group of lovely females; I engaged with them. I went out with them, and I care to see them if I have spare time...I communicated with them via WhatsApp and know their news..... I prefer to go in person to visit the council to see the activities for kids more than using SM

Me: Do you follow any Australian accounts on SM?

15a: “Oh you remembered me yes I use Facebook to know about the activities in Melbourne. I forget the name[...] yes I follow two accounts on Facebook.”

Arwa’s answer about learning non-academic words (or, vernacular words) has similarity with the study by Eckert (2012, p. 91) who emphasised that although “the vernacular may be stigmatized on a global level, its association with local values and practices gives it positive value on the local level”. So Arwa finds that SM offers her the chance to learn about everyday life in Australia not just for the purpose of university.

#### **4.2.2.2 FSIS online social relationships**

The participants are asked about having males and females friends on SM. they stated that:

16a: “they are not friends, they are followers”.

16b: “I can make fake digital identity and follow his friend, but I do not like that I deleted the account on Twitter, I returned now because I follow some influential Saudi academic persons who provide information for PhD students”.

16c: “ I prefer to deal with females [...] I do not prefer to deal with males on SM

Me: What about male teachers?

16c: [...] it is a different story, I can communicate with a man in the street, my neighbour, in supermarket, in university, this is different. They see my identity that I am wearing hijab so there are certain boundaries in the speech, he communicate with you to send a message, but on

SM I do not know his reality, what in his heart, mind, I put bad impression for him. However, if I see him in person and the situation ended like sale process that ok

Me: What about male teachers which she prefers on SM or in person?

16c: I prefer SM to communicate with male teachers. I prefer to send an email and express the points and the circumstances because I will be shy when I stand in front of him and express for him [...] When I write it better”(Norah)

All the participants except Norah reported that they have male and female and Saudi and non-Saudi followers on their platforms. Most of their male followers are classmates who they have come to know through their study in Australia. Their relations are both formal and for study purposes. Also, they have male followers from their extended families. Lobnah stated that on Snapchat she has just female followers, and she sends her photos and videos there, but on Instagram, she has female and males followers, and she is formal. She stated that her husband asked her to unfollow his male friend on Twitter. She has male followers, but they are not her husbands' friends. She stated, “ I followed doctors on Twitter now, and I do not think one of his friends is a doctor”. Arwa stated that the males are followers not friends, to show that her relation with them is formal and not as a friendship relationship.

It is important to discuss the online relationships of FSIS with a male, female Saudi and non-Saudi communicators. Al-Saggaf and Begg (2004, p. 43) outlined what people do in online communities “People join online social communities to meet other people, make new friends, talk about the meaning of life, discuss their social problems, fall in love, and so on”. It is known that Saudi culture has the segregation of the genders, although on SM, there is no strict separation. I think that FSIS on SM are conservative with respect to the norms of their culture. Although SM offer the opportunity to contact the opposite gender, the FSIS in this study still keep some boundaries between them. Norah stated that she prefers to communicate online rather than offline with male Australian teachers. She communicates with her male teachers via email. However, she does not like to communicate with males who are strangers on SM.

#### **4.2.3 FSIS' languages on SM**

This theme is presented through a discussion of three points: online activities, Language and identity on SM, and English proficiency.

##### **4.2.3.1 Online activities**

This section is about the online activities in which FSIS participated in English and that could potentially help their learning or use of English on SM.

17a: “I follow a famous person in Snapchat and Instagram because I feel that he improve my listening skill every day, I obtain new words, sometimes I learn the accent, and more various things, when I add the news web, everyday I will listen at the beginning it will be difficult but after continuous use for more than three months it will be easy and I will use to the way of speech. I used to read the transcription for the videos, I write in the snap chat when I comment.

For example, a woman put a photo for her daughter birthday, I commented, and I liked the idea and asked her how it prepared it. Also, in snap chat I follow a person who explains ten English words every day . I follow Simon site, I studied from it, and it was so beneficial”(Monerah)

17b: “ I follow famous Australians in psychology on Snapchat. Also, I follow Australian accounts on Snapchat and Instagram where I learn how they talk, pause, do the intonation, knows the meaning of the taboo words. I believe that photos send messages to people, so I love to send positive messages. Also, I write poetry in my status that has a positive meaning. I do not like to speak English with persons do not understand unless they want to learn English. I do not like to show off” (Sarah)

17c: “ I listen to Ted talk videos, I think it improves my learning because it contains the transcription and I read it sometimes I learn vocabulary, their way of speech, they speak normally so I learn the language they do not feel weak their language to make you understand, I learn when they pause [...]. Also, there is a language exchange website, it is a very fabulous website. You can register, and you have a language, and you want to develop another. You should state what is the native and what the other language you like to learn [...] After you agree to communicate with someone you can contact through Skype one class for one class for the other and me it is free, and you can search for people in Melbourne. I refuse some invitations because the time difference between us ” (Norah)

17d: “ mostly it will comment, I put a photo and comment or send a comment for a person sent a photo, it depends on the individual who sent the photo if he/she speaks English. For example my siblings, I send in English to my two brothers because of they are active and reply in English but my sister If I sent in English, she replies in Arabic. Sometimes I make a video for my kids or me when they speak in English. I use TV shows application to know about American shows because I dedicated to them. I like to watch the show; I see when the show will appear on the app. After watching the show, I send comments on something or read the comment. Sometimes I see something, and when I read the comments, I recognise that this has relation with the American culture. (Lobnah)

17e: I have two groups with foreigners in Whatsapp, I write in English. I used it for one year to teach them Arabic language so I need to speak in English. I record voice notes. Also, they make another group to teach me English for one hour for each listen in Skype”(Lyla)

17f: “Sometimes I write wisdom in English, possibly I read from a person comment, and I find a strange word, so I translate and learn. Sometimes I assess someone grammar, so I need to search about the grammar” (Arwa)

17g:“mostly I search in English for places, information, conferences, article, journal, the author in the Google. Also, on the university website, I use English. I search for editors, tutors. On Freelancer.com, I communicate with them in English to ask for a tutor, and they reply by someone suitable for your order. This improves my writing and reading because I deal with English speakers. I am careful to write the order in an understandable way.” (Afnan)

17h: “I share a photo that has a meaning, also I create a new photo from two photos and comment in English and share it. Because in English it will reach to a big number of people, but Arabic is specified to Arabs, I have two accounts as I said one is for my hobbies, so I have ideas and I write them in English”( Razan)

The participants reported that they use English to contact their friends from different nationalities. Lobnah uses the English language more than learning the language on SM. Lyla learns English from the members in the groups because it is the language of communication. This agrees with Siemens (2014, p. 7) who affirmed that “connectivism presents a model of learning that acknowledges the tectonic shifts in society where learning is no longer an internal, individualistic activity”. So SM platforms offer a place to undertake learning within a group. Razan uses English in her comments on a photo. Lobnah is the only one who reported that she uses English with her brother on WhatsApp. Online activities have connections with the participants’ hobbies (as for) Razan, their desire to increase the level of their skills (as for Norah and Monerah), their studies (as for Afnan), and for teaching (as for Lyla), and their watching of TV show (as for Libnah).

#### **4.2.3.2 Language and identity on SM**

One of the interesting points is the effect of the language used on SM on participants’ identities. I asked the participants to imagine their reactions to a situation that might happen to them and whether they would react in Arabic and English for a negative or a positive situation. I wanted to explore the differences in their ways of speech, their chosen words, their moods, and their behaviours on SM.

18a: “ I need to be lovely to send the idea I want, but in the Arabic language; Arabs understand each other” (Monerah)

18b: “I will be more confident in my language, and hesitated in English” (Sarah)

18c: “I can express easily in Arabic, but in English, I want to know what they say”(Afnan)

18d: “I feel normal to write in Arabic or English in a reply for a positive situation like congrats, but it depends on the people who see this comment if they are understanding Arabic or not. Sometimes I use the English language in a case when I want to ridicule someone or if someone replies to an irritating comment, and he does not understand English. Sometimes I use the Arabic language to ridicule someone does not understand Arabic” (Lobnah)

Monerah stated that she tries to be a kind, lovely person in both languages but more so in English. Sarah reported that she is more confident and shows her identity in the Arabic language. She hesitates in English. Afnan was hesitant in English, and talked about spending time googling to find the appropriate comment for someone admitted to hospital when her Australian supervisor had an accident. She concluded that “wishing you a speedy recovery” is suitable. Identity changed according to the language of the communicators. Lobnah uses English and Arabic in her comment on a situation that happened to her in Coles ( a supermarket in Australia). Australian women commented on her shopping “it is a big shopping”, she replied, “ it is for the whole month”. She stated that her idea would not be reached if she said it in



Arabic. She reported that the followers who did not understand English asked about what the Australian woman said. Lobnah considered the English language to be an important factor in showing her identity on SM. This supported the literature review that language shapes identity. Also, these findings support the claim that “language is then a ‘double- edge sword’; constraining identity by erecting boundaries between ‘them and us’ be they geographical or sociocultural, and liberating identity by offering fresh opportunities to cross barriers and boundaries.”(Evans, 2014, p. 4). Therefore, there are some differences in identity according to the language used. I think people could be more confident, expressive, more detailed in their first languages, but they could be hesitatant and use stereotypical expressions when using other languages. Identity also affected by the culture of the spoken language.

#### **4.2.3.3 English proficiency**

The participants answered questions about their level of English proficiency before and after using SM, with different responses.

19a: “ You can say that my level of all the skills was sufficient before using SM, there is a huge different after using SM, I am very good in speaking, writing, reading, and good in listening” ( Monerah)

19b: “ My English language level in all skills was sufficient before using SM, but after using it becomes very good” (Norah)

19c:“listening is sufficient, the speaking level is developed because I record my voice for the teaching class in the group, I developed reading by books, not by SM. Writing become better” (Lyla)

19d: “ I learn little from Snapchat, and Instagram but I think I learn more from Youtube. The listening was sufficient before, and it becomes very good after using SM. Also speaking is the same. Reading, I do not think SM has a relation I do not learn from SM. I do not think that it has effect in writing, I use Google more than SM” (Arwa)

19e: “I think SM are not the reason because I did not use them until I have good English, I can say my language become sufficient, and of course SM help me a lot” (Sarah)

19f: “I used to speak English from when I was a kid [...] possiple it is learning the culture more than learning the language” (Lobnah)

19g: “I do not think that SM have an effect on my English. I speak English, and my level is excellent. If I want to develop my language, I will use more academic way not by using SM” (Razan)

19h: “honestly I do not think that SM have an effect, but I care when I am writing not to make mistakes, and write full sentences especially when I send to my supervisor or my friends in the office. For reading, I read more before using SM when I should take the newspaper with me on the train, but after using SM, I postpone [...] No effect in speaking because I did not use any platform for speaking. I think the effect of writing that I used to use the abbreviations like “u” for you, “r” for are to say how you are? , it becomes how r u? I felt that it is a wrong way and I stopped using that” (Afnan)

These results agree with the research by Aifan (2015) who claims using technology in the educational field can enhance learners' skills. One of the research questions specifically asked about the effect of using SM as a tool for learning English. The responses were categorised into three sets: positive change, no change, and negative change. Some participants reported that they have a significant positive change in their English language skills after they use SM, such as Monerah. Norah and Lyla also reported that their English skills become very good after using SM. Arwa pointed out that using YouTube enhanced her listening and speaking skills; she learned a lot of vernacular words that she will never learn at university. Some participants, such as Sarah, reported that SM are not the reasons for enhancing their English level. Sarah pointed out that she used SM after she learned English, so she does not think that SM are the reason for her development of the academic English language, but she does believe that SM helps in learning the English language generally. She pointed out that she learned on Snapchat the informal language which helps her to understand local people she communicates with every day. She stated that SM "is a place, not a replace". While Lobnah stated that she learned more about the Australian culture than the language on SM (because she has spoken English since childhood, as she was born in America), and she thinks that she is perfect in English. Razan, like Lobnah, stated that SM communication does not have an effect on her English. On the other hand, Afnan stated that she was reading more before using SM, especially the newspaper while commuting on the train, but after using SM, she always postponed reading to the next available time. She stated that her identity as a Ph. D student affects her English proficiency; she is more competent in reading academic articles and academic writing, but less in speaking and listening because most of her time is spent reading and writing. It is possible that the informal learning that occurs on SM could support formal learning. SM may enhance learning skills and offer opportunities for users to be exposed to the culture, the customs, and the daily life experience of English language speakers. Those students who studied a language programme in Australia found that SM help them to increase the level of their skills, except Afnan because she is a PhD student and feels that she needs more academic skills.

To sum up, FSIS share, communicate, and have strong digital identities on SM. They have strong relations with their relatives and friends, as SM helps them to be in touch with them every day. They invest emotional energy in their dealings with others on SM by commenting, praising, sharing, liking, or retweeting others participation.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Overview**

This chapter highlights the main findings of the research and relates them to the research questions mentioned in the first chapter. Also, this chapter introduces the limitations and the implications of the study. Finally, it provides suggestions for further research.

### **5.2 Contributions of the study**

This study aims to explore FSIS' practices on SM and the effect on their identities and their English language proficiency. Specifically, this research investigates the three questions:

- 1- How do FSIS interact on SM and what motivates those interactions?
- 2- Do the daily practices by Saudi women on SM create their digital identities?
- 3- What is the effect of using SM in their learning of the English language?

A qualitative research method was used, with semi-structured interview as the data collection instrument. A thematic analysis method was employed to analyse and interpret the data. The main themes of the study are FSIS' daily practices, FSIS' digital identity, and FSIS' languages on SM.

The findings show that FSIS are active on SM, and they have accounts on different SM platforms. They communicate with people from Saudi Arabia and different nationalities. From the results, they still demonstrate behaviour consistent with their conservative culture even though they have males and females followers on the platforms. The communication is formal in the platforms which contain male and female followers; it can be more humorous and funny with relatives and only female followers platforms. The participants are enthusiastic to share their photos and videos with their relatives overseas and share everyday life with them. They use English and Arabic languages depending on the people with whom they communicate, and the situations that they encounter. Most of them use their mobiles, which makes participation on SM much easier. They listen to Australian English speakers on SM and enjoy learning the Australian language and the culture. Their main purpose of using SM is for communication with others, and to know more about the world around them. Also, they are eager to keep their relations active with their relatives from Saudi Arabia, and with their old and new friends.

The findings also assert that FSIS have a strong digital identity on SM. It is argued that creating the digital identity is inevitable for SM users. FSIS are active users of SM. They have digital identities similar to their real identities. Privacy is important for FSIS practices on SM. They do not like to show their private life on SM. I think that this is their right and it is not a hinder for their communication. They show different identities on different platforms, depending on the people with whom they communicate and on the nature of the platform. They prefer platforms that offer privacy for users and allow control over who can see their sharing. They have strong identities which has an effect on others. They do not have fake digital identities, as they do not prefer these. Their identities changed from formal on some platforms (or even within groups as occurred on one platform) to humorous and funny on other platforms in other contexts.

Moreover, the findings emphasised that using SM helps some of the FSIS to improve their language proficiency. They use SM as a learning tool for learning the English language. They see SM having an effect on developing their listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. They watch videos of Australian people, which improves their listening and also their speaking skills. Using SM increases their knowledge of the English language and how to use it in the Australian community. They even learn the informal language like slang, which while a taboo enables them to understand the people around them in everyday life. Others highlighted that they learned more about the culture than the language through SM. They stated

that they learn about the Australian culture by following famous people on the SM platforms. Also, their communication with their Australian friends helps them to develop their engagement with the community. They admitted that learning on SM is not formal but actually helps their formal learning.

### **5.3 Limitations of the study**

There were some limitations of the study. First, there was only a limited number of participants for this study. More participants could have allowed for more exploration of FSIS' practices on SM. This limitation resulted because of the restriction on time for the project. This project was conducted in the last semester of the year in a limited period of three months. More time would have helped to recruit more participants and allow for more investigation of the phenomenon.

Secondly, in the nature of qualitative research, the researcher is a part of the study. It involves reflexivity which allows including the investigator' values, biases, and assumption in reporting the data (Dörnyei, 2007). It is expected to see the first person singular. So the results were co- constructed product of the participants' and my perceptions. I consider myself as insider researchers because I am female Saudi international student in Melbourne, and I am using SM in my daily life. I see the impact of SM on my studies in Australia and how they help me to adapt to the Australian community. However, it is not necessary to hold the same views with the participants and the way of practising on SM may be different for different users. Therefore, while the interpretation of the data are affected by my experience and views, there were attempts to reduce the bias by including more examples of the participants' views.

There are efforts to ensure the reliability and the validity of the study by using techniques, such as the researcher being the translator of the data. This method is considered as a check on the validity of interpretations (Temple & Young, 2004). However, it has a limitation when the data translated; it is subject to the researcher' position, social background, understanding of the phenomenon. I tried to be close to the data, and I always returned to the Arabic version to check the actual meaning, but still, I am not a professional translator.

### **5.4 Implications and suggestions for further research**

The findings of this research show that FSIS' use SM in their learning of English language and the Australian culture. This might encourage educators to activate the use of SM in their teaching methods. The new generations are native users of SM, and teachers should be ready to deal with these creative methods in an efficient way.

Also, this study contributes to the linguistics knowledge of language learning skills. Participants reported that their English language learning skills improved through using SM. The results show that participants became better at listening to the news and reading the transcription. Also, participants gain more vocabulary and language expressions from the everyday watching of Australian persons who demonstrate their culture and language. This could suggest designing online activities using these platforms to enhance learners' skills.

For further research, I suggest investigating more phenomena about Saudis' use of SM. More studies are needed to explore how FSIS use English to teach the Arabic language for foreigners on SM platforms. This could help educators to legitimate SM as a formal learning tool. Also, FSIS' writing on SM platforms could be a topic for further research by undertaking discourse analysis of the participants' samples of their everyday communication. This could help to investigate their writing strength and weakness. There is a need to explore more about international Saudi females' and males' practices on SM and the effect on their identities. It could be a case study of males and females participants and investigate the effect of gender on using SM.

### **5.5 Closing comment**

As international students, I and all the participants appreciate SM platforms as they are ways of communicating to maintain our social relations. They are worthy time investments, as SM facilitate my life in many ways. They keep me connected with my relatives in Saudi Arabia. They help me to create new friendships with many people that I may not see in person after returning to Saudi Arabia. They open my mind to other cultures and let me know more about other people's perspectives and think critically about what I read. I am thankful to the creators of SM platforms, who have enabled me to announce freely my research in WhatsApp and facilitate my communication with the participants in this project.

### **Declaration**

This project contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any educational institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the project.

The research for this project received the approval of the Monash University Standing Committee for Ethical Research on Humans (project number: 8018).

Signed: Hanan Mohammed Alshehab

28/5/2017

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## **Appendix 1**

Hanan Alshehab

Interview Questions

To warm up the interview, the interviewer will ask some factual questions to collect data about participants' background then ask questions about the practices of social networking sites (SNS) and its effect on English language proficiency and identity:

### **Participants' background:**

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) Where were you born?
- 3) What is your current marital status?
- 4) Do you have children? How many?
- 5) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- 6) When did you come to Australia? Why?
- 7) What languages do you speak?

### **Practices on SNS**

- 8) What is your favourite platform? Why?
- 9) How many accounts do you have on SNS?
- 10) What devices do you use to practice interaction on SNS?
- 11) How many hours do you spend on SNS? When do you prefer to be active on SNS?
- 12) Can you spend one day without interacting on SNS? Why? Why not?
- 13) What is your goal in each platform that you have on SNS?
- 14) How many followers do you have on SNS platforms? Are they Saudis or different backgrounds?
- 15) Does SNS help you to adapt to Australia? If so, how?
- 16) Does SNS help you to relieve homesick for Saudi Arabia? If so, how?

**Practices' effect of SNS on the English language:** 17) Do you use English for SNS? How long have you been using English for SNS?

18) In general, how would you rate your English language proficiency before you engage in SNS?

- Listening skill: bad, sufficient, good, very good
- Speaking skill: bad, sufficient, good, very good
- Reading skill: bad, sufficient, good, very good
- Writing skill: bad, sufficient, good, very good

19) In general, how would you rate your English language proficiency after engaging in SNS?

- Listening skill: bad, sufficient, good, very good
- Speaking skill: bad, sufficient, good, very good
- Reading skill: bad, sufficient, good, very good

- Writing skill: bad, sufficient, good, very good
- 20) How often do you interact in English on SNS?
- 21) Which platform do you use English? Why
- 22) Do you follow Australian official accounts like news, community services, universities, councils? Why?
- 23) What sort of online activities do you do in English?
- 24) Do these activities help in learning English?

**Digital Identity:**

- 25) Do you think that you have a digital identity separate from your identity? How?
- 26) Does your identity change on the different platforms? How?
- 27) Describe your identity when you engage in a situation on SNS in the Arabic language, and how it differs in English?
- 28) In what ways, do you think that your identity(ies) have an impact on your learning of English language?
- 29) How do you sit profile's privacy on SNS?
- 30) Do you have English speaker's friends (male, female) on SNS?
- 31) Which platforms do you keep the emotional energy between the individuals?

The definitions

SM:

Falahah and Rosmala (2012, p. 158) identified that “Social media take on many different forms, such as Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wiki, podcast, photo or video sharing, rating and social bookmarking”. SM include all the applications and programs that enable people to find information, search for the knowledge, enable knowledge sharing, have free video, and voice calls, and provide opportunities for social interaction, in an easy way.

The digital identity:

“Digital identity is an individual's identity which is composed of information stored and transmitted in digital form. Digital identity is all the information digitally recorded about an individual which is accessible under the scheme”(Sullivan, 2012). The digital identity could be all the explicit and implicit online information that people know about an individual that has accounts on SM and practices communication with others. This digital identity could be weak or strong as defined by Ivan Ferrer and José Armando (2013, p. 58) “The weak digital identity is limited to virtual characters, avatars, or fakes, which play digital roles with no significant impact on the subjects’ lives. The strong digital identity is constructed when subjects use digital technologies as a support to convey meanings that extend into the subjects’ lives and reach beyond a virtual concept”.

The emotional energy:

It is argued that “mediated sharing allows for personal expression, such that the memorability, salience and personal significance of the event can be enhanced. It also allows for enthusiastic feedback to be conveyed, and for a deepening of social relationships. Indeed, research finds that mediated communication and face-to-face communication are strikingly similar regarding their degree of emotional expression and social connectedness” (Choi & Toma, 2014, p. 533). The emotional energy is expressing the feelings towards the individual's sharing. It can be positive like the comment by using praise words, pressing like button on Facebook, retweet on Twitter, comment in WhatsApp. Alternatively, it can be negative by commenting offensive words, no comments or no showing of the significance of the posts.

## **Appendix 2**

**Project:** Female Saudi International Students' Daily Practices on Social Networking Sites

**Chief Investigator:** Dr. Simon Musgrave      **Student's name:** Hanan Alshehab

Lecturer

Phone : +61434382391

School of Language, Literature, Cultures, and Linguistics, email: [hmals4@student.monash.edu](mailto:hmals4@student.monash.edu)

Monash University

Phone: +61 3 9905 8234

email: [simon.musgrave@monash.edu](mailto:simon.musgrave@monash.edu)

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

My name is Hanan Alshehab, and I am a Master's student in Applied Linguistics at Monash University. I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr Simon Musgrave, a lecturer in the School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics at Monash University, Australia. My research will be submitted as a research project and will be written from the data I collect in this research.

The aims of my research project are to investigate the practices of social networking sites by female Saudi international students. The research project will find out how female Saudi international students interact on Social networking sites. Also, it will explore the digital identity that female Saudi international students construct. More importantly, it will investigate how their practices on SNS affect their English language skills, and how their digital identity differs from their real identity.

You are invited as a Saudi speaker of English to participate in my study; participation will involve an interview which will be recorded and which will take approximately 30-60 minutes. If you are interested, you can contact me via the email or phone number above to arrange a time for the interview. You will be given a consent form to complete. Because recording the interview is important, I will need to have your agreement to be interviewed and also to be recorded. Signing the consent form will indicate that you have consented to take part in this research.

In the interview, you will be asked some questions about your daily practice on social networking sites and its effects on your English language. Also, you will be asked questions about whether you have a digital identity or not and if the answer is yes there will be questions about how it is different from your real identity.

Participation in this project will not cause you any mental, emotional, or physical harm or inconvenience, beyond losing a small amount of your time. There are no risks because of participation in this project. Please note that you are welcome to ask for clarification, and you must understand that your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw or refuse to participate at any time with no penalty and without offering an explanation.

I would like to inform you that the data will be reported anonymously, no names or personal information will be included, and the data will be reported using codes. The data will be accessed only by the researcher and the supervisor(s).

To protect you, the data will be stored on the researcher's computer for one semester, and after that, they will be destroyed as will the recording. This study may also be published as an article in a journal. However, participants will not be identified in the final report.

If you have any queries or would like to receive a summary of the research findings, please do not hesitate to contact Hanan Alshehab on 0434382391 or email [hmals4@student.monash.edu](mailto:hmals4@student.monash.edu). The findings will be released after 10/7/2017.

### **Complaints**

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Chancellery Building E,

24 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Project No. :8018

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu) Fax: +61 3 9905

3831

Thank you,

**(insert Chief Investigator's signature)**

**Chief Investigator's name**

**Simon Musgrave**



**Appendix 3**

**CONSENT FORM**

**Project: Female Saudi International Students' Daily Practices on Social Networking Sites**

**Chief Investigator: Dr Simon Musgrave**

**Second Investigator: Hanan Alshehab**

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement, and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
1-Being interviewed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2-Being recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant:

Participant Signature :

Date :