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UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

“IT BEGAN WITH A DM”: A STUDY OF YOUNG GHANAIAN TWITTER USERS’

SEARCH FOR INTIMACY ONLINE

BY

NANA AMA GYASIWAA ASARE (10477358)

**THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MA
COMMUNICATIONS STUDIES DEGREE**



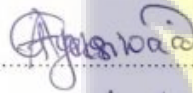
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DECLARATION

I declare that except for the works of other people that have been duly acknowledged, the work presented in this dissertation was done by me under the supervision of Dr. Abena A. Yeboah-Banin. This work has not been submitted either in part or whole to any other educational institution for the award of any degree or certificate.

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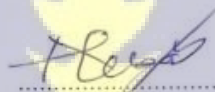
(Student)



Date: 13/01/2023

Dr. Abena A. Yeboah-Banin

(Supervisor)



Date: 13/01/2023



DEDICATION

To my father



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my father for all his support, financially and morally, as I pursued this study. I am very grateful for the love and encouragement he provided for me and pushing me to always reach for greatness.

My deepest appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. Abena A. Yeboah-Banin, whose stringent guidance ensured that I stayed focused on my work and provided me with ideas, suggestions and her time to better shape my dissertation.

A very special thanks goes to all the young men and women who voluntarily offered to share their insightful experiences with me.

A big thank you to all my lecturers and members of the university community who shared their knowledge and provided me with guidance throughout my period of study. To all my friends, especially Alma-Lisa Lartey and Alexander Kodjokuma, I say thank you for being there for me and making this journey a memorable one.

Thank you all.

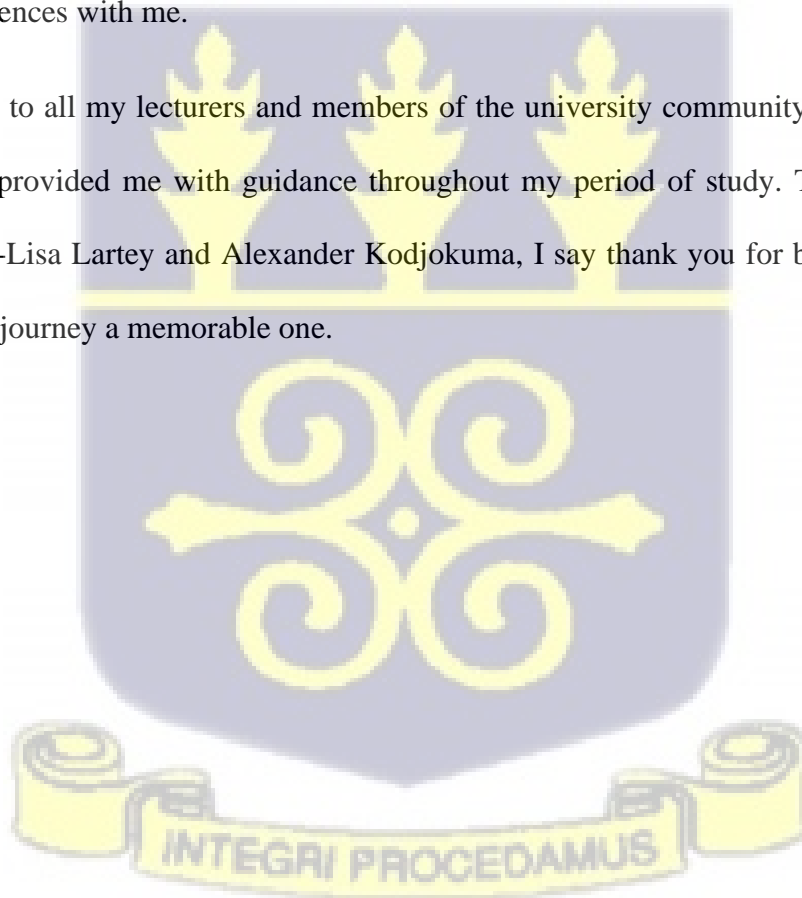


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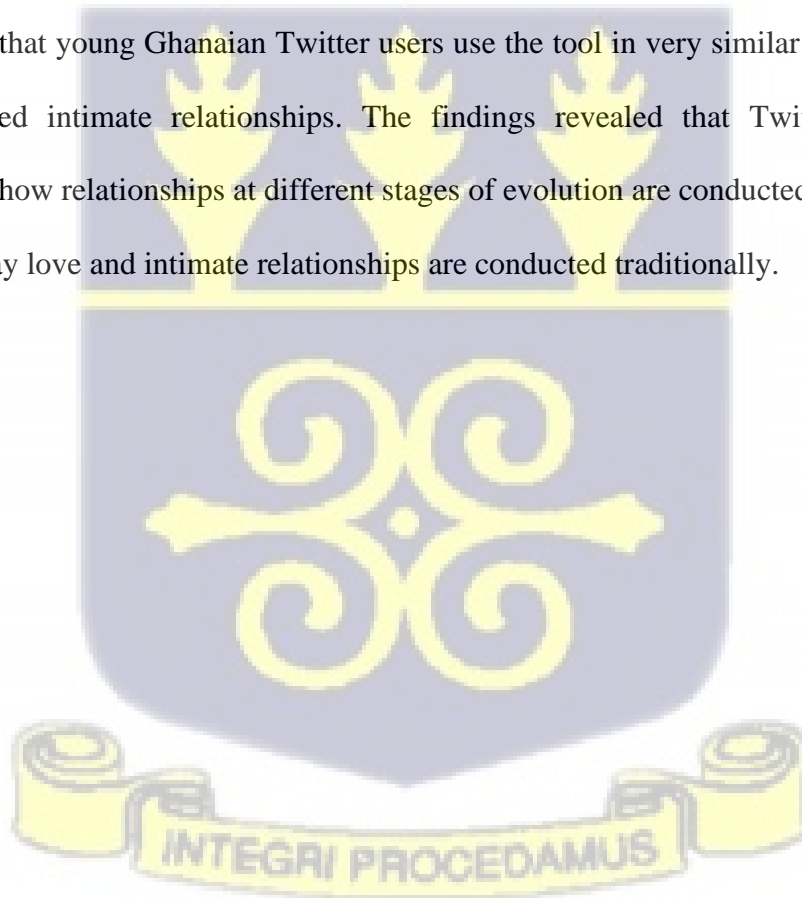
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ABSTRACT

Recent statistics have shown a rapid growth in the use of social networking sites among Africa's youth (Ngwainmbi, 2017). The increasing popularity of these sites highlights how social networking sites have gradually become a place of convergence (Hughes and Palen, 2009), making these sites powerful social intermediaries which mediate how people meet, maintain and negotiate their relationships. This study sought to explore how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter for self-presentation, to create, negotiate, and maintain their intimate relationships, to express their sexual agency and to redefine the traditional codes of intimacy by drawing on the theory of impression management. Using in-depth interviews conducted with 12 young Ghanaian Twitter users, the study found out that young Ghanaian Twitter users use the tool in very similar ways to negotiate their online-based intimate relationships. The findings revealed that Twitter has different implications for how relationships at different stages of evolution are conducted and is enabling a change in the way love and intimate relationships are conducted traditionally.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter begins with the background of the study and information relevant to what the study sought to achieve. The chapter also presents the research problem, objectives of the study, the significance of the study and a summary of how the study has been organized.

1.1 Background of Study

Social Networking Sites have over the years become a very important part of people's lives, particularly the youth (Boyd and Marwick, 2014). Young people go online to use these sites for a wide range of activities including seeking new friendships and relationships (Subrahmanyam and Smahel, 2011).

These social networking sites have caused a change in the many ways young people interact and connect with each other. Many are learning and coming up with various ways to negotiate their romantic and sexual relationships within these new contexts (Len-Ríos et al, 2016). Young people are meeting new people, maintaining and ending relationships within these contexts. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tinder are giving young people access to millions of people all over the world with whom they can interact and build relationships easily.

This means that social networking sites are providing young people with an avenue and space to express themselves and connect with more people in a manner that is not considered norm from a cultural and traditional point of view (Bishop, Mehra and Merkel, 2004). For some people, romantic relationships that are built over the internet are virtual and not real and should not be taken seriously. Thus,

relationships formed over the internet are, sometimes, frowned upon because they go against the traditional way people form and maintain bonds.

According to Hootsuite (2018) about 3.48 billion people are using social networking sites. This figure represents 45 per cent of the total world population - meaning 45% of the world population are using social networking sites. In Ghana, there are over 10 million internet users (Internet World Stats, 2019) with Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter being the top three social networking sites they use (Statscounter, 2019). Facebook is the most used social networking site by Ghanaians with 82.22 percent of Ghana's internet population on there. Twitter follows Facebook with 7.52 percent while Pinterest comes third with 7.3 percent.

1.1.1 Social media, youth and romantic relationships

Young Ghanaians on these sites are using them in ways that are very similar to other young people all over the world; they are also creating and managing romantic relationships there.

Young Ghanaians are reaching out to people they have never met before on social media and establishing friendships with each other like they would do in real life. They check out the profiles of individuals that pop up on their feeds and if they catch their attention, they connect with these people and build relationships from there. This is quite similar to seeing someone new at school, work, church or any other public space and walking up to them, when one finds something intriguing about them, to get to know them and may sometimes lead to romantic relationships.

Anecdotal evidence shows that young people openly flirt with each other on social media- even with users they do not know personally, and this sometimes progresses to exchanging information via the private messaging features social media offers and go on to build great friendships and relationships with each other with some even ending in marriage.

1.1.2 Conducting romantic relationships: traditional versus contemporary notions

The new way of building romantic relationships, where everything is virtually situated, challenges what Ghanaians know love to be and how they “do” love and relationships.

Traditionally, romantic relationships across Ghana’s cultural groups were negotiated at the family level with parents choosing spouses for their children (Omari, 1963). It is important to note that women are seen as passive actors when it comes to these relationships. For instance, among the Akans, marriage is an agreement between two families (the man and woman) and is deeply entrenched in the customs and laws of the land (Boni, 2002). The father of a male child finds him a suitable wife. Courting is not shown in public and this includes public displays of affection. Thus, gifts are sent to the chosen woman to show the intent of the man. When the girl reciprocates interest in the man, which is often after some weeks, messages are sent to the woman’s family through the man’s father. This further establishes good relations between the two families and when they both receive the green light from their families, the man can now occasionally send gifts to his to-be bride and her mother. (Boni, 2002).

In some ethnic groups such as the Dagombas and Akans, both parties need the consent of their parents. Girl-children were typically betrothed to a man right after their birth. However, there are cases where the couple makes their own choice and with that, it is the man who initiates the move (Awedoba, 2006). This was especially during the pre-colonial times. Over time, however, increased levels of emigration from towns and villages, and education meant that young people gained more freedom to choose their partners while away from their families. Exposure to cosmopolitan lifestyles and tastes, thus, began to change the way these young people started and nurtured their romantic relationships. Thus, in contemporary Ghana, most young people select their own partners, often with the meeting point being school, church, and workplace or even through friends (Omari, 1963).

The closest to virtual relationships were long distance relationships in which spouses were chosen by the family of an emigrated individual and relationships had to be nurtured via calls and letters until the couple could live together. While this suggests that individuals meeting romantic partners online is no different, it flouts the traditional expectation that romantic relationships should be set in a context of a courtship in which the partners are physically present (Omari, 1963).

Other expectations of traditional notions for creating and maintaining romantic relationships include dating within your social class and status. An individual is expected to form romantic relationships with people that are in their social standing in society. Anything contrary to this usually raises concern (Langevang, 2008).

Public display of affection between intimate partners is also restricted in Ghanaian society. Sexuality is structured by norms of discretion and indirection ascribed to Ghana's dominant ethnic linguistic group, the Akan. Discretion here means the feeling that hinders the public display of affection between intimate partners. It restricts explicit talk about an individual's sexual life and that of others, especially when it happens outside the confines of marriage (Danquah, 2009).

Similarly, ideas of masculinity in Ghana focuses on men exercising authority over women and junior men, accumulating wealth, and exhibiting courage and bravery in the face of adversity and not being openly soft (Miescher and Miescher, 2005). Anecdotal evidence indicates that there is an ongoing shift online with men openly exhibiting softness on the internet.

Accordingly, one may argue that creating romantic relationships and maintaining them online is a new trend that has accompanied the internet era.

1.1.3 Twitter as a platform for romance

However, people seem to be forming and maintaining intimate relationships on Twitter despite the peculiar nature of the site. Twitter's unique characteristics restrict what could otherwise be used by young people to attract love on less restrictive sites (e.g. character limits) such as Facebook.

Based on anecdotal evidence, young Ghanaian Twitter users play games online with people they follow on that virtual space which involves complimenting people you have never met in real life and expressing their interest in getting to know them. They have been relationships that have sufficed from these games, some eventually leading to closer bonds in real life and even marriages.

1.2 Problem Statement

Recent statistics indicate a rapid growth in the use of social networking sites among Africa's youth (Ngwainmbi, 2017). The increasing popularity of these sites highlights how social networking sites have gradually become a place of convergence (Hughes and Palen, 2009), making these sites powerful social intermediaries which mediate how people meet, maintain and negotiate their relationships. In this sense, social networking sites are partially displacing the codes of traditional matchmaking. There is an increasing trend of "love stories" beginning from the simple act of sending a direct message to a potential partner on these sites.

Intimate bonds form a crucial aspect of the lives of young adults (Meier and Allen, 2008), and although a growing body of research explores new media and interpersonal relationships (see Bosch, 2011; Carlo, Cooper, Deutsch, Len-Ríos, Streit and Killoren, 2016; Hobbs, Owen and Gerber, 2017; Meenagh, 2015), it focuses more on Facebook and Tinder due to the popularity and nature of these sites.

Studies have however shown that young people are migrating to Twitter and have posting behaviours that are different from that which they portray on Facebook due to its widespread use and the possibility that their family members may be ‘watching’ (Miller and Melton, 2015).

Besides, Twitter is a microblogging site that appears to be less about social friendships and relationships (Honey and Herring, 2009). Twitter allows people to follow important topics, people, and conversations that are relevant or interesting to them. The site has limits for how much (in characters) people can post, thereby limiting the chance to self-present comprehensively and attract romantic partners. These make Twitter and how young Ghanaians are using it to negotiate their romantic relationships an interesting site of research interest. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to create, negotiate and maintain intimate relationships.

1.3 Research Objectives

The problems discussed above call for the following goal and set of objectives to address them. The broad aim of this study is to explore how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to create, negotiate and maintain intimate relationships.

For the realization of the study’s goal, this research seeks to accomplish the following set of objectives:

- To identify how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter for self-presentation in attracting intimate partners.
- To examine how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to navigate the various stages of their romantic and sexual relationships.
- To find out how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to express their sexual agency.
- To ascertain how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to redefine the codes of intimacy.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following questions:

- How do young Ghanaian adults use Twitter for self-presentation in order to attract intimate partners?
- How do young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to navigate the various stages of their romantic and sexual relationships?
- How do young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to express their sexual agency?
- How do young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to redefine codes of intimacy?

1.5 Significance of Study

Although a substantial amount of research has been conducted on how young people are using new media to navigate their intimate relationships, there is hardly enough available literature where young Ghanaian adults are concerned. Scholarship presents a limited scope on the subject and research in Ghana in that area is even more limited in the sense that it is geared more towards reproductive health and sexuality studies.

Beyond looking at how young people are using new media technologies to negotiate their relationships, there is a need for an in-depth qualitative study on how young people in Ghana are using Twitter to negotiate their intimate relationships. This will give researchers an idea of how young people are creating and maintaining relationships on Twitter and present an opportunity for further research in that area.

Also, discourse on young people and their social media habits is gaining momentum on the global front, therefore, presenting a need for the Ghanaian reality to be investigated. This study therefore finds merit in shedding light on how young adults in Ghana use digital technologies to negotiate intimacy and

romantic relationships. This research will also contribute to media studies by adding to the literature on new media and interpersonal relationships.

1.6 Organisation of study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one consists of the introduction to the study, the statement of problem, research questions and objectives, as well as the significance of the study. Chapter two is the theoretical framework underpinning the study, as well as the review of relevant literature to the study. Chapter three contains the methodological framework that guided the study. Chapter four contains the presentation of the findings and Chapter five contains the discussions of the findings, conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

The study ends with a bibliography and an appendix.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theory which underpins this study and a review of literature related to it and on the phenomenon under study. The discussions here present existing knowledge and gaps that directed this study. The discussion begins with insights from the Impression Management theory (Goffman, 1959) which explores the overt and the unconscious strategies individuals deploy in social settings to try and influence how others perceive them.

2.1 Impression Management Theory

“All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts; his acts being seven ages” William Shakespeare (*As You Like It*, Act II Scene VII, Jaques to Duke Senior).

Shakespeare in his play, *As You Like It*, alludes to the idea that society is a stage with the individuals in it being the actors. Thus, the lives of individuals are merely a chain of performances. It is from this that Erving Goffman draws his theory of how human interaction takes place in society.

Goffman (1956) argues that when people come into contact with other people, they consciously make efforts to steer and control how the latter perceive them. They control people's impression of them by altering or adjusting their appearances, settings and way of doing things while the people are trying to form impressions and obtain information about them. Thus, Goffman

believed that all individuals participating in social interactions undertake specific measures to steer clear of any embarrassment.

Impression management is a conscious or unconscious process in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object or event by regulating and controlling information in any given social interaction to achieve a specific goal. This Goffman presents dramaturgically to throw more light on the complexity of human behaviours during social interactions.

The theory describes how individuals, posing as actors in their daily interactions, consciously create, maintain, defend, and often enhance their social identities through assumptions, settings, props, and scripts similar to what happens in stage plays (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman social interaction may be likened to a theater with people in everyday life likened to actors on a stage - each individual playing a myriad of roles. The audience is made of other individuals who pay attention to and observe the roles the actors are playing while reacting to the performances.

Goffman's dramaturgical approach draws a link between theatrical performances and real-life interactions. According to Goffman, every individual in social interactions has the power to pick the stage they want to act on which includes props and also the costume they would wear in front of their chosen audience. The individual's (actor) foremost objective is to be able to adapt to the various settings and situations that will be offered to them while also ensuring there is some consistency. Their interactions with other individuals facilitate this.

Goffman uses elements in drama to explain how individuals act in social interactions. For instance, in every social interaction, there are various regions the interaction takes place in - with

each serving particular purposes. In theatrical performances, there is the front region where the actors perform on the stage in front of an audience. The back region, also known as backstage, is where the individuals can be who they really are and not conform to the role they have to play in front of the audience. Below the dramaturgical approach proposed by Goffman is used to explain aspects of the present work.

The actor, shaped by the environment and target audience, sees interaction as a performance. The objective of the performance is to provide the audience with an impression consistent with the desired goals of the actor. Thus, impression management is also highly dependent on the situation.

In addition to these goals, individuals differ in responses from the interactional environment; some may be unresponsive to audience's reactions while others actively respond to audience reactions in order to elicit positive results. These differences in response towards the environment and target audience are called self-monitoring. Another factor in impression management is self-verification, the act of conforming the audience to the person's self-concept. The audience can be real or imaginary.

Individuals have a goal of reducing their chances of embarrassment or any unfavourable incidents by employing certain measures. These measures include individuals intentionally managing the information they give by sometimes over communicating or under communicating some information usually determined by what they intend to achieve in the end.

Although Goffman's theory pertained to everyday interactions between individuals which may be different from interactions on social networking sites in terms of richness and depth, the issue of having to establish and maintain an "ideal" self remains valid. The internet has contributed to

a whole new mode of communication which comes with its own rules and regulations on how communication or interaction takes place. Interaction that takes place on the internet may be similar to face-to-face interactions. However, there are some limitations that come with it. The internet is a strong mode of communication because of how easy it can be used to reach large and diverse audiences while curating an online experience that caters to the individual's needs and preferences. This means that individuals have to bear the responsibility of strategically managing how they present themselves online by employing several ways to leave favourable impressions on people (Whitty, 2008).

People may argue that interactions that take place on these social networking sites are very much different from the kind of social interactions Goffman used for his analysis. However, we cannot dispute the fact that the internet is now a social space - thanks to these social networking sites - that allows people to interact with one another, in ways quite similar to the way other social settings outside the internet facilitate these social interactions.

The advantage of using this theory to explain how Twitter users strategically present themselves in their search for intimacy online is the manner with which it can be applied to online situations. This is because social networking sites are to some extent facilitating a shift from what people are used to when it comes to social interactions. For instance, using a social networking site like Twitter, for example, means that the individual has to first create a profile for themselves and interact with other Twitter users.

For the purpose of the study, the metaphors in Goffman's dramaturgical approach that were used to describe social interactions will be mainly considered in explaining self-presentation among

Ghanaian Twitter users and how it plays a role in their search for intimacy online. These metaphors are the theater, play, character, actor, audience, front stage and backstage.

Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach

The Theater	Twitter
Play	Flow of twitter (romantic/intimate) interaction
Characters	Twitter Users
Actor	Individual
Role Behavior	way of interacting
Audience	Users observing the individual
Front Stage	The Twitter timeline where the individual's actions are performed
Back Stage	The Twitter direct messages where the individual's actions are geared towards what is going to happen or towards what has happened.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Online self-presentation and relationships

Self-presentation theory is built on the assumption that in social interactions, individuals aim to control images of self or information that is relevant to their identity and the way they are perceived (Schlenker, 1980). Individuals constantly make an effort to portray themselves in a certain way that caters to their greater advantage and is ideal to the situation. The desired end result is to attain approval or avoid disapproval from other individuals in the social situation (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Scholars have made claims that young people are conscious when choosing what identity-related information they disclose to their audience (Lui and Browne, 2014; Greene et al, 2006).

2.2.2 Online spaces and the management of romantic relationships

Communications technology is a vital and pervasive part of young people's lives and relationships (Campbell and Murray, 2015; Khonou, 2010). Khonou (2010) argues that new mobile technologies play a significant role in the constitution and maintenance of intimate relationships by facilitating an environment where different men and women are able to create, maintain and put an end to relationships regardless of proximity. These technologies also blur the line between gender roles and the way communication is done face to face interactions (Khonou, 2010).

Murray and Campbell (2015) support this claim by asserting that within intimate relationships, partners utilize technologies for various purposes. These include keeping in touch with each other, expressing their feelings for each other, making plans and getting to know themselves better. In their quantitative study that examines the pleasures and perils of technology in intimate relationships, they argue that technology enhances intimate relationships by making partners accessible to one another and also providing access to the interests of their partners outside of their relationships.

2.2.3 Social media and online relationships

Literature suggests that new media keeps evolving and plays a very important role so far as communication is concerned in intimate relationships. Yang (2014) makes claims that evolving digital technologies have changed daily lifestyles in addition to causing fundamental changes in intimate relationships, interactions, and practices. She emphasizes that modern intimate relationships and gender practices are significantly influenced by new technologies. Research that individuals use connectivity technology to have some control over how devoted they are in their relationships – their time, finances and emotions. In addition to that, connections created online satisfy individuals' need for intimacy and relationships through the characteristics of connectivity. Individuals also make use

of digital spaces to express their love for one another, communicate with each other, follow people they would want to make acquaintance with and also discourage advances from people they do not want to associate with (McKinney et al; Yang, 2014). Others also use these technologies to create a personal erotic space and interact with other parties which have an impact on their negotiation abilities (Bosch, 2011; Yang, 2014).

Other scholars however do not think new media technologies make negotiations of intimate relations any different from how it was done in person. Meenagh (2015) argues that although new media environments provide a new context within which young people negotiate their love/sex relationships, these negotiations are not different from how they were done before the advent of new media technologies.

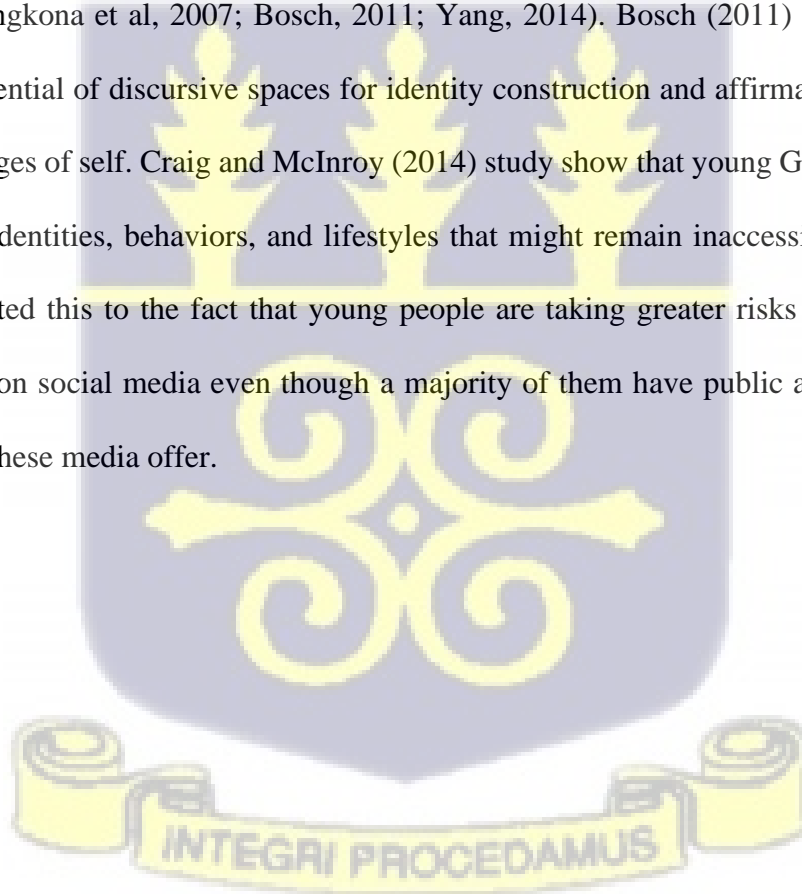
The use of the internet for reasons that enhance social connectivity continues to grow steadily because the relationships individuals form online evolve into offline connections in spite of the stigma attached to such relationships. Anderson (2005) argues that there is a relationship between the time a person spends online and likeness for the internet, and the individual's perception of online intimate relationships. Her research, however, showed that romantic personal beliefs may lend themselves to more conventional notions of intimacy (Anderson, 2005).

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2.2.4 Social media and the changing face of codes of intimacy

Many new media scholars are of the opinion that online dating is fighting the traditional codes of intimacy. For instance, Bauman (2012) claims that internet dating is liquefying societal ideals of intimacy while Hobbs et al (2017) argue that technology gives people a greater agency in pursuing potential partners and increases the pool of romantic possibilities.

Several studies suggest that women have an affinity with new technologies because they can explore various gender identities in a virtual environment and help them develop and express their gender identities (Boonmongkona et al, 2007; Bosch, 2011; Yang, 2014). Bosch (2011) claims that online spaces offer the potential of discursive spaces for identity construction and affirmation, as well as to test out varying images of self. Craig and McInroy (2014) study show that young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to explore identities, behaviors, and lifestyles that might remain inaccessible offline. Some studies have attributed this to the fact that young people are taking greater risks when it comes to posting behaviours on social media even though a majority of them have public accounts given the pseudo-anonymity these media offer.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the rationale behind the approach chosen for this study and also the research methods that were used to gather data for the study. This includes the population used, sampling method, the unit of analysis and the data collection process. It also presents the demographics of the participants studied and discusses the coding indices of the study.

3.1 Research approach and method

The qualitative approach was the approach adopted for this study. Based on the fact that this study attempts to unearth how young Ghanaians use the Twitter application to present themselves online and also create and maintain intimate relationships, it was only appropriate that the approach used should be one that is receptive to exploratory studies. (Brannen, 2017) The method used to investigate how young Ghanaian Twitter users employ the application in their search for intimacy online was in-depth interviews. This method gives the opportunity to delve into the phenomenon and fish out what goes into this search for intimacy online. (King et al, 2018)

3.2 Population

The population for this study was Ghanaian Twitter users between the ages of 18 to 25 years who have sought intimacy on the application. This age range was used because 18 years is the legal marriage age in Ghana. The cap is 25 years because of the United Nations' definition

of youth which defines youth as “those persons between the ages of 15 and 25 years” (United Nations, 1985).

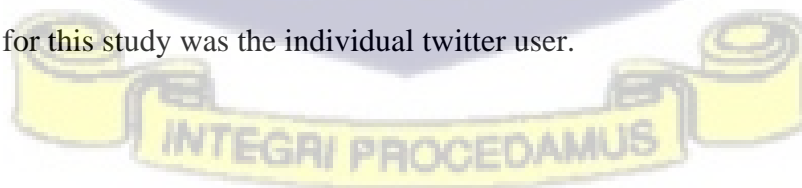
3.3 Sampling

Tongco (2007) argues that purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, is very effective when one is studying a specific cultural domain with individuals who have undergone the phenomenon under exploration within it. Accordingly, participants were selected because they have used Twitter to search for intimacy online. Given this purposive sampling was found to be the most suitable sampling method.

A total of 12 individuals were sampled purposely for the study which comprised 6 males and 6 females. Below is a complete list of factors considered in sampling individuals:

1. Must be an active user of Twitter.
2. Must have been active on Twitter from 2015 to present. This is because 2015 is most likely the year any 18-year-old who uses twitter signed up as the signup age for the application is 13 years.
3. The participant’s Twitter timeline must have a personal feel that goes beyond news and trending topics.
4. Gender was another major sampling factor because literature suggests some differences in how men and women present themselves and communicate online (Slater, 2002).

The unit of analysis for this study was the individual twitter user.



3.4 Data Collection

The data analysed for this study was collected using in-depth interviews. Respondents were given a detailed brief on the purpose and nature of the study, their ethical guarantees and then asked to give a verbal consent to be engaged in the in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted over WhatsApp using the voice note option. This is because a mediated approach like that encourages more sharing and engagement - which gives respondents time to really think about the questions and answer them thoroughly (Tracy, 2019). Participants are also more likely to be candid with a complete stranger when they communicate online rather than face to face (Joinson and Paine, 2007). Research has also shown when studying an online community, participants feel more comfortable and safer in that same context (Tracy, 2019). Each interview lasted between 45 to 70 minutes, after which the voice notes were transcribed. The interviews took place across a span of seven days.

3.5 Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to guide the interviews conducted with the participants. The interview guide contained 16 open-ended questions for all the participants. This gave room for a discussion with the participants rather than a rigid straightforward interview. The questions were framed in accordance with the purpose and objectives of the study. Issues explored included how participants present themselves on Twitter, how they use Twitter to find intimate partners, how they use Twitter to navigate the various stages of their intimate relationships and how the application is changing traditional codes of intimacy.

3.6 Analytical strategy

In order to make analyzing the data easier, the interviews were transcribed. Thereafter themes were identified following the methodological directions by Ryan and Bernard (2003). They recommend that in thematic analysis, one should watch out for repeated words, similarities, differences and transitions that transpire within the data in the attempt to identify themes in textual data that hold ample narratives. The themes identified from the transcribed data became the basis for answering the research questions and addressing the study objectives. The respondents were assigned codes to anonymise their identity and give them privacy.



CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to create, negotiate and maintain intimate relationships. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the study. The findings are presented starting with a profiling of the interviewees, their use of Twitter, and then progresses to presenting the themes that emerged from the study. The presentation of the themes has been organized to correspond to the objectives of the study.

Findings

4.1. Profile of Interviewees

The study conducted in-depth interviews with 12 young Ghanaian Twitter users randomly selected online. The table below shows a breakdown of the profiles of the interviewees.

Respondent No.	Age	Sex	Years on Twitter	Occupation
Interviewee A	25	Male	7 years	Student
Interviewee B	19	Male	6 years	Student
Interviewee C	23	Male	8 years	Student
Interviewee D	23	Male	10 years	Teaching Assistant

Interviewee E	23	Male	6 years	Technology Consultant
Interviewee F	21	Female	6 years	Student
Interviewee G	22	Female	6 years	Student
Interviewee H	23	Female	5 years	Public Servant
Interviewee I	21	Male	9 years	Student
Interviewee J	21	Female	10 years	National Service Person
Interviewee K	22	Female	6 years	Student
Interviewee L	24	Female	9 years	Marketing Assistant

4.1.2 Interviewees' Use of the Twitter app

Although this study focuses primarily on how young Ghanaian Twitter users are using Twitter in their search for intimacy, the reasons why they use Twitter as indicated by the interviewees does not revolve around searching for intimacy. Interviewees indicated that they have several uses for Twitter. These uses include following trending issues, sharing their opinions on issues online, following celebrity news and updates, following sports news, interacting and connecting with people t One interviewee recounted:

“...I use twitter to connect to my friends from primary school, junior high, secondary school and then university and also use it to meet new people and also look out for business opportunities.”

(Interviewee A).

Another interviewee explained:

“...I normally use Twitter for information, entertainment, making new friends, talking to the old ones, humour, following the latest news one some of my interests like anime and music especially. That’s pretty much it.” (Interviewee F)

None of the interviewees expressed using Twitter to find intimate partners only but a platform they use to microblog and keep up to date with issues while being entertained at the same time. It is safe to say that the platform is almost like a part of their daily routines.

4.2 Use of Twitter for self-presentation in attracting intimate partners

The first major objective of this study was to find out how young Ghanaian adults are using Twitter for self-presentation to attract intimate partners. The findings from the in-depth interviews revealed three ways young Ghanaian Twitter users employ Twitter for self- presentation in attracting intimate partners. These include being particular about pictures of themselves they share, tweeting about their need for intimacy and having intentional interactions.

4.2.1 Being Particular about Pictures Shared

From the interviews conducted with the interviewees, some interviewees indicated that how they looked or how good-looking other Twitter users perceived them positions them in a way that could attract a potential partner. They explained that since twitter is a public platform with everyone on your feed being able to see the things you post, it is very important to ensure that you put out a good image of yourself so you do not just attract just any kind of intimate partner but the right ones you want to be approached by. One of the interviewees put it as:

“...I am particular about the pictures I post and some tweets, so I don’t call the wrong kind of attention.” (Interviewee J)

For the interviewees, posting good pictures of themselves was not just for a potential partner to find them as attractive but also to put a face to their profile name whenever it appears on their feeds or timelines. One interviewee further explained:

“...I mean I also post pictures and videos of myself so that people can at least put a face to my twitter account...” (Interviewee I)

It appears, pictures seem to be a major way of catching a potential partner’s eyes given the virtual nature of the platform. For the interviewees, the pictures people post online cause people to reach out to them, want to get to know them or cause people to interact with their tweets to get their attention, as shown here:

“...so usually on Twitter I’m sure you are aware that there is Ghana Twitter and Nigerian Twitter blah blah blah and when I was posting my pictures and they were gaining traction you know I got a lot of followers from Nigeria Twitter and one of them caught my eye. Some guy in Nigeria and he was liking my pictures and stuff and I noticed that he was slightly interactive with my tweets so I decided to...make my move...” (Interviewee B)

This notion that posting pictures of yourself are a major part of self-presentation online was reechoed by other interviewees who shared the same sentiments. This explains why young Ghanaian Twitter users will be particular about the pictures of themselves they post since this could be a major reason why someone would want to interact with them and want to know them better.

4.2.2 Tweeting about Need for Intimacy

Another way young Ghanaian Twitter users position themselves to attract potential intimate partners is by tweeting about their need for intimacy. Twitter as a microblogging platform allows its users to share their thoughts as and when they feel like it which in turn gives users to tell their followers that they are open to knowing new people or they would like to have someone to share an intimate bond with. Interviewees mentioned that they tweet about wanting that kind of interaction with people in the hope of someone interested in then messaging them privately. The interviewees therefore see themselves as active parties in their search for intimacy online and not just passive ones. They put out tweets that may grab a potential partner’s attention to privately message them and this may be the start of an intimate relationship of some kind. One of the Twitter users who consciously does this explained:

“...I’d be very intentional about my tweets to allude that you know I am looking for this type of interaction... I’m like, for example, sending nudes then that emoji with the begging emotion and the two fingers joining together that’s an example of an attention seeking tweet or maybe I’d give a sexual joke...” (Interviewee B)

Another female participant explained:

“...For me I constantly quote tweets from relationship accounts with the question “God when?” just to prove that I really want to have that. All those lovey dovey things are cute so yeah, I express that want always hoping that one day someone will notice me and maybe DM me...” (Interviewee L)

For these interviewees, a potential partner may not approach them if they have no certainty about whether or not they would be interested in having an interaction like that. Therefore, they drop hints of being open to romantic or sexual relationships in the tweets they post and in the things they retweet or share onto their timeline. This reduces the uncertainty a potential partner has on whether to approach you not.

These responses indicate that a major responsibility lies on the individual if they are searching for an intimate partner on the platform. This responsibility involves being open about it to some extent to reduce uncertainty in potential partners.

4.2.3 Having Intentional Interactions

Findings from the interviews showed that young adult users are intentional with their interactions on the timeline in order to attract potential intimate partners. The interviewees revealed that in order to position themselves to find intimate partners, they are very intentional with their tweets and how they interact with that of others.



For example, they pay close attention to the things a person they may be attracted to tweets about. These include their interests, favourite movies, books, political views and others. They then make sure they tweet similar things and interact with the tweets to make the person aware that they have common interests and views. This may prompt the potential intimate partner to reach out to them by privately messaging them.

An interviewee explained how she puts in effort in being intentional in her bid to get the attention of a twitter user she is interested in:

“...when I found someone or came across someone who I found interest in or I found myself attracted to, I'd go through their timeline and tweet about the things they tweet about. So that, they notice me or somehow somehow we have an interaction. For example, I've seen a movie they've seen and I talk about it and then they say, "You've seen this movie before? So have I" and then we talk about our opinions on the movie et cetera.” (Interviewee G)

Interviewees disclosed that when they have an interest in another Twitter user and want to be noticed by the said person they interact with their tweets a lot by either quoting the tweets, liking the tweets and replying the tweets. This makes the potential intimate partner notice them and sets the tone for further interactions with the person. One interviewee explained this as:

“... If they post a lot and I am seeing it on my tl, I'll interact with it when I see it fit but I usually don't assign too much meaning to it because people laugh at things, they retweet things, they like things but it doesn't mean much. I prefer to take what they tell me about themselves, their values, and others much more seriously than anything they tweet...” (Interviewee C)

Interviewees also revealed that in doing all this they make sure to exercise caution when posting tweets so they do not convey a bad image of themselves that may push potential intimate partners away.

Someone may tweet certain things or indulge in certain interactions that may be off putting and this may drive potential intimate partners away as they may not want to be involved with someone with a bad image on the timeline as explained by one of the interviewees:

“...I'd be very intentional about my tweets to allude that you know I am looking for this type of interaction. You know those types of attention seeking tweets. Also, I would put nice pictures of myself to give off that impression that I am attractive and stuff and also I would censor my

interaction I would watch... I'll be very chiseled so what's even the English word? I'll be very careful with my interactions because I wouldn't just talk a lot..." (Interview, Interviewee B)

4.3 Using Twitter to Navigate Intimate Relationships

Another key objective of this study was to identify how young Ghanaian Twitter users use Twitter to navigate the various stages of their romantic and sexual relationships. Findings of the study revealed that young Ghanaian Twitter users have several ways they use Twitter to navigate the initiation, maintenance and termination of these intimate relationships.

4.3.1 Initiating Intimate Relationships on Twitter

Findings showed that young Ghanaian Twitter users initiate their romantic and sexual relationships on twitter by sliding into the DMs of potential partners, following potential partners and interacting with them on the timeline.

4.3.1.1 Sliding into the DMs

From the findings, some of the interviewees mentioned that the initiation of intimate relationships on twitter typically begins from one party sending the other a private message. They indicated that they send each other private messages to begin to get to know potential intimate partners better and know them in ways beyond what they tell the rest of their followers through their tweets. Interactions in the DMs are on a very personal level where the users delve into each other's personalities and find out each other's interest. One interviewee stated what typically goes on in the DMs as:

"...Like I said earlier we got to know each other deeper in the DMs. I mean we can't possibly talk on the main timeline...everyone will see. So yeah...talk about our day, what we do, our interests, hobbies...very laid back stuff. I mean it got deeper but yeah the DMs are getting to know someone on a really personal level." (Interviewee J)

The interviewees earlier stated that most users post very limited information about themselves on their timelines because of how public twitter is and how such information can end up in the hands of the wrong people. People tend to post things they may not particularly believe in or exaggerate some information. The DM therefore becomes a safe place for sharing personal information and details about each other. One of the interviewees made a comment that embodies this:

“...I’ve found that most people like myself or a little bit more don’t really show their true personality or interests on their profiles or their accounts like they do when you have actual conversations with them. So yes, DMs are often not the same as the tl. Sometimes people would even say certain things concerning a certain topic or issue on the tl but then in the DMs their opinions may be way different from what they are saying...” (Interviewee F)

The interviewees revealed however that “sliding into the DMs” does not just happen and that they make some observations of the one they want to privately message before they actually do. It was observed from their responses however that messaging someone does not automatically warrant a reply. The receiver of the private message does some checks themselves before replying to the message. One of the female interviewees explained:

“... I’d check their social media...the kind of people they are following, the kind of posts they are retweeting or engaging with. I’d definitely make sure of that before I text them and then when people text me I do the same. I check the kind of people they interact with, and the things they post and retweet...like I just monitor for a while and then I decide whether I can go ahead and open myself up to them.” (Interviewee H)

4.3.1.2 Following Each Other

Another way young Ghanaian Twitter users use twitter to initiate their romantic and sexual relationships is by following the individual they are interested in. Some of the interviewees revealed that they hit the follow button on Twitter when they see someone they are interested in and would want to know them. Following someone on Twitter meant that you would be able to

have access to their profile and get updates of their tweets on your Twitter feed. For these interviewees, initiation of intimate relationships begins from following each other. One female interviewee recounted:

“...I had a crush on some guy with a lot of following. We didn't necessarily follow each other but somehow he followed me one day and I quickly followed him back...” (Interviewee G)

Based on their responses however one can tell that following the potential intimate partner is not just enough to initiate the interaction especially when the individual has a lot of followers already. Therefore, following the individual goes alongside other tactics that could get their attention and let you closer to them. One male interviewee commented:

“...one example that readily comes to mind is this particular person always tweeting about mental health, her mental health and I related to it so I followed this person, liked some of her tweets and with time I DMed this person and we talked about our mental health...” (Interviewee D)

4.3.1.3 Interacting on the Timeline

Another way these romantic and sexual relationships are initiated is when young Ghanaian Twitter users constantly interact with the tweets of an individual on their timeline. Some interviewees revealed that some of the intimate bonds they had formed on twitter began with the mere action of interacting with the tweets of the people they got involved with These interactions include liking, retweeting, quoting and replying the tweets of other twitter users.

These young Twitter users see the tweets of other users all the time and some of these tweets may be attention grabbing which may cause them to interact with them and in the end, an intimate bond may begin to form with the individual they are constantly interacting with. This finding reveals that the initiation of some of these romantic and sexual relationships are not intentional but happens over time as Twitter users continue to interact with each other. A male interviewee recounted an experience where he bonded with another user on Twitter:

“...So there was a time where a lot of businesses online were doing giveaway promotions where if you quoted a tweet and didn't have any likes or retweets on their tweet, they will give you a free product. This girl kept quoting the tweets and I kept liking and retweeting them just to annoy her even though I didn't know her at the time. That got her attention and finally, she dmed me about how I was always liking her tweets. From there we hit it off, we complemented each other very well and it was even better when we met in person. Unfortunately, distance stood in our way but we are now very close friends and we talk almost every day...” (Interviewee I)

For some of the interviewees, interacting with the tweets of potential partners is more about strategically positioning yourself to grab their attention and to make them notice you. This is intentional with the sole aim of getting the other user to notice them and eventually lead to a bond, be it platonic, romantic or sexual, with them. One female interviewee explained:

“...I had a crush on some guy with a lot of following... I did all I could. Strategic positioning by drafting a certain tweet of his, finding our common interests and using that in our interactions and then he DM'ed me...” (Interviewee G)

For some of the interviewees, some of these bonds begin with a simple interaction like giving a compliment to a user you may not be familiar with. It establishes some cordial relationship on the timeline which may lead to a deeper bond later as recounted by one male interviewee:

“...so from the beginning, it was a tweet. Somebody posted pictures of herself. I quoted the tweet, gave her compliments, it was also kind of funny, she laughed, and you know that kind of started the relationship.” (Interviewee E)

4.3.2 Maintaining Intimate Relationships on Twitter

Findings revealed that young Ghanaian adults maintain their intimate relationships on Twitter by flirting on the timeline, sharing tweets in the DMs, posting their partners, posting subliminal messages, avoiding interactions that may bring conflict, constantly talking in the DMs and using another platform to complement Twitter.

4.3.2.1 Flirting on the Timeline

The study also finds that post relationship initiation, young Ghanaian Twitter users use their timelines to hold playful and suggestive conversations with their partners. The flirting may be very obvious to other Twitter users. This may be something as simple as quoting the pictures they post with compliments or jokes with sexual innuendos in them. One female interviewee explained:

“...there are times I would post a picture on the timeline and someone I am sexually involved with or sometimes it is just platonic will come and quote it with something like “me I dey eat” and you know stuff like that is sometimes cute because the person is kind of being open about you two since everyone on the timeline can see it.” (Interviewee L)

However, the flirting can also be subtle as one female interviewee put it:

“We flirt on the TL but, like vague flirting, it depends...” (Interviewee G)

4.3.2.2 Sharing Tweets in the DMs

Another way young Ghanaian Twitter users use Twitter to maintain their sexual and romantic relationships is by sharing tweets on the timeline with each other. Some of the interviewees interviewed revealed that they send tweets that they feel their partners may be interested in when they see them on their timelines.

Sending each other tweets appears to be some form of showing affection to your intimate partners on Twitter. Therefore, if young Ghanaian Twitter users are intimate with each other, they tend to do this which keeps the relationship going. This may range from cute tweets down to when there is a fight on the timeline and the partner was offline and so missed it. One male interviewee explained how he shows affection for his intimate partner by sharing tweets:

“People see posts that they want to share with their loved ones and it’s easy to send a tweet that was funny or a tweet that I thought was cute or a tweet that reminded me of you.”

For one female interviewee, she goes out of her way to consciously do this:

“...I have this friend who likes cat videos so whenever she is down, I just search for some cat videos and I forward them to her...”

Even though interviewees agree that sharing cute tweets about relationships and love is a way of maintaining your intimate relationships on twitter, it may sometimes cause a strain on the relationship.

One male interviewee made a comment that embodies this:

“...it could also be a bad thing because twitter can sometimes give unrealistic relationship expectations. Everyone’s relationship dynamic is different, and twitter could show you things people in other relationships have that you might want but might not fit your relationship dynamic which could make you feel like you deserve more in your own relationship...”

For some of the interviewees, the fact that the bond was formed on Twitter makes it very normal that a major part of the maintenance stage will revolve around the platform.

4.3.2.3 Posting Partners on Twitter

Another way young Ghanaian Twitter users navigate the maintenance stage of their intimate relationships is by posting pictures and videos of their partners online. Some of the interviewees disclosed that they post photos of their partners to show them off to the timeline and reassure them of the affection they share with each other.

One female interviewee recounted:

“...I see other people post their partners and be open about their relationships so I do that sometimes. On my boyfriend’s birthday last year, I posted a video...like a minute video...of us together doing different things and I thought it was cute. He also thought the same.” (Interviewee J)

According to some of the interviewees posting partners on Twitter during the maintenance goes beyond just posting their pictures. It includes posting intimate conversations between intimate partners for everyone on the timeline to see. An interviewee recounted:

“...yes usually people post their partners or maybe gifts they do for their partners or conversations or anything to reassure your partner that yes you are the only one in their lives or just to express their love for their partner but you know it’s usually down to Public display of affection through whatever means...” (Interviewee B)

4.3.2.4 Posting Subliminal Messages

Some of the interviewees revealed that, to keep these relationships going, they post subliminal messages for their intimate partners on the timeline. That is they post tweets that are intended for their intimate partners without actually mentioning their names or making it obvious who these messages are intended for. However, the intended receivers of the messages know it is about them and it keeps these relationships going. One female interviewee recounted:

“...You can put out like subliminal tweets and they’d know it’s about them and feel all happy and giddy inside. That kind of thing. It’s nice...” (Interviewee F)

4.3.2.5 Avoiding Interactions that Cause Conflict

The findings revealed that young Ghanaian Twitter users make sure that they stay away from certain interactions on the timeline that may make their partners uncomfortable or threaten their intimate relationships. These may include liking the pictures of other users, quoting their tweets or retweeting certain tweets that may make their partners insecure. Four of the interviewees mentioned that since they met their intimate partners on Twitter, it is very normal if certain interactions with other people make them feel insecure. One male interviewee explained:

“...I try as hard as possible to avoid certain forms of interactions as they may make my partner feel insecure or it may disrespect them. I don’t want my partner feeling threatened by by activities online...” (Interviewee B)

4.3.2.6 Talking Constantly in the DMs

Although sliding into the DMs forms an integral part of the genesis of intimate relationships on twitter, findings indicated that sending intimate partners private messages does not end after the bonds are established. Interviewees revealed that after these bonds are formed, young Ghanaian Twitter users constantly communicate with each other through private messages by checking on each other to see how their partners are faring throughout the day and what they have been up to. Since some form of bond has already been established, intimate partners have intense conversations in the DMs too as stated by this male interviewee:

“...But people I’m more intimate with it becomes a whole deep conversation...” (Interviewee E)

However, for most part of the talking in the DMs between intimate partners, it is more about checking on each other during the day and indulging in banter. One male interviewee stated:

“...it’s probably just the same normal conversations like you just talk regularly. You might talk every day...every other day, send each other tweets occasionally...that kind of stuff. If you’re keeping the conversation going that’s it...” (Interviewee C)

4.3.2.7 Using another Medium to Communicate

Findings from the interviews revealed that young Ghanaian Twitter users after establishing intimate bonds move their conversations to other platforms that make communication easier, better and more convenient. The interviewees mentioned that the Twitter DMs in itself is sometimes limiting. Aside from text messages, the private message feature on Twitter does not offer a great experience when it comes to conversations and this causes users to sort of migrate to other platforms. This does not mean that they stop using Twitter to communicate completely. One male interviewee explained:

“...The only problem is because there’s no voice note feature on Twitter and sometimes you want to explain something a bit more so you might have to go to WhatsApp or iMessage or Snapchat or

something so usually you might talk to the person mostly on one even though depending on whatever app you started on you might end up talking to someone on another app more because sometimes you meet the person on Twitter so you use Twitter the most but sometimes you meet the person on Twitter you might move to another app so you might maybe iMessage, Snapchat, wherever but you may end up talking the most. Usually, everyone has that app they talk to certain people with so you usually just figure out the app that's best for you even though you met on Twitter but you might still occasionally share tweets with a person even though you don't use it to communicate as much." (Interviewee C)

For some interviewees, however, the relationship moves completely off Twitter even though conversations may revolve around happenings on Twitter as embodied in this comment by on male interviewee:

"...Relationships usually go off Twitter once you meet the person. The medium changes because you start talking on the phone, video calls and all of those things. So relationships will usually go off Twitter but probably conversations might be around Twitter and Twitter personalities - so whatever happens on Twitter, the trending issues - will come up in your conversations because that is where you started off from..." (Interviewee A)

4.3.3 Terminating Intimate Relationships on Twitter

Findings from the study revealed that young Ghanaian Twitter deal with the termination of their intimate relationships by blocking their partners, unfollowing them, muting them and venting on the timeline.

4.3.3.1 Blocking Intimate Partners

Findings from the study show that young Ghanaian Twitter users block (former) intimate partners when these romantic and sexual relationships end. Some interviewees mentioned that they ensure that their now ex partners do not see their profile and are unable to interact with their tweets by blocking them. However, taking the extreme decision to block these partners depends on the circumstances surrounding the termination of the relationship as explained by one interviewee:

“...Personally, either I mute you or block you depending on how bad it is but mostly I just block the individual. I block you and when I feel like I can handle coming across your tweets, I unblock you. Most of the time I block and unblock so we're not following each other. And if after I do this someone retweets your tweets or quotes them and I find them triggering, I mute you or I just go back to blocking you again...” (Interviewee G)

4.3.3.2 Unfollowing Intimate Partners

For some of the interviewees, however, they just unfollow (former) intimate partners when these intimate relationships end. Interviewees mentioned that they stop subscribing to the profiles of their partners, so they are no longer able to see their tweets. Some block and unblock their intimate partners so that they automatically unfollow each other. One female interviewee explained:

“...I block and unblock them usually and mute them. That way we automatically unfollow each other and I mute because I wouldn't want to see their stuff on my timeline just in case someone retweets them.... someone I follow. Sometimes these breakups can get messy and end on the timeline. I have had an experience where I fell out with someone and it became a full-blown fight on the tl. In very rare cases, I just block the person and move on.” (Interviewee J)

One female interviewee expressed her want of not feeling like she is being observed by a former partner as the reason for unfollowing them when the relationship ends. She stated that:

“...after things ended I didn't want us to follow each other anymore because I feel that well for starters I don't want you observing me or anything like that or thinking that me agreeing to certain things will mean that I am taking jabs at you which I'm not and creating unnecessary arguments when we are not together.” (Interviewee F)

4.3.3.3 Muting Intimate Partners

Findings from the study indicate that in some cases, just unfollowing the former partner may just not be enough. Young Ghanaian Twitter users remove their former intimate partners' tweets from their timelines without unfollowing or blocking the account but just by hitting the mute button. Some of the interviewees revealed that they do this because they do not want to see their partners' tweets on their timelines.

One male interviewee explains:

“...it depends on how I’m feeling at the end. The last time something like that happened to me I just muted her and she eventually blocked and unblocked me so we weren’t following each other then we started talking again then she got mad at me for some reason and finally blocked me so I guess people usually block. I don’t usually get it because if I’m over someone I won’t be checking for them anyways, so I’ll just mute them...” (Interviewee C)

4.3.3.4 Venting on the Timeline

For some young Ghanaian Twitter users, navigating a breakup of a romantic and sexual relationship entails venting their emotions and how they feel about the breakup on the timeline. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they, and have also observed that, let out their feelings and emotions about how they feel about the termination of these intimate relationships through their tweets and tweets they retweet onto the timeline. One female interviewee explained how she uses Twitter to express her emotions when the relationships end:

“...I have very few friends and like to deal with my problems alone most of the time. I remember my last breakup I couldn’t talk to anybody but I somehow felt better putting how I felt into tweets and funny enough when you are going through it you see a lot of tweets on the TL you relate to so I was usually retweeting depressing stuff like that sometimes and sometimes going on full rant on the tl about how bad I feel...” (Interviewee L)

It appears also that Twitter gives them a place where they can vent to people and will help them go through the phase. One male interviewee explained:

“...Twitter helps with coping with breakups when you’re looking for someone to help you calm down and let you know that everything is okay. There are also people who decide to get revenge by defaming them [past romantic partners] on social media on Twitter so you know it plays many roles...many diverse roles...” (Interviewee B)

4.4 Twitter as an Avenue for Expressing Sexual Agency

The third key objective of this study was to identify how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to express their sexual agency. Findings from the study indicated that Twitter offers a safe space, pseudo-anonymity and easy access to sexually explicit content which enable young Ghanaian adults to have the ability to define and control their sexuality.

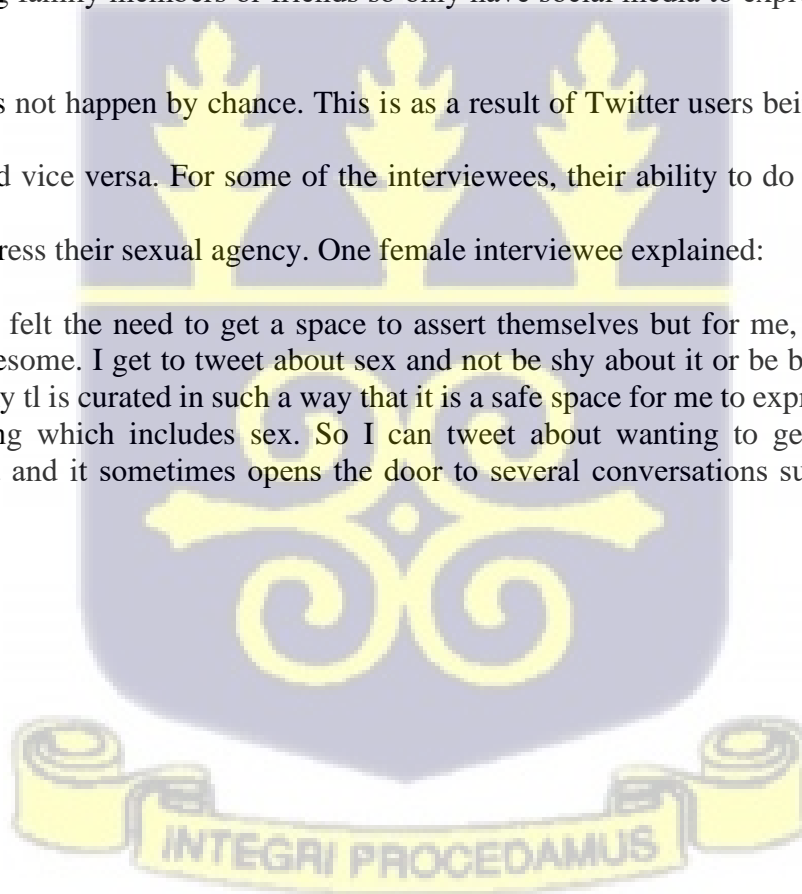
4.4.1 Safe Space

Findings from the study indicated that Twitter provides an environment for Ghanaian Twitter users to be themselves without being harassed, judged, criticized or discriminated against. Five of the interviewees mentioned that twitter has become an online space where individuals who do not have the ability to define or control their sexuality in the real world are able to do it free from criticism and scrutiny. One male interviewee observed:

“...Twitter, especially, is a safer and accepting space for people with different sexual orientation and it’s also sexually liberating. So women and girls who were not able to express out loud to their friends and family they know in real life are able to talk about sex and it’s not looked at like you are a girl and you are talking about sex on Twitter. A lot more people are accepting and all that and especially the LGBTQ community they also have a lot more freedom on Twitter especially those who kind of don’t have accepting family members or friends so only have social media to express themselves...” (Interviewee E)

This safe space does not happen by chance. This is as a result of Twitter users being selective about who they follow and vice versa. For some of the interviewees, their ability to do this made Twitter safe for them to express their sexual agency. One female interviewee explained:

“...Boys have never felt the need to get a space to assert themselves but for me, a woman, I think twitter has been awesome. I get to tweet about sex and not be shy about it or be bullied into silence because of course my tl is curated in such a way that it is a safe space for me to express myself and be vocal about anything which includes sex. So I can tweet about wanting to get sex or a sexual experience I’ve had and it sometimes opens the door to several conversations surrounding sex...” (Interviewee K).



4.4.2 Twitter Offers Pseudo-anonymity

Another interesting observation from the interviews was the pseudo-anonymity Twitter offers its users. Findings indicated that Twitter offers young Ghanaian users the chance to use pseudonyms as their profile names making it easy to hide their identity to some extent. Some of the interviewees mentioned that this pseudo-anonymity made it very easy for minority groups such as women and LGBTQ+ individuals to freely express themselves and take control of their sexuality. One male interviewee embodied this in his comments:

“...people feel comfortable on twitter, and it allows them to express themselves easily because they see everyone else doing it. Also, social media is basically a screen you can hide behind so you don’t have to see the person you are talking to which would usually bring about some nerves...” (Interviewee D)

For some interviewees however this pseudo-anonymity gives individuals confidence to be themselves because they have a feeling that their identity is hidden. Twitter has a relatively small number of Ghana's internet population using it making the likelihood of having family members and people you know in real life on there. One female interviewee explained:

“The great thing about it is that while it’s a relatively popular app, not too many people have their immediate family and also some of their friends on it or having access to their accounts or knowing what they tweet. So considering the modern young person who is in tune with who they are and what their sexual representation and interests are, it’s easy for that person to want to tweet about those things or react to tweets about those things...” (Interviewee F)

Some female interviewees mentioned how these reasons make it easy for them to openly talk about sex and all its related issues and how it has demystified sex for them and helped them take control of their sexuality. One female interviewee explained:

“...I followed a lot of smart, amazing, women.... feminist women. And they just filled me up with so much knowledge about these things and removing shame like purity culture and all those things. It just helped me and then learning that vocabulary is very important because sometimes a lot of these things while I was young growing up I had these feelings and thoughts but I didn’t have the words to bring them out but now I can. There are so many things. I can talk endlessly about it because I have the vocabulary to be able to express myself...” (Interviewee H)

4.4.3 Easy Access to Sexually Explicit Content

Five of the interviewees mentioned that Twitter has a relaxed policy regarding explicit content which makes it easy for young Ghanaian twitter users to access sexually explicit content and post their own than other sites like Facebook, Tumblr and Instagram. They explained that Twitter's flexible regulation with regards to sexually explicit content makes content like that easily accessible and also encourages users to post explicit content of themselves. It is quite normal to post explicit photos and videos of oneself without it being flagged down by the site. One male interviewee explained:

“...Twitter in particular has a more lax regulation policy towards sexually explicit content. This is one main factor as compared to other social media sites such as Facebook and all of those where getting access to sexual content is more difficult. Because of this, young people are given more access to media which portrays sexual content and sexuality and it informs them on their own sexual preferences...” (Interviewee E)

Some interviewees mentioned that there were pages on Twitter dedicated to content like that and users engage with such pages which include women who are not supposed to be loud when it comes to matters of their sexuality.

4.4.4 Access to community

Findings from the interviews indicated Twitter provides an environment for young Ghanaian twitter users to connect with people they have common interests and shared experiences with. Some of the interviewees mentioned that having access to the experience of other people and realizing how accepting certain things with regards to their sexuality are gives them confidence to fully express themselves and their sexuality. One interviewee explained:

“...Twitter is just about people sharing your opinion on things so people tend to make friends with people who have the same mindset that's kind of why it's easier to make friends You know how people with common interests are able to create communities.” (Interviewee H)

For one male interviewee, it has aided women in particular to face their sexuality head on. He embodied this in his comment:

“...I think this point goes for women in particular. There’s access to international movements such as the me too movement and co which has more or less emphasized the need for women to take control of their own sexual agency and be able to say what they want sexually, reject certain unwanted sexual contact or sexual advances and so on. So in all of these ways it is empowering young people to claim and to take hold of their sexual agency.” (Interviewee D)

4.5 Twitter as a tool for redefining traditional codes of intimacy

The fourth key objective of this study was to identify how young Ghanaian adults are using Twitter to redefine traditional codes of intimacy. Findings indicated that women are initiating intimate relationships on Twitter. Secondly, it appears the dating process has become easier and young Ghanaian adults are openly displaying their affection for their intimate partners online.

4.5.1 Women Initiating Intimate Relationships

While traditional codes of courtship in Ghana place the man in the position of the courter and the woman that of the courted, on Twitter, it appears things have changed. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they had seen several instances where women reached out to men they liked to express interest in them rather than being passive and waiting in the hope of the men noticing them. This they attributed to how small the world has become because of Twitter. Young Ghanaian Twitter users have access to the experiences of other young people across the world and learn from them things that may be contrary to the Ghanaian norms. A woman expressing her interest in a man first goes against traditional codes of intimacy. Women are even encouraged online to make the moves first if they are interested in someone. One interviewee explained:

“...someone will create a thread and say ladies shoot your shots or enter somebody’s DMs and then post the screenshots of how it goes. It forces people to move out of their comfort zone and try things that they usually wouldn’t and there’s also the issue of sexual agency being less damning on Twitter. If a girl on Twitter expresses a lot of sexual ideas or expresses herself sexually, it’s fine because it happens all the time on Twitter. It’s kind of part of a real-world movement where women are taking back control of their sexuality. And even though we haven’t reached that point in Ghana, Twitter is a global community that has empowered girls here to do the same thing because you know it’s Twitter and other people are doing it too so you know it kind of gives them the vim.” (Interviewee E)

Interviewees shared the same sentiments with regard to how exposure to things happening around the world which includes women being very active when it comes to intimate relationships. The fact that women sharing their success stories online is emboldening other women to do the same. One female interviewee stated:

"...I belong to a community on twitter that's always challenging the status quo already. And there are several times where people share their how we met stories and it's the woman who made the first move. You know, stuff like that gets you thinking like if others are doing it and it's working then what stops me?" (Interviewee J)

4.5.2 Easier Dating Process

Some of the interviewees mentioned that Twitter has made the dating process easier and very convenient as opposed to the traditional way we "do" love. Some of the interviewees stated that Twitter offers young Ghanaian users a wide pool of their preferences to choose from given the way it gives them access to people they share interests and common things with. This is because the platform is open to everyone and they get to have a wide pool to pick partners from. One interviewee explained:

"...It's so easy to acquire smartphones these days and with any kind of smart phone at all and an Internet connection you get to have access to a wide array of potential friends and potential partners regardless of your own behaviors and your characters so you can have a group which fits perfectly for you. If you are a football fan, you have football Twitter, you have Future Twitter, you have feminist Twitter and all of these little classifications and if you're more adventurous it will allow you to kind of go across these stratifications and meet people with different opinions and different views....an opportunity you won't have in ordinary life." (Interviewee D)

So whereas traditionally there is a typical way these relationships are formed, Twitter offers a shortcut that defies these norms.



4.5.3 Public Display of Affection

Ghanaian traditional norms frown upon displaying sexual and romantic affection for partners in public. However, findings indicate that young Ghanaian adults publicly display affection for each other on Twitter. They post pictures of themselves doing romantic things and sexual things sometimes.

One female interviewee recounted:

"...You know how virtual twitter is so you don't get shy doing PDA online even though everyone can see it and then you see what gifts girls are giving to their boyfriends, so you take a few notes" (Interviewee J)

Interviewees mentioned that since it was a common thing for people to be expressive when it comes to intimacy, men are also very expressive and show some vulnerability which is usually discouraged in real life outside the Twitter space. One interviewee explained:

"...it encourages vulnerability. It's been easier for me to get stuff off my chest and say what I feel because usually society doesn't give men a way for men to do that so usually, we have to suppress stuff. Twitter has really helped with us being expressive romantically through seeing other people be expressive and the feedback that they get has encouraged a couple of others to also not to be afraid to share how we feel because at the end of the day we get to drop off that weight that we've been holding onto for so long..." (Interviewee B)

Some of the interviewees attributed the redefining of the traditional codes of intimacy to the movements springing up that are challenging norms that in a way limit a particular group of people from reaching their full potential. One interviewee mentioned that the uncensored nature of twitter has amplified voices that have been silenced over the years due to how contrary the beliefs they have been trying to share go contrary to traditional norms. One male interviewee explained:

"...we get to know see other people's experiences lived experiences...you know... from the US, from the UK, different cultures so then you begin to question your own social constructs that are put in place in your own culture and you know even with the feminist movement even with women wanting social, economic and political equality with men, they also begin to demand their say in relevance of the social constructs." (Interviewee B)

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the findings, the conclusions and recommendations that resulted from the study. To understand how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter in their search for intimacy online, the study carried out in-depth interviews with young Ghanaian adults who use Twitter. The research questions for the study dwelt on finding out how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter for self-presentation online, navigating the various stages of their intimate relationships, expressing their sexual agency and redefining the codes of intimacy.

The study posed four research questions on how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter for self-presentation in order to attract intimate partners, how they navigate the various stages of their romantic and sexual relationships using Twitter, how they express their sexual agency and the ways in which Twitter use may be redefining traditional codes of intimacy. This section juxtaposes the findings on these questions with what existing knowledge says about the issues of interest. The discussion of the findings has been arranged according to the objectives that were set for the study.

5.1 Research Question 1: How do young Ghanaian adults use Twitter for self- presentation in order to attract intimate partners?

The findings from the study reveal that young Ghanaian adults employ Twitter for self- presentation in various ways that help them attract the intimate partners they desire. These include being particular about pictures of themselves they share, tweeting about their need for intimacy and having intentional interactions. It appears that young Ghanaian adults understand that Twitter is a public platform that

has other users on it. Hence, they employ several tactics to ensure that they manage how other users perceive them. This is in line with Goffman's (1956) theory that people manage impressions of themselves by posturing themselves onstage - this stage being Twitter. Twitter is a social networking site that allows people to interact with other people. As such, individuals will constantly try to manage impressions by controlling information in their interactions there. The study found that young Ghanaian adults are particular about the pictures they share of themselves on Twitter. They consciously select good pictures of themselves to portray a good version of themselves to the audience (other users observing them). This finding also corroborates Leary's (1990) argument that individuals constantly put in effort to portray themselves in a certain way that caters to their greater advantage and is apposite for the desired result of gaining approval from other individuals in the social situation.

Among other things, the study also found out that young Ghanaian adults sometimes tweet about their need for intimacy and are intentional with their interactions on Twitter in their bid to attract potential intimate partners. This finding is in line with Lui and Browne (2014) and Greene et al's (2006) findings that young people are conscious when choosing what identity-related information they disclose to their audience.

5.2 Research Question 2: How do young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to navigate the various stages of their romantic and sexual relationships?

The findings from the study revealed that young Ghanaians initiate intimate relationships on Twitter by sliding into the DMs of potential partners, following potential partners and interacting with potential partners. It appears that they have to be active individuals and not passive for these bonds to be formed. This shows that the initiation of these intimate relationships is intentional and does not just

happen - they involve conscious effort. This finding is in line with Meenagh's (2015) findings that new media environments provide a new context within which young people negotiate their love/sex relationships. These negotiations are not too different from how they were done before the advent of new media technologies as there still needs to be the direct contact and agreement. However, the difference here is the mediation by technology and the uncertainty it brings as the true persona of the person can be portrayed differently to whom they are engaging in direct conversations with.

Young Ghanaian adults maintain their intimate relationships on Twitter in many ways, according to the findings. They flirt on the timeline, share tweets in the DMs, post images of their partners to publicly display affection, post subliminal messages, avoid interactions that cause conflict, and talk constantly in the DMs. In addition to these, though, the maintenance stage often requires the intervention of other more conversation friendly channels such as phones. At this stage the need for more intense interactions calls for channels that are more suited to deeper discovery about the other person and Twitter is sometimes considered to be inadequate. These findings are in line with McKinney et al (2012), Yang (2014), and Murray and Campbell (2015) who made claims that individuals make use of digital spaces to express their love for one another, communicate with each other and also discourage advances from people they do not want to associate with. The findings also reflect Khonou's (2010) argument that new mobile technologies, in their variety, play a significant role in the maintenance of intimate relationships.

The findings from the study also revealed that, in the unfortunate case of terminating the relationship, young Ghanaian adults block their intimate partners, unfollow them, mute them and in some cases, vent on the timeline. This finding is in line with Khonou's (2010) argument that new mobile technologies facilitate an environment where partners are able to put an end to relationships regardless of proximity.

5.3 Research Question 3: How do young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to express their sexual agency?

The findings from the study revealed that Twitter offers young Ghanaian adults a safe space, pseudo-anonymity, access to community and easy access to sexually explicit content which enable them to have the ability to define and control their sexuality, free from scrutiny and judgement. These findings are in line with findings from Bosch (2011) that gender and sexuality are lived social relations and ongoing performative processes that are continuously being negotiated online. Findings from the study revealed that young female adults, in contravention of traditional codes of sexual behaviour, use Twitter to claim their sexuality and define it on their own terms. Like Craig and McInroy's findings (2014), the study finds that young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to explore identities, behaviors, and lifestyles that might remain inaccessible offline and therefore allows them more freedom to explore. It appears that the pseudo-anonymity Twitter offers allows young adults to freely express their sexuality without any fears. This finding is in line with Meltobb and Miller's (2015) study findings that young people are taking greater risks when it comes to posting behaviours on twitter even though most of them have public accounts.

5.4 Research Question 4: How do young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to redefine the codes of intimacy?

The findings from the study revealed that women are initiating intimate relationships on Twitter. This is a change in the way love is conducted traditionally. Similar to findings from Boonmongkona et al (2007), women exert agency in negotiating and expressing their sexuality despite discourses on their chastity which suppresses them both online and offline. Twitter gives people greater agency when it comes to pursuing potential partners and liquefying society's ideals of intimacy and how it should be

done. Twitter is softening young adults' sense of appropriate gender roles, language and posture customary to in-person interactions, reaffirming Khonou's (2010) finding that new media serve as icebreakers of intimate relationships. Also, findings indicate that Twitter has made the dating process much easier. It offers its users a wide pool of their preferences for which to choose affirming findings from Yang (2014) that modern intimate relationships and gender practices are being significantly influenced by new technologies.

5.5 Conclusion

Overall, the findings highlight the following conclusions:

Young Ghanaian Twitter users use the tool in very similar ways when it comes to online-based intimate relationships. They use twitter for:

- Self-presentation online
- Navigating the stages of their intimate relationships - initiation, maintenance and termination.
- Expressing their sexual agency
- Redefining the traditional codes of intimacy

When it comes to using Twitter to express sexual agency, women use it more given that it provides them with a safe space to do things in ways different from what traditional norms expect of them.

Findings also show that Twitter has different implications for how relationships at different stages of evolution are conducted.

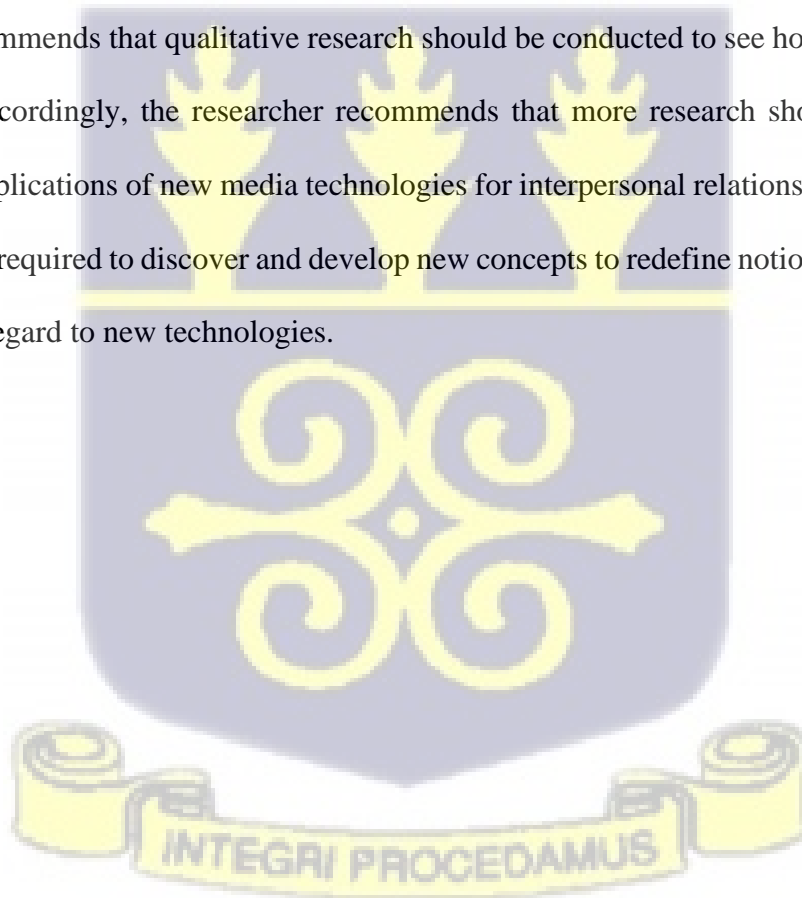
Altogether, these findings lead to the general conclusion that Twitter is enabling a change in the way love and intimate relationships are conducted traditionally.

5.6 Limitations

This study was successful in meeting its key objectives. However, it faced some limitations. Interviews were not done in person because the data for the study was collected at the time when there were strict public restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that some non-verbal cues were unavailable which may have been of essence to the study. Also, there was great difficulty finding literature on new media and interpersonal relationships in Ghana. This means most of the literature reviewed was based on other geographical locations other than Ghana.

5.7 Recommendations

The researcher recommends that qualitative research should be conducted to see how widespread this phenomenon is. Accordingly, the researcher recommends that more research should probe on the transformational implications of new media technologies for interpersonal relationships. Also, further research is urgently required to discover and develop new concepts to redefine notions of relationships and intimacy with regard to new technologies.



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APPENDIX: Interview Guide

Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana

Topic: “It Began With a DM”: A Study of Young Ghanaian Twitter Users’ Search for Intimacy Online.

The aim of this research is to gain understanding of how young Ghanaian adults use Twitter to create, negotiate and maintain intimate relationships and how it redefines the traditional codes of intimacy.

Ethical guarantees

The interview will be recorded (voicenotes) to ensure that all discussions are accurately captured. This exercise is for the sole purpose of research and I wish to assure you that your views will be treated with utmost confidentiality and for the intended purpose only. The time will be at your discretion. Your participation is voluntary and you are free at any time to withdraw from the interview should you deem it necessary.

Question Guide

1. Please tell me about yourself
2. Could you describe for me your Twitter experience (how long, what you do on platform etc)
3. Typically, what information do you post about yourself on twitter?
4. What is your understanding of online intimacy?
5. What are your thoughts about using online platforms such as Twitter to find love and romantic partners?
6. Please share with me an example of your using Twitter to find romantic partners
 - a. Probe: how the relationship progressed e.g. how long before conversations move from Twitter DMs to either meeting up or using another app with more chat features?
 - b. Probe: describe your decision process in the personal experience you just shared.
7. How does Twitter help with navigating the various stages of your intimate

relationships?

Probe: Initiation stage, maintenance stage, termination etc

8. Tell me about how you position yourself online in order to find romantic partners on Twitter?
9. What strategies do you employ to attract intimate partners on Twitter?
10. Among your network of friends, how common are twitter-based relationships?
11. What do you think are the reasons people are using Twitter to search for intimacy?
12. Studies have shown that new media is giving young people an avenue to express their sexual agency. In what ways do you think Twitter facilitates this?
13. How has Twitter made you expressive, from a romantic point of view?
14. Are there certain situations or happenings on Twitter that facilitates your expressing your interest in someone?
Probe subliminals
Probe twitter romance games
Probe personal experiences with these
15. How do you think Twitter is changing the norms/traditional codes of intimacy e.g., expectation that men should initiate relationships etc.?
16. Are there any final thoughts you want to share with me.

