A Multimodal Analysis to the Construction of Identity in Online Dynamic Platform

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Abstract*:*

This paper presents a semiotic analysis to the use of language in combination with nonlinguistic resources for identity construction. This study then, traces the role of those semiotic resources or mode of communication such as (texts, symbols, pictures and colours etc.) in Facebook profiles. Analytically, those modes will be conducted as direct self-representational devices to design and construct identity in online channel. The study explores not only the parallel strategies used in constructing identity, but also to understand how that/those resource(s) work closely together to construct that identity (ies) in online environment. In spite of the fast development of technology and new methods of communication, Facebook was chosen as it permeates our daily culture. Facebook is the most affordable and familiar online means of social communication. In order to achieve the aim(s) of this study, a multimodal analysis is presented set within the theoretical framework of 'Critical Discourse Analysis'. Based on a quantitative analysis, this exploratory research investigates 120 male and 55 female students University Facebook's profiles. All of underlying profiles are presented and analyzed in coded profile usernames. Results showed that these devices or semiotic resources were seen as sets of signs or systems combine to emerge semiotic choice as an active performance, by which each users creates meaning and carries cultural value and significance (i.e., identity). Meanwhile, the study also found that most of these profiles (identities) seem pretty much unstable (i.e., flexible) and differ from their real world specially in terms of name, age, sex, nationality. This is can be attributed to a mistaken assumption that presenting a real identity could post private and intimate information in real world and then reflect their real identity the matter which may crash with users' social, political, security and religious traditions and beliefs. Hopefully, these findings can give a better understanding to online identity construction within Iraqi culture.
Key words*: an online identity, multimodality, Critical Discourse Analysis, Semiotic resources.*

1 . Introduction

In our everyday life communications on the social networking sit, has an overwhelming role not only in shaping our social relationships, but also in constructing identity. *Facebook[4]* for instance*,* has significantly impacted our daily lives and subsequently how we socialize with one another and the world around us (Nir, 2012:1). One of its unique function is that people maintain their friendship(s) with each other via their profile. Throughout this social interaction (i.e., Facebook) or 'social establishment' as Goffman calls it, a new level of identity construction can be easily created, controlled and

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modified (i.e., an online identity). In Goffmanian terms, a social establishment is " any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place. Within the walls of a social establishment, we find a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation." Increasingly, the use of social media was not limited to the affluent societies as it was (Duggan & Smith, 2013), but even the less affluent societies intersect their lives with social media in multiple ways (see also Thurlow 2012). For instance, the widespread use of Internet in Iraqi society especially after 2003[1], afforded new spaces of collective identity construction. It includes a "collection of beliefs about oneself that includes elements such as academic performance, gender identity, sexual identity, and racial identity."(Leflot et al., 2010: 385-405)

Therefore, it seems necessary to look over to aspects of identity construction in social media and how they might be differently constructed in academic environments, especially when Facebook was first initiated at Harvard University and then developed to use outside Harvard. Furthermore, the idea of offline and online identity construction is a debatable issue. For instance, Shafie et al. (2012:1) believe that people (females in particular) couldn't post their personal and intimate information without ramification in their real world as online conversations, otherwise their privacy becomes offline conversation. This means there is no correlation between online identity and real one. Whereas, Sofia, (2016) on the other hand, shows opposite perspective. In her words "Identity constructed online has its reflections and foundations on the publicly known identities." Here, we can say that identity is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped. In this respect, it would be highly essential to refer to Carl Rogers's (1957: 184-256) division of constructing 'components of' identity to understand that. Accordingly, identity consists of self image, self-esteem and ideal self. Self image represents how one views her/himself, self-esteem refers to the value that one has for himself, and the ideal self shows how someone was really like.

Because this research paper aims at investigating not only the parallel strategies used in constructing identity, but also how that/these resource(s) work closely together to construct that identity (ies) in online environment. Therefore, the study surveys University students' Facebook profile focusing on usernames, choice of languages and profile pictures. In terms of Carl Rogers's division of identify, self-image, self-esteem and ideal self would have particular significance in this exploratory analysis. Hence, this article presents a multimodal analysis of Facebook's accounts set within the theoretical framework of Fairclough's 'Critical Discourse Analysis' CDA

Based on a quantitative analysis, this exploratory research analyses 120 male and 55 female Facebook's profiles. All of underlying profiles are presented and analyzed in coded profile usernames. Results showed that these devices or semiotic resources were seen as sets of signs or systems combine to emerge semiotic choice as an active performance, by which each users creates meaning and carries cultural value and significance (i.e., identity). Meanwhile, the study found that most of these profiles don't match with their actual identity. This is can be attributed to a false belief that presenting a real identity could post private and intimate information in real world and then to become an offline identity the matter which may crash with their social, political, security and religious traditions and beliefs. Hence, these findings can be used for better understanding of online identity construction within Iraqi culture.

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2. Literature review

2.1. Identity and Social Networking

The portability of communication technology and the rapidly use of social media by people worldwide as a means of communication and a new way of socializing our behaviors affects our social identity construction. For instance, "*Facebook* is connecting over 800 million people, with membership growing at a rate of about 700,000 people per day." Accordingly, Nir (2012) states that using social networking site and Facebook in particular has significantly affected our culture and daily lives routine. Using this social networking permeates our interact with one another and people worldwide. Once people become friends on Facebook, their profiles will be automatically linked and allowing them to interact with one another (Boyd, 2004, April). Nir (2012) states that "*Facebook* profiles can be seen as an online embodiment of real people using the site as their relationship can anchored through friends or mutual friends." (Nir, 2012:26). In Facebook, as Boyd (2012) states online friends are normally befriended when offline friendships are established.

In the same context, Shafie, et.al (2012) add that social connectedness is a very important strategy in forming identity in social networking sit. According to their statistic analysis, Latisha et al. (2011) found that some of their participants (female in more particular) were ready to publically share their private issues "privacy" just to be well-connected\followed in social media. Adding that one of more strategies to do that is the "peer-approved identity" strategy or "identity substitutions". In doing so, users of Facebook or twitter replace their real identity with peer influenced identity (see Shafie, et al, 2012). This on the other side conforms the idea that identity construction is affected by peer behaviours such as "hobbies, interests, favourites, testimonials, groups and affiliations" whether in positive or negative ends (see Shahrinaz, 2010 for examples).

These peer behaviours can be represented in forms of symbolic communication and textual communication to design a participant's self-concept, which reflects his/her personal and social aspects. This in turn leads to self-presentation construction "Identity performance" a participant wants to present through online stream (Canary et al. 2008). In online interaction, identity performance that participants want to present is visualized through online nicknames. A nickname then, such as (well-known people, animals, and well-known places) is the mode of communication through which a participant gain access to other social networkers. In his study *"Children's chat on the net: a study of social encounters in two Norwegian chat rooms"*. Tingstad (2003) investigates two chat rooms designed by children KISS_ME, Popboy, Cat, and Osloboy, are popular nicknames in the investigated data.

2.2. Facebook-oriented studies on 'Identity Construction discourse'

Over the past two decades, social media in general and Facebook in particular has proved itself to be valuable data analysis to the study of visual communication and interaction in academic communication among students, especially when Facebook was first used and developed by students at Harvard University. In this connection a sizable corpus of

studies on online communication highlights its impacts on identity construction is available. Hence, it is desirable to review some of those relevant studies to place my thesis in the context constructing online identity. In this connection a review of relevant studies concerned with studies that consider Facebook as identity services and constructing identity through this online social network site a debatable issue worth mentioning. These selected studies have utilised different methodologies to reach their researchers' goals and research questions, such as (Back et at., 2008; Kraut, & Boneva, 2008; Siibak, 2009; Salimkhan et al., 2010; Tufekci, 2008; Koole, 2010; Wang et al., 2010; Chen & Gonglue, 2011)

Back et. al (2008) state that online identities and offline identities are exchangeable. They analyze 236 Facebook accounts of 17-22 years participants in which they prove there "is no self-idealization as they are using Social Networking Sit (henceforth, SNS) to maintain their social relationships. This to some extent is supported by Kraut, & Boneva (2008). They argue that adolescents in SNS are also maintain their existing relationship. At the environment of Estonian schools, Siibak (2009) surveys 713 students between 11-18 years old. Their findings confirm that social communication influences and influenced by social network sites profiles.

In terms of visual communication and its influence on identity construction, Salimkhan, et al. (2010) investigate 10 active MySpace users through online communication and self-representation in SNSs. The findings of their research indicate that visual metaphors such as photos and visual images are used to represent users desired identity. In this connection, Tufekci, (2008) and Koole (2010)) argue that profile images a participants adopted can be used to understand the influence of the formation of online identity and community. Wanget al. (2010) examine online friendships in SNSs and its influences and perception to identity construction. To put in their words, "people use similar processes to initiate online relationships and offline relationships,[…] in which physical attractiveness is crucial in online friendship initiation as both genders especially males prefer attractive images."

Regarding to the effectiveness and impression of cultural variation on constructing offline and online identity, Chen & Gonglue (2011) scrutinize American and Chinese users of SNSs. One of their outstanding result is that Chinese respondents employed more polished self-photos than American, who prefer group photos. This revelation provokes that Chinese respondents are influenced by their collectivism culture than Americans do. This can be recognized when Chinese reveal their real personal information in profile picture in one hand, and American respondents concentrate more on social activities by utilizing group photos/images as their profile pictures on other hand.

In conclusion, the above-mentioned thoughts and findings provide some debatable examples of identity construction through SNSs. In addition, these studies also expand readers' understanding abilities in terms of online and offline identity construction. However, very little studies has been done to express Middle Eastern respondents (Iraqis in particular). Hence, it is necessary to fill this academic gab and present Iraqi perspectives towards online identity construction through social network sites.

2.3. Social Media and Language Interaction

The way we communicate have substantially affected the way we socialize and interact and, by extension, the way we maintain relationships to give meaning through word, symbol, photo. In media and culture studies, meaning is generally constructed not only through language, but also it can be communicated through other semiotic modes either in form of language or via visual communications. Therefore, the complexity of managing and understanding these semiotic choices need a critical discourse approach (see Machin, 2007; van Leeuwen, 2008). Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) investigates the complex interrelations between discourse and society,' and to 'demystify discourses by deciphering ideologies" (Weiss & Wodak, 1999:8). CDA, as Teun A van Dijk states is 'a type of discourse analysis research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts (van Dijk, 2004:352). CDA uses an assortment of analytical concepts and tools to investigate discursive constructs (spoken, written, and visual), and examine the nature of their interactions with existing dissymmetrical power configurations in a specific spatial and temporal context. As Gilbert Weis and Ruth Wodak argue, 'texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). CDA focusses primarily on discourse as 'use of language' and 'a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is analysis of how texts work within sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995:7)

The embeddedness of discourse in the complex networks of the social milieu entails that discourse does ideological work, which is why discourse is conceived of as the primary medium through which power relations are articulated, maintained, changed, or challenged. CDA examines the ways in which discourse mediates ideology in a variety of social institutions. In other words, CDA investigates the extent to which the articulation, interpretation, and reproduction of discourse could contribute to the maintenance of societal oppression. CDA, thus, is 'a means of raising people's self–consciousness (Fairclough, 1996:41). CDA seeks to promote critical empowerment through both demystification of ideological baggage implicit in discursive constructions, and exposé of the manipulative rhetoric of centres of power in society.

According to Teun A. van Dijk, CDA deals with 'an oppositional study of the structures and strategies of elite discourse and their cognitive and social conditions and consequences, as well as with the discourses of resistance against such domination (van Dijk, 1995:19). Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Karin Liebhart, in *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (2009), argue that one of the aims of CDA is to 'unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use (Wodak, 2009: 8). Weiss and Wodak remark that CDA aims to 'discover patterns of elite dominance and manipulation,' to analyse 'the complex interrelations between discourse and society, to 'demystify discourses by deciphering ideologies, (Weiss & Wodak, 2009), and to give voice to the historically–marginalised sections of society. 'CDA often chooses the perspective of those who suffer and critically analyses the language use of those in power; those who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and the opportunity to improve conditions. 'CDA is interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. CDA examines the discursive conditions, structures, and consequences of power–abuse by dominant groups and institutions so as 'to gain a proper understanding of how language functions in constituting and transmitting knowledge, in organizing social institutions or in exercising power.

2.4. Multimodality and Social Semiotic Theory

Multimodal discourse analysis[1] (henceforth MDA) is a new field in discourse analytical studies and critical discourse studies in particular (O'Halloran, K. L, 2011:1). It emerges when a numbers of authors and linguists such as Hodge, Kress, van Leeuwen at the late of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s released that meaning can be communicated not only through language, but also through a combination of other semiotic modes (Machin & Mayr, 2012:6). For instance, much of meaning which in turn constitute identity in social media might be communicated through visual communication like gesture, image, color, and so forth. Hence, MDA, then came to extend the study of language in relation to non linguistics/semiotic resources (mode of communication) which are fundamentally different to language such as symbols, picture, music, color etc, to give meaning. In this connection, Halliday (1978: 192) states that a sentence (i.e., language) is not only a code or set of rules connected to each other to create a grammatical and meaningful sentences, it needs a 'resource for making meanings', where signs are considered the fundamental concept of semiotics choices.

In discussion of social semiotic resources, Ferdinand de Saussure (1974 [1916]: 16) has put sign as 'A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable." In this regards, one of the most famous definitions of semiotics is that of Halliday (1978: 123) to whom the term semiotic recourses is originated. He defines semiotic resources as "system[s] of meanings that constitute the 'reality' of the culture." Hence, the interaction of semiotic resource greats meaning and carries cultural value and significance. For the purpose of clarity, Van Leeuwen (2005:4) extends the meaning and function of semiotic resources to include

> The actions and artefacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically – with our vocal apparatus; with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc. – or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc.

Accordingly, semiotic resources/ modes/ modalities are not restricted themselves to speech and writing or picture to construct an identity. Semiotic resources are key terms interacted with each other to explain how meaning is created through complex semiotic/sign/mode interactions that engage with our social understandings and beliefs (i.e., culture). Following Halliday & Hasan (1985: 4) culture is "a set of semiotic systems, a sets of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate." Wherein semiotic resources are "system[s] of meanings that constitute the reality of the culture" (Halliday, 1987:123) through materializing available multimodal phenomena such as language, image, gesture to construct attractive identity. This kind of interdisciplinarity provides people (i.e., Facebook users) with the knowledge and skills they need to designs and formulate their un/real identities either in form of language (texts) or in visual communication. This means individuals (i.e., Facebook's users) are aware of the used words or visual elements, as the use of certain words or signs (modes of communication) may potentially have negative impacts.

Furthermore, the free download and use of these resources users express who they are and how they want others to see them and join their posts. For instance, some of our sample use pictures of flower or pink color not only to show their gender (female) but also to give hit (i.e., physical activity) that we are romantic, dreamers and so on. Each of these signs

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[1] See O'Halloran, 2011) for historical backgrounds and developments , approaches, popularity and examples of MDA.

has its own ideology, the user want to share to identify and recognize their followers. In the context of visual communication Facebook users don't know beforehand what resources they will apply. They first need to collect, chose and then apply these signs to represent their profiles in line with the purpose in their mind.

In view of the above discussion, it seems that constructing identify as meaning in online environments is a complicated issue. An online identify is an interaction and a combination of multimodal somatic modes. Unsurprisingly, this needs MDA to understand not only the features and elements of these modes, but also how these modes worked together with text(s) to make meaning which later can be recognized as ideologically significant. (see Kress, 1985; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). The scope of MDA is not only covers the semiotic resources themselves, but it extends to include the semantic expansions of those multimodal phenomena. Through the integration of those multimodal phenomena a semiotic choices is emerged. This semiotic choice, (i.e., identity in case of this study) or *intersemiosis as* Jewitt (2009a) prefers to call, is a central area of any multimodal studies. In terms of our study how this semiotic choice(s) was designed, produced and unfolded in social setting (i.e., Facebook) through which an online identity is reflected. In this connection, van Leeuwen (2008) states that in social domain, the design, production and distribution of multimodal/semiotic resources are lies at the heart of MDA research (see Iedema, 2001b, 2003 for examples) not only to understand what is semiotic, but to answer "What kind of activity is semiotic"?

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

Methodologically, our research departs from an interdisciplinary framework anchored theoretically in Social Semiotic Theory (Theo van Leeuwen, 2005), and uses analytical tools from CDA. Social Semiotic Theory (SST henceforth) investigates language within, through and around society, as language affects and affected by society (van Leeuwen, 2005), . SST believes that Language shapes maintains and legitimises society's thoughts, values and ideas. Therefore, SST prepared to examines language in terms of the way it used in social context (Machin & Mayr's words 2012: 23) not in thought of language is rule-based. Particularly, SST looks at language as set of resources not as a system of rules. In spite of the fast development of technology and new methods of communication, in this research we are interested in the way the Facebook' users use these semiotic resources through and around their social context to relies their choices of signs which in turn reflect their identify either in language or in visual communication or on any other mode of communication. Like any semioticians I will follow van Leeuwen's (2005:3) framework in which I do three things:

1. Collect, document and systematically catalogue semiotic resources – including their history
2. Investigate how these resources are used in specific historical, cultural and institutional

contexts, and how people talk about them in these contexts – plan them, teach them,

justify them, critique them, etc.

3. Contribute to the discovery and development of new semiotic resources and new uses of existing semiotic resources.

In order to provide a critical reading to the role of social semiotic in forming and constituting online identity, I draw on Fairclough's "socio–dialectic theory", which posits a three–dimensional model of CDA. This conceptual framework is

comprised of three axes: an engagement with the text, an exploration of the text's processes of articulation (discourse practice), and an evaluation of the socially available resources that the text draws on in constructing its meanings (sociocultural practice). Fairclough stresses the interconnectedness of the three dimensions "text, discourse practice, sociocultural practice" (Fairclough, 1995). According to Fairclough, 'analysis of texts should not be artificially isolated from analysis of institutional and discursive practices within which texts are embedded, Fairclough, 1995: 9) that 'the analysis of discourse practice involves attention to processes of text production, distribution and consumption, Fairclough, 1995:9 and that '[t]he interpretation of texts is a dialectical process resulting from the interface of the variable interpretative resources people bring to bear on the text, and properties of the text itself'.

To put it a bit differently, Fairclough emphasises that discourse (text or language) is deeply intertwined with society that understanding one requires understanding the other. The integration of the textual, discursive and social levels suggests an interdisciplinary perspective that informs Fairclough's model of CDA. Such a textually–detailed analysis that Fairclough suggests has to be contextualised in 'both the immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures. What Fairclough suggests, therefore, is a socially–grounded pragmatic analysis of texts that investigates not just what he calls the 'social determination of language use' or 'the linguistic determination of social structures,' but also the consequences of such a dialectic between 'structures and practices. This integration assists in gaining nuanced understandings of the explicit and implicit influence of ideology and power on discourse constructions.

Fairclough sketches out the three levels of analysis in his conceptual framework of CDA, which correspond to the three dimensions of discourse (texts, interactions, and contexts). The three stages of CDA are 'description' (concerned with formal properties of the text); 'interpretation' (concerned with the relationship the text as the product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation); and 'explanation' (concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context) (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough's CDA model, thus, espouses a close reading of the text and relating it to its socio–historical matrix.

The portability of communication technology and the rapidly use of Facebook by people worldwide as a communication tool and a new way of socializing impacted our social identity construction. Angus Stevenson, the Oxford English dictionary editor points out 'the internet and social media have had a huge impact on creating new words […], which reflect the society and era in which they enter the dictionary."[1] Hence, the current study explains not only the parallel strategies used in constructing identity, but also to understand how that/these resource(s) work closely together to construct that identity (ies) in online environment. In more specific, the study attempts to answer how *Facebook* users utilize their profile Image, language, and symbols to represent themselves on the social networking site *Facebook*?

The analysed data, then is Facebook profiles which are often a good starting point for analyzing aspects of online identity construction via University students, specially, when "Facebook was first created at Harvard University" (Boyd et al.

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[1] Matthew Holehouse, *Woot! Retweet and sexting enter the dictionary,* The Telegraph [www], August 18, 2011, http://tgr.ph/o87yCf , Accessed April 12, 2020.

2004: 54). Meanwhile, Facebook accounts are obtained easily and tend to use a wide range of semiotic resources as visual communication means. Moreover, *Facebook* as Nir (2012: 8) explains consists of three circulated elements. These are: identity, conversation and community "Community refers to the people we know and trust and who help us to make decisions. Conversation refers to the interactions we have with our communities. Identity refers to our sense of self and how we are seen by our communities."

Based on a quantitative analysis, this exploratory research conducted 175 accounts. In particular. 120 males and 55 females University students Facebook profiles. All of those underlying profiles users were Iraqis and randomly chosen, and presented and analyzed in coded profile usernames.

4 . Findings and Discussions

This section discussed the employed of usernames, profile pictures and choice of languages by Iraqi University students to construct their online identity (i.e., Facebook profiles in particular). These components: usernames, profile pictures and choice of languages are critically investigated.

In terms of username, the analysis found that 55 male users and 49 female users prefer creative variations of their real names as their usernames accounts. Meanwhile, those 55 males and 49 females adopted unreal names are not resemble to their real names. For the males the study found that they mostly borrowed their usernames form names of famous character (figures)   such as football players, singers, artists and a like to be more playful and attractive to their followers. That means males shift between their online and offline identities. Wherein, females prefer to use catchy creative variations usernames which are mostly don not their real names such 'Rose Rose', 'The princess', 'Snow White', and mostly appeared in English language. While, 65 of males users and 6 females users prefer to use their real names.

In terms of females respondents, they study found 13 of 49 of them used religious names, such as "أمام زماني" , محبة "الزهراء", " بطلة كربلاء" which are mostly displayed in local language (i.e., Arabic language-Iraqi language) to confirm their religious background. The choice of proper words and arrangement (i.e. style) to design nickname make user's account interested to fellow (see Katea, 2018 for more about style) . While, others, used their child's name when they are married. To put it a bit differently, males were more comfortable in using their real names to reveal their true self in online setting than females who prefer to hide themselves, identities behind various nicknames or unreal names. This result provokes Boyd's (2012:14) who found that "users are reluctant to use their real names as they are afraid if their personal information is compromised as observers are able to use search engines to find information about them by using their real names. This action may compel users to have less power to control online social situations." He adds that "the issue of using real names in any social online environments is about power and control" (Boyd, 2012: 35). In the beginning, when Facebook was first lunched and expanded at Harvard University using real names was one of its social norm. Later on when Facebook being immensely popular, and used outside Harvard some new users do not use their real names (Boyd, 2012).
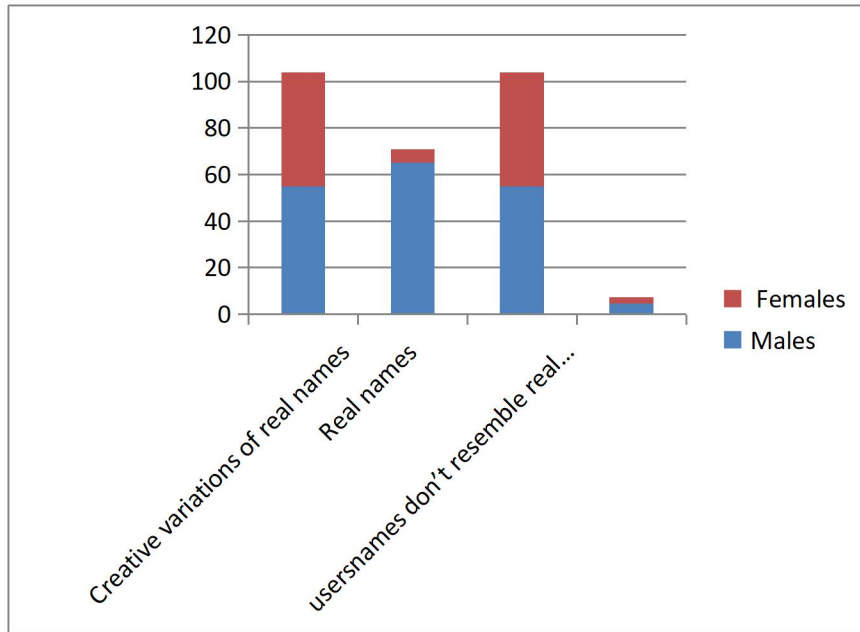
Figure 1. Facebook usernames

In terms of profile pictures, the study found that users are constantly updated their profile pictures due to personal or social situations, and sometimes due to their whims. For instance, in case of death relative(s) users specially males opt their profile pictures for black background to indicate sadness or use sign of 'MOURNING' " **"حداد"**and sometimes they use the picture of the dead person as profile picture. It also noted during the time of collecting the data that males users in particular change their profile pictures to the sign 'Closed for Examination". While, this is not the case of female users, who use creative images. While in normal situations, users use meaningful and catchy image as their profile pictures. The findings indicate that the majority of female users (41 users) use cute and meaningful pictures such as flowers, babies, cartoon characters, artists which are mostly negative real identity. To connect this finding to previous studies, Wang et al. (2010) found that male users respond strongly to visual images in making strong relationships. In our study, 9 females users apt their profile picture for their family photo, (group family photos) to show how they value the significance of family relationships. While, the last (5 users) use body parts to symbolise their profile picture especially fingers with rings. In spite of photo(s) is a common form of identification, non of female users use their own real photo in their Facebook profile. This could be because the traditions and customs of their real life which are more restricted on females than male.
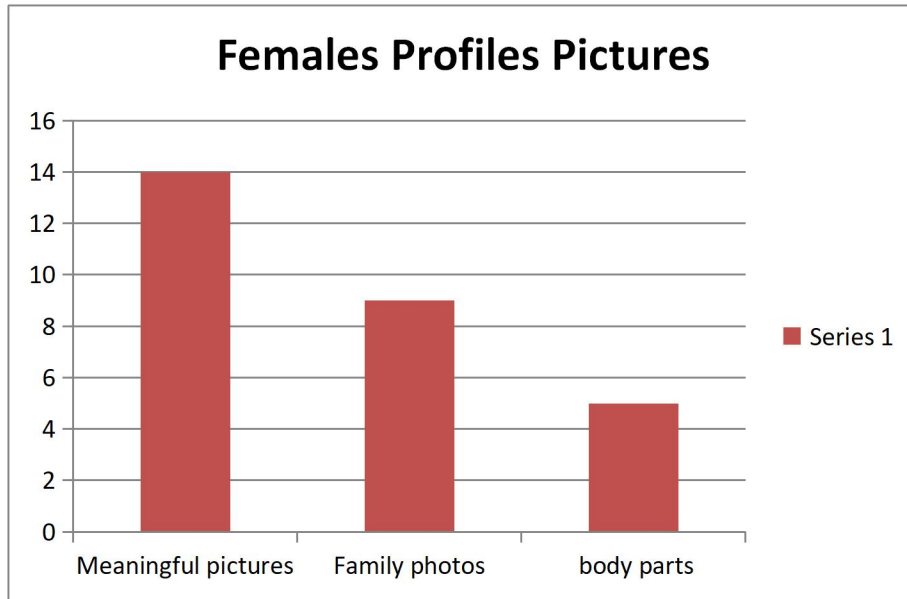
Figure 2. Females Profiles Pictures

On the other side, the majority of male (88) users prefer to use their own pictures as profile pictures as use their real names as usernames. This indicates that male users are more self-conscious compared to females users when they employed their actual names as Facebook usernames, and they are more free of their traditions and customs. With reference to preceding studies, this finding agrees with Wang et al. (2010:13) that "physical attractiveness is crucial in online friendship initiation as both genders especially males prefer attractive images." Furthermore, Shafie et al. (2012:1) confirmed that "male users are more comfortable than female users using their real own pictures as their profile pictures." Meanwhile, 21 of them utilized group photos (friends or classmates in university of school) as profile pictures. This indicates that the males users value their social relations and friendships than females, and they are more self-conscious when they use their offline identities. Whereas, the last 11 male users prefer to use meaningful objects as profile pictures such as a photo of mosque, shrine, cover of magazine or verses of poem to reflect their religious or cultural background.
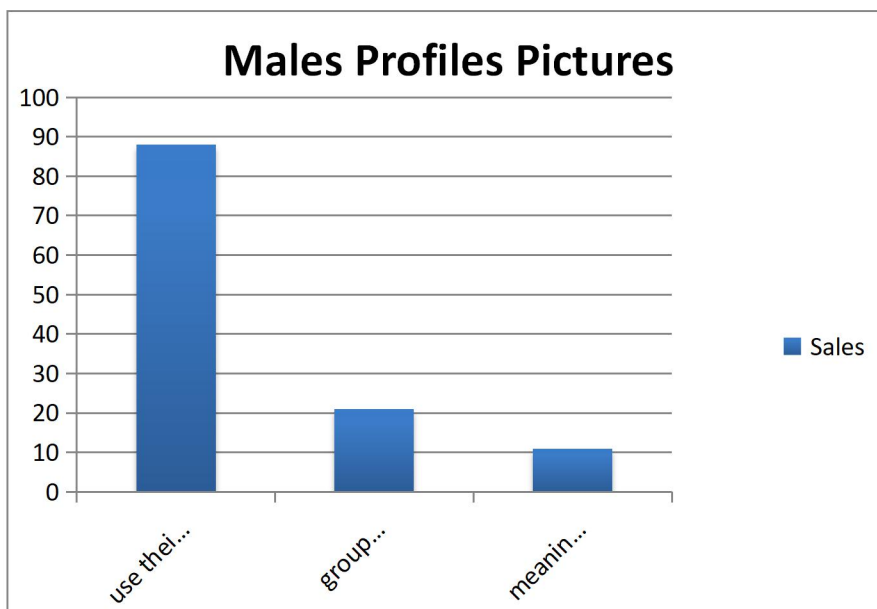
Figure 3. Males Profiles Pictures

In spite of Arabic language is deemed the mother tongue of Iraqis, not all the underlying users used Arabic to construct their desired Facebook profiles, despite they are given language choices in the general account setting. The analysis found that some of our analysed sample prefer to use English than Arabic as the language of their Facebook profiles, especially when English is not treated as a second language in Iraq. This could be to show their high proficiency in English as some of them were students of English department where English is the medium of instruction in the University and they are familiar with English and all of their classmates can follow them easily as they are using English language. Another reason for using English than Arabic is that some users looking for international relationships especially when English is the language of Facebook. This result in particular, goes hand in hand with Shafie et al. (2012) study, which found that all the investigated sample of Malaysian university students were comfortable with English language than their native language in chatting and designing their profile.

6. Conclusion

This study has delineated the uses of semiotic resources or mode of communication such as (texts, symbols, pictures and colours etc.) by Thi-Qar University students to construct their online identity. Analytically, these modes were conducted as direct self-representational devices in designing and constructing identity in online channel. The study found that these semiotic resources were seen as sets of signs or systems combine to emerge semiotic choice as an active performance, by which each user creates meaning and carries cultural value and significance (i.e., identity). Furthermore, the study found that most of these constructed profiles (identities) are carefully designed, but they were pretty much unstable and differ from their real world specially in terms of name, age, sex, specially for females users accounts. This can be attributed to a belief which considers presenting real identities could post private and intimate information of real and actual world the matter which may crash with users' social, political, security and religious , and traditions and customs.

Moreover, the research indicated that females were more comfortable in hiding their offline identities behind unreal online identities. This could be demonstrated by using unreal names as usernames and false\fake\symbolic photos\picture as profile pictures. On the other side, the investigated males were more self-conscious and comfortable in presenting their online identities, once by displaying their real name as usernames and other via using their own photos as profile pictures. Another good indication of the fact that confirms this result is the ratio of males participation in this research to display their identities which was double of the females. On encountering these findings and figures, we can conclude and confirm that Iraqi community is a male community restricts the freedoms of woman, and releases and legitimates the freedom of males. However, these findings can give a better understanding of construction online identity within the culture and context of Iraq, but it does not make sense to generalize them to include the whole of Iraq, as Iraqi society is multi ethnic, religious, tribal sectarian and linguistic. Their fore, our study sheds light on University students within certain context, i.e. the south of Iraq, which is part of Iraq. Thereof, future research could be conducted with universities form diverse parts of

Iraq and students from various ethnic backgrounds to give a comprehensive understanding of online identity construction in Iraqi context.

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