

**Investigating the Social Media Literacies of Female Undergraduates in  
English: An Ethnographic Case Study from Saudi Arabia**

**Nada Fahad Bin Dahmash**

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

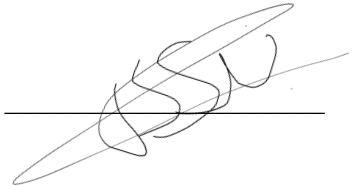
Doctor of Philosophy at Lancaster University

**May 2019**

## DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Signed by \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Nada Bin Dahmash', written over a horizontal line.

Nada Bin Dahmash

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platforms and for allowing me to view their posts. I feel privileged to have had this honour. Without them, this PhD study would not have been possible.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Investigating the Social Media Literacies of Female Undergraduates in English: An Ethnographic Case Study from Saudi Arabia**

**By**

**Nada Fahad Bin Dahmash**

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This PhD research investigated the literacies of Saudi female undergraduates that emerged as they used English on social media. My research participants were Saudi female users who were studying English Language and Translation at a university in Saudi Arabia. I draw on Literacy Studies (LS), which understands literacies as social practices involving more than technical skills. By means of a connective approach to ethnography, I conducted detailed online observation of these Saudi female undergraduates on social media, had repeated informal conversations, held semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews, and kept an online log of English usage on social media. This thesis focuses on the conceptualisation of social media by these Saudi female undergraduates, the literacy practices that emerge in English on

social media, the reasons for using English, the material resources and concrete activities they employed as they read and wrote, as well as illustrating how they projected their identities in English on social media.

The findings indicate that these Saudi female undergraduates' understandings of social media were affected by three factors: the perceived roles of social media, their understanding of the basic components of social media and their personal histories of social media. Social media is defined as Internet-based smartphone apps that perform various roles in the lives of their users, as well as enabling users to post content and interact with large numbers of other users on a regular basis via an account with a unique code. These Saudi female undergraduates had diverse and tangled literacy practices in English on social media that were part of their everyday lives. These undergraduates chose to use English for various reasons and drew on a wide range of approaches as they read and wrote in English on social media. The findings also indicate that these Saudi female undergraduates projected their identities in English by displaying certain character traits on their social media profiles and displaying their current feelings and situations. The findings of this research have implications for language educators and language learners based on the in-depth accounts of the English literacies of these female undergraduates and the approaches they drew on to correct, craft and improve their English. These approaches involved the use of Google app, Google Translate app, Dictionary apps, the COCA website, asking people online or offline, and changing the default settings of their smartphone English keyboards.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background: Social Media in Saudi Arabia

Social media rose in Saudi Arabia and “young Saudis are increasingly relying on social media to express and entertain themselves, earn money and meet friends and potential mates” (Hubbard, 2015 para. 4). As a Saudi myself, I use social media on a daily basis. I started to use social media in 2009. I access social media from my smartphone to socialise with my friends and family. In my generation, we chat and share photos taken from our everyday lives on different platforms. Using social media became very popular among my age group and soon this phenomenon exploded. It spread to different age groups and Saudis have been reported to be avid social media users (Fouad, 2015). According to Hubbard (2015), social media has boomed in Saudi Arabia due to the fast Internet and the extremely restrictive social codes that limit Saudis’ public life. The *Saudi Gazette* newspaper published a report on 26 May 2016 stating that the use of social media apps is increasing in Saudi Arabia, as 93 per cent of Saudi nationals access the Internet (Saad, 2016).

The number of social media users in Saudi Arabia and the most used platforms were explored by the Social Clinic; a Saudi social business consultancy and social media agency. According to the Social Clinic (2015), Saudi Arabians were reported to send an average of 210 million tweets per month and the country to have 5.4 million Twitter users, of which 51 per cent were females. This indicates that females are slightly more likely to tweet than males. The report also points out that Twitter users in Saudi Arabia make up 40 per cent of Twitter users in the Arab world, highlighting that Saudis are very active on Twitter.

Yet, in Saudi Arabia, Twitter is not the most popular social media platform. Five social media platforms have been reported as popular, though their daily usage varied (TNS, 2015). These platforms according, to their usage, are listed from the most to the least used: WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube (see Fig.1.1).

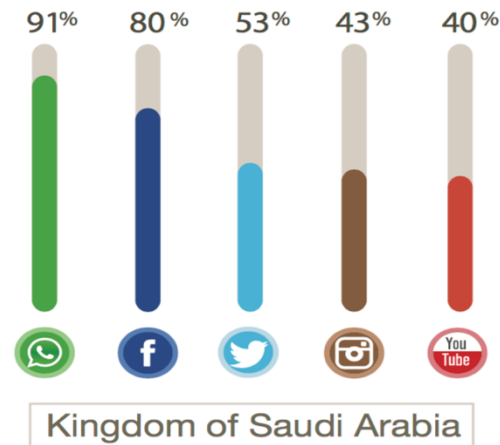


Figure 1.1: WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube usage in Saudi Arabia  
(adapted from TNS, 2015, p. 4)

Statistics about social media use in 2016 in Saudi Arabia were published by Global Media Insight (2016), another social media agency. In this report, social media was divided into: social network platforms and social chat apps (see Fig.1.2). It provided evidence that the number of Twitter users was growing and had reached 6.37 million in Saudi Arabia. According to that report, WhatsApp users exceeded Facebook Messenger and Snapchat users. It also provided evidence that Facebook user numbers exceeded Twitter and Instagram users. A year later, Saudis were reported to be the most active Twitter users in the Arab countries, and this result came from measuring the numbers of tweets and trending hashtags (Salem, 2017). Twitter is not the only social media that has grown; Snapchat is on the list. Snapchat has seven million active Saudi users each day (Saeed, 2017) and this accounts for 21 per cent of the total

population of Saudi Arabia. It is important to mention that Saudi Arabia is a particularly young country, with 60 per cent of the total population being under 30 years of age (Chulov, 2017).

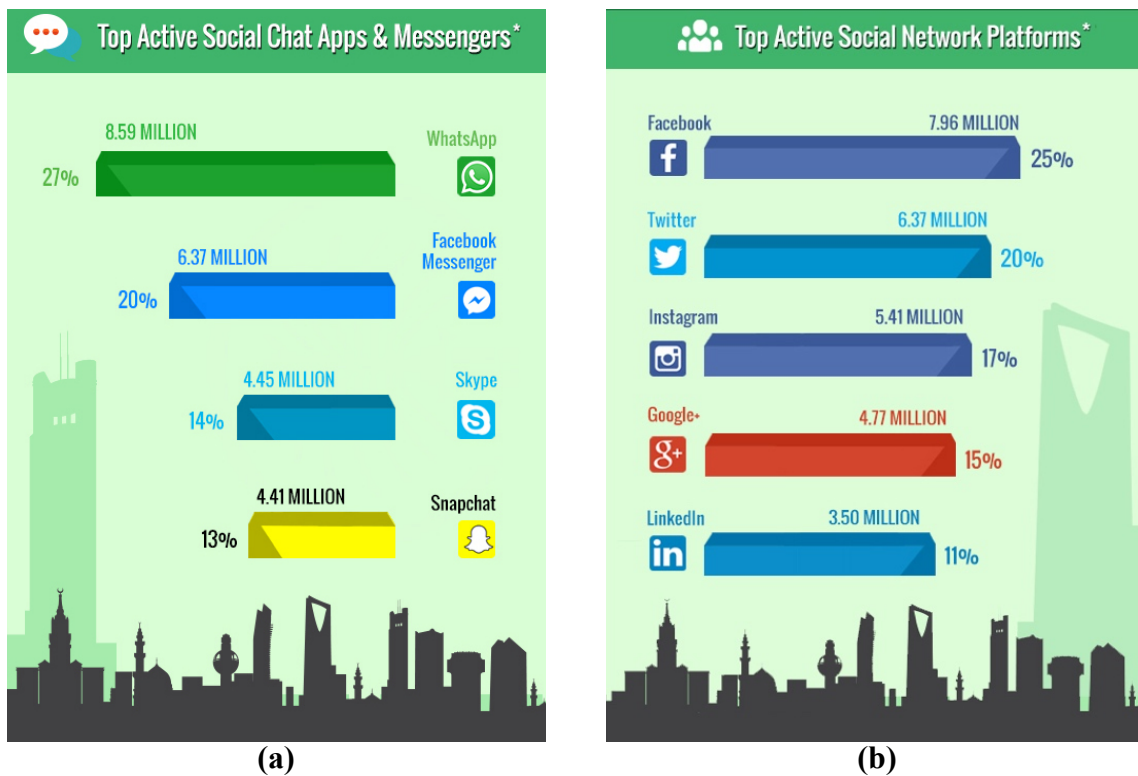


Figure 1.2: Active social media users in Saudi Arabia in millions on selected platforms arranged into (a) social chat apps (b) social network platforms (adapted from GMI, 2016)

In terms of English use on Social media, Salem (2017) indicated that the number of Facebook users who opted to use English increased in the Arab Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, between 2014 and 2016. Salem further indicated that English was used more than Arabic by 18.3 per cent of users on Instagram in all Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, and the use of English on Facebook increased by 7.6 per cent. To be more specific, 50.5 per cent of Saudi female undergraduates were reported to use English on Instagram, whereas 27 per cent used English on the whole range of social media platforms on an everyday basis (Albawardi, 2017; personal communication). Therefore, the use of English on social media by young people seems to be common in Saudi Arabia.

From the aforementioned statistics, the number of social media platforms in Saudi Arabia appears to be growing as these platforms continue to update their different affordances and produce smartphone apps. I collected my data in late 2016 and this is the year taken as current in the fast-moving field of social media, unless otherwise specified. It is possible to download social media apps to any smartphone or tablet connected to the Internet for free. In 2016, for example, the Snapchat app allows its users to create accounts with lists of friends in order to take and upload photos or short videos, called snaps, that last for a maximum of 10 seconds for each snap as part of a story which can only be viewed by approved friends for 24 hours, before it spontaneously disappears. This app allows its users, snapchatters, to send private snaps in the form of short videos or photos to specific friends, and these can only be viewed once before they disappear. Another feature of Snapchat is that it can only be downloaded as an app to smartphones or tablets. Twitter, another social media platform, allows its users to create their online content with images, an avatar and a written bio about the account user, as well as letting its users post 140-character messages, referred to as tweets, which contain multimedia content such as images or videos. This platform allows its users to add their own comments, quote tweets, retweet and like tweets. They can add lists of friends to be followed and Twitter gives users the possibility to secure their account by letting them add or block people who want to follow them or read their tweets. But what has been distinctive about Twitter from the very beginning is that it has always aimed, usually successfully, to be accessible whatever the hardware, if connected to the Internet. Mobiles, desktops, PCs, Macs and tablets – it has always put a lot of investment into this.

## **1.2 The Position of Social Media in the Life of Young People**

Social media appears to dominate the everyday lives of young people with access to the Internet. For example, Kutbi (2015) indicates that one interviewed undergraduate saw social

media as a family member, as she uses it on a daily basis. In the same vein, boyd (2010) reported that teenagers in the United States value using social media as they compare losing social media to losing their connection to the social world and one informant expressed this by stating “if you’re not on MySpace, you don’t exist” (p.79).

Social media consumes a considerable time in Saudis’ everyday life. Rajab & Al-Sadi (2015), exploring the reading habits of 330 undergraduates, of both genders, taking intensive English courses at three different universities in Saudi Arabia, indicate that about two-thirds of these undergraduates spend 3–6 hours everyday accessing social media from their smartphones. Similarly, Alkhatnai (2016) indicates that half of Saudi undergraduates of both genders who study English at King Saud University spend 20–30 hours per week on social media. Kutbi (2015) explored females in particular and reported that the majority of these Saudi undergraduates spent around five hours per day on social media. This indicates that Saudi females spend more time on social media. To obtain more details, young Saudi and Arab social media users of both genders were surveyed about the average length of time each user spends on social media per session (not per day), and the report indicated variable lengths of time (TNS, 2015). In the report, a quarter of social media users spent 16–30 minutes on a single session, while 23 per cent of them spent 5–14 minutes. This suggests that these young people use multiple social media platforms and navigate from one to another during a single session. It also indicates that people differ in their engagement time per session.

I was interested in people’s literacy practices in English on social media as they carry out their everyday lives. Through this research, I aimed to distil reading and writing on social media in English, as performed by these Saudi female undergraduates. The focus of the present study was on the social media literacies of these Saudi female undergraduates in English. I explain my rationale for choosing females in the next section.

### **1.3 Females in Saudi Arabia**

I consider describing the status of females in Saudi Arabia who are full citizens essential before I explain my choice of “young women” in particular. The situation of women in Saudi Arabia derives from both Saudi and Islamic culture. Women were given their economic and social rights in Islam according to the Holy Quran. They are legally entitled to have their wealth in their own names, to inherit and are not obliged to give their possessions to their families. Men, however, are entitled to safeguard their female relatives by contributing money and protection. For protection purposes, women and men who are not related by blood are not allowed to sit together in the same place.

Saudi culture derives its guidelines from Islam, and as a result a separation between men and women is established in most aspects of everyday life, including in public places. This separation is regarded as segregation and affects the norms of Saudi society. It has even been claimed that “Saudi Arabia is the most profoundly gender-segregated nation on Earth” (Cynthia, 2016, February, para. 3), indeed males are not allowed to mix with females in restaurants, cafés or even in queues. Females and males are not allowed to mix together in educational institutions (Baki, 2004). There are schools and colleges for boys and schools and colleges for girls. There is always a section for males and a section for females in banks and government agencies. A considerable number of Saudis, from my knowledge, design their houses to meet this norm, and thus the ideal house is one that has one reception room for female guests and another for male guests. Thus, males and females who are not related may live completely isolated from each other in the physical space of Saudi Arabia.

As a Saudi female, I could not contact males as this would defy both cultural and Islamic norms in Saudi Arabia. I would like to clarify that it is not my intention to draw on gender studies by focusing on females only; it is more a matter of access and reaching participants in conservative

Saudi society. My ethnographic approach (see Chapter 3 for details) requires gaining participants' trust and building a friendly rapport with them, as the success of this approach depends on having good relations (Gobo, 2008), and thus I decided to focus on Saudi females only.

The most important reason for my decision to focus on Saudi females was their ability to position themselves in creative ways in the online world. These Saudi females expressed their opinion on international issues such as the US elections in 2016 and condemned what happened to Muslims in Aleppo on Twitter hashtags (see section 6.5.2). Their activities on social media shed light on their intellectual level and suggested that these females were valid subjects in their own right. These females presented their everyday life in English and kept the Saudi norms in mind. They celebrated their social gathering on Snapchat and their meetings and college life on both Twitter and Snapchat. These females were selective and extended their everyday life by posting short snaps on Snapchat showing their faces smiling and spreading their joy to their Snapchat friends and did not present their faces or their friends' faces on Twitter. They also had complex multi-layered practices in English that needed deep thinking to grasp what they intended to say; e.g. posting on a Snapchat story that she was tired and not well to apologise for not fulfilling a favour (see section 6.4) and sending an indirect advice to a specific follower on Twitter (see section 6.2). Focusing on females enabled me to understand how they managed their social media literacies to fit in the Saudi norms and be part of the wider social context in Saudi Arabia.

#### **1.4 Aim and Rationale of the Study**

As a teacher of English in a college, I saw that Saudi female undergraduates are often busy with their smartphones and I heard that they were using social media, and this provided the motivation for this study. In my experience, female undergraduates frequently hold and stare

at their smartphone screens during their classes, and I learned that they were engaged with social media. My colleagues often complain about this phenomenon where undergraduates respond to their smartphone notifications during classes by typing and even laughing. We are not the first to experience such activity, as Cox (2014) has noticed the same phenomenon elsewhere. Cox points out that “college students are on social media sites during classes, hiding their smartphones beneath their desks, or using lab computers to access platforms like Twitter and Facebook” (ibid., p.21). The majority of Saudi female undergraduates spend a long time on social media chatting with friends or family and sharing their experiences by posting videos and photos. In this way, social media has become an important way to maintain communication with others in their everyday lives, especially the social aspect.

Since I teach English in a college, I became interested in exploring the everyday literacy practices of female undergraduates, in particular their habits of reading and writing in English, their L2, via social media. Zourou (2012) claims that various tools built into social media have the potential for multiplying the possibilities for people to learn languages. Similarly, social media platforms potentially afford a wealth of opportunities to learn and improve language skills (Lima & Lamy, 2013; Reinhardt & Chen, 2013; Wigham & Chanier, 2013) and have the potential to facilitate learning in higher education in Saudi Arabia (Alkhatnai, 2016).

In light of this, questions regarding the literacies engaged in by female Saudi undergraduates in English occupied my mind. Therefore, the aim of this research was to examine female undergraduates’ literacies in English on social media in Saudi Arabia. I aimed to discover the nature of the reading and writing activities female undergraduates engage in in English, and how they viewed social media; to uncover the reasons underpinning using English on social media as well as using English to enact their identities in their literacies; to present a detailed description of the social media literacies of these female Saudi undergraduates in English on

their preferred platforms. Although I had hoped that the study would help me to develop helpful resources to learn English, unfortunately I was not able to present materials that could be implemented directly in English language lessons.

As I explain in Chapter 2, the theoretical and conceptual framework I drew on in my thesis is primarily based on Literacy Studies, which focuses on a social account of literacy (Barton, 2007; Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2012; Street, 1984, 1993, 2001). I drew on ethnographic approaches (explained in Chapter 3) that account for the specificities of literacy practices by relating to an emic perspective of people (Barton, 2012; Green & Bloome, 1997) and a connective approach to ethnography (Leander & McKim, 2003). I also drew on the conceptual frameworks of 'literacy events' and 'literacy practice' (discussed in detail in section 2.1.2). I chose this theoretical framework for my thesis because I noticed that previous studies on social media in Saudi Arabia in English tend to view reading and writing in English as measurable skills (Ahmed, 2016; Almekhlafy & Alzubi, 2016; Alnujaidi, 2017; Alsaleem, 2013; Fattah, 2015; Kutbi, 2015). These studies emerged from a cognitive paradigm of understanding literacy, that is, conceiving of reading and writing as acquired skills, decontextualized from everyday life. I viewed posting and browsing content on social media as a form of social practice. I also viewed social media literacies in English as performed by Saudi female undergraduates as consisting of both skills and activities that were linked to the social and cultural contexts in which these activities occur. In other words, the contexts of social media were seen as a social practice that gathers people and texts in English. In this way, my study gave more insights into social media literacies in English which were culturally embedded and socially constructed in the everyday practices of these female undergraduates in Saudi Arabia.

## 1.5 Perspectives on ‘Social Media’

Social media is itself a new phenomenon; I briefly review various definitions of social media before explaining how I define the term as appropriate for this study. Social media is referred to in the literature as social networking sites (SNS). There are various definitions of SNS but I feel boyd and Ellison’s definition is well thought out. boyd and Ellison (2008) view SNS as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211).

The term ‘social media’ is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Social media, 2018). Ito et al. (2010) use the term social media to refer to “a set of new media that enable social interaction between participants, often through the sharing of media” (p.28). However, these definitions seem to focus on the capability of these websites to enable social interaction by sharing media. Social media is defined from a pedagogical perspective by Joosten (2012) as “web 2.0 applications that have the potential to increase interactions among individuals through creating and sharing” (p.8). Page (2012) comments on social media as follows:

I use the term *social media* to refer to Internet-based applications that promote social interaction between participants. Examples of social media include (but are not limited to) discussion forums, blogs, wikis, podcasting, social network sites, video sharing, and microblogging. Social media is often distinguished from [other] forms of mass media, where mass media is presented as a one-to-many broadcasting mechanism. In contrast, social media delivers content via a network

of participants where the content can be published by anyone but is still distributed across potentially large-scale audiences. [emphasis in original] (ibid., p.5)

From Page's perspective, social interaction and publishing content to a large number of people seem to define social media. Her examples of social media assist the reader to identify what counts as social media. Rajab and Al-Sadi (2015), however, ignore the characteristics of social media and what it is to its users by limiting 'social media' to five smartphone apps, namely, WhatsApp, Viber, Blackberry Messenger, Twitter and Facebook.

The technological advances and constant updating of social media platforms seem to provide reasons for the discrepancies in defining social media. Drawing on the above, I use 'social media' in this research to refer to Internet-based apps that connect participants to one or several other participants by (1) enabling content creation, (2) allowing a list of people to be friends and be friends to and (3) sharing content in any form with different audiences. This list of people 'to be friends and be friends to' may be visible to other social media users and might be hidden depending on the specificities of social media platforms. Examples of social media are Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Path, Tumblr, Flickr, Blackberry Messenger and YouTube.

## **1.6 Research Scope and Research Questions**

Building on the previous brief theoretical and conceptual framework to capture the literacies of Saudi female undergraduates in English on the different social media platforms they access on an everyday basis, my research aimed to explore and examine the social media literacies of these female Saudi undergraduates as they use English on their preferred platforms. To fulfil this aim, I designed five research questions and draw on an ethnographic approach (see Chapter 3 for detail). Each question is explained below.

The first research question is about the meaning of social media from a Saudi female undergraduate perspective. This question was constructed while piloting my data collection (discussed in detail in section 3.2.2.3) as the participants did not have a unifying definition of social media as I had assumed and kept asking me to label the apps on their smartphones as social media apps or other apps. I did not impose my preconceived definition of social media and turned my initial confusion into one of my research questions. I approached this question in focus-group interviews and semi-structured interviews. The first research question is: **How do these female Saudi undergraduates conceptualise social media?**

The second research question is about literacy practices in English as performed by these Saudi female undergraduates on social media. English is used in Saudi Arabia as a second language (L2) while Arabic is the first language (L1) of these Saudi female undergraduates. These Saudi females were majoring in the English and Translation Department and I wanted to identify the literacy practices they performed in English on different social media platforms. At that point, I asked about the social media platforms where these Saudi female undergraduates are active to paint a picture, as I did not want to limit them or instruct them to use a particular set of social media platforms. This question guided me when collecting my data as I observed my participants on social media when they used English and allowed me to ask questions about the nature of those literacies. The second research question is: **What are the literacy practices of these Saudi female undergraduates that emerge as they use English on social media?**

The third research question concerns the reasons underpinning their choice of English in their social media literacies. I was interested to know if their use of English, their L2, is related to their major, which is English language and Translation, and whether there were other reasons for their choice. I noticed that these Saudi female undergraduates sometimes used English and

these concerns led to the third research question, which is: **What reasons do these female Saudi undergraduates have for choosing to use English in their literacies on social media?**

The fourth research question was constructed during data analysis and concerns the specific material resources and concrete activities these Saudi female undergraduates draw on as they use English. This question differs from the second question in that it captures the specificities of the materiality of the tools these Saudis draw on and use when they opt to use English. I noticed while conducting my informal conversations that these Saudi females were using various digital resources to check and edit their spelling, grammar and word choices in English. I sought to investigate their engagement with these, and this led to the fourth question, which is: **What material resources and concrete activities do these Saudi female undergraduates employ as they read and write in English on social media?**

The fifth research question is about how these Saudi female undergraduates construct themselves in English on social media. This question is based on the assumption that literacies on social media are used as an identity resource (Page, 2012). It is also based on the assumption that an examination of literacies in online spaces always leads to asking how the people who engage in these literacies enact their different identities in online spaces (Jones, 2017). Therefore, I wanted to explore how these Saudis constructed themselves in their literacies in English and the dynamics of this process on their preferred social media platforms. Thus, the fifth research question is: **How do these female Saudi undergraduates project their identities through their literacies in English on social media?**

## **1.7 Thesis Outline**

This thesis is divided into ten chapters. In Chapter Two, I focus on theorizing social media literacies by explaining related concepts and synthesizing literature relevant to this study.

In Chapter Three, I deal with the ethnographic research methodology employed by explaining my theoretical perspective, mapping the process of creating the data tools and outlining the journey of collecting my case study data in Saudi Arabia.

In Chapter Four, I focus on the processes of managing and organizing my ethnographic data and how I went about data analysis. I outline how I coded my data before creating the themes that answered my research questions with ATLAS.ti software.

In Chapter Five, I respond to the first research question by illustrating how these Saudi female undergraduates conceptualised social media. I present the three factors that influenced their understanding of social media.

In Chapter Six, I respond to the second research question by offering an account of the diverse literacy practices I found in the data. I present the literacy practices that emerged in English organised in ten categories in the everyday lives of these Saudi female undergraduates.

In Chapter Seven, I respond to the third research question by illustrating the purposes these Saudi female undergraduates had for choosing English on their preferred social media platforms.

In Chapter Eight, I respond to the fourth research question by illustrating the material resources and concrete activities these Saudi female undergraduates drew on as they read and wrote in English on social media.

In Chapter Nine, I respond to the fifth research question by describing the ways in which these Saudi female undergraduates displayed and performed aspects of their identities on social media in English.

In Chapter Ten, I conclude this thesis by summarising my study and clarifying its contribution. I also reflect on the methodology, acknowledge its limitations and suggest further studies to

clarify the relationship between the use of English and social media. I conclude this chapter by discussing some implications of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORISING SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACIES AND A REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

This chapter is about theorising social media literacies and reviewing literature relating to this research. This chapter consists of three parts; I start by outlining the theoretical orientation of literacy I take in this thesis. I present my understanding of literacy drawing on Literacy Studies and review the concepts that are commonly used within this framework that are relevant to my study, such as: literacy events, literacy practices, vernacular literacies and digital literacies. After that, I explain the concept of social media literacies and the paradigms that are used to research English on social media by conducting a critical discussion of the similarities and differences between Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and digital literacies. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) refers to “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997, p.1). I also explain social media literacy-related concepts such as affordances, mode and identity, and how these concepts are applied in my study. I then review the literature that illustrates everyday literacy practices on social media. Finally, I briefly review the literature exploring English on social media by users for whom English is their L2 and elaborate on the literature dealing with researching social media in English in Saudi Arabia.

#### 2.1 Literacy Studies

The acts of posting on social media and browsing social media content are seen as a form of social practice. To understand the social media literacies of these female Saudi undergraduates in English, I draw on Literacy Studies that relates reading and writing to the wider social context in which these activities occur. Reading and writing are not examined as formal English

nor as the ability to decode or encode a set of linguistic expressions in standard English. The act of checking and posting English content on social media, as carried out by these female Saudi undergraduates, is explored in light of a social practice that relates a participant to the social setting(s) she is in.

As I was focusing on a social account of the literacy practices of Saudi undergraduates in English, I adopted Literacy Studies as the theoretical framework for my study. I first introduce the main tenets of Literacy. I then explore key concepts of Literacy Studies that are useful for my study, namely: literacy events, literacy practices, vernacular literacies and digital literacies.

### **2.1.1 Concepts of Literacy**

I identify two perspectives on literacy: a skills-based view and a social practice view. I explain each perspective in this section, followed by presenting the view of literacy I embrace in this thesis.

In the skills-based view, literacy is seen as a set of discrete skills that reside in the individual (Papen, 2005). This skills-based view of literacy is germane to the ‘autonomous model’ of literacy (Street, 1984). The idea of an ‘autonomous model’ of literacy emerged when Street (1984) conducted an ethnographic study of Iranian villagers. He found that ‘illiterate’ people, according to a label given by institutions in that village, performed various literacy activities in their everyday lives that were different from the literacy activities taught in educational settings. These literacies are used in Iranian society and in Quranic schools. Literacy in the ‘autonomous model’ is seen as a neutral variable that can be learned out of context in formal settings.

Barton (2007) acknowledges the benefits of this view in the education sector and asserts that one way of looking at literacy is as follows:

Literacy is seen as a psychological variable which can be measured and assessed. Skills are treated as things which people own or possess; some are **transferable skills**, some are not. Learning to read and write becomes a technical problem and the successful reader and writer is a **skilled** reader and writer. As an educational definition of literacy, this view is very powerful, and it is one which spills over into the rest of society. [emphasis in original] (ibid., pp. 11–12)

Barton (2007) explains that embracing this view of literacy is associated with learning and the practice of schooling. Literacy in this view can be broken down into skills that can be taught to individuals and later tested. Treating reading and writing as a set of skills assists educators in their methods of instruction and their methods of testing. An example of this view is to assess reading in terms of vocabulary choice and assess writing in terms of correct spelling and grammar. In this way, methods of assessing reading and writing, such as grading, testing and evaluating, can be systematically closely linked to the way of teaching. Measuring and abstracting such skills away from the individual then becomes an autonomous view of literacy, removing assessment from an authentic context of social practice.

This skills-based view of literacy is narrow as it does not look at reading and writing that originate outside institutions and relate to social and cultural aspects of literacy. Thus, the reading and writing that these Saudi female undergraduates do on social media in English are not seen as literacy.

The second perspective on literacy is the social practice view. Viewing literacy as a social practice, according to Barton (2001), came about as a reaction to the dissatisfaction with viewing reading and writing in terms of cognitive skills, as these are “based on over-simplistic psychological models” (ibid., p.93). One influential study that deals with viewing literacy in

this way was conducted by Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1981), who investigated the Vai community in Liberia. They view 'literacy' as:

...a set of socially organised practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it. Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in a specific context of use. (ibid., p. 236)

Thus, the social aspect of literacy is acknowledged and the idea of conceptualising reading and writing as purely decoding and encoding scripts is seen as insufficiently broad. This view is referred to by Street (1984) as the 'ideological model' of literacy. Literacy in the 'ideological model' is not seen as merely neutral and technical skills, but as a social practice that is tied to people's values, social attitudes and prevailing discourses (Street, 1993). Street (1993) asserts the following:

[the ideological model] does not attempt to deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power. In that sense the 'ideological' model subsumes rather than excludes the works undertaken within the 'autonomous' model. (ibid., p. 9)

I draw on Street's (1993) 'ideological model' of literacy that sees literacy as a social practice and thus provides a wider lens on literacy. The 'ideological model' entails a holistic view of the various purposes, sources and contexts wherein people make sense of their literacy activities. This perspective starts with what people do with literacy in their everyday lives (Barton, 2007).

I also draw on Barton and Hamilton's (2012) view of literacy as a social practice in the updated edition of their book 'Local Literacies'. They posit literacy as follows:

- a process rather than a thing to be possessed and exchanged.
- part of social practice, embedded in collective action and the creation of everyday worlds.
- an identity resource, [for] the making of meanings and persons.
- constantly re-invented in different material forms, from carving on stone, to printed on paper to digital screens. (ibid., p. xxix)

From the above, I acknowledge that viewing literacy as an isolated set of skills to be gained out of context is easy, but perhaps inadequate, in terms of revealing people's whole gamut of literacy practices (see section 2.1.2.2 for details of literacy practices). Literacy is ideological that starts from the everyday lives of individuals and combine viewing literacy as situated skills and processes which cannot be owned by a single individual. Literacy (1) is embedded in the social context, collective activities and cultural practices in which these occur, (2) differs according to purposes, (3) is reinvented and able to evolve in material forms. I also hold that literacies [in the plural] consist of 'literacy practices', which these Saudi female undergraduates drew on to use English in their activities on their preferred social media platforms.

The skills-based view of literacy is the prevailing model in Saudi Arabia. It is, therefore, the model that the studies I am going to discuss in sections 2.3 and 2.3.1 adopt, although the researchers in these studies do not, of course, identify themselves as drawing on the 'autonomous model' of reading and writing.

## **2.1.2 Literacy Events and Literacy Practices**

Literacy Studies scholars have found using the terms ‘literacy events’ and ‘literacy practices’ to demonstrate the literacy experiences and accounts of people useful. I present various perspectives of literacy events and literacy practices and then illustrate the notions I embrace in my thesis.

### **2.1.2.1 Literacy Events**

The concept of ‘literacy events’ in researching literacy experiences began with Heath (1982) exploring the literacy surrounding bedtime stories and the significance of talking around texts. Heath (1982) examined how parents read bedtime stories aloud and talk around this activity with their children. According to her, literacy events are “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (ibid., p. 50).

The term literacy events is used as the basic unit to analyse the activities of reading and writing (Barton, 2007). Literacy events are viewed as activities in which literacy has a purpose, in the form of either a written text or a spoken utterance around a text, which is essential to activities (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995). These events are observable episodes that come from practices and consistently arise in social contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Barton and Hamilton (2000) contend that defining literacy events as observable activities that involve written texts is straightforward. Using the term literacy events is useful as it provides researchers with a means to concentrate on a specific situation, see what is happening and be able to determine its characteristics (Street, 2001).

Literacy events were originally defined as face-to-face events. When faced with online interactions, however, this concept can still be used but is usually confined to written texts.

Barton and Lee (2013), in their book *Language Online: Investigating Digital Texts and Practices*, illustrate how to define the boundaries of literacy events and literacy practices in online settings by providing examples of literacy events as follows:

...going online to comment on a news story, to book a ticket, to play a game or to arrange to meet a friend all involve negotiating written language and are all literacy events. In deciding where and when to do these things, along with what styles of language to draw upon, the participants draw upon their literacy practices. (ibid., p. 12)

Building on the above, I come to define what I mean by literacy events on social media. Literacy events are asynchronous activities which involve written texts in English on different social media platforms. My definition seems to draw a clear boundary around social media literacy events. To capture these literacy events, I screenshot the production of these Saudi female undergraduates in English as I observed them on social media from my smartphone shortly afterwards and uploaded these screenshots to my field-notes (see Chapter 3 section 3.2.3 for further details). These literacy events are observable, though not in real time, as I can detect the written text, identify the space that corresponds to the name of the social media app and specify the participant who produced the text.

### **2.1.2.2 Literacy Practices**

There are two ways in which literacy practices are used by Literacy Studies scholars. I explain both and describe how I view literacy practices in this study. Literacy practices as a concept is confusing as it is used in two ways by Literacy Studies scholars “indiscriminately” (Tusting, Ivanič, & Wilson, 2000, p. 210). Tusting, Ivanič, and Wilson (2000) explain that literacy practices are used to refer to (1) observable activities which go beyond texts or to (2) “culturally

recognisable patterns of behaviour” (p.210) including values, beliefs and feelings that inform literacy events.

Literacy practices in view (1) guided Scribner and Cole (1981) when researching the literacies of the Vai community in Liberia. They use the concept of ‘practice’ to understand literacy and defined ‘practices’ as “a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge” (p.236). Literacy practices in view (2) is used by Barton and Hamilton (1998), who define literacy practices as “general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p.7). Literacy practices are not observable units, as they consist of feelings, attitudes, values and social relationships. Barton and Hamilton contend that “the notion of literacy practices offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape” (ibid., p. 6). Literacy practices differ according to domains of life and “are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (ibid., p. 7).

I align with those scholars who use literacy practices in view (2). However, defining literacy practices within the domain of social media is rather complex. Jones, Chik, and Hafner (2015) use ‘digital practices’ in their collection of studies book, *Discourse and Digital Practices*, to refer to the “‘assemblages’ of actions involving tools associated with digital technologies, which have come to be recognised by specific groups of people as ways of attaining particular social goals, enacting particular social identities, and reproducing particular sets of social relationships” (p.3). I am building on their digital practices view by being interested in the values and beliefs of the people performing these actions on social media. Their definition adds virtual settings to the definition of practices and includes the values and beliefs underpinning these activities of participants. In my case, I am interested in exploring the ways in which these

female Saudi undergraduates make sense of reading and writing in English on different social media platforms.

Page, Barton, Unger, & Zappavigna (2014) suggest looking at literacy practices as non-observable activities on social media sites and explain how texts are part of the practices on these sites as follows:

Texts are located in the practices of how they are made and how they are used and practices provide a way of bringing in the social world in which texts are located. As the interactions on social media sites are largely created by their users (for example in writing updates, posts, circulating materials, uploading images and so on), this focus on text-making practices can be revealing. (ibid., p. 110)

According to Page et al.'s definition, however, text-receiving practices are missing, or at least not stressed, and I regard these practices as an important component of the social interaction between social media users. Their definition stresses the importance of 'text-making practices', as these are one way of interacting with other users on social media; and thus focusing on these practices can help to divulge the experiences of participants. They illustrate these practices by listing examples as posting, uploading, circulating etc. In my study, I focus on text-making practices and text-receiving practices on social media by the participants themselves, as well as on the values and beliefs that inform such practices. In this regard, Kress (2010) contends that the nature of reading and writing has changed, especially in contexts where digital technology is used. He explains that 'text-making' representing the productive aspect of literacy and 'text-receiving' representing the receptive aspect of literacy cannot be distinguished. Drawing on Kress (2010), Gillen (2014) argues that reading and writing in online domains are not seen as two separate activities as reading texts involving multimodal

content allows readers to position themselves as designers of that text. I agree with Kress and Gillen and I contend that this could be extended in in my case. Reading on social media positions readers as designers of texts, because they can choose to write and respond in texts and emoticons, or combine these with images. They can even repost these again on the same social media platform, as in retweeting or redirecting a story on Snapchat, or on any other platform of their choice in various forms.

I regard text-making practices and text-receiving practices as intertwined on social media. They can be seen as a combination of both writing and reading practices in the physical world. In these practices, the values, beliefs and feelings of those who carry out these practices are looked at.

Text-making practices, as defined by Page et al. (2014), include how various modes are used together online to produce meaningful texts, conceptualised by Barton and Lee (2013) as instantiations of ‘multimodality’. The notion of mode is important in my study (it is discussed in detail in section 2.2.3), as my participants draw on various modes in their literacy practices on social media. I pay attention to the different modes my participants use to make meanings, in addition to using English texts in their practices. In other words, I look at how different modes are used to make meanings when used with English texts, as Barton and Lee (2013) contend that “no matter how multimodal online texts are, the written word is still central to all forms of online interaction and content creation” (p.36). This, of course, does not mean that interaction and creating content on social media cannot be accomplished without written texts, such as using Instagram or Snapchat without captions, but rather stresses an essential point in my study: the use of written texts in English.

Drawing on the above, I present the components of literacy practices that I consider for this thesis:

- They are not observable units as they consist of feelings, attitudes, values and social relationships;
- They are purposeful and inform literacy events;
- They are shaped by cultural ways of utilising literacies, including texts, images, videos, emoji and the affordances of the specific social media platforms used.

### **2.1.3 Vernacular Literacies**

A key concept for my research is that of vernacular literacies. I illustrate the meaning of vernacular literacies, the domains used to assist in grouping these literacies and the characteristics of these literacies. Barton and Hamilton (1998) emphasized the term in their exploration of literacies in the everyday lives of people in a town in North West England in the 1990s. They contrast institutionalized official literacies with a wide range of voluntary, spontaneously generated literacy practices they term vernacular literacies. They assert that:

The vernacular literacy practices we identified are rooted in everyday experience and serve everyday purposes. They draw upon and contribute to vernacular knowledge. Often they are less valued by society and are not particularly supported, nor regulated by external social institutions. (ibid., pp. 251–252)

This seems to imply that these literacies are only generated from everyday experiences and are not related to the literacies learned in schools and institutions. In their research, they identify six areas or domains of life in which these vernacular literacies occur (ibid., pp. 248–250) as follows:

- organizing life;
- personal communication;

- private leisure;
- documenting life;
- sense-making;
- social participation.

These practices are characterized as being less appreciated, less encouraged and less observable than institutionalized official literacies and not regulated by external social organization. They are also learned in non-systemic informal settings and are implicitly embedded in everyday activities. They overlap with other activities; social practices are versatile, people originally mix with others and participate in these literacy activities for numerous purposes.

Barton and Hamilton (2012) indicate that digital technologies for many people all over the world have permeated vernacular literacies in all domains, as well as official literacies. Barton and Lee (2012) extend and redefine the notion of vernacular literacies. They examined writing activities on the photo-sharing site Flickr.com via online observation and interviews with users. They note that Flickr users perform their existing practices in creative ways by using the affordances of Flickr.com. They indicate that the literacy practices on Flickr are similar to any face-to-face vernacular practices, as these practices are described as being creative, original, voluntary, self-generated and learned in an informal way, and the process of learning is infused with their uses. They redefine the practices of vernacular literacies and change the previous notion, as they view these new practices as more valued on a local level; and what were thought before to be private and personal practices are now public, and people are spreading their personal experiences beyond their local sphere. Further, they indicate that dominant and vernacular literacies are blurred as the vernacular becomes more valued. They assert that:

[Vernacular] activities are no longer confined to the local sphere. People are using these writing spaces consciously and deliberately to tell the world

something about their personal experiences or local life. They are knowingly addressing and responding to a global audience ... The comments they make are often valued by members of Flickr and others, who all draw upon and contribute to expanding global funds of knowledge. At the same time, such photos are more valued elsewhere, even within dominant institutions where vernacular practices are generally discouraged. (ibid., p. 279)

In my thesis, I explore how the vernacular literacies of these female Saudi undergraduates play out on social media in English, and the characteristics of these practices.

### **2.1.3.1 Language Learning Generated from Vernacular Literacies**

Vernacular literacy practices can include language learning. As Barton and Potts (2013) point out, learning a specific language and using it are not distinguished when people are engaged in an online activity. Learning is a broad notion that incorporates unconscious activities as well as the goal-directed activities of formal education. This seems to imply that while these Saudi female undergraduates are using English on social media they are learning English. I do not assume that they are using English to improve their capacity nor that they are aware that such an act might impact on their English language learning. I am interested in exploring the nature of using English on social media platforms as performed by these Saudi female undergraduates to demonstrate the nature of this process and determine its characteristics.

In synthesizing literature related to using English in everyday lives, Barton and Potts (2013) demonstrate how learning English is not perceived as “the ordered acquisition of grammatical forms, conformity to powerful genres of institutional educational discourse, or the patterned social interaction that dominates communicative language textbooks” (ibid., p. 816), but as an individualized, dynamic, process, dependent on people themselves, as they use English to

manage their everyday life activities. From this, I hold the idea that English learning could exist on social media platforms, but the process of learning is not known.

#### **2.1.4 Digital Literacies**

Another key concept for my research is that of digital literacies. Digital literacy is treated as an extension of literacy within the New Literacy Studies framework, according to Lankshear & Knobel (2008), and they define 'digital literacy' as "a shorthand for the myriad social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts that are produced, received, distributed, exchanged, etc., via digital codification" (p. 5). This definition combines the broader social aspects underpinning text meaning making with digital specificities. Gillen and Barton (2010) view digital literacies, in the plural, as "the constantly changing practices through which people make traceable meanings using digital technologies" (p. 9). They contend that this view allows digital literacy practices to be explored in detail and remain sensitive to broader social processes. They argue that drawing on this approach "reinforces the idea that we need multiple, rich methods to uncover the complexities of people's interactions using digital technologies" (ibid., p. 9), and thus exploring the specificities of complex evolving digital literacy practices requires careful consideration of the methods employed (methods are explored in detail in chapter 3). The view of digital literacies propounded by Jones and Hafner (2012) seems to imply a sense of belonging and being connected with others via social media. They use digital literacies to "[refer] to the practices of communicating, relating, thinking and 'being' associated with digital media" (p.13).

I align with Barton & Lee's (2013) view of digital literacies, as it shares elements of vernacular literacies. They assert that:

When we say ‘digital literacies’, ‘new (media) literacies’, and ‘new vernacular literacies’, we are broadly referring to the everyday reading and writing activities online. The plural ‘literacies’ is preferred to capture the fact that literacy is not skills-based but there are many different sorts of literacy that people draw upon for different purposes. (ibid., p. 8)

In a more recent definition, Jones (2017) draws on Jones and Hafner (2012) and Lankshear and Knobel (2008) to define digital literacies as:

[The] study of the everyday, vernacular literacy practices people engage in using digital technology and the ways these practices affect language learning and language use. (p. 286)

Jones’ definition seem to open the door for language educators to use the lens of digital literacies to examine the dynamics and complex literacy practices that involve learning a specific language (see section 2.2.1 for further details). I argue that this theoretical perspective of Jones (2017) links vernacular literacy practices with language learning, as he contends that the digital tools that people draw upon when they perform their vernacular practices influence how they use and how they learn language. This perspective also implies that learning and using a specific language by drawing on digital tools may be related.

## **2.2 Social Media Literacies**

In this section, I propose a definition of social media literacies that aligns with my purposes in this study and is appropriate to literacy practices in 2017. I am aware of the notion of virtual literacies that is closely linked to my proposed notion of social media literacies, but I argue that my notion is different.

Virtual literacies, according to Gillen and Merchant (2013a), attempt to describe the new and diverse forms of literacy practices that are “involved in the social construction of online spaces” (p.9); online spaces refer to the virtual world and video games that computer users engage with to play and have fun. Practices in virtual literacies are examined without contacting or observing participants in the physical world. The tools that are used to mediate literacies in virtual literacies are the computer keyboard and mouse. However, social media literacies attempt to group and describe the diverse literacy practices that are engaged in on social media platforms on an everyday basis to serve everyday purposes by the users themselves. In other words, social media literacies attempt to describe how practices with material consequences online interact with the values and attitudes of the people performing those practices in the physical world. These practices are carried out on smartphones or tables that support touchscreens and through desktop computers. Practices carried out on smartphones or tables are mobile, ‘on the go’ activities and are bound by the availability of the Internet on these devices.

Researching social media literacies seems to attract researchers in Saudi Arabia. The paradigm they draw on, however, is different. I would like to explain two approaches I found in the literature that deal with researching literacies on social media in the following section.

### **2.2.1 Difference Between CALL and Digital Literacies in Research**

In Saudi Arabia, using social media as a new technology in English is largely approached through the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) paradigm. The studies discussed in section 2.3.1 adopted the CALL paradigm. I start by describing language learning within the CALL paradigm. After that, I differentiate between adopting CALL and Digital Literacies in researching the use of English language and social media in terms of research aims, the role of the researcher, technology, learning and language. It is essential to note that Jones (2013,

2017), to the best of my knowledge, is the only researcher who has discussed the link and differences between adopting CALL and Digital Literacies in researching online settings.

Language learning within the CALL paradigm is germane to Street's (1984) 'autonomous model' and to Barton's (2007) skills view of literacy. Language learning is conceptualised as a separate skill of reading and writing a specific linguistic system. Reading and writing are treated as skills that can be broken down into parts that can be assessed and supported in educational settings. Enhancing English vocabulary learning (McLean, Hogg, & Rush, 2013), learning English grammar (Kruk, 2013), improving the production of English vocabulary and the use of standard English grammar in sentences (Alshumaimeri, Alfadda, & Almasri, 2011) are examples of breaking down the skills of reading and writing in English into smaller components that can be assessed, tested and graded within the CALL approach.

Of course, both approaches, CALL and digital literacies, as described above, can be used to research English on social media. In fact, at the beginning of my doctoral research, I was tempted to use CALL as a lens to describe how English is used on social media, but it did not align with my research aim nor my intended research site, while the digital literacies paradigm seems to work more effectively. Drawing on the CALL studies mentioned in the previous paragraph, the research aim seems to describe how people learn and acquire a particular linguistic competence where the research site is restricted software that, in a way, replaces classroom walls (Jones, 2013). Accordingly, the role of the researcher is to design English learning lessons to implement this software and investigate the effectiveness of such software in delivering those English lessons to language learners (Jones, 2013). The research aim in digital literacies, however, seems to describe the activities people engage in in everyday practices and how language is used in these practices. The research site in digital literacies can

be an online setting, and thus the role of the researcher is to observe the activities of participants and the language used on these sites, such as social media sites and gaming sites (Jones, 2013).

I align with Jones's (2013) outline of the difference between digital literacies and CALL in terms of the identity of people involved in the research. According to Jones (2013), the identity of the people researched in CALL is stable as they are referred to as language learners. However, the identity of people viewed through the lens of digital literacies tends to be more multi-faceted, fluid and dynamic as they engage in different types of participation in their natural setting. The identity of people in digital literacies is thus mostly referred to as identities in plural.

More recently, Jones (2017) has further distinguished the link between CALL and Digital Literacies and the differences between these two approaches. He contends that these two approaches attempt to conceptualise the relationship between the process of language learning and technology, but differ in how each paradigm views technology, learning and language. I share Jones's (2017) view of the differences between these two approaches and therefore I will discuss Jones' notion of such differences in detail.

In the CALL approach, Jones (2017) demonstrates how scholars view the nature of technology and the process of learning and language differently from the digital literacies approach. Technology, whether in the form of computers or the Internet, is conceptualised as a 'delivery' machine for materials needed for language learning, 'facilitators' of the activities needed for language learning, or as 'teachers' of language themselves. In this way, a computer user is largely referred to as a learner whose interaction with technology is explored in cognitive learning terms. The language learned is mainly seen as a discrete linguistic variable to make meanings which can be labelled as 'English' or 'French' etc. CALL views language learning

in a similar way to the learning that occurs as a result of classroom instruction that limits learning by space (virtual or physical), time and types of activity.

However, Jones (2017) shows how digital literacies scholars view technology and the process of learning and language differently from CALL. Technology is conceptualized as a medium or setting in which people engage socially with others and interact in different social practices. Hence, a technology user is viewed as a 'social actor' who engages in practices that are mediated by technology for practical reasons in social life. The learning process is viewed as the ability of a social actor to find opportunities to participate in social groups successfully. In this way, 'language' is viewed as a resource which a social actor uses to engage in her community. Jones (2017) asserts that:

...a primary preoccupation of [digital literacies] scholars is how language learning occurs in the context of situated social practice and the role it plays in social identity and memberships in communities. (ibid., 287)

This view became a guiding principle in my work. The aim of my research was to describe the activities these Saudi female undergraduates engaged in on social media platforms in English and how English is used in these practices. My role as a researcher was to observe the activities these participants engage in in English on social media. I conceptualised social media as a setting in which my research participants engaged socially with others and I started from the platforms they prefer to use on a daily basis. I viewed English as a resource which my participants used to engage in activities on social media.

### 2.2.2 Social Media and the Concept of ‘Affordance’

In this section, I define affordances and review the literature that looks into affordances on social media. The notion of “affordances” is often drawn upon in research into social media practices. Drawing on the well-known definition of Gibson (1979), Haffner (2015) notes that

...different individuals may perceive different affordances in a given tool and also that they may differ in the extent to which they choose to take up the affordances that they perceive. Therefore, affordances are not only characteristics of tools, they are characteristics of tools as they are used by individuals in meaningful activity. (ibid., p. 100)

Jones and Hafner (2012) define affordance as “A feature of a cultural tool which makes it easier for us to accomplish certain kinds of actions” (p.192). They suggest that the affordances of the digital tools built into social media might facilitate new forms of literacy practices, as well as rendering others obsolete. Literacies on social media, according to Jones and Hafner, “require from people new abilities and skills, new ways of thinking, and new methods of managing their relationships with others” (ibid, p.1). They comment as follows:

[T]hese tools enable us to *do new things*, think in new ways, express new kinds of meanings, establish new kinds of relationships and be new kinds of people. On the other hand, they also prevent us from *doing other things*, of thinking in other ways, of having other kinds of relationships and of being other kinds of people. In other words, all tools bring with them different kinds of *affordances* and *constraints*. (ibid., p. 3, emphasis added)

Viewing affordances on social media platforms seems to imply that different people can perceive the possibilities of the tools built into these platforms differently and take up the

affordances of these platforms differently. It also implies that the choices of individuals are a factor that determines the extent of taking up these possibilities in their activities on social media platforms.

Affordances in literacy activities have been studied on their own. For example, Lankshear and Knobel (2011) suggest that the affordances of social media have resulted in new forms of literacies. They explained that the affordances of social media are among the new technical ‘stuff’ that they view as New Literacies. They give examples of the new literacies resulting from the affordances of technical stuff as follows:

... ‘friending’, sharing photographs, presenting identity ‘bits’ through images and other texts, sending messages, using applications (apps), managing privacy and self-disclosure, taking part in social gaming, building social relationships (accomplished in myriad ways, such as tagging others in photographs, sending them virtual ‘gifts’, commenting on their posts, posting on others’ walls, adding suggested friends who are ‘strangers’ to you, etc.), and so on. (ibid., p.196)

Lankshear and Knobel are profoundly interested in changes to social practices. Barton and Lee (2013) examine Flickr affordances. They look at how the people perceive the affordances of Flickr and how they take up these affordances to perform their activities. They indicate that individuals might not necessarily pick up the affordances of digital tools in the same way that other individuals with the same linguistic resources do who come from similar backgrounds. These people might pick up the affordances of these tools in different ways, depending on the situated purposes of their actions, as “affordances are socially constructed and change as people act upon their environment” (ibid., p. 28). Thus, affordances are emergent and not pre-determined, and people can be creative in creating new affordances and exceed existing

possibilities in their literacy practices on social media. This implies that these Saudi female undergraduates may not perceive the affordances of different social media platforms in the same way as their friends, although they share the same linguistic background. It also implies that these Saudi female undergraduates' literacies on social media may be different, depending on the purposes of their activities.

The affordances of Twitter and Facebook serve various purposes. Gleason (2016) explored how five teenagers in the United States read and wrote on Twitter and listed different purposes underpinning teenagers' use of Twitter functions (see Table 2.1).

Twitter Function	Purpose
Tweet	Participate in 'relevant' youth culture by being a part of the story
Mention	Introduce or 'tag' others in a conversation
Favourite	'Like' a tweet
Hashtag	Express identity Participate in Twitter memes Demonstrate a sense of humour Contribute information
Retweet	Share information

Table 2.1: Teenagers' use of Twitter (adapted from Gleason, 2016, p. 38)

Gleason further explains that Twitter's 'favourite' feature serves a greater diversity of functions than expressing approbation. He indicates that participants used favourites to add value to opinions expressed, to remind these young users to go back to them later to read, to show agreement with and feel empathy for peers. This seems to imply that the 'favourite' feature is used to preserve a tweet in an archive, in which interesting items are kept for use later.

The functioning of the 'like' feature on Facebook is not just an act of favouring a page on Facebook. Davies (2012) points out that one of her participants clicked 'like' on Facebook as an alternative to sending a smile in a text and to indicate that the comment was read. She notes

that 'like' serves as an indication of acknowledgment and a sign of being positive. Georgalou (2015) relates the act of clicking 'like' to aspects of identity. She explains that one of her participants clicked 'like' on comments made by her friends on posts they wrote earlier on their Facebook profile "to accept and espouse other constructions of themselves" (p.31). Georgalou contends that the action of 'like' on Facebook adds a further layer to enhance, compliment and consolidate the postings made by Facebook users themselves. In this way, the act of 'like' on Facebook, which I consider a literacy event, seems to be related to the values and feelings of the person who clicks 'like' and the social relationship of that person to the other person who contributed to the post.

Facebook users co-create meaning by using Facebook affordances (Davies, 2012). Davies illustrates that users blend traditional and new practices to enable them to connect to other users. She explains that asterisk (\*) is used to "denote a kind of stage direction as in \*singing\*" (ibid., p.26). Thus, an asterisk seems to convey a special message that can be interpreted by social media users and their friends.

To summarise, affordances are the characteristics of tools built into social media as they are used by these Saudi female undergraduates in literacies in English. Looking at the affordances of social media as they are perceived by these Saudi female undergraduates may provide a better understanding of their literacy practices in English. I also look at how they conceptualise social media, as this seems to affect how they take up the affordances of these platforms in their literacies in English on social media.

### **2.2.3 Social Media and Mode**

The concept of 'affordance' led me to the notion of 'mode'. The affordances of social media include how participants take up different modes to perform their literacy activity on social

media. My research participants drew on various modes in their literacies on social media, as my data show. As a result, I find clarifying the meaning I hold for mode essential.

Mode is a much-contested topic, but for the purposes of my study I use mode to refer to “systems or resources that people draw upon for meaning making” (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 29). In my study, I am interested in English language as used by these Saudi female undergraduates in literacies on social media. For this reason, I use mode to refer to the images, photos and any non-verbal resources available on smartphone keyboards and in written texts to make meanings on social media. It is important to recognise that deciding upon a specific meaning of a “text” in each study is essential (Page et al., 2014), and in my study I use ‘text’ and ‘English’ interchangeably. In this way, I use the term ‘text’ to refer to the words typed into a social media template in *English*.

The non-verbal resources available on smartphone keyboards that my research participants drew on were emoji and hashtags. What are emojis and hashtags? Emoji, as Danesi (2016) notes, surfaced as a way of enhancing broader understandings of written texts and he contends that emoji are “preconstructed and largely standardized pictorial characters [and thus] can be seen to constitute a new kind of artificial, universally usable writing code” (ibid., p. 4). I agree with Danesi’s definition of emoji and that emoji are used to enhance our comprehension of written text as they replace non-verbal reactions in face-to-face settings and refute the idea that they can serve as a writing code in their own right. A hashtag (#) is used to precede a word or phrase on Twitter to group all posts containing the hashtagged word or phrase automatically (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) by a single group of people to discuss an event (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015). In terms of function, hashtags are created to make the content searchable and to indicate a topic or a theme for tweets (Barton & Lee, 2013; Jones et al., 2015).

I would like to clarify that I am interested in English as used by these Saudi female undergraduates in their literacies on their preferred social media platforms. I am also interested in modes when used with English by these participants in literacies on social media. Describing these modes when used with English provides a better understanding of the social media literacies these Saudi female undergraduates perform.

#### **2.2.4 Social Media and Identity**

The concept of identity in my study is closely linked to literacy. My view of literacy, as I mentioned earlier, is “an identity resource, [for] the making of meaning and persons” (Barton & Hamilton, 2012, p. xxix). Lee (2014), drawing on Goffman’s view of identities in 1959, talks of “masks that can be worn and taken off in different contexts of social interaction” (p.91). Identities on social media are not only about showing whom a person is but rather whom a person wants to be seen as by others and how others see that person or expect that person to be (Barton & Lee, 2013; Lee, 2014). As a result, identities (in the plural) in online settings are multifaceted, dynamic and fluid (Barton & Lee, 2013; Barton & Lee, 2011; Jones, 2017; Lee, 2014).

People project themselves on social media in their choices of profile names and the extent of allowing others to view their content. According to Lee (2014), the name displayed in a social media profile can be either a nickname or a real name. Users’ choices of names on social media profiles, however, depend on how much they want to share moments of their life with a large number of people, as other users could be “close friends or complete strangers” (ibid., p.93). Social media users post photos of personal activities on social media under either their real names or nicknames to be viewed in public. They may also use their real names and allow only friends to view the content of posts privately.

The interactional context of social media platforms influences how people project their identities when writing on others' platforms. Projecting oneself by writing on someone's Facebook wall depends on the relationship of the user who comments with the account holder (Lee, 2014). Lee explains that a person on Facebook wall can wear a more serious and formal identity in particular situations but a more playful identity in other situations. To clarify this point, Lee gives an example of one of her informants, Tony, who has two Facebook accounts: one as a teacher of English and the other to socialise with his friends. On the Facebook wall designed for a teacher of English, Tony projects his formal and serious identity by carefully editing and polishing his standard English whenever he writes on his colleagues' Facebook walls. On the Facebook wall designed to socialise with his friends, Tony mixes between English and Cantonese and plays with language and styles of writing. Extending the idea of projecting one's identity by being conscious of one's style of writing on a Facebook wall to Twitter and Snapchat seems to reveal some features of social media literacies. To clarify this point, these Saudi female undergraduates writing in English in reply to a tweet, retweeting, mentioning in a retweet or redirecting a story on Snapchat may be influenced by the interaction context or their relationship with their audience on Twitter or Snapchat and how they want to project their identities in these situations.

The expression of age and time on social media is seen as one form of projecting age identity. Georgalou (2015) explored how a female Greek Facebook user projected her age identity through her Facebook timeline. To fulfil her aim she looked for instances where a Facebook user referenced age and ageing on a Facebook timeline. Status updates, a video link and 11 comments were collected from Carla's Facebook timeline and later analysed. The process of constructing age identities was found to be collaborative, involving more than one user. It was also found that the affordances of Facebook, such as "linking, commenting and liking" (p. 31), affected how Carla projected her age identity on her Facebook wall.

Projecting oneself on social media is linked with narrating events and making friends. Davies (2012), exploring the ways in which teenagers use their literacy practices on Facebook to present themselves and form friendships, suggests using the ‘on-going story of the self’ (p. 23). The notion of the ‘on-going story of the self’ directed Davies in finding the ways that affected teenagers’ sense of themselves and how others see them. She indicates that teenagers developed a way of presenting themselves by the images they post and their written updates and comments and asserts that a teenager’s sense of audience (friends) affects how they narrate their private life.

We have seen that identities have been explored with respect to the affordances of specific social media platforms and the sense of audience as these impact on how users present themselves (Davies, 2012; Georgalou, 2015; Lee, 2014). Since constructing oneself is affected by social media users’ sense of audience, I consider it important to explain the term social media audience in my study. I use the distinction made by Barton and Lee (2013) of “intended audience” in online settings:

There are three main groups of intended audience or viewers in online spaces: the general ‘unknown’ audience on the web (especially on Flickr and YouTube); ‘friends’ who are listed as contacts (especially on Flickr and Facebook), and friends in ‘real’ life (especially on instant messaging). (ibid., p. 56)

I suggest adding ‘known audience’ to include the friends they meet in real life and friends who appear in their contact lists. Thus, I see a social media audience as consisting of two main groups: an unknown audience and a known audience; the unknown audience is all the people who can view a post on social media over the web and the known audience is those other social media users who are listed as contacts on social media. The known audience, however, consists

of two sub-groups: friends in real life who meet in the physical world and friends on social media who never meet in the physical world.

In discussing the notion of the projection of identities on social media, I am referring to the ways in which these Saudi female undergraduates use English to construct themselves on their preferred social media platforms. I look at how they use English along with other modes on their preferred social media platforms to construct themselves on specific platforms.

### **2.2.5 Literacy Practices on Social Media**

Social media, as I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, are Internet-based apps that connect participants to one or several other participants by (1) enabling content creation, (2) enabling a list of people to friend and be friends with and (3) sharing the content in any form with different audiences. Social media has previously been explored as Internet websites. For example, Facebook and Twitter have been explored as Web-based platforms that can only be accessed via Internet browsers on computers. With the advances in technology and the spread of smartphones, these two social media websites have continued to grow and produced mobile versions that can be downloaded as smartphone apps. In this way, social media can be accessed in two different forms: mobile version and desktop version. Gillen and Merchant (2013b) took a view that was very important in their study, that is the affordances of the desktop version of Twitter, and in my study I consider carefully the affordances of smartphones. The studies I am going to synthesise in the following sections are explored in terms of everyday literacy activities, and the affordances of mobile or computer versions of social media are not stressed.

Empirical studies that look into everyday literacy practices on social media, drawing on Literacy Studies, constitute a pool of research illustrating English usage on Flickr and Twitter and the nature of these literacies. I discuss this research in the following sections.

### **2.2.5.1 English Usage on Flickr and Twitter**

In this section, I present two studies that examined the use of written English to engage in literacies on social media through the lens of Literacy Studies, because they give me an opportunity to demonstrate key differences in how English is explored when used as L1 (Gleason, 2016) and the purposes of choosing English by people who do not speak English as L1 but still make use of written English (Barton & Lee, 2011). I want to orient the reader to how English as a linguistic resource is explored in these two studies and present how my study is different.

English on Twitter is described after examining the tweets of users who speak English as L1 in the United States (Gleason, 2016). According to Gleason, tweets show that users draw on standard grammar as well as unconventional grammar. He refers to the use of standard grammar in tweeting as ‘traditional literacy practices’ and lists examples such as the “use of proper punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and attention to audience” (p.43). Unconventional grammar, however, breaks the rules of standard English in terms of capitalisation, punctuation and abbreviations. For him, the audience is assumed to be L1 speakers of English, or at least people who are knowledgeable in English, and not those who have little knowledge of English. In my study, participants use English as L2 in Saudi Arabia and their preferred social media spaces are examined, not just Twitter. I also investigate English in any form, not just focusing on standard English.

English on Flickr has been examined in terms of how multilingual speakers of Spanish and Chinese draw on it in their literacies and the reasons underpinning such choice of English have been investigated (Barton & Lee, 2011). Barton and Lee specify several purposes for choosing to use English on Flickr by people who do not speak English but do make some use of written English. They indicate that Flickr users choose English to reply to comments they receive on

photos they have posted themselves in two situations: when they receive comments in English or when they receive comments in a language not familiar to them. Choosing English in these situations depends on the language used by the audience who comment on the photos. Flickr users also choose English to describe photos that are related to their local culture in China. English is used in this situation to translate a local culture for an audience who do not speak Chinese. Some Flickr users choose English because they prefer to use their L2 English over their L1, one participant reported that English “is shorter and more phonetically appealing than the Spanish equivalent” (ibid., p. 52). Barton and Lee first looked at the use of a specific site, that is, Flickr. Participants in Barton and Lee’s study were contacted online, and their physical locations were not identified. Those participants also spoke English as their L2 and claimed that they had limited knowledge of English; their L1 was either Spanish or Chinese.

My study is different from Barton and Lee’s study in the social media platforms examined, the L1 of the participants, the English proficiency level of the participants, and the physical location of the participants. I started from the social media platforms used by the participants and followed those. The participants in my study shared the same Arabic L1 and spoke English as their L2. They were also highly proficient in English as they were majoring in English Language and Translation at a Saudi Arabian University. The physical location of the participants in my study is identified as Saudi Arabia and English is not the L1 there. Thus, opting to use English by my study participants is entirely voluntary and a matter of choice.

These studies have contributed to a better understanding of the use of English on social media as L1 and the purposes for using English on social media from people who use English as their L2. The following section describes the nature of literacies on social media.

### **2.2.5.2 Nature of Literacies on Social Media**

In this section, I explore the nature of literacies on social media in terms of purposes of participation and degree, time spent on literacies, and the feelings participants associate with these literacies. I aim to present the specificities of social media literacies.

Teenagers participate on social media for various purposes and to different degrees of participation that are related to their daily life practices. In participation on social media, Ito et al. (2010) separate young people use social media into three different groups: “hanging out, messing around and geek out”. These three groups, however, become successively smaller. In the first group of participation: hanging out refers to friendship-driven practices in which teenagers use new media to maintain friendships. In the second group: messing around refers to using new media by doing some tinkering. In the third group: geeking out goes beyond tinkering and refers to the creative and intensive use of one type of new media or software in which they design their own games. boyd (2010) indicates that many teenagers engage with Facebook to maintain and develop friendships with others and to “negotiate identity, gossip, support one another, jockey for status, collaborate, share information, flirt, joke, and goof off” (p. 79). Gleason (2016) indicates that teenagers in the United States use Twitter “to communicate with others, to record daily experiences, to maintain and initiate friendships, to stay informed, and to share relevant information” (ibid., p. 37). These Twitter literacy practices, however, involve using Twitter with a little tinkering.

Researchers described the time spent on social media, inferring this from different evidence. boyd (2010), for example, uses the number of visits to perform various social tasks in describing the time users spend on Facebook. She indicates that her teenage research participant, Tara, logged on to her Facebook account several times per day to perform tasks such as checking for new messages from friends, commenting on friends’ photos and reading

her classmates' updates. boyd explains that Tara used the word 'addiction' to describe her frequent visits to social media, possibly echoing a common media trope (see e.g. Fairclough, 2010; Leppänen, Westinen, & Kytölä, 2017). The number of users' visits to Twitter is no different to Facebook users' visits. Gleason (2016) indicates that the Twitter users he studied visited their accounts several times per day to accomplish everyday needs. Buck (2012) adds the time spent on 'thinking' to describe the time spent on social media sites. She examined the literacies of Ronnie, an undergraduate student, over several social media sites and reported similar results. Buck explains that Ronnie went to social media sites several times per day to post short updates. Ronnie fused his everyday activities and identities within social media sites, to the extent that these activities and identities could no longer be defined and distinguished. Buck asserts that Ronnie spent a significant time on social media sites and even longer reflecting on the information he shared on these platforms. These studies seem to imply that the time spent on social media literacies is related to the tasks users intend to complete.

As research participants describe their social media literacies they inevitably communicate emotions and attitudes. Gleason (2016) indicates that participants enjoy using Twitter as they regard it as the 'go-to' social media platform. Buck (2012) points out that Ronnie, who uses several social media sites, feels like an expert who does not care about having the information he shares online visible to the public. Buck explains that being an expert required Ronnie to create profiles on 14 social media sites and be conscious of his number of followers on Twitter. The feelings associated with literacies on social media can be related to aspects of the identity of users as they participate in these literacies.

These studies illustrated the nature of everyday social media literacies in terms of purposes of participation, time spent, and the feelings users associate with these literacies. Extending this to examine the nature of participation on social media of these Saudi female undergraduates

who use English may yield interesting results, because my study branches out to a population little studied so far from these perspectives.

### **2.3 Experimental Studies on English on Facebook and WhatsApp by L2 English language users**

In this section I take a different approach to a certain body of studies: experimental studies where Facebook and WhatsApp were used as pedagogical resources for language learning. One reason for doing this is to orient the reader to the skills-based approach to the teaching of reading and writing in Saudi Arabia, even when social media platforms are involved. Another reason is to highlight how the Literacy Studies theoretical framework I have outlined will necessarily lead to a very different methodology when exploring the use of English on social media platforms. These studies illustrate how Facebook is used to support writing in English as a skill (Yunus, Salehi, Sun, Yen, & Li, 2011) and how WhatsApp is used in a particular way to teach and supplement grammar and writing in English (Adelore, 2017; Mufanti, 2016).

Yunus et al. (2011) examined the perceptions of 43 English language learners on the use of a Facebook group to improve their writing skill in English through mixed methods in a Malaysian University. The participants were first asked to join a Facebook group called ‘write out loud’ and to contribute to writing tasks such as brainstorming and writing summaries, as well as discussing and commenting on writing content. The participants were later surveyed to measure their perceptions. The study found that the respondents strongly agreed that the Facebook group helped them learn new vocabulary by reading their peers’ posts and strongly agreed that the spell-check feature of the Facebook group reduced their spelling errors. The participants in this research were not tested to see if they had made improvements in specific features of their writing skills nor were they asked about concrete activities they drew on as they used English on Facebook. The spell-check feature found on Facebook might not be the

only affordance that contributed to their learning. The affordances of the Facebook group were not explored from the participants' perspective.

Using WhatsApp groups was explored by Mufanti (2016) to supplement an EAP class over six months with Indonesian learners of English. She used two WhatsApp groups and divided the two groups according to the conversation in the groups as 'independent' and 'dependent'. In the dependent conversation WhatsApp group, the teacher guided the conversation by posting English learning materials, instructing the learners to respond in standard English and correcting the learners' grammatical errors and lexis use. The teacher discussed the learners' errors in the dependent conversation WhatsApp group immediately after they posted, as well as discussing the same errors when meeting those learners face to face in the classroom. In the independent conversation WhatsApp group, the learners were instructed to use English and were given complete freedom to choose the topics they wanted to share. In this group, the teacher was a member of the group and passively observed the conversation. From observing the interaction in the groups, Mufanti found that the less active learners gradually obtained the confidence to write in English; they used to read the messages on WhatsApp at the beginning, then moved on to write in words and phrases, and at the end of the study period these learners began to write full sentences. This research illustrates that the WhatsApp groups were effective in motivating less active English learners to gradually gain the confidence to use English and take up the opportunities for practising English with their teacher and colleagues.

Adelore (2017) implemented an English language learning course on the WhatsApp platform consisting of four modules and reflected on his experiment. He used a module with 20 advanced adult learners of English in Nigeria over three months. The module was used as a literacy programme consisting of short lessons tailored to each learner. The English teacher sent a short English lesson daily to each learner in their individual space on WhatsApp and

each learner's improvement process was measured by a quiz sent at the end of each module. If the learner achieved a 'good' score, the teacher moved to the next module and started posting new English lesson materials, otherwise the teacher repeated the same materials. Adalore surmises that such a course is workable if the teacher provides immediate feedback, supports individual learners, tests the material with quizzes and does not send more than two lessons per day.

I argue that Adalore's study distorts the essence of WhatsApp as social media. WhatsApp is used to initiate a dialogue or conversation between people; but here, learners were not instructed to write in English or to respond in text but rather to read passively and select from one of the available options to answer questions in a quiz. WhatsApp was used as a one-way medium to deliver English language learning materials.

These studies illustrate some of the potential of using Facebook and WhatsApp to assist in learning English as they started with viewing social media as a way to learn; however, these studies did not consider how these users of English, their L2, conceptualised social media. In my thesis, I started from how female undergraduates conceptualised social media and how they viewed their activities in English on these platforms. The following section continues this discussion of studies using English on social media, focusing more on studies conducted on Saudis in Saudi Arabia.

### **2.3.1 English on Social Media in Saudi Arabia**

In this section I describe the findings of a systematic literature review aiming to explore studies on the use of English on social media in Saudi Arabia. I first explain the criteria I followed for a literature search on social media in English in Saudi Arabia, then I explore the studies I found relevant in detail. I used both the OneSearch and ProQuest databases and the following search

terms: 'social media'/ 'social networking site'/ 'web 2.0'/ 'Snapchat'/ 'Facebook'/ 'WhatsApp'/ 'Twitter' and added 'Saudi Arabia'/ 'Saudi'/ 'undergraduate'/ 'English'; I narrowed down my results to literature from 2010 to 2017. I included studies from sources such as peer-reviewed journals and grey literature such as MA or PhD dissertations and theses. I expanded my search results beyond the Lancaster University library collection. In this way, I was able to access literature not provided by Lancaster University Library. Using this approach led to many studies, I reviewed them and decided that six empirical studies were relevant to my research. I excluded other studies for three reasons: (1) not finding the full text of a paper, (2) studies not examining English in particular, and (3) studies where the participants were not human, such as using English in Saudi newspapers on social media. I now discuss these studies in detail, outlining their methods and findings as they are particularly salient to my setting, Saudi Arabia. I then synthesise their results, discuss the limitations of these studies and identify an area of opportunity for my research.

Alsalem (2013) conducted six-week experimental research to explore the effects of using WhatsApp on the writing performance in English of 30 Saudi female undergraduates majoring in English Language Translation at a Saudi Arabian University. Alsalem later confirmed that she used the "group chat" feature not the "private chat" feature of WhatsApp (Alsalem, personal communication). Alsalem is the English teacher and researcher in this study. She invited the participants to download WhatsApp app to their smartphones and created a WhatsApp group to post English learning materials for 30 days. She asked each participant in the WhatsApp group to engage in conversation and reply in English to her prompts involving common everyday topics, such as: the weather, jobs, dreams, wishes, school experiences etc. The participants were pre-tested and post-tested on writing topics in English and two teachers (not the researcher) assessed the participants' writing competency using a rubric. The participants' test results in the post-test outperformed their pre-test on their vocabulary choices.

Fattah (2015) explored the effectiveness of using WhatsApp for 45 days to improve the writing skills of Saudi undergraduates majoring in English at a Saudi Arabia university. This study was quasi-experimental in nature and involved 30 students studying an 'Essay Writing' course. The students were divided into two groups, each with 15 members. The control group were taught through a prescribed textbook in a face-to-face classroom. The experimental group were taught through a WhatsApp group and met face-to-face for three hours each week to discuss the writing errors they made when writing the final draft of their essay on WhatsApp. The students in the experimental group were added to a WhatsApp group called 'Writing Programme' and the teacher monitored their English writing activities.

Fattah (2015) instructed the students to follow five steps when writing their essay in the 'Writing programme' WhatsApp group distributed over six days. In a prewriting step, the teacher posts the topic to be discussed and the students are invited to write their ideas for a day. The drafting step comes the next day, when the students are required to brainstorm their ideas by writing in paragraphs without being limited by correct spelling or punctuation, and the teacher provides feedback on sentence structure and correct grammar. The reviewing step comes on the third day, when students are required to address the teacher's feedback and write a coherent essay consisting of five paragraphs about the topic. The editing step comes on the fourth and fifth days, when the students are required to correct and write their essays in standard English, checking their spelling, grammar and punctuation. Publishing is the last step and comes on the sixth day, when the students post the final versions of their essays. The students in both groups were pre-tested and post-tested by asking them to write a five-paragraph essay, and they were assessed according to standard English grammar, spelling and punctuation. Fattah found that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test. He also found that the post-test of the experimental group outperformed their pre-test. He surmised that the experimental group benefited from using the WhatsApp group.

Almekhlafy and Alzubi (2016) investigated the use of a WhatsApp group as a learning setting where English must be the only language used by group members. The sample in this study consisted of 40 Saudi male undergraduates and four English native language teachers at Najran University. This study was conducted over four months and employed the observation of conversations, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The students were taking an intensive English course in a Preparatory Year and were invited to practise English with four native speakers in a WhatsApp group. The researchers created a WhatsApp group called 'PYP English Community', invited students and teachers and laid out the rules of the group, which included using English for whatever topics they chose but avoiding topics that contradicted Islamic mores or Saudi culture.

Almekhlafy and Alzubi found that the students posted and shared content from their surrounding environment and discussed local issues that sparked the interest of Saudi males, such as sport events, weather forecasts, the war with Yemen and issues related to academic life. Students self-corrected their errors in English by posting edited words followed by an asterisk and engaged more before and during examination. They also posted audios and videos with English content on different topics. They sent English learning content such as stories and invited group members to summarise these in a few sentences. Students sent voice messages to engage in conversation and justified this by avoiding making spelling errors in their writing. They played with English to fit with Saudi culture, as in "Have a nice dusty day" (p. 396). Although students cared about their use of standard English, they still used phrases and letters to replace words in their replies, such as: U and OMG to replace 'you' and 'oh my god'. They also neglected the use of punctuation as they said that moving from one keypad page to another was a waste of time. Students also used emojis in addition to using English text in sentences if they thought such use would add an extra layer to their meaning. Students expressed that they liked using English in the WhatsApp group as it helped them to improve their reading,

vocabulary and writing skills. They indicated that using WhatsApp to interact in English with native speakers built their confidence, reduced their learning anxiety and improved their motivation.

Kutbi (2015) explored how 25 Saudi female undergraduates viewed social media, namely Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, as a learning tool. This study involved 30 days of using social media to supplement an English course in the European Languages Department in a Saudi Arabian university, followed by an online questionnaire and interviews. This course was taught by the course instructor, not the researcher, and students were non-English speakers majoring in English. Participants were instructed to post on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, content related to the week's unit in Standard English. They were required to check the grammar and spelling of their content. They were permitted to post material related to classroom discussions and post questions to their peers and instructors.

Kutbi's study findings are illustrated in relation to the methods used. From closed-ended questions, Kutbi found that 88 per cent of the students spent more than five hours per day on social media while 84 per cent of them were 'extremely satisfied' with their experience of using social media to supplement their learning. Closed-ended questions asked the students to categorise their purposes in using social media generally and the majority chose entertainment, followed by communication and then browsing, with the last category being pedagogical purposes. In answer to open-ended questions, one of the students stated "social media is a part of our daily life, so why won't we use it in our daily learning" (ibid., p.56) to justify her preference for using social media in learning. Kutbi reveals some interesting findings from interviewing three participants. All three participants reported that they wished to utilise social media for all the courses they were required to take. One of the interviewees indicated that using social media in her learning made her feel comfortable, as the process is both enjoyable

and fun. Another interviewee recommended using social media for learning as “Everyone can learn from it, especially this time. It doesn’t need a genius to learn how to deal with it. Anyone can do it” (ibid., p.55). The third interviewee reported that posting on social media improved her writing skills, as the course instructor demanded they use standard English in their posts and correct spelling and grammar mistakes if detected for each post.

Ahmed (2016) conducted three-month experimental research to investigate the effects of using a Facebook group to learn English grammar and improve the writing skills of female Saudi undergraduates in Saudi Arabia. She divided 60 participants into two groups: experimental and control. The researcher was the teacher for both groups. The experimental group consisted of 30 participants, and these were only taught through the Facebook group. The control group consisted of 30 participants and these were taught using traditional methods in the classroom. The participants in the experimental group were asked to write a five-paragraph essay on a topic chosen by the teacher each week. They were also invited to participate in a discussion about the grammatical rules needed to write their essay, as well as correcting their peers’ essays in the Facebook group. All participants were pre-tested and post-tested using a grammar and writing English test designed specifically for English language learners. This study found that the experimental group outperformed the control group in a post-grammar and writing English test. Ahmed surmised that that participants improved their grammar and writing skills by “(1) reading the comments and posts from their peers; (2) being able to identify their own and their friends’ writing mistakes and correct them; (3) discussing incorrect grammar with Facebook friends; and (4) by responding to classmates’ comments and post” (p.942).

Alnujaidi (2017) explored the effectiveness of social networking sites in English language learning from the point of view of English language students through quantitative measures. He surveyed 103 participants studying at different universities in Saudi Arabia regarding their

experiences, attitudes, perceptions and expectations regarding the effectiveness of popular social networking sites to learn English. The participants were asked to arrange ten social networking sites, provided by Alnujaidi, from the most to the least used; these were YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Google+, Classmates, English baby, Academica, Flickr and MySpace. He found that most of the participants expressed their confidence and desire to use social networking sites to learn English. He also found that most of the participants strongly agreed that social networking sites gave them greater access to credible information from English speaking countries and made the process of learning English more fun.

As can be seen, these studies were limited in their methods to experiments followed by questionnaires or the use of experiments with structured interviews, they did not use ethnographic tools and referred to participants' activities on social media as an English language learning process. The studies conducted by Fattah (2015), Kutbi (2015) and Ahmed (2016) were limited by the use of social media in relation to teaching a specific English language course to undergraduate students majoring in English. Fattah and Ahmed replaced the classroom walls with a group via social media to deliver English learning materials in their experimental groups of participants while Kutbi supplemented a face-to-face course with social media. Alnujaidi's (2017) study, however, explored the views of undergraduate students of both genders, doing various majors, regarding using social media platforms to offer English language learning materials.

These studies limited the participants' choices of the social media platforms they could use. Alsaleem (2013), Fattah (2015) and Almekhlafy and Alzubi (2016) offered a WhatsApp group, Ahmed (2016) offered a Facebook group, Kutbi (2015) offered three platforms and Alnujaidi (2017) asked their participants to rank ten specific social media platforms according to their use. Kutbi (2015), Ahmed (2016) and Almekhlafy and Alzubi (2016) required their participants

to use standard English, while Alnujaidi (2017) asked the participants about their views regarding the social media platforms that helped them learn English and did not ask them to disclose other social media platforms they were active on where they used or learnt English.

In the studies conducted by Alsaleem (2013), Fattah (2015) and Almekhlafy and Alzubi (2016), I contend that the undergraduates' interaction on WhatsApp groups in English may have been inhibited by the presence of an English teacher. Alsaleem (2013) and Fattah (2015), as teachers of English, provided constant feedback to correct the grammar and spelling errors of these undergraduates. Almekhlafy and Alzubi (2016) invited four English native teachers to be used as a source of authentic standard English and get engaged with the undergraduates' conversations in English.

I contend that Ahmed (2016) neglected to explore some factors that might contribute to her findings, such as interviewing the participants about how their grammar and writing skills had improved or the nature of the strategies they followed. This might be related to the affordances of the devices they used to access the Facebook group, such as being portable and easy to carry around, or a built-in dictionary available in their devices. Their improvement could be temporary and relate to their identity and how they wanted their peers to view their participation in English in online settings. Having the researcher assume the nature of the participants' improvement does not answer this question.

I argue that Alnujaidi's (2017) findings are largely limited by the closed-ended questions used in the questionnaire. The participants in his study were asked to answer questions that had a pedagogical orientation, as they revolved around the effects of social networking sites as a learning tool to improve students' skills in English. Alnujaidi assumed that participants only used social networking sites for learning purposes and framed his questions accordingly.

These studies explored the potential of using social media in English language learning to supplement or replace a classroom setting for teaching a course or offering materials. Additionally, these studies did not start from the participants' own usage of English on social media and did not use the lens of Literacy Studies.

In my study, social media is used as a setting in which these Saudi female undergraduates who are majoring in English Translation use English in their daily life. I did not ask them to use standard English nor encourage them to use only English. I informed them that I aimed to explore their use of English in their posts. I did not limit them in their choice of social media platforms, instead I asked them to provide me with the names of the platforms in order to follow them and observe their activities.

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated how my thesis is conceptualised, and it has justified my aim and theoretical orientation. This thesis builds on Literacy Studies traditions and demonstrates the debate among literacy scholars on using literacy events and literacy practices. I extended the concept of 'literacy events' to asynchronous activities which involve written texts in English on different social media platforms while I use 'literacy practices' to refer to the general cultural ways of using English which these Saudi female undergraduates draw upon for their preferred social media platforms in their lives.

Based on the findings of this literature review I aim to clarify how my research contributes to the growing body of digital literacies exploring how social media platforms as a digital space shape the choices and uses of English in vernacular literacies, and hence provide a new perspective to research the domain of social media literacies.

To summarise, drawing on the literature discussed, I contend that this PhD thesis contributes to the field of digital literacies and addresses a gap in the research literature for the following reasons:

1. This study expands the concept of literacy practices and literacy events by applying these two concepts in a social media environment. Hence, this study is situated in a debated theoretical perspective.
2. This study expands the notion of language learning in digital literacies to include discrete linguistic systems as in English as used by L2 students of English.
3. This study explores the relationship between social media and the use of English in Saudi Arabia. Such a relationship was explored previously by using the CALL paradigm and thus the results were limited by the CALL methodology.
4. This study explores the approaches to reading and writing in English on social media through touchscreens by L2 English adults. It reveals the material resources and concrete activities participants employ, the roles the participants play in digitised ways of reading and writing and how this can inform language educators about reading and writing pedagogy.
5. This study explores the relationship between projecting identities and using English on social media in Saudi Arabia. Such a relationship was explored in previous studies without examining the use of English in places outside Saudi Arabia.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN: TOWARDS AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I explain the ethnographic perspective I drew on to investigate these female Saudi undergraduates' literacy practices in English via social media. I demonstrate the methodology I followed, with a justification for using Leander & McKim's (2003) connective approach to ethnography and how ethnography is used by Literacy Studies scholars (Barton, 2012; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995; Papen, 2005). I also show the research design, the rationale underpinning each ethnographic tool, the types and amounts of data collected. I end the chapter by giving a detailed account of how my tools evolved after going into the research field.

I begin by briefly describing my epistemic constructivist position and how it shapes my methodology. I view methodologies as the researcher's philosophical epistemological stance. Based on this position, Schwandt (2000) notes that the researcher's interpretation cannot be accomplished in isolation and inevitably involves the sociocultural dimension in constructing that interpretation. Denzin & Lincoln (2008) indicate that a constructivist stance assumes a subjective epistemology which views the researcher and respondents as cocreators of understanding. This stance, I feel, is compatible with the ethnographic approach I discuss in the following section.

### **3.1 Methodology**

#### **3.1.1 Ethnographic Approach and Connective Ethnography**

I used ethnographic approach in my study for several reasons. First, it assisted me in fulfilling the aim of studying the everyday literacies which take place in digital settings (Jones, 2013), i.e. social media, instead of going into the field to look for what I think and conceive of as literacy. Second, ethnographic tools, as suggested by Street (2001) in his collection of studies researching everyday literacies, aim and “[attempt] to understand what actually happens” (p.1). Third, using ethnographic tools helps the researcher to gain a better understanding of the behaviours, motivations and beliefs of people more than if they used other methods (Tedlock, 2000). Fourth, using ethnography in an online setting is highly efficient and practical, as it enables me to observe multiple social media platforms because there are no geographical boundaries, and this allows me to access multiple participants on different platforms at any time (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

In the literature, several labels have been given to describe ethnography conducted online, such as ‘virtual ethnography’ (Hine, 2000), ‘cyber ethnography’ (Hallett & Barber, 2014) and ‘digital ethnography’ (Murthy, 2008). Online ethnography generally refers to ethnography that is conducted in sites connected by Internet settings where the ethnographer can only recruit and meet participants in a ‘virtual’ or online world, rather than the physical or real world. In Literacy Studies, Gillen (2009) used online ethnography, referred to as ‘virtual literacy ethnography’, to explore the literacy practices that exist in a virtual world as carried out by teenagers.

Ethnographic tools are mainly used in online settings by several scholars. For example, Barton and Lee (2012) investigated the vernacular literacies in Web 2.0 by using online methods such

as online questionnaires and interviews. Androutsopoulos (2008) suggests a procedure referred to as ‘discourse centred online ethnography’ in which online interviews and the observation of online activities are used to analyse German-based websites.

I wanted to gain a better, more emic ethnographic understanding by working not just with online evidence but both online and offline evidence. Leander and McKim’s (2003) ‘connective ethnography’ is more appropriate for my aims, as I wanted to meet people in the physical world to gain a more rounded understanding. Leander and Mckim (2003), in examining adolescents’ everyday online literacy practices, indicate the necessity to change from physical location-based ethnography and suggest a connective approach to ethnography that follows and traces the practices of participants as they move between online and offline settings. I drew on Georgalou’s (2015) ethnographic study, as she combined online observation and face-to-face meetings to research how five Greek users constructed their identities on Facebook. I followed Leander and Mckim’s (2003) suggestion of meeting participants face-to-face to triangulate online observation with offline interviewing. Meeting my participants in the physical world helped to gain their trust, assisted in building a good rapport and sustained my relationship with them through the period of data collection. As such, I conducted semi-structured and informal interviews and ran one session for a focus group to interview and meet my participants face-to-face in an offline setting. I wanted to move with my participants as they travelled from one social media platform to another and stay connected with them across these social media spaces.

Early works on Internet interaction looked at texts as websites were relatively text-based and not multimodal. For example, Markham (2008) notes that an Internet user’s identity in online ethnography is constituted and negotiated in texts only in a text-based setting. However, the world has changed, and online environments are much more multimodal than they were 10

years ago and, crucially, this multimodality is now easily accessible to all users, not just professional creators of Web spaces. In my research, text specifically was not my sole interest but a starting point, as I focused on how my participants used English texts, images, photos, emojis etc. to make meanings. I did not use social media as a tool for researching, instead I used social media platforms as a setting where my targeted participants utilised the English language.

### **3.1.2 An Ethnographic Perspective**

I adopted an ‘ethnographic perspective’ as viewed by Green and Bloome (1997), who argue that there are three approaches to ethnography in education and the social sciences:

1. *Doing ethnography* which involves the framing, conceptualizing, conducting, interpreting, writing, and reporting associated with a broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group, meeting the criteria for doing ethnography as framed within a discipline or field.
2. *Adopting an ethnographic perspective* means that it is possible to take a more focused approach (i.e., do less than a comprehensive ethnography) to study particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of a social group. Central to an ethnographic perspective is the use of theories of culture and inquiry practices derived from anthropology or sociology to guide the research.
3. *Using ethnographic tools*, refers to the use of methods and techniques usually associated with fieldwork. These methods may or may not be guided by cultural theories or questions about social life of group members. [emphasis in original] (ibid., p.183)

Adopting an ‘ethnographic perspective’ aligns with my aims and opportunities as I aim to focus on literacy practices in English as performed by Saudi undergraduates for a limited period. In terms of time, it is germane to what Heath and Street (2008) refer to as a “compressed time mode” (p. 63). Heath and Street (2008) suggest setting time limits for each tool used within the research design where the ethnographer inhabits the research setting for brief intensive periods. As such, I endeavoured to observe all the activities conducted in English via social media relating to my participants.

### **3.1.3 Ethnography and Literacy**

I was inspired to adopt ethnographic methods in my study by the work of literacy researchers who advocate using an ethnographic perspective to examine literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984). According to Barton (2012), using ethnographic research to examine literacy as a social practice in a social world mediated by text can provide a better understanding of the changes in literacy aspects that occur as a result of rapid changes in social life and knowledge technologies.

I will explain what is meant by ethnography. Ethnography refers to “close, in-depth examinations of social activities as they naturally occur in real-life settings” (Papen, 2005, p. 26), as well as getting the meaning of these social activities from the participants’ perspective. Street (2001) used ethnography in his collection of case studies, in which he demonstrates literacy practices in different countries to refer to the methods used in fieldwork and ways of observing and discovering both the meanings and uses of literacy practices of people themselves who live locally. Similarly, Barton (2007) views ethnography as a methodology in which several research methods are used to paint a comprehensive detailed picture of people’s lives from an emic perspective in order to locate the literacy practices within them.

However, I adopt Barton's (2012) view of ethnographic approaches. He distinguishes between two types of ethnography when studying literacy: 'doing ethnography' and 'using ethnographic approaches'. The first type involves long-term intensive research of a specific culture, while the second involves using ethnographic tools in a narrower and more focused way to examine literacy. Barton suggests using ethnographic approaches to "examine people's practices in particular contexts" (ibid., p. 1). Using ethnographic approaches to study language and social media, according to Page et al. (2014), attempts to locate specific language instances within a wider cultural context and this can be done through making sense of particular activities and accordingly ethnography is interpretive.

To summarise, I draw on Barton's (2012) characteristics of an ethnographic approach to examine the literacy practices of these Saudi female undergraduates in English on social media, thus:

- It concentrates on the participants' individual perspectives;
- It concerns the theorizing and sense-making of participants;
- It is interpretative in the sense that analysing literacy entails theorizing and sense-making by the researcher.

### **3.1.4 Online Observation**

Gobo (2011) indicates that observation is given a more prominent role within ethnography and states that participant observation is seen as follows:

...the researcher establishes a direct relationship with the social actors; staying in their natural environment; with the purpose of observing and describing their social actions; by interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonials and rituals; and learning their code (or at least part of it) in order

to understand the meaning of their actions. (ibid., p. 17)

Angrosino (2008) suggests that concentrating on using observation as part of an ethnographic methodology is better seen as a shift away from viewing observation as a specific method to observation as a context in which those involved in the research interact collaboratively. He notes that ethnographers see themselves as having an “observer-as-participant role” (p. 169). Roller and Lavrakas (2015), however, view ‘participant observation’ in terms of the ethnographer’s relationship with the participants, and the ethnographer’s level of engagement with his participants as: passive participant observer, participant-observer and complete participant observer. In each of these forms, my role as an observer of the activities my participants engaged in on social media changed over time and moved me closer to being fully involved in their literacy events in English. At the beginning of data collection, I was a passive participant observer whereby I observed without any kind of engagement. After developing my relationship with the participants, I became a participant observer where I mirrored the activities of the participants and reply in a word, an emoji or an image. However, I avoided being a ‘complete participant observer’, as this role might have influenced the activities of the participants and I never posted on any of the social media accounts that I used to observe the participants’ content in English.

In my study, the ‘natural environment’ of participant activity is social media and, as suggested by Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000), it is possible to observe the natural loci of participants’ activities whatever the setting is. Further, Hine (2000) indicates that ethnographic observation of online settings is gaining in popularity due to the fact that the process of observing online spaces is more accessible, as it needs an Internet connection and time, and she asserts that offline observation requires being immersed for a long time in a physical research field site, which can be demanding.

Leander and McKim (2003) argue that observation in an online rather than an offline setting differs in many respects. They use the notion of ‘lurker’ to refer to any person who reads online without posting and the researchers question the effect of this presence on the results of a study. They further indicate that an ethnographer can go into online spaces without making his/her existence visible and thus he/she “participates as lurker” (ibid., p. 216). In terms of analysing the results, Hine (2000) assumes that there is no effect from the ethnographer as lurking in an online setting “leaves no observable traces” (p.25). I argue here that on *some* social media platforms lurking *can* leave a recognizable trace, even when passively reading. For example, when a person uses WhatsApp app to send messages to communicate to individual persons or groups, this app gives the user the opportunity to know who read their posts and when, through two affordances: a blue check mark indicates read and when a user clicks on a message he/she gets further information about the specific time when the other person read the message. In the Snapchat app, lurking and observing are traceable, it tells users who read messages, when they read them and adds further information not afforded by any other social media app. As far as I know, before December 2016 it informed its users about who took screenshots of their posts. On the Instagram app, lurking by taking a screenshot of disappearing videos was only traceable starting from 1 December 2016, as it now notifies its users who has taken a screenshot. On the Twitter app, however, lurking is untraceable, even after tapping on tweet activity. This app does not inform users about the particular names of people who read their posts, though it does inform them of the names of the people who retweet or favour their posts. Tweet activity shows the number of times people saw a particular tweet on Twitter, the number of times people interacted with a tweet, the number of times people viewed details about a tweet, and the number of clicks on a profile after viewing a particular tweet.

Leander and McKim (2003) indicate a way to step further from being a lurker and suggest that an “ethnographer mirrors the activity and awareness of other active” Internet users. Davies

(2013) suggests “[interacting] occasionally and briefly, such as ‘liking’ a photo or comment” (ibid., p.152) to avoid ‘lurking’ and retain a logical distance, as commenting reminds participants of the researcher’s presence.

I combined observation with interviewing for several reasons. Spradley (1980) indicates that combining data taken from interviews with data obtained from direct observation enables researchers to differentiate between what participants report that they are doing and what the researcher observes them doing. Dirksen, Huizing, & Smit (2010) indicate that using observation helps the researcher to understand the context of the stories that participants might be willing to share and provide in interviews.

### **3.2 Research Design**

I now explore some of the elements of an ethnographic approach suitable for researching the literacy practices of these female Saudi undergraduates in English. I used online observation, a focus group, two sessions of semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and an online logbook to track participants’ activity in English. It is important to note that I followed Gobo’s (2008) advice in preparing a flexible research design “so that it can be adapted to the irregular flow of decisions required to deal with unexpected events in the field” (ibid., p.75).

#### **3.2.1 Sampling and Setting**

I aimed to recruit Saudi female undergraduates face-to-face from the English Language and Translation Department in the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University. Davies (2013) advocates recruiting participants face-to-face as this helped her trainee hairdresser participants “to trust [her] identity as a legitimate researcher known to the college” (ibid., p.152). I intended to recruit my participants by asking one of their course instructors to introduce me to them in their classroom. In the process of recruiting the first participant for my

study, I used ‘purposive sampling’ (Dörnyei, 2007; Patton, 2001; Perry, 2011; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015) or what is referred to as ‘theoretical sampling’ (Mason, 2002; Strauss, 1987).

Mason (2002) defines theoretical sampling as:

...selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position ... and most importantly the explanation or account which you are developing. Theoretical sampling is concerned with constructing a sample ... which is meaningful theoretically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test your theory or your argument. (ibid., p.124)

As a researcher employing ethnographic tools, I used a process referred to as ‘reflexivity’, recommended by Heath and Street (2008), in which I disclose my perceptions, the obstacles I encountered in the methodology and my psychological state. They assert that “*Reflexivity*, [is] a process by which ethnographers reveal their self-perceptions, methodological setbacks, and mental states, [and] often includes general critiques of the field” [emphasis in original] (ibid., p. 123).

### **3.2.2 Interviews**

In ethnographic research, interviewing seems to be invaluable as a way to generate information that might be difficult to get using other qualitative data tools (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Interviewing is an appropriate tool to examine these Saudi female undergraduates’ “understanding of the meanings of their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 105) and can penetrate their “insider accounts” by inviting them to talk about their own literacies (Baynham, 1995).

In the same vein, Kendall indicates that interviewing when studying new literacies is utilised to “analyse accounts of experience that are difficult to observe” (2008, p. 134); in my situation, it was not possible to observe all the literacy activities of the participants’ in English via social media. For instance, the ways participants read posts in English are hard to notice in online settings as I would have had to be there in person to observe and that was impossible. As a result, I treated the participants’ responses as a tool for accessing their multiple stories and experiences (Silverman, 2013). I view the process of interviewing as an ‘active construction’ between me and the participants, an occasion for producing reportable information (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) and “a joint construction of an explicit give-and-take interaction” (Lillrank, 2012, p. 282).

### **3.2.2.1 Focus-group Interviews**

Focus-group interviews are a particularly fertile methodology for the exploration of experiences and attitudes in literacy research. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) and Boellstorff et al. (2012), a focus group is regarded as a group interview. Focus-group interviews are conducted with a small group of participants (typically 6–10) guided by a moderator (Litosseliti, 2003).

I adopted focus-group interviewing for several reasons. First, the format of a focus group helps participants to think together, inspire each other and thus produce insightful data (Dörnyei, 2007). Second, it assists in exploring the experiences and views of individuals within a group discussion (Litosseliti, 2003). Third, it facilitates and promotes interaction between individuals (Robinson, 2012). Fourth, it makes the process of interviewing less threatening for the participants and thus encourages them to participate more (Boellstorff et al., 2012). I intended to conduct a focus-group session with all the participants.

### 3.2.2.2 Semi-structured and Informal Interviews

The literature on semi-structured interviews highlights their flexibility, which allowed me to follow unexpected directions emerging during the interview process (Mason, 2002; Richards, 2009). According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015), flexibility allows the interviewer to tailor the sequence of the interview questions, modify the wording of the questions, and follow up interviewee responses with questions to clarify meaning. Having a flexible interview guide is appropriate to an ethnographic stance with its emphasis on the participants' emic understanding. Flexibility is a feature I appreciated in my research as it enabled me to modify the interview guide slightly throughout the course of data collection, based on my own observations of the participants' literacy activities whilst using their preferred social media platforms, and the materials I collected in this process. Thus, I aimed to conduct two interview sessions, one in the form of a techno-biographic interview (explained further below) after developing my relationship with the participants, and a second at the end of data collection after conducting the informal interviews and collecting the participants' logbook entries.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) distinguish two types of interviewing in an ethnographic approach: informal and formal. In formal interviews, the interviewer is responsible for directing the conversation, arranging the setting, time and preparing an interview guide with the topics to be covered, while in an informal interview, the interviewer conducts short conversations based on observing the participants and in this way the questions in this type come from observation.

As an interviewer, I followed Hammersley & Atkinson's (2007) suggestion of being an active listener. They suggest that the interviewer should be 'an active listener' and listen to what the interviewees say, "in order to assess how it relates to the research focus and how it may reflect the circumstances of the interview" (ibid., p.118). As an active listener, I also followed

Lillrank's (2012) suggestion of leaving aside my own perspective and focusing on what the interviewees had and wanted to say, interpreting, taking care to respond to the stories the interviewees told and encouraging the interviewees to explore their experiences.

I drew on techno-biographic interview technique in my first semi-structured interview. I used techno-biographic interviews to paint a picture of the participants' historical use of social media before I moved on to explore their current practices on social media. Techno-biographic interviews mean asking the interviewees to tell their life stories and their experiences of technology. Kennedy (2003) uses techno-biography to refer to participants' accounts of their everyday experiences with technology and advocates using this method to examine digital lived experiences in offline contexts, as "technobiography can enhance our understanding of digital experiences in general, and the relationship between online and offline lives in particular" (ibid., p. 136). Barton and Lee (2013) used techno-biographic interviewing with 20 participants in Hong Kong to explore the different languages they used in online and offline settings after recording the participants' computer screens as they engaged in activities online, and after asking the same participants to complete a survey. I adopted the questions used by Barton and Lee but modified the wording, added new questions to explore the participants' histories with social media and the language they used in such practices.

In my informal interviews, I adopted Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) view of an 'informal interview' and Page, Barton, Unger, & Zappavigna's (2014) focused interviewing. 'Focused interviewing' is a form of interviewing that refers to the use of text or any form of artefacts created by the participants themselves, such as social media posts, as the focus for discussion in interviews. They state that this form can be conducted face-to-face, individually or in groups, or carried out at a distance using online settings, as they indicate that this form can be "a powerful way of examining details of language use and ... can often lead to richer interviews

than a more general set of question prompts can do” (ibid., p. 120). Davies (2012) refers to this approach as ‘Facebook tours’, categorizes this technique as ‘talk aloud’ and suggests using it after interviewing. In ‘Facebook tours’, participants are invited to talk about their Facebook accounts as they control what is seen by the researcher, who uses prompts such as asking about what they do on Facebook, what they like, the first thing they do on Facebook, their usual rituals and their profile pictures. I also followed Davies’ (2013) suggestion of having regular face-to-face meetings with the participants. Davies, when researching written texts and photographs posted on Facebook by trainee hairdressers, met her participants on a regular basis to “make sense of their texts” (p. 154). As such, I aimed to meet my participants on a regular basis to discuss the screenshots I collected while observing them on social media.

### **3.2.2.3 Pilot Data Collection**

Before deciding to use techno-biographic interviewing in the first semi-structured interview session, I piloted an interview guide – which I intended to use in the first interview with my participants – in early June 2016 with three participants. The pilot helped me to revise the focus of my research and the choice and organization of my methods for collecting data. I had a preconceived notion of the meaning of social media and assumed that my participants would have the same notion. Although I conducted the interviews individually, they all asked me the same question, and that was whether to label the apps they have on their smartphone as social media platforms or not. I was confused at that point, whether to tell them about my own notion of social media or not and gave them the freedom to label as they wished. I decided later not to define social media and to add a new RQ and make it RQ1. I also decided to start with focus-group interviewing, to hear their shared views and experiences of the social media concept. I reduced the number of questions in the interview guide and arranged them in topics to be used in a focus-group interview session. I decided to focus on their own notion of social media, since

how they conceptualise the meaning of social media seemed to me to have an influence on their literacy practices.

### 3.2.2.4 Interview Guides

I illustrate how I developed the interview guides by presenting the interview questions. The first interview guide focused on the participants’ historical use of social media and the literacies they engaged in. The second interview guide will be discussed in detail in section 3.4.3.1. However, it is important to note that the second interview guide was developed during the process of data collection, and the questions were tailored to the individual participants, based on my own observations of their writing and reading habits on social media, and their online logbook entries. I used the interview guides to assist me in interviewing, but not in a restrictive sense; I was open and willing to change the sequence of the questions in the guides to follow up interviewees’ specific responses and ask specific questions to clarify their stories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

#### 3.2.2.4.1 Social Media Historical Use

In the first interview, I aimed to understand my participants’ historical use of social media and the literacies engaged in there by modifying the questions used by Barton and Lee (2013, pp. 192–193), and I tailored the questions to cover social media generally and the specific platforms they were using. The following questions in Table 3.1 were used in the first interviews with all my participants.

Topic	Interview guide questions
<b>Current practices</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the social media you most often use, and what are the ones you have contributed to?</li> <li>2. Do you use different social media platforms in different places (iPad, laptop, smartphone)?</li> <li>3. Do you have different accounts for the same social media platforms? Why?</li> </ol>

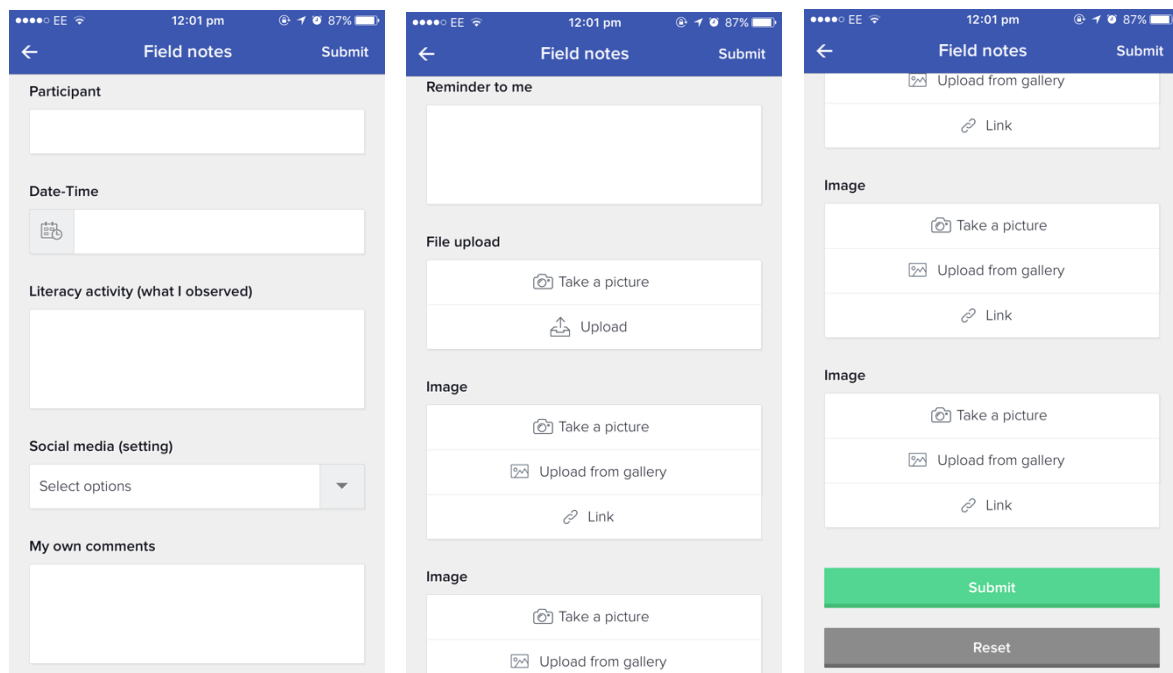
<b>Ways of participation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How much reading and writing do you do on _____ (a specific social media platform)?</li> <li>2. What are the different functions of _____ (a specific social media platform)?</li> <li>3. Do you cross-reference (i.e. similar content posted on different platforms, though it may be written in different ways)?</li> <li>4. Do you enjoy posting on _____ (a specific social media platform)? Why?</li> <li>5. Have you ever deleted/ modified any posts?</li> <li>6. Do you use different languages/ scripts on different platforms? Why? Why do you use English?</li> <li>7. How often do you post pictures/ videos on _____ (a specific social media platform)?</li> <li>8. Do you write things about your photos? What do you write?</li> </ol>
<b>A day in the life</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Think about yesterday, what social media platforms did you first deal with when you woke up, how did you continue during the day?</li> <li>2. Can you imagine a day without social media? What difference would this make to your life?</li> </ol>
<b>Technology-related life history</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When and how did you start using a computer?</li> <li>2. What did you use the computer for at that time?</li> <li>3. When and how did you start using social media?</li> <li>4. When and how did you send your first text message/ write your first post on social media/ Tweeted/ snapped? Etc.</li> <li>5. Have you stopped using a specific social media platform? Why?</li> </ol>
<b>Domains of life</b>	Do you use different social media in different areas of your everyday life, e.g. at home, at school, at work? Other domains, such as religion, sports, politics, music etc.
<b>Cross-generational comparisons</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you notice differences between the social media used by your parents and yourself? How about your grandparents? Are there younger children in your family who are exposed to social media? How are their online activities different from yours?</li> <li>2. Do you notice any differences in social media use between you and your friends from other countries? How about gender differences?</li> </ol>
<b>Imagined future</b>	What does social media mean to you now and what do you think your social media use will be like in 10 years' time?

Table 3.1: Techno-biographic interview guide questions (adopted from Barton and Lee, 2013, pp. 192–193)

### 3.2.3 The Process of Recording Participant Observations

Using online and digital tools to record field-notes data is suggested by Stirling (2016). Stirling explored the everyday use of Facebook as a social network site SNS by six undergraduate participants in the United Kingdom over an academic year and how their uses of Facebook

hindered and helped them in their transition to university life. Before going to the research site, I thought of using an app to assist me in keeping my notes organised and to be able to synchronise all the data from my smartphone via a secure website instantly. I tried using Evernote app based on suggestions I heard from colleagues and started to experience what it is like to use before embarking on the research and found it difficult to keep up with. The Evernote app did not allow me to devise my own template and thus I would have to take unstructured notes each time I observed my participants. Later, I went to the Zoho Creator website, learned how to build my own app and was excited and thrilled to start building a template for my field-notes (see Fig. 3.1). It is important to mention that data on Zoho Creator are highly secure. Zoho Creator has a built-in encryption feature which protects any form of data on the website or the app.



**A**

**B**

**C**

Figure 3.1: Field-notes A–C arranged to show a single entry

In specifying the areas of observation in my field notes template, I combined suggestions made by Heath and Street (2008), Hamilton (2000), Barton and Lee (2013) and Stirling (2016). I followed Heath and Street's (2008, p. 77) suggestions when studying language which included (1) live accounts of events in actual times, (2) taking notes of notable short phrases spoken by the participants, (3) any changes in the routines, audience or characteristics of context that occurred with changes to language and mode.

I also adopted what Hamilton (2000) counts as literacy events and practices by looking at photographs taken of people interacting with texts and adopted her view of *the basic elements of literacy events and practices*. Hamilton (2000, p.17) suggests that participants, settings, artefacts and activities are the basic units of literacy events and practices and that these literacy event units are visible and can be captured in photographs, while literacy practice units that are non-visible can only be inferred from photographs. 'Artefacts' in my field notes template are the texts and images used by my participants on social media, and thus they are captured in the screenshots I took shortly after these participants performed these activities.

In taking screenshots, I drew on Stirling's (2016) use of 'digital' screenshots to capture the participants' posts and profiles, as "the visual nature of these notes offers a richer view of the practice than written notes alone ... [and can] be used at a later time to work up to fuller written notes" (ibid, p.58). I aimed to use these screenshots to describe the participants' literacy activities in my notes, as well as using them as stimuli for informal conversations with my participants. I specified one space in Zoho Creator to upload a screenshot with each field-note entry.

I focused on the observable elements of the literacy activities in instant messaging (IM), as advocated by Barton and Lee (2013, p. 189), which consisted of: participants, texts, tasks, resources, modes/ media of interaction, times, places and settings. Since I was going to observe

them online, I would not be able to observe tasks and resources; for this reason, I used informal interviewing and was conscious not to present myself in an obtrusive way. Heath and Street (2008) note that ethnographers probably need to specify the times of observation and recording, especially when examining a community's organization, and timing when observing a site should follow 'an ordinary time flow' (p.60), depending on the purpose of the study.

I also specified a separate field for each 'observed literacy activity', 'reminders to me' and 'my own comments' in my field-note log. It is important to note that I followed Heath and Street's (2008) suggestion in separating these fields by using a separate column for each of these in the field-note logs in an attempt to better organise the data.

#### **3.2.4 Conceptual memos**

I used weekly 'conceptual memos', as advocated by Heath and Street (2008), in an attempt to keep a research diary in a structured and systematic way. It consists of writing memos about general ideas emerging from specific events and about concerns I raised in the 'reminder to me' section in field-notes. I used Zoho Creator and developed a separate log entry designed especially for conceptual memos (see Fig. 3.2).

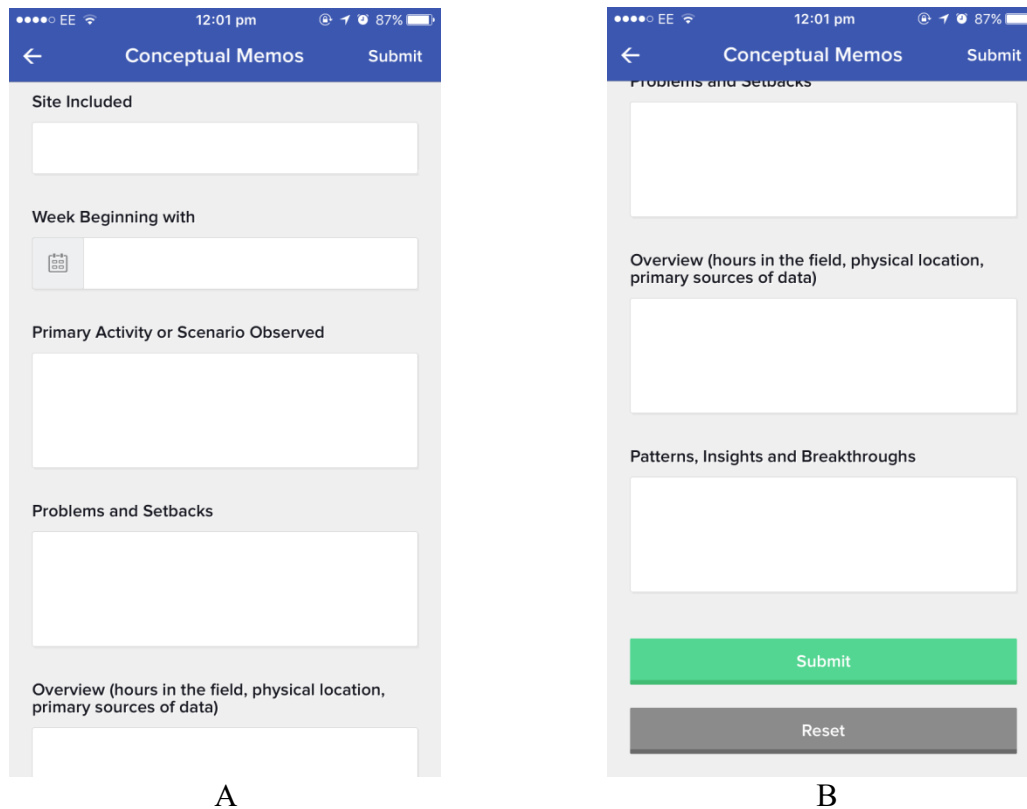


Figure 3.2: Screenshots of conceptual memos arranged as A and B to show a single entry

In creating a conceptual memos log template, I followed the suggestions made by Heath and Street (2008) and assigned a separate section for each area, such as ‘date’, ‘setting’, ‘main activities observed’, ‘problems and setbacks’, ‘overview’ and ‘patterns, insights and breakthrough’. Heath and Street (2008, p. 80) suggest writing unexpected challenges in ‘problems and setbacks’, the time spent in the field, the physical location, the data tools used in ‘overview’, the detected patterns, trends, realisations or insights in ‘patterns, insights and breakthrough’.

### 3.2.5 Online Logbook

As my aim is to investigate the social media literacy practices of these Saudi female undergraduates in English, it was impossible to observe all the social media activities of my participants by following them online. I thought of an approach to assist me in observing my

participants without being there in person, based on the suggestions of Page et al. (2014) and Barton and Lee (2013); I found inviting participants to describe their activities to be the best available option, involving recording in a log. Page et al. (2014) suggest involving the participants in collecting research data in two ways : (1) asking the participants to record their activities during a day or an entire week in the form of a diary or log, (2) asking them to collect screenshots, as this “can provide new insights into people’s literacy practices and language use” (ibid., p.121).

I drew on Barton and Lee’s (2013) electronic logbook, which served as the participants’ online journals. They suggest using an online method in studying the everyday digital online literacy practices of participants. They used this method to study the digital literacy practices of participants in Hong Kong and refer to it as an ‘electronic logbook’. They asked their participants to record and describe their everyday IM (instant messaging) activities for seven days in a word-processed diary in which they copy and paste all their online text chats. Barton and Lee gave their participants guidelines on the information required from them, as well as the process of keeping their logbook. They gave their participants the freedom to use (1) the template provided or any other format, (2) the language they preferred to write in the log, (3) any length of word counts (4) various methods of submitting (5) any seven days of their choice to keep their text-chat literacy record in their electronic logbooks. They asked their participants to mention the time, duration, frequency of text chats each day, the physical space in which they chatted, the purpose of the chat, the person with whom they chatted, the name and number of online programs that they used to chat. They also asked their participants to describe the activities they performed while chatting via text online by dividing these activities into three categories:

1. 'on-screen' activities where they use any online site, such as PowerPoint, to do their homework, check their emails, listen to music etc.
2. 'off-screen' activities where they perform any action in an offline setting, such as scribbling notes on paper, watching T.V. talking on the phone etc.
3. other activities besides looking at the screen, such as reading chat aloud and the way they use the mouse.

I found the 'logbooks', as suggested by Barton and Lee (2013), helpful in collecting the data I sought and modified the wording of the questions and added new ones to suit the aim of my study. In terms of describing the activities my participants performed while using social media in English, I used Barton and Lee's two categories: on-screen and off-screen activities. I merged the 'other activities' category with off-screen activities, as I found it hard to distinguish between the two while using social media on a smartphone. While creating the logbook, I did not assume that all participants used their smartphones, and that is why I asked them to specify the devices they use, though I had the idea in mind that, as the majority of the participants informed me, they rarely used devices other than their smartphones to log in to their social media accounts. I used Zoho Creator, instead of a word-processor diary, created a template and called it 'social media English usage' (see Fig. 3.3).

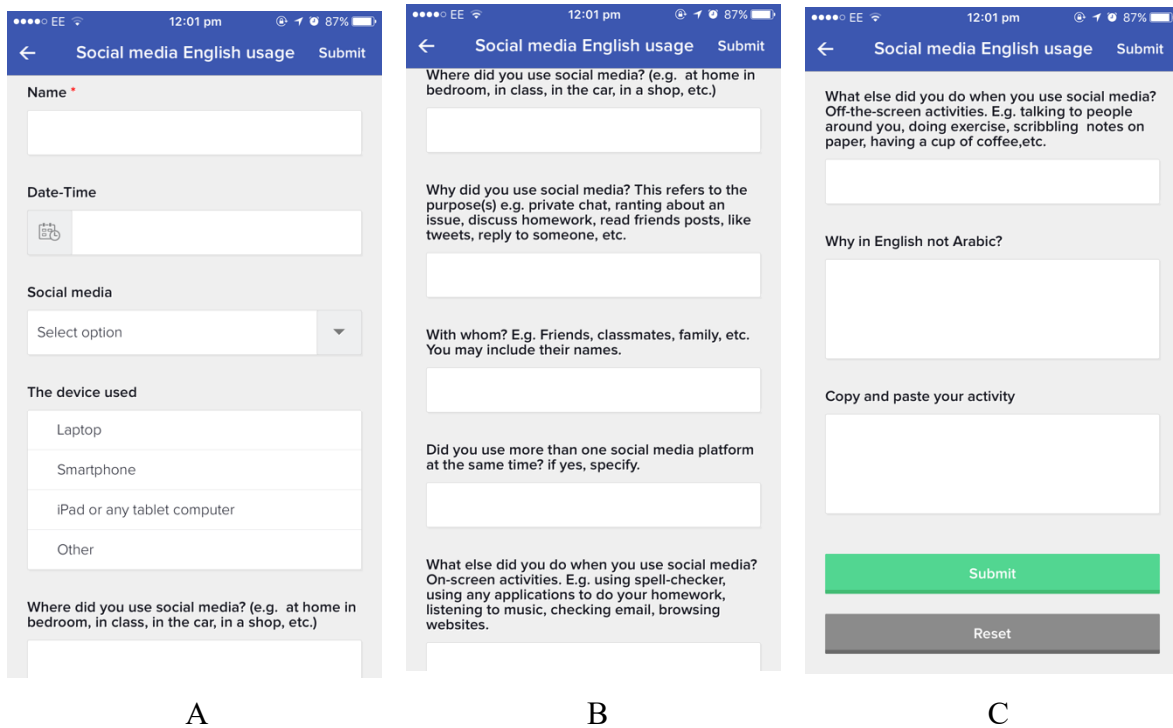


Figure 3.3: Screenshots of the electronic logbook, arranged from A to C to show a single entry

In creating a template for the electronic logs, I also followed Gardner’s (as cited in Baynham, 1995, p. 260) approach to specify the information that I wanted my participants to fill in. Gardner implemented activities in her research about language and second language education where she aimed to explore how people value written and spoken language. She asked the participants about whom they communicated with, their purposes of such activities, and to describe the ways in which they communicated.

### 3.2.6 Ethical Considerations

I draw on an ethnographic approach, and as such I have to consider ethical issues. These ethical issues included paying particular attention to my relationship with the participants and the issue of power (see section 3.4.1.1 for detail). In this section, however, I describe the ethics approval process I followed before I entered my research site, which is Saudi Arabia.

I had to seek ethics clearance from Lancaster University before starting the process of collecting my data. I filled in the forms provided by Lancaster University's ethics committee (UREC) and obtained their approval for the participant information sheet and consent form (see Appendices A and B). On the information sheet and consent form, I had to explain the purpose of my study, what my study entailed, the purpose of inviting my participants, what would happen if they took part, the benefits and risks of taking part in my study. I also emphasised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time, as well as assuring them that all information they shared would be confidential.

As a sponsored PhD student, besides getting ethical clearance from the university, I had to obtain the approval of my sponsors, the Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in London and King Saud University. Knowing the bureaucratic nature of my sponsors, I had to start the process four months before the actual process. I first sent an email to get approval from the English Department to allow me to contact my participants, and I explained the nature of collecting data by providing an overview of my research, my research questions and explained in detail the procedure, including the data collection timeline. After a month, I received an email rejecting contacting possible participants from the Dean of the College of Languages and Translation, because these participants were 'vulnerable females'. I contacted him to convince him and he said that allowing me to contact these participants through the campus was 'beyond his power' and he directed me to seek approval from the Deanship of Scientific Research. I sent an email to a senior there, explained my research and he contacted me later by phone. The phone call lasted for an hour, in which I had to answer several questions regarding my research, such as the rationale for choosing social media, the tools I intended to use to collect data and whether I was aware of the guidelines of the Ethics Committee of Scientific Research in the university where I intended to conduct my study. I assured him that my research had been approved by Lancaster University's Ethics Committee (UREC); he was convinced and

promised to contact the Dean of the College of Languages and Translation to inform him himself that I had approval. After two hours, I received an email from the Dean allowing me to contact my participants. After that, I filled in the forms provided by my sponsors and attached the email agreement, information sheet and consent form as approved by Lancaster University, and then waited for three months before getting approval.

### **3.3 Entering the field**

In this section, I explain how I accessed the physical setting of my research and the difficulties I encountered before I met my research participants. I also provide an overview of the data I collected.

#### **3.3.1 Access to the Research Physical Site**

I went to visit the setting where I intended to meet my participants two weeks prior to commencing my data collection to see the gatekeepers of my participants. King Saud University's main female campus is quite large with walls surrounding the whole campus. To access the main campus, I had to go through a large gate where female security guards asked me to show my identification card. I met the Vice Dean of the College of Languages and Translation and introduced myself as a PhD student. I reminded her of my research as I had gained her consent via the Dean to access the site three months earlier, but apparently she had forgotten about the research and what it would entail. Although I got approval from the university authorities prior to obtaining the approval of my sponsor, as I explained earlier, I encountered a shower of questions from the Vice Dean of the college. She asked me to gain consent to meet my participants from the "Male Section", referring to the Dean of the College, so I showed her a copy of his approval received by email. The meeting was then more directed towards checking my identity and the tools I would use to collect data. She asked for a copy of

my questionnaire, assuming all research is questionnaire-based, and the technique I had used to recruit participants and the required sample number.

I realised later that I had not introduced myself as a member of King Saud University staff and once I did so she was relieved and replied, “You are a colleague then.” I informed her that I know the regulations and guidelines of the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research at King Saud University and she directed me to see the Vice Chair of the English Language and Translation Department. I went to the Vice Chair’s office and arranged an appointment to meet her through her secretary. I went back two days later and was conscious this time to introduce myself as a ‘colleague’ to the Vice Chair of the Department. She was cooperative and notified me that students in the department were fully aware of their rights and stated that her duty was to protect the students from any harm. I assured her that participation was voluntary and showed her the consent form. Meeting her was the end of the chain of meeting seniors in the Department.

### **3.3.2 Overview of Data Collected**

In this section, I present an overview of the data collected before I discuss how I recruited my research participants in section 3.4.1. I discuss the duration of the data collection process, detailing the types and amount of data I was able to collect from my research participants. I collected my research data over three months, from October to December 2016. In total, eleven Saudi female undergraduates studying English Translation participated, three of them agreed to participate only in the focus group conducted over WhatsApp, and one withdrew after participating in the face-to-face focus-group interview. The data I collected for my study consisted of field-notes, conceptual memos, two semi-structured interviews, two focus-group interviews and informal interviews, as well as logbook entries in the form of texts constructed by my participants of their own literacy practices via social media, plus a total of 14 hours of

audio recordings of two sessions of individual interviews with seven participants (including one interview split into two halves: one half face-to-face and the other half over WhatsApp private chatting due to the participant’s busy schedule), an hour of audio recording of the focus group, WhatsApp chat records of the focus group, 267 field-note entries, 13 conceptual memo entries, four hours of audio recording of face-to-face informal interviews, 23 electronic logbook entries. Table 3.2 shows the data types and research tools used in my study.

<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Numbers and Types of Data Collected</b>
<b>Participant online observation</b>	267 entries of field-notes describing the social media apps observed and 560 screenshots taken by myself of participants’ uses of English on social media.  13 conceptual memo entries
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	14 individual interviews with 7 participants. Each participant had two session totalling 14 hours and each interview session ranged from 45 minutes to 70 minutes.  6 screenshots taken by Deema as she gave her account of her approach to writing.
<b>Focus group interviews</b>	An hour of audio recording of a focus group with 5 participants  Chat record of a focus group via WhatsApp app with 6 participants, as well as 20 images attached by the participants to support their discussion
<b>Electronic logbooks</b>	23 entries of logbook social-media usage tracking all 7 participants
<b>Informal interviews</b>	4 hours of informal interviews (5-10 minutes long per interview)  2 Screenshots taken by Deema as she gave her reasons for choosing English  3 photos of Nouf’s phone screen as she gave her account of her approach to writing

Table 3.2: Research tools used, types and amount of data collected

### **3.4 Evolving Methods of Data Collection in the Field**

In this section, I explain how I recruited my research participants and how my relationship with them was established and developed. I also explain how I conducted the focus-group, semi-structured and informal interviews. I describe the process of transcribing all the audio recordings and the process of recording the online observation and conceptual memos. I then describe the online logbook I employed and conclude this section with a reflection on this tool.

#### **3.4.1 Process of Recruiting Participants**

Recruiting participants for my research was not an easy task, as I focused on participants who were willing to allow me to follow them via all the social media platforms they were currently using by providing me with their usernames. Before going to the field site, I intended to recruit my participants by asking one of their course instructors to introduce me to them in their classroom, but after the challenges I faced in accessing the field (discussed in section 3.3.1), I decided to change to a ‘snowball’ technique (Bryman, 2008; Dörnyei, 2007). Bryman (2008) defines ‘snowballing’ as a technique where “the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others” (p. 184), and so I used the first participant as my key informant to recommend others who met my criteria and were willing to participate in my research. This is what Georgalou (2015) refers to as ‘a friend of friend’ sampling. This sampling, suggested by Georgalou, involved recruiting a group of friends whom she followed to recruit her participants to research how Greek users constructed their identities on Facebook. I assumed that using this type of sampling was beneficial and might be the most appropriate way to help me achieve my study aim.

I was introduced to my first participants with the help of the Vice Chair of the English Department, who nominated an active student on Twitter and sent an email inviting her to help a PhD student with her research. Deema, a pseudonym, as are all the names of participants, was my first participant. Deema was studying in the English Translation Department in the last semester and was expected to graduate in February 2017. She was cooperative and agreed to participate in the research (for details of my relationship with the participants see the following section). I drew on my knowledge of Saudi culture to build a good rapport with my participants and gave them some personal information to develop their trust and bridge any gap that might be there between us (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I can say that I was able to build a good rapport in a short time, as four of them invited me to create a WhatsApp group to discuss our meetings and hang out virtually.

#### **3.4.1.1 The Researcher and Research Participants' Relationship**

The last senior I met before actually meeting my participants was the Vice Chair of the English Department. As I said earlier, she was cooperative and offered her help. She asked me about how I wanted her to introduce me to the participants. At that point, I realised that meeting the participants in the classroom might not be the best option and might not help in building a good rapport with the participants, and worst of all it might highlight the power differential between me and the participants. Crang and Cook (2007) advise ethnographers to be sensitive to the power differences between the participants and the researcher and to strive to eliminate such differences. Thus, reducing these differences might lead to better cooperation from the participants. As ethnographic approach relies heavily on the cooperation of participants, gaining and maintaining their trust is advisable throughout the entire process of data collection (Gobo, 2008). As a result, I asked the Vice Chair to introduce me as a PhD student, not as a member of staff. The Vice Chair nominated a cooperative student based on her knowledge and

experience of this student being a member of the English Translation Club and active on Twitter. The Vice Chair sent an email the day after our meeting to the nominated participant, she cc'd me, and asked her if she would be willing to volunteer to help a PhD student with her research.

In the previous section, I mentioned that Deema agreed to participate in my study but I did not describe how our relationship was established. Deema replied to the email sent by the Vice Chair two days later. I replied to her email with my contact number instantly, as she sent her email at 8.00 a.m. and I invited her to send me her mobile number. She was very cooperative and sent me her mobile number to communicate with me. I immediately sent an SMS to Deema to arrange an appointment to call or meet her face to face at anytime and anywhere, and she replied 'call anytime'. I called her and invited her to bring her friends along, and she arranged a meeting at the end of the day in the Department's local library, which is on campus. I was excited to meet Deema, who brought her friend Emma with her to the local library. I introduced myself as a PhD student and gave them a brief overview of my research and a copy of the information sheet and consent form. They agreed to volunteer, and I invited them to choose pseudonyms. They were excited, gave me their pseudonyms and we chatted about our interests for an hour.

Deema offered to help recruit more participants and invited me to chat via WhatsApp. She communicated with me via WhatsApp private chatting during the day and updated me about her process of recruiting participants and the criteria I was following to choose more participants. She gave potential participants the general idea of my topic and when she received their initial consent she sent their contact information via WhatsApp.

I chatted with each participant via WhatsApp privately and invited each one to a separate meeting at a time and a place of their choice to introduce myself and my study. I went to the

campus early and projected a PhD student identity. I did not hang out or chat with any of the teachers or staff. I wanted my participants to feel that I was equal to them, as we were all female Saudi students. I went to the local library and waited for them. I was holding my smartphone to keep myself busy and appear more like a student. I remember chatting with three participants via WhatsApp and arranging a separate time for each one, so I was surprised to see four people approaching me in the Department's local library. I knew that they were the participants because they were looking for someone. They all knew each other and preferred to meet at the same time, and the additional participant knew about the research from their friend Deema. I introduced myself and gave them an overview of my study, copies of the information sheet and consent form, and invited them to choose their pseudonyms. We chatted for an hour and I felt that they trusted me, as they started to criticise one of their teachers' way of teaching.

Deema kept recruiting more participants and I chatted with three participants via WhatsApp and invited them to a face-to-face meeting. These three participants wanted to meet at the same time in the local library. We met, and I followed the same procedure with them.

The consent forms were returned within a week. I invited all the participants to let me join them on the different social media platforms they were currently using after receiving their consent forms face-to-face. These participants allowed me to contact them individually by WhatsApp. As I said earlier, I joined them on their social media platforms by sending requests to be their friends on Snapchat and Instagram. I tapped follow on Twitter and asked Deema and Lama to teach me how to use Path and Tumblr. I had already learned how to use these two apps but wanted to improve my relationship with them. I double-checked my participants' social media accounts by asking them if their account names were correct by chatting with each participant privately via WhatsApp.

As I said earlier, four participants suggested creating a WhatsApp group to better communicate and organize the timing of our future meetings. Deema asked them if they were all willing to join me in a WhatsApp group and they all agreed. I asked each participant by contacting them on WhatsApp private chatting if she was willing to join me via a WhatsApp group. I wanted to ascertain that each participant was happy and did not feel obliged to join me in the WhatsApp group. They agreed, and I created a WhatsApp group named 'Social media expert' to hang out with them virtually on 29 September 2016.

I invited my participants to a focus group and sent an invitation to each participant privately via WhatsApp. The participants organised the first focus group and arranged the time and place through the WhatsApp group. Those who did not attend the first focus group suggested having another focus-group session, but this time the setting was the WhatsApp group (for details of the focus group arranged via WhatsApp see section 3.4.2.1). I did not stop recruiting participants and two more volunteered to participate in the research, expressed their willingness to participate only in the focus-group session via the WhatsApp group and indicated this on their consent forms. These two participants were very busy and did not want to participate in the whole period of data collection.

I now discuss why I often contacted each participant via WhatsApp private chatting before I detail how we hung out via the WhatsApp group. I used to send the screenshots I collected to each participant on WhatsApp private chatting after removing their identifying information by cropping the screenshots. I was aware that my participants were notified that I took screenshots of their Snapchat stories which showed their faces and their friends' faces when they used English. I wanted to assure them that the screenshots I took from their Snapchat stories did not include their faces or their friends' faces, as they did not allow me to keep these in my notes. I wanted to assure them that the screenshots I kept in my own notes also did not contain their

faces or their friends faces. Keeping photos with faces violates Saudi society norms for some people and I wanted to maintain the participants' trust. As a result, I sent the screenshots via WhatsApp private chat to ask them if they were happy with the way I cropped them. I did not attach any edited screenshots in my field-notes template in the Zoho Creator app before gaining my participants' approval.

The WhatsApp group, Social Media Experts, was our virtual place to hang out, arrange our meetings and discuss any issues related to my data collection. I used to organize our meetings as well as chatting and talking about what we did in our everyday lives. On one occasion, one of the participants sent a photo of a dress she liked and we all chatted about it. After their exams, they sometimes talked about exams, how they felt and their anxiety over the results. I always comforted them and, at one point, I told them about my worries as I was waiting for the results of an assignment I had already submitted. I wanted to emphasize my identity as a student and most of the group members then comforted me. After getting to know them better, I used to send encouraging words to motivate them minutes before they were to take their exams. on a few occasions, I asked them to help me in translating certain expressions from Arabic into English, to give them credit for being translators and give them an expert feeling. When I received my assignment results, I immediately told the group that I had passed, in Arabic. They congratulated me by sending emojis indicating celebration as soon as they read my message. Another time, my iPhone broke and the WhatsApp app was deleted, but I fixed my phone in two hours. When I downloaded the app again, I was able to restore all the WhatsApp groups but with no chat history. I sent a message immediately to them apologizing for this error as I was afraid that they would get a notification that I had left the group. Lama replied promptly, saying *"We are the most precious people you could ever have, and you did not lose us,"* and added sarcastically, *"Oh how did I gain all this confidence?"* I replied by using emoji and said, *"Yes, you are all very precious."* Another time, my mother was very ill, and I had to change

the timing of interviews for three participants. I was devastated and informed my participants via the WhatsApp group that my mother had been admitted to hospital. All the members expressed their sympathy and supported me through that time. On the last day of data collection, I expressed my gratitude and my honour at having them as participants in my study and said that they could unfollow me on all the social media apps.

I would not claim that hanging out with them via the WhatsApp group closed the gap completely between the participants and me. In conducting my last interview with Latifah, she revealed that she blocked me from seeing her Snapchat story because she did not have the permission of the people whom she usually snaps with. I replied that I completely respected her decision and thanked her for allowing me to follow her. I discovered that Lama did the same but did not tell me this in person. I discovered this when conducting the last interview with one of the participants while she was talking about her activities on Snapchat story and referred to Lama's Snapchat story and how I viewed Lama's Snapchat Stories. I smiled that time and did not discuss with that participant whether I viewed Lama's stories or not or any issues related to Lama. However, during the time of interacting with my participants, Norah asked me about studying in the UK and how to get a scholarship. Getting a scholarship sponsored by Saudi Arabia is not far-fetched for female Saudis. I helped her by telling her the requirements and directed her as to how to fulfil them. Deema, Emma, Rawan, Norah and Nouf kept me on their list of friends who could view their Snapchat stories after the end of data collection. None of the participants blocked me from their Twitter accounts after the end of data collection. I would not have been able to collect all the data for my thesis if my relationship had not developed into a friendship.

### 3.4.2 Focus-group Interviews

I conducted two focus-group sessions, one face-to-face and the other in a virtual setting (see the following section for details). I decided to conduct a focus-group session two weeks after meeting my participants face-to-face as I started to build a rapport with them; I wanted them to feel comfortable to express their views. Seven participants chose the time and place of the interview after discussing it in the WhatsApp group and decided to meet on campus, so I arranged a room and got permission to use that facility.

On the day of the focus-group interview, five participants came on time and two sent apologies. I welcomed them and addressed each one by her name to help them feel comfortable. I prepared a list of topics to be covered in all the focus-group sessions. I focused on how they conceptualized social media and what a typical day on social media looks like. I was able to understand their views on social media. I also asked them to show me the social media platforms that they were currently using and they explained that they all accessed their preferred social media platforms via their smartphones. They appeared motivated and excited to label and name the social media apps they had on their smartphones and the social media apps they were currently active on. I wanted to understand their literacy practices in English and I asked them to describe how and why they used English on social media.

This focus group provided me with rich information. I can say that the participants felt comfortable as they all knew each other beforehand. From transcribing the focus-group interview, the participants were building on each other's responses by agreeing, elaborating and sometimes questioning each other. There were more episodes of laughter in this group than in the semi-structured individual interviews. As I said earlier, I used the focus-group interview to elicit shared views, experiences and knowledge of the participants in the group through their interaction and discussions.

### **3.4.2.1 Focus group via WhatsApp**

Six participants offered to get together in a WhatsApp group that was different from the one I used to communicate with all my participants. As a result, I created a WhatsApp group chat and named it “Social Media Experts”, which was the same name as the main group but used different emojis in the name and a different group picture. Boellstorff et al. (2012) advise researchers conducting focus groups in an online setting to mitigate the problems of coordinating schedules between participants, and in my case I drew on my local understanding and agreed to meet the participants at 7.00 p.m. These participants chose the time of the gathering, which was the time when they finished Isha prayers and three hours before they went to bed. I covered the same list of topics I had already discussed with the face-to-face focus group.

I decided to conduct the focus group via this app for several reasons:

1. To chat with several participants at once in their different places.
2. It was the only possible way to get six participants together at the same time.
3. To follow their inclination, as they were the ones who asked me to create a group chat so I gave them the freedom to choose the space to conduct the focus group. Some of them chose the online space.
4. To save the participants’ time and expense as they were very busy in the morning and did not have to use their transport to go to a physical space.

#### **3.4.2.1.1 Reflections on Conducting the Focus Group via WhatsApp**

I realized I saved time by having a conversation transcript ready. The transcript was the chat history which included texts and emojis, as well as indicating who said what and the exact time. Exporting a chat history is one of the unique affordances of the WhatsApp app. This can

be achieved simply by opening a WhatsApp conversation, tapping the name of the group in the navigation bar, tapping 'export chat', selecting 'email' the conversation and tapping 'attach media' to attach all the photos, images and screenshots that were used during the conversation.

Using WhatsApp app secured my chat via end-to-end encryption, so all messages could only be read by group members, not third parties or even the developers of WhatsApp. Using WhatsApp app, in particular, enabled me to follow up all the participants' (WhatsApp group members) messages simply by tapping on a participant's message and choosing 'reply', just to make sure that they knew which message needed more clarification.

I was able to monitor who received and read each message I sent. This was achieved in two ways. The first way was by the ticks that appeared next to each message I sent. These ticks come in three versions, a single grey tick indicates that a message is successfully sent, a double grey tick indicates that the message was successfully delivered to the phones of all the participants in the group, and a double blue tick indicated that all the participants in the group has read my message. The second way gave more details of who read and received messages and at what time. To see the details of a message I sent, I swiped my message from right to left or tapped and held on my message until a popup menu appeared and I chose "info". The 'message info' screen enabled me to see a list of the members who had seen my message and when.

Employing WhatsApp when conducting a focus group had the following drawbacks:

1. I was unable to see their full nonverbal reactions, as seeing the emoji they used only helped partially in delivering their nonverbal reactions.
2. Despite spending more time on conducting this mode of focus group, the group interaction and discussion was less. The word-count of the exported chat was less than

the word-count of the face-to-face focus-group transcription file, and this is clear evidence.

- When I exported the conversation, I was able to see follow-up questions (in text) without the exact responses that I replied to. To illustrate this point, see Table (3.3) which gives the same conversation but in different formats. Column (1) shows a screenshot of how I followed up participant responses as displayed on my smartphone screen and column (2) shows the exported conversation. I named the participants with their pseudonyms in my smartphone followed by their real names in brackets. I have blurred their real names in the screenshots in column 1 to protect their identities and deleted their real names from the excerpt of the exported chat history in column 2.

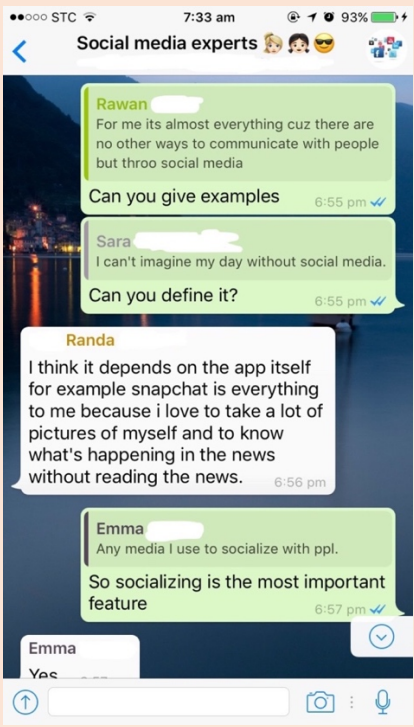
(1) Screenshot of a conversation	(2) Excerpt of exported chat history
	<p><b>18/10/2016, 6:55:21 pm: Nada:</b> Can you give examples</p> <p><b>18/10/2016, 6:55:53 pm: Nada:</b> Can you define it?</p> <p><b>18/10/2016, 6:56:43 pm: Randa:</b> I think it depends on the app itself for example snapchat is everything to me because i love to take a lot of pictures of myself and to know what's happening in the news without reading the news.</p> <p><b>18/10/2016, 6:57:17 pm: Nada:</b> So socializing is the most important feature</p> <p><b>18/10/2016, 6:57:57 pm: Emma :</b> Yes</p>

Table 3.3: Two formats of chat conversation in the WhatsApp group

### 3.4.3 Semi-structured Interviews and Informal Interviews

I conducted a techno-biographic interview session with seven participants a week after conducting the focus-group interview and after observing my participants for several days. I conducted this type of interview face-to-face with all my participants, except Norah. Norah had a hectic schedule and chose to stop in the middle of interviewing but offered to complete the interview via WhatsApp in the evening of the same day. In making this decision, I followed Boellstorff et al.'s (2012) advice as they advocate having a “flexible, responsive methodology, sensitive to emergent phenomena” (ibid., p. 6) in ethnographic approaches. In following Norah's inclination in conducting this interview via an online setting, I drew on Barton and Lee's (2013) suggestion of using online interviewing with participants if meeting them face-to-face is difficult. I contacted Norah privately on WhatsApp at the time she chose and reminded her of our conversation in the morning. The pros and cons of conducting online interviews via WhatsApp are the same as those discussed in section 3.4.2.1.1.

I conducted informal interviews after observing my participants for four weeks and knowing the nature of their activity. In these interviews, I arranged to meet my participants face-to-face every week or fortnight depending on their schedules, and these participants chose the campus where they attended their courses. I used recent screenshots I took of the participants' own posts in English via social media to direct our short conversations. I used to show them from 2 to 6 screenshots in each meeting and used the following prompts:

1. What was going on here?
2. Can you talk about this post?
3. Can you describe what you did and why?

Street (2001) suggests talking to people immediately after their experience with a literacy activity and listening to them to link their activity with their experience, as it could be the case

that what gives meaning to the activity might not be about literacy. I would not claim that my informal interviews immediately followed their activity on social media, as it might remind my participants of my obtrusive presence. I wanted to reduce the effect of my presence as an ‘obtrusive’ ethnographer, as advised by Gobo (2008). According to him, an ethnographer’s presence is obtrusive when it causes stress, embarrassment and unease in the participants and the ethnographer can reduce this unavoidable obtrusiveness by understanding the situation and avoiding reminding the participants of the researcher’s presence. However, I tried to choose recent screenshots of the participants’ own writing via Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram or Path and left the screenshots I took when they liked or retweeted tweets on Twitter to be discussed in the second interview sessions. I can say that some of my participants did not notice my presence as one expressed her astonishment when I showed her a screenshot during our informal interviews and laughed, saying “*I cannot believe it! how did you notice this?*” (Rawan, informal interview 3).

It is important to note that I conducted informal interviews more with some participants than others (see Table 3.4). I had more interviews with Emma for two reasons: her willingness to meet me every week and her activity on social media; she used English in the majority of her posts on Twitter and Snapchat, more than any other participants. However, I had the fewest informal interviews with Norah, as I conducted only two sessions with her due to her extremely busy schedule.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Number of Interview Sessions</b>	<b>Total Duration</b>
<b>Emma</b>	8	60 minutes
<b>Deema</b>	6	40 minutes
<b>Lama</b>	4	28 minutes
<b>Nouf</b>	5	32 minutes
<b>Rawan</b>	3	25 minutes
<b>Latifah</b>	3	26 minutes
<b>Norah</b>	2	24 minutes

Table 3.4: Duration and frequency of informal interviews

In each interview, whether semi-structured or informal, I was aware of the effect of presenting myself to my participants as this “leaves a profound impression on the respondents and has a great influence on the success of the study (or lack thereof)” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 132) and I took care of the way I dressed, the words I chose to break the ice each time I met my participants. Kendall (2008) indicates that the interviewer has to master interpersonal skills, and be able to make the interviewee feel equal in social status features with the interviewer to encourage them to divulge and disclose information the researcher needs. Kendall further suggests that the interviewer will be able to make the interviewee feel equal if there is a good “fit in background and status” (Denzin, 1989; as cited in Kendall, 2008, p.137) between them.

I conducted all types of interviewing in the language my participants preferred; some wanted to use English, others wanted me to present the questions in English and give them the freedom to answer in Arabic or English as they were all interpreters. I also used the language they were using in their responses to follow up and clarify their accounts, whether they used Arabic or English. In doing this, I followed Cohen, Manion, & Morrison’s (2011) suggestion of using the language that is chosen by the interviewee to help them feel at ease and ensure that they have the capability to talk. I also gave my participants the freedom to choose the locations for interviews to help them divulge their personal experiences, as this technique is advocated by Hammersley & Atkinson (2007).

#### **3.4.3.1 Second Interview Guide: Participants’ English Language Learning History and their Activities in English on Social Media**

The second interview guide focused on the participants’ English language learning history and their habits of reading and writing on social media. I tailored lists of questions for the individual participants after observing them on social media apps, examining their entries in the electronic

logbook and reading the transcripts of the focus-group and informal interviews. The questions mentioned below cover the basic questions I used with each participant.

I noticed in observing my participants that their frequency of using English via social media differed and I wanted to see if their language learning history influenced their literacy practices. I was inspired to ask these questions by Emma as she used English in her posts more than the others. I was also inspired after meeting Emma for the first time when we chatted to get to know each other. Emma talked about her school memories when she was studying in London and related to her school memories as a child when I raised my concerns regarding my eldest daughter who resisted speaking Arabic and used English when communicating at school. Thus, I decided to ask questions about the participants' previous English language learning history and questions 1–4 covers that.

To understand how they first used English via social media, I asked question 5 and used question 6 to clarify the relationship between using English via social media and learning English. I used the screenshots I took to ask questions about their profiles (question 7) and the reasons for 'like' and 'retweet' on Twitter (questions 8 and 9). I asked questions to explore in detail their ways of reading and writing in English (questions 10, 11 and 12). At the end of the interviews, I asked questions about the online logbook of English usage on social media and the information provided there relating to their own descriptions of their literacy activities in English via social media. The last question in the list below belongs to this type of question.

1. When did you start studying English? How did you study it (e.g. at school, at home, in an English-speaking country etc.)?
2. How many years have you been studying English?
3. Have you done any writing in English that might be related to the English comments you post on \_\_\_\_\_ (a specific social media app)?

4. Have you done any reading in English that might be related to the English comments you go through on \_\_\_\_\_ (a specific social media app)?
5. How did you first post in English via social media? Why?
6. Do you study English via \_\_\_\_\_ (a specific social media app) or any other social media platform? Did you use English via social media to learn English?
7. Why is your profile page on Twitter written in English/ English and Arabic? (show a screenshot)
8. Why did you like this tweet? (show a screenshot)
9. Why did you retweet this post? (show a screenshot)
10. What do you read in English on \_\_\_\_\_ (a specific social media app)? How?
11. Tell me about the people you follow on \_\_\_\_\_ (a specific social media app) who use English?
12. Before using Twitter, did you do anything like posting in English/ replying to some posts in English?
13. Did you record every instance of using English on social media on (a specific day) on the link provided? why?

#### **3.4.4 Transcription of Focus-group and Individual Interviews**

Silverman (2013) states that there is no single best method to transcribe interviews. Thus, I adopted Bird's (2005) transcription convention in transcribing my one-to-one interviews and focus-group interviews. Bird suggests a transcription key, which resulted from her experience of transcribing three types of data: individual interviews, group interviews and a classroom lesson.

Transcribing the interviews was challenging. As my participants switched between English and Arabic, I had to make decisions regarding the transcription key and the program I used to transcribe. Arabic is written from right to left and English is the opposite. I tried several programs to assist me in transcribing but ended up doing it manually. I used Microsoft Word to type Arabic and English on the same line and thus turned my transcription hard copy into soft copy. To overcome the transcription key obstacle, I came up with two transcription keys: one in English, the other in Arabic. I translated the English transcription key into Arabic and encountered a problem of translating capital letters as there are no capital letters in Arabic. However, I used this symbol ‘((كلمة))’ to indicate words spoken at a loud volume.

Tables 3.5 and 3.6 illustrate the final transcription key (adapted from Bird, 2005, pp. 236–241) in Arabic and English for analysis of all the audio recordings in my thesis.

Symbol	Meaning
...	Indicates a speaker’s brief pause between spoken words
[Laugh]	Laugh
CAPITAL LETTERS	Words spoken at a louder volume than other words
[unclear]	Words that are inaudible or indistinguishable
Nada	Interviewer
A	Speaker
A?/B?	Indicates not sure which speaker, but only one
C/D	Means both speakers at the same time
...	at the end of a line Means the next person started talking over the top of the first speaker/or interjected a comment
[pause]	Indicates a speaker’s pause longer than a brief pause of ...
(words?)	Means the word or phrase in parentheses sounds like what was heard, but it is not certain
“words”	English words as spoken by the interviewee

Table 3.5: English transcription key for audio analysis in my thesis

المعنى	الرمز
تدل على الصمت القصير بين الكلمات	...
الضحك	[ضحك]
الكلمة بين الأقواس صوتها اعلى من الكلمات الاخرى	((كلمة))
الكلمة الغير واضحة	[غير واضحة]
المسؤولة عن المقابلة	ندى
الشخص الثاني المتحدث	أ
لست متأكدة من المتحدث	أ/ب؟
تدل على ان الاثنان تحدثتا في آن معاً	ج/د
بنهاية الجملة	...
تعني ان المتحدث تمت مقاطعته من قبل المتحدث التالي	
الصمت بين الكلمات الأطول من ...	[صمت]
الكلمة التي لم اتأكد من وضوحها	(الكلمة؟)
الكلمة باللغة الإنجليزية	“English”

Table 3.6: Arabic transcription key for audio analysis in my thesis

I transcribed the interviews into written form in the language spoken in the data. I did not translate the data into English as I feel that working on raw data can capture their essence.

### 3.4.5 Online Observation and Conceptual Memos

I relied on observing my participants in an online context and on observing the social media apps that they use and gave me permission to observe and take screenshots of. To be specific, I illustrate the social media apps that my participants gave me permission to observe and thus become one of their friends and followers in Table 3.7. I mark the apps I was given permission to observe with a (√) and the ones I was not given permission to observe with a (X). I use (N/A) indicating not applicable for the apps they were not using. Lama and Latifah partially allowed me to be their friend on Snapchat by not allowing me to view the stories they posted there. However, Lama and Latifah occasionally sent private snaps to me.

Name of Participant	Social Media Apps				
	Twitter	Snapchat	Path	Instagram	Tumblr
Deema	√	√	√	N/A	N/A
Emma	√	√	X	N/A	N/A
Nouf	√	√	X	N/A	N/A
Rawan	√	√	X	N/A	N/A
Norah	√	√	X	N/A	N/A
Lama	√	√	X	√	√
		Not allowed to view her stories			
Latifah	√	√	X	N/A	N/A
		Not allowed to view her stories			

Table 3.7: The social media apps I was allowed to observe for each participant

To reduce the effect of ‘lurking’ in online observation, as mentioned earlier in section 3.1.4, I observed my participants through social media and mirrored their activities by briefly commenting on their posts in texts or emojis, retweeting or tapping a heart icon indicating that I liked their tweet. I sought to turn my observation into some sort of hanging out and socializing with my participants, as my observation lasted three months. I can say that my observation was similar to the less ‘intrusive’ type of observation suggested by Page et al. (2014). They assert that “‘Hanging out’ is a form of observation and is the least intrusive form of research. It can be open-ended or it can be more focused observation, looking for particular things” (ibid., p. 119).

For the purposes of observing my participants, I created a new user name on Twitter and Instagram. I downloaded the Path and Tumblr apps and learned how to use them. I followed Stirling’s (2016) suggestion and used my existing account on Snapchat and WhatsApp. Stirling (2016) suggests using the researcher’s own social media account as she used her Facebook account to explore her participants’ uses of Facebook and reflected that her use was not negative. I intended to conduct online participant observation three times per week during the period of data collection. I discovered myself going to Snapchat, Twitter, Tumblr, Path, Instagram and WhatsApp to view my participants’ accounts on a daily basis. I observed them

in the first two weeks and took notes almost every day, but after that I started to organise my observation and took notes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. I kept observing them every day as I viewed their accounts every two hours, excluding my sleeping time. I tried to separate my personal accounts from my research account. Establishing this separation was strange to me as I have never used two Twitter accounts at the same time. Observing my participants on social media allowed me to view their production in English texts in different forms as they retweeted or posted texts on Twitter and stories on Snapchat.

Creating my own template with Zoho creator as I discussed earlier allowed me to access the app and fill in the template quickly from anywhere in Saudi Arabia, as I used an iPhone 6 smartphone and subscribed to an unlimited data pack. Using Zoho Creator secured my field-note data as it saved my notes and synchronised all entries instantly to a website.

When writing my notes during fieldwork, I kept in mind the suggestions made by Heath and Street (2008), Hamilton (2000), Barton and Lee (2013) and Stirling (2016), as discussed earlier in section 3.2.3. I aimed to record the chronological order of literacy activities shortly after they occurred as I observed my participants on their social media apps. As literacy practices cannot be observed, I was able to notice observable elements in literacy events and to describe these in my field notes after observing my participants interact but I did not write about their literacy practices, leaving those to be inferred from the screenshots I took of participants' activity in English texts on social media.

After going into the field, I realized the importance of specifying more than one space in each field-note entry to upload screenshots I took of Snapchat stories, which usually include more than one image or a short video. As a result, I modified my field-note template to include six spaces for uploading screenshots.

All instances of using English texts in social media I noticed while observing my participants were screenshotted and written up in my field-notes template, in addition to noting the obstacles, interpretation and challenges I encountered in the process. In writing my field-notes, I followed the techniques suggested by Roller & Lavrakas (2015) and Merriam (2009). I filled in my field-notes template immediately after observing my participants and made spelling and grammatical changes to them later. During the process of observing my participants on social media, I filled in the template in Zoho Creator app with the literacy events I observed, as shown in Figure (3.4).

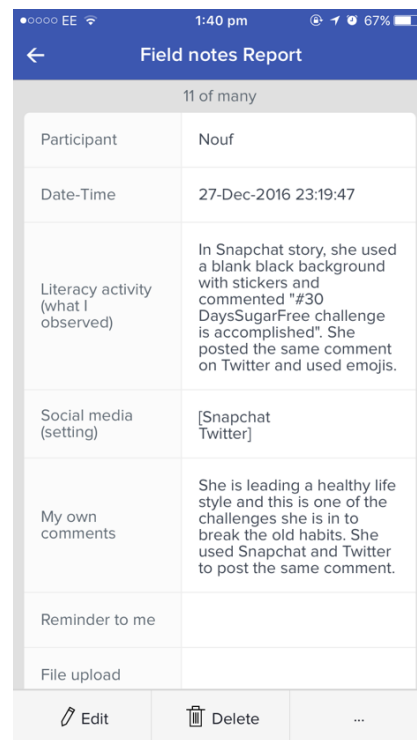


Figure 3.4: A screenshot of a field-note entry with information.

As Heath and Street (2008) suggest that an ethnographer gathers her data by removing and extraction, I used screenshots of my smartphone whenever I encountered my participants using English text on social media.

I filled in the log entries of my conceptual memos at the end of every week. I can say that the conceptual memos combined with field-notes allowed me to anticipate what the participants would be willing to share with me in their online logbook of English usage on social media and in interviews.

### **3.4.6 Social Media Online Logbook**

As I used Zoho Creator to involve the participants in describing their activities on social media in English, I sent the logbook as a link via the main WhatsApp group – the group we used to hang out in virtually (see section 3.4.1.1 for details of this group) and attached instructions (see Appendix C) on how to fill in the log as a pdf file. I sent the instructions only once and asked them not to hesitate if they did not understand the instructions. I answered my participants' queries regarding the instructions as I received them, either by chatting privately on WhatsApp or in the main WhatsApp group, and checked that they all knew how to fill in the logbook entries. I gave them the freedom to use that template or any other template and invited them to share at least six days and specified Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays of the next four weeks. I reminded my participants on the morning of each specified day for four weeks by sending a morning greeting with a link in the main WhatsApp group.

#### **3.4.6.1 Reflections on the Online Logbook**

At the beginning, the participants reported having a technical problem I could not solve, even after contacting Zoho Creator support. Entries were freezing when participants were trying to upload their screenshots, and I had to delete that field after suspending the process for seven days. I intended to rely on the information I collected from the logbook to describe their literacy practices in English in terms of frequency, but I had to change my plan after a month of sending logbook links. Participants did not fill in the logbook as I imagined, I had expected them to

cover all their activities on social media in English for six days. Only 23 entries were filled in by all seven participants. When interviewing them they indicated that they did not fill in the logbook every time they used English on social media and so their entries did not reflect their frequency of using English on social media. I could tell that they did not record all their instances of using English via social media as I followed them on their social media apps. My participants indicated that filling in the logbook as I invited them to do was too demanding as they were busy with exams and graduation projects. One of the participants indicated that navigating from the social media app she was active on to the WhatsApp group to open the link I sent was difficult. I could argue that the information they provided, though not as I expected, was helpful in describing some of their literacy practices. I worded some of the questions in the second semi-structured interview from their entries in the electronic logbook.

### **3.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have illustrated the theoretical perspective that inspired me to choose an ethnographic case study methodology. In the first section of this chapter, I described the methodology by discussing an ethnographic approach, connective ethnography and the ethnographic perspective I drew on. I also discussed how ethnography has been used by Literacy Studies scholars and described the online observation in my study. In the second section, I described the research design I followed by detailing the sampling procedure and the setting of my research, and the types of interviews I intended to use in my study. I also discussed the process of recording participant observation, conceptual memos and the ethical procedures I followed. In the third section, I discussed how I entered the research field by describing how I accessed the physical research site and the data I was able to collect. In the fourth section, I discussed how my methods of data collection evolved in the field by describing how I changed the process of recruiting participants. I included a detailed description of my

relationship with the research participants. This was followed by a description of the number and settings of the focus groups I conducted. I also described the semi-structured interviews by detailing the second interview guide, the informal interview process and the procedure of transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews. I illustrated how I observed my participants online, the conceptual memos I wrote and reflected on the logbook of English usage.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ORGANIZATION AND APPROACHES TO ANALYSIS

This chapter demonstrates the process of data analysis used to examine the diverse and rich types of ethnographic data collected during my fieldwork, in order to clarify the findings in the following Chapters 5–9. The process of data analysis has been greatly aided by ATLAS.ti software. I begin by explaining the three stages of data analysis, including data organization phases and coding cycles. I then discuss the rationale underpinning using CAQDAS in general and ATLAS.ti in particular, followed by data analysis approaches. I conclude this chapter by recounting my experience of using ATLAS.ti for data analysis, explaining the iterative six-step process and providing screenshots showing the built-in tools I drew on to untangle my various data types.

#### 4.1 Stages of Data Analysis

As I adopted an ethnographic approach, the processes of analysing and collecting my data overlapped. I had three data analysis stages: first, second and third. The first stage started early, during data collection, by transcribing the interviews and reading the logbook entries of my participants to identify topics to be explored and devise questions for subsequent interviews. The second stage involved data organization phases and the third stage included the coding cycles (see Fig. 4.1).

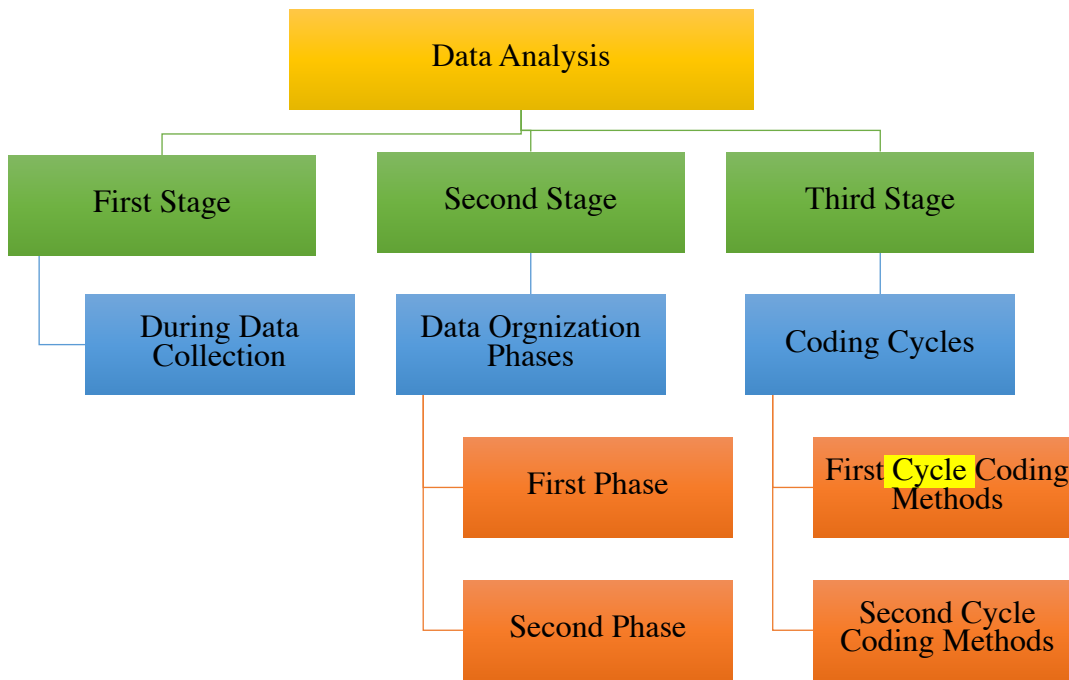


Figure 4.1: Process of data analysis for my thesis

#### 4.1.1 Data Organisation Phases

I had two phases in organising my data: first phase and second phase. In the first phase, I had to prepare my data before importing them into ATLAS.ti. I transcribed all the interviews manually, as I mentioned in section 3.4.4, and typed the transcript in MS Word. As I used Zoho Creator app in my field-notes, conceptual memos and the participants' online logbook of English usage, I was able to export these data into pdf format and downloaded each image attached in its actual size to a folder in LU Box.<sup>1</sup> I renamed each image with the name of the participant, the date and the exact time of the literacy activity (e.g. Nouf\_28-Nov-2016 12/43). I had 13 reports of field notes and a single report for each of the conceptual memos and the electronic logbook. Since I used some of the screenshots to stimulate the informal interviews, I had to rename the screenshots I used in informal interviews with the name of the interviewee,

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<sup>1</sup> A secure online cloud storage system protected by Lancaster University.

the number of the informal interview and the number of screenshots used in that interview (e.g. Norah\_informal interview (1) (4)).

In the second phase, I imported all the data I collected in different formats, such as pdf, plain text, MS Word, images and audio files, in ATLAS.ti and created a new project (see section 4.3.1 for further details about ATLAS.ti). I drew on Friese’s (2014) suggestions for using ATLAS.ti in dealing with data. I organised the data into document groups, such as conceptual memos, field-notes, focus groups, informal interviews, interview (1), interview (2), logbook and screenshots (see Fig. 4.2).

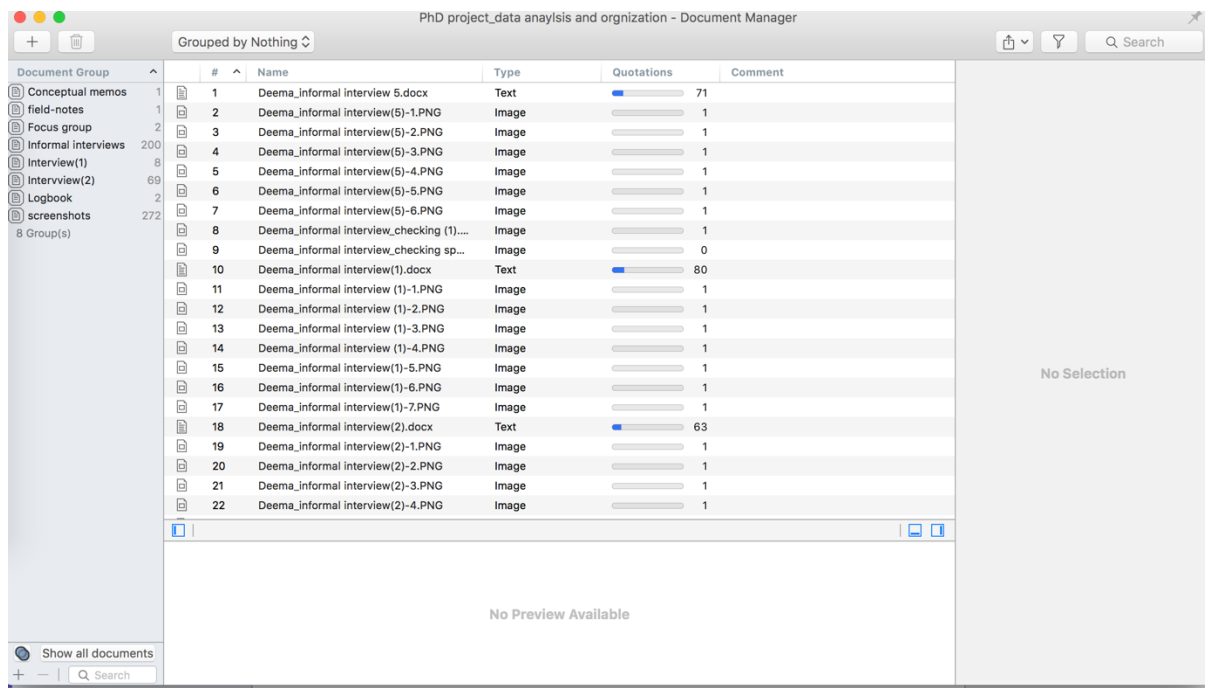


Figure 4.2: A screenshot of document group names in ATLAS.ti

### 4.1.2 Coding Cycles

I used ‘coding’ to refer to “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). I found Saldaña’s (2016) approaches to coding compatible with

my theoretical framework, which involved two main sessions for coding: first cycle and second cycle. I adopted different methods in each cycle as some methods worked better in parts of the data. These two cycles are embedded in a multidirectional cycling frame aided by ATLAS.ti (see section 4.3.1). In the first cycle coding method, I used Process Coding, Descriptive Coding, Attribute Coding, In Vivo Coding, Emotion Coding and Structural Coding, while in the second cycle, I used coding method, Pattern Coding and Focused Coding. I discuss each method in this section.

I adopted Saldaña's Process and Descriptive Coding at the beginning of the analysis process with my observational data. In Process Coding, the researcher uses gerunds (-ing) to signal actions in the data (e.g. writing with voice, checking grammar with Google), while in Descriptive Coding, the researcher uses nouns to summarise a topic of segmented data (e.g. corpus website, Google). This worked well for the field-notes, screenshots, logbook entries and conceptual memos. Using gerunds and nouns to refer to what I regard as 'literacy events' worked well with Hamilton's (2000) strategy in identifying a literacy event (see following paragraph for an explanation). In doing this, I kept in mind the framework suggested by Barton and Hamilton (2012) to identify literacy practices from inferring the basic unit of literacy, which is the literacy event. I used this initial lit.eve- prefix before naming a literacy event code (e.g. lit.eve.attending parties, lit.eve.coffee shop).

It is essential to revisit the components of literacy events and practices on social media to clarify how I analysed my screenshot data. I discussed the meaning of a literacy event and literary practices in the literature (see section 2.1.2), as well as defining the concepts of literacy events and practices I drew on in my thesis. I showed in section 3.2.3 how I used these concepts to guide the process of taking notes while observing my participants as they used English on social media. I drew on Hamilton's (2000) view of the basic elements of a literacy event and

literacy practices (see Hamilton, 2000, p. 17). Table 4.1 shows how these elements of literacy events and literacy practices are identified in my study from the screenshots I collected shortly after being posted on social media. The data obtained from the informal interview transcripts guided me in identifying literacy events and constituted the basic layer of how I inferred literacy practices from the screenshots.

<b>Literacy Elements</b>	<b>Literacy events as captured on screenshots of social media</b>	<b>Literacy practices as inferred from screenshots of social media</b>
<b>Participants</b>	The name of the participant(s) who produced the activity on social media app as it appears in the post, e.g. a retweet on Twitter and redirecting a Snapchat story indicate that two people were involved: the person who produced the original post and the other who circulated the post.	The non-visible participants – other people who influence and regulate the written text. These are the social media audience who are involved in the production of the post as they read the post, circulate (retweet/redirect) and interpret the production of the written text on social media posts.
<b>Settings</b>	The place where the activity took place, such as the specific name of the social media app.	The domain of practice in which the literacy event took place and which informed the event with a purpose. The domains are the six domains of vernacular literacies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2012) and other domains the participants stated during informal interviews.
<b>Activities</b>	The actions of the participants as they engaged with social media, such as tweeting, retweeting, liking, posting a	The pathways that regulate and facilitate actions on social media. These pathways are the social and cultural norms that

	Snapchat story and any form of production/ receiving on social media apps	regulate actions, including what social media users can/cannot engage with to allow followers to see/not see posts and the duration of specific actions.
<b>Artefacts</b>	The social media tools the participants used to produce activity in addition to English texts such as emoji, images, links, hashtags and videos.	The resources social media users drew on such as values, feelings, ways of thinking, understanding, skills and knowledge.

Table 4.1: The approach I drew on to identify literacy events and literacy practices in my data

When analysing the transcripts of all interview types, I used Saldaña’s Attribute, In Vivo and Emotion coding to code data segments. With Attribute Coding, I coded all the data with basic descriptive information such as the participants names and the name of social media. With In Vivo Coding, I used the direct word(s) of the participant(s) to ground my analysis in their perspectives (Saldaña, 2016). Since I worked with raw data where my participants used Arabic and English in interviews, I named the code either by the English words they used or by translating their Arabic words and using quotation marks (e.g. lit.eve.‘accommodate feelings’, lit.eve.greet with ‘long weekend’). I found using Saldaña’s Emotion coding was compatible with Tusting et al.’s (2000) framework for analysing literacy practices. I coded how my participant’s felt about their activities on social media in English as they gave their accounts and experiences (e.g. lit.eve.express happiness, lit.eve.graduation anxiety).

I drew on Saldaña’s (2016) ‘Structural Coding’ with my various types of data, which is question-based coding. I assigned a phrase to a segment of data that I believe relates to one of my research questions in order to index and label that segment. I used this method to name the

code or part of it. Table 4.2 illustrates the question-based code and the related research phrase and segment.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Related Research Question phrase/segment</b>
<b>SM basic component</b>	RQ1: Social media basic component
<b>res.Eng.address my classmates</b>	RQ3: Reason for choosing English
<b>res.Eng.reply in the same language</b>	RQ3: Reason for choosing English
<b>RQ5.SM.account.2.writer</b>	RQ5: Identity construction in second social media account

Table 4.2: Examples of the Structural Codes I used with the equivalent research questions, phrases and segments

Saldana identifies six strategies to develop a sense of the codes generated in the first cycle codes, and this leads to the second cycling coding methods. I selected two methods in this cycle: Pattern Coding and Focused Coding. In Pattern Coding, I grouped the codes according to similarities, relations and contrasts, and organised them in themes. In Focus Coding, I identified frequent themes based on counting their occurrences in the data and from generating themes (discussed in the following section). In this coding cycle, I applied the codes to relevant information in the data without restricting myself to working with one type of data as in interviews or screenshots. In this process, I renamed some codes, merged other codes and assigned a code family for yet more codes.

#### **4.2 CAQDAS and ATLAS.ti**

CAQDAS refers to any software that is designed to assist in analysing qualitative data. It is important to note that CAQDAS software packages do not perform any data analysis by default but rather assist researchers by “[replacing] the traditional tools of qualitative data analysis –

paper, pen, scissors and highlighters – with tools of the digital age; screen, mouse and keyboard” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 263). Hence, decisions about naming the codes, coding segments and clarifying outcomes to be used in the analysis are made by the researcher.

There are various software packages available, such as NVivo, MAXqda and ATLAS.ti. These different programs function by importing all the data files and saving them in project files on a computer. According to Lewins & Silver (2007), CAQDAS helps in many ways, such as organizing data, keeping a record of analytical memos, assisting researchers in reading and marking data segments, searching for words, developing a coding scheme, coding and retrieving coded segments, linking data segments to other data segments in order to provide visual representations of coded data and providing reports of data analysis progress. In the same vein, Saldaña (2016) asserts that CAQDAS “efficiently stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures your data to enable human analytic reflections” (p.30). Dörnyei (2007) lists several methodological merits of using CAQDAS, such as the efficiency in dealing with large volumes of data, easy retrieval of data and speed of coding.

I was tempted to use CAQDAS for the aforementioned merits, especially as I collected various types of data in my ethnographic fieldwork. CAQDAS provided me with the tools to organize and arrange my data into a more manageable project. It also provided me with a space to store all my coded data on my computer and in LU Box, and thus save my data. At the beginning, I had to choose from among the available software packages and I chose ATLAS.ti Mac version, because it provided me with the tools to create relationships between codes, raise queries, export queried information in tables and link multiple segments of data through meaning as well as with coding. It also provided me with a way to visualize data networks with details. I learned how to use ATLAS.ti from the tutorial videos available on the official website of ATLAS.ti.

### 4.3 Data Analysis Approaches

I combined Saldaña's (2016) coding approaches with Schreier's (2014) 'qualitative content analysis' method. Schreier's 'qualitative content analysis' method condenses data in a highly systematic and flexible way. This method is systematic as it involves coding by following certain steps and is flexible as the coding frame can combine data-driven (inductive) codes and concept-driven (deductive) codes. In other words, decisions about choices of codes can be made in two ways: either in advance via frameworks related to literacy as a social practice, (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2012; Hamilton, 2000; Tusting et al., 2000) or emerging from the data analysed.

I developed themes in the data to answer my research questions from the codes I created. In other words, coding helped me to generate themes that are the "outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 198).

I analysed my data vertically by examining each case individually to identify themes for each participant; after that, I moved on to analyse horizontally by examining all the cases together to identify patterns within reading and writing practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2012). I use a theme to refer to "an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 199).

It is important to note that I kept a record of what is referred to as 'analytical memos' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2012; Saldaña, 2016) in a separate notebook. In analytical memos, I reflect on my coding choices, the operational definitions of these codes, emerging themes and patterns, the names of potential visual networks among the codes or patterns as I saved in the ATLAS.ti project, relating theory and tentative answers to my research questions.

### 4.3.1 Data Analysis with ATLAS.ti

After the second phase of organizing my data, I started a multidirectional cycle of data analysis. For the purposes of explaining my multidirectional cycle of the data analysis process, I tried to break the process up into six steps. Figure 4.3 shows the general iterative process of analysing my data in ATLAS.ti in six steps. To describe this process briefly, I explored the data by reading the data related to each participant in document groups, rereading the data to get a thorough understanding, shape my thinking and influence the way I code. Then, I quoted the text or image and added a code. I semantically linked between these codes or quotations by dragging and dropping desired quotations. I visualised codes and quotations in the network and I searched and queried the data by following certain rules from the quotation manager in ATLAS.ti to answer my research questions.

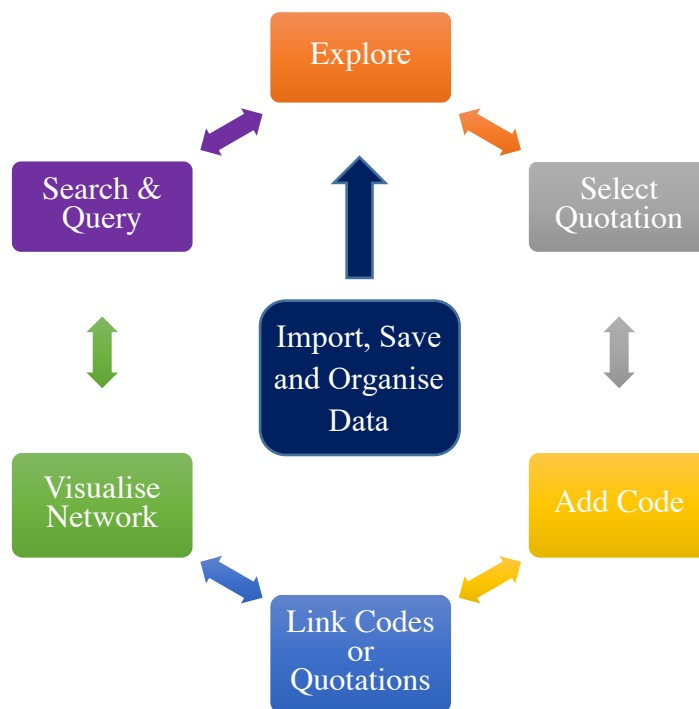


Figure 4.3: Iterative process of analysis with ATLAS.ti

To clarify the “link code or quotation” step, I selected part of the informal interview where I and the participants were discussing a specific screenshot and creating a quotation, I then created another quotation in a different document by selecting the screenshot we were discussing. I then linked these two quotations semantically by “this quotation discusses this quotation”. Clicking on this quoted interview would show the screenshot we were discussing (see Fig.4.4). The selected quotation shows three linked codes: ‘lit.eve.attending parties’, ‘lit.eve.snapping to document daily life’ and ‘Snapchat’.

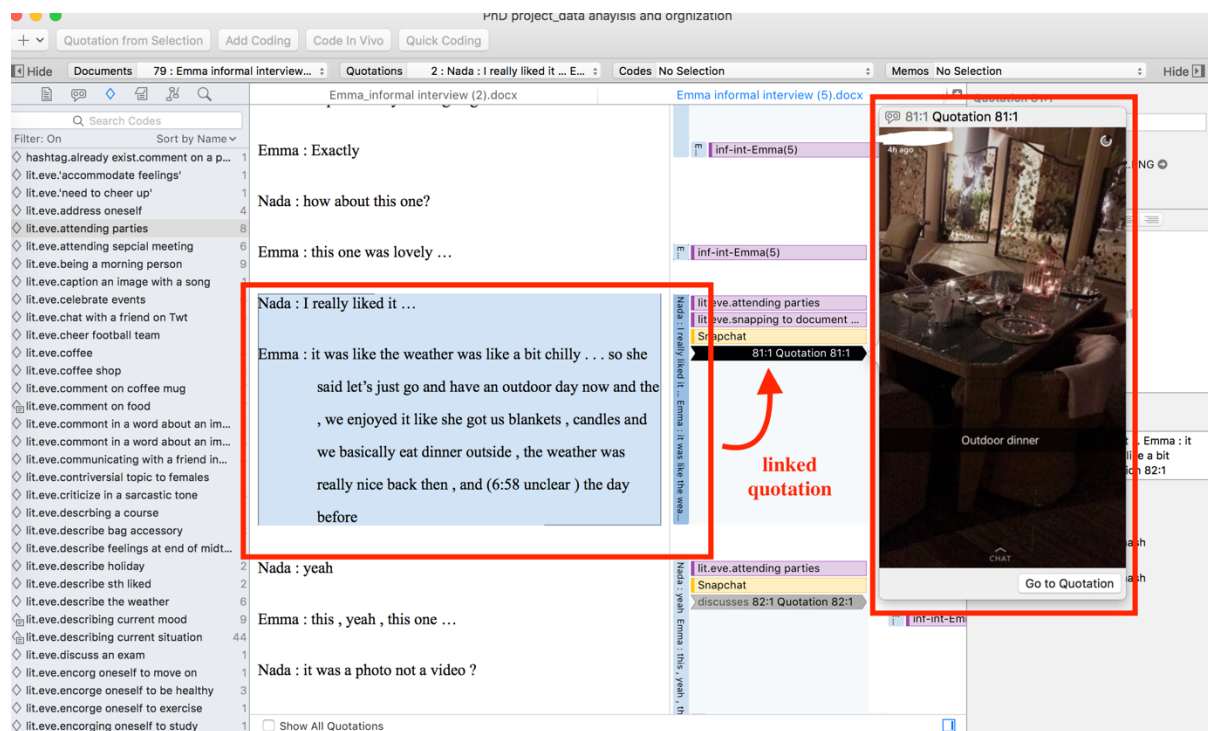


Figure 4.4: A screenshot of ATLAS.ti showing the result of linking part of the informal interview with the screenshot under discussion

In the network tools, I was able to visualise the network of codes and view each quotation linked with a code. Figure 4.5 shows how I viewed the quotations I linked with the code ‘res.Eng.limit to people who know English’.





I used the quotation manager to run a query and I exported the query data grouped by codes in order to write memos, as I mentioned in section 4.2. It is important to note that I wrote a short and detailed description of each code in ATLAS.ti (see Fig.4.7). In this way, I avoided using two codes to refer to the same idea.

Name	Comment	Creator
con.act.tapping	This code groups when the participants use tap to des...	Nada Bin Dahma...
con.act.using the keyboard	This code refers to the participant account of using th...	Nada Bin Dahma...
corpus website	This refers to the use of corpus website by the partici...	Nada Bin Dahma...
del.post.correct grammar	This refers to the process of editing posts on social m...	Nada Bin Dahma...
del.post.correct meaning	This refers to the process of editing posts on social m...	Nada Bin Dahma...
del.post.correct typo	This refers to the process of editing posts on social m...	Nada Bin Dahma...
del.post.erase painful memories from T...	This code groups the participant response justifying d...	Nada Bin Dahma...
dif.read.Twitter VS Snapchat, path & W...	The difference between reading on Twitter and readin...	Nada Bin Dahma...
Eng.learn.public school sixth grade	The participant account of starting to learn English	Nada Bin Dahma...
Eng.role.essential in all aspects of life	The participant description of the role of English in her...	Nada Bin Dahma...
google	This refers to the use of google by the participant to c...	Nada Bin Dahma...
gram.corection.use of asterisk	The code refers to when participant use asterisk to co...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.comment on food	This refers to posts commenting on food	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.describing current mood	This refers to the participant account of the purpose o...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.describing current situation	This refers to the participant account of the purpose o...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.enrich follower's knowledge in Tr...	This relates to posts to enrich the knowledge of the fol...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.express opinion	this refers to the participant purpose for posting as to...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.expressing irritation	this refers to the participant purpose for posting as to...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.fun comment on current situation	This code refers to the act of writing/producing Englis...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.give public opinion on issue	This code refers to the act of writing/producing Englis...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.greet with 'long weekend'	This refers to the participant production of texts on so...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.greet with good morning	his refers to the participant purpose for posting on so...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.quote a friend tweet to add opini...	This refers to the participant purpose for quoting a tw...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.quote a tweet to enrich the know...	This refers to the participant purpose for quoting a tw...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.quote a tweet to entertain follow...	this refers to the participant purpose for posting as to...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.rep.twt. to give opinion	this code group the participants responses when they...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.replying to her own tweet to add...	this refers to the participant purpose for posting as to...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.retweet own tweet to enrich the...	This code refers to the act of retweeting oneself to enr...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.share the happiness of a friend	this refers to the participant purpose for posting as to...	Nada Bin Dahma...
lit.eve.sharing liked quote	This refers to the participant purpose for posting as to...	Nada Bin Dahma...

Figure 4.7: Names of codes and description of each code in ATLAS.ti

Since I followed two coding cycles, as I mentioned in section 4.1.2, the family code feature in ATLAS.ti is used to arrange the codes hierarchically in the second cycle phase. The hierarchical arrangement can be viewed by clicking the code forest. Figure 4.8 shows the hierarchy of some codes.

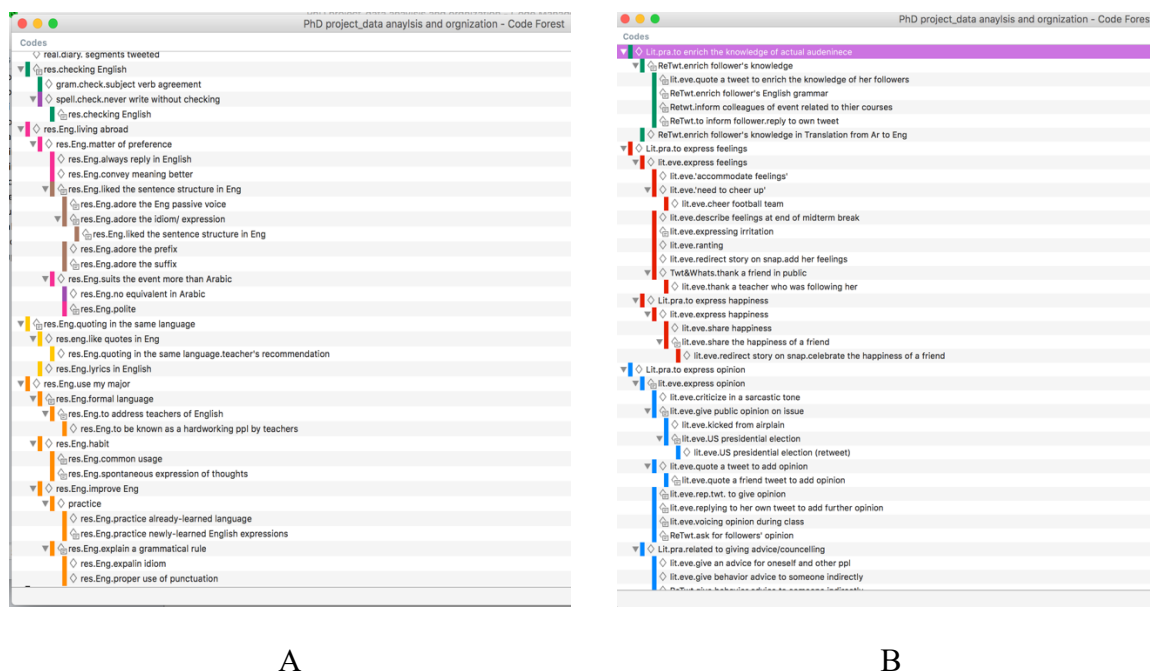


Figure 4.8: Code forest in ATLAS.ti showing the hierarchical arrangement of some codes used to answer purposes for using English on social media in (A) and some codes used to answer literacy practices on social media in English in (B)

When data were coded, ATLAS.ti provided an array of diverse and powerful query tool options that assisted me in making sense of the data. Figure 4.9 shows the query interface screen in ‘Quotation Manager’ in ATLAS.ti. As can be seen, this feature allowed me to run both simple and complex query requests. To run a simple query, I clicked on the filter icon (1) in order to select from an array of options to allow me to search. I was able to choose my query criteria from no (2) and click on (3) to start building my simple query based on quotation attributes and content (4), linkages (coded with/ linked with quotation/ linked with memos/ part of a specific document) (5), Boolean operators (6), semantic operators (7) or proximity operators (8). To run a more complex query, I clicked on (9) and combined my rules by choosing from the same array of options as in 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9. Each time I raised a query I applied a different set of rules and clicked on (10) to export the product the query into a table. Querying my data

allowed me to link codes to networks as well as view the queried product, which opened possibilities for analysis.

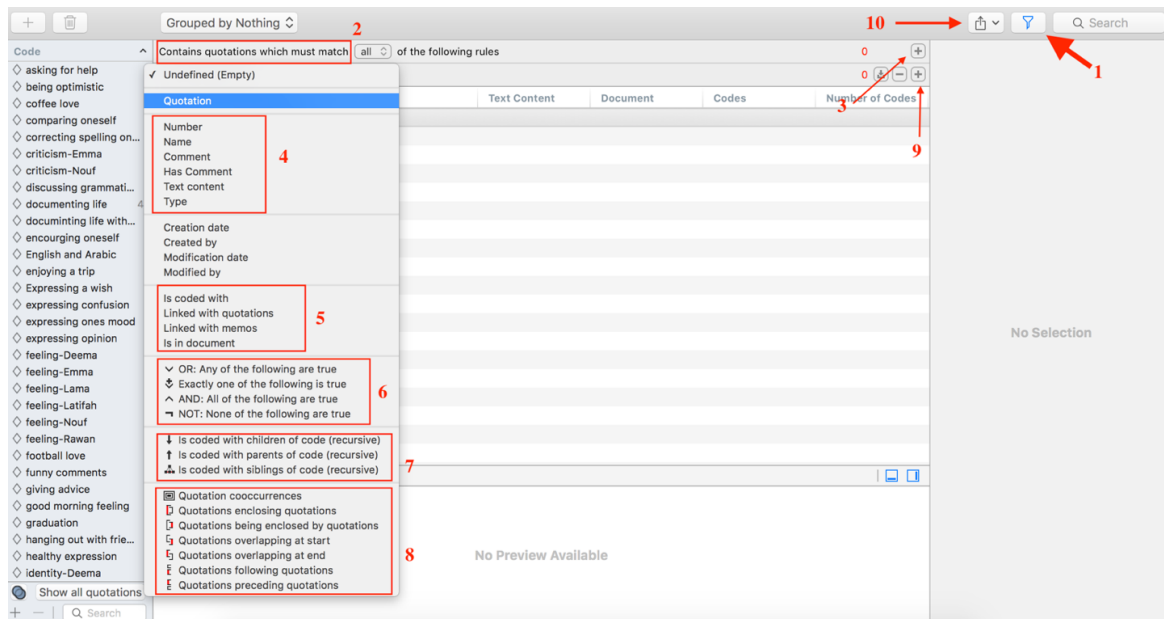


Figure 4.9: Query tools built-in quotation manager

The query tools built into ATLAS.ti allowed me to make sense of my data by previewing the quotation I selected based on the querying rules I discussed. Running a simple query allowed me to view and count how many participants mentioned a specific phenomenon in different interview transcripts and the number of times this phenomenon occurred in the data. Counting allowed me to identify the codes I needed to analyse further and deepen my understanding of these codes in my study. Through embracing this sense, I decided to add a further research question to my thesis, which is the fourth research question, and include a chapter about the material resources and concrete activities these Saudi female undergraduates drew on as they read and wrote in English on social media (see Chapter 8). Codes as in ‘spell.check.predictive keyboard’, ‘spell.check.red squiggly line under misspelled Eng word’, ‘spell.check.Google Translate’ and ‘gram.check.search twt native speakers’ were among the codes I created after I decided to add the fourth research question. This theme emerged strongly in my data analysis.

Running a complex query based on the linkage between the code ‘del.post.correct grammar’ and the code group ‘edit.post.reasons’ allowed me to preview all the quotations that matched these two rules across my data (see Fig. 4.10).

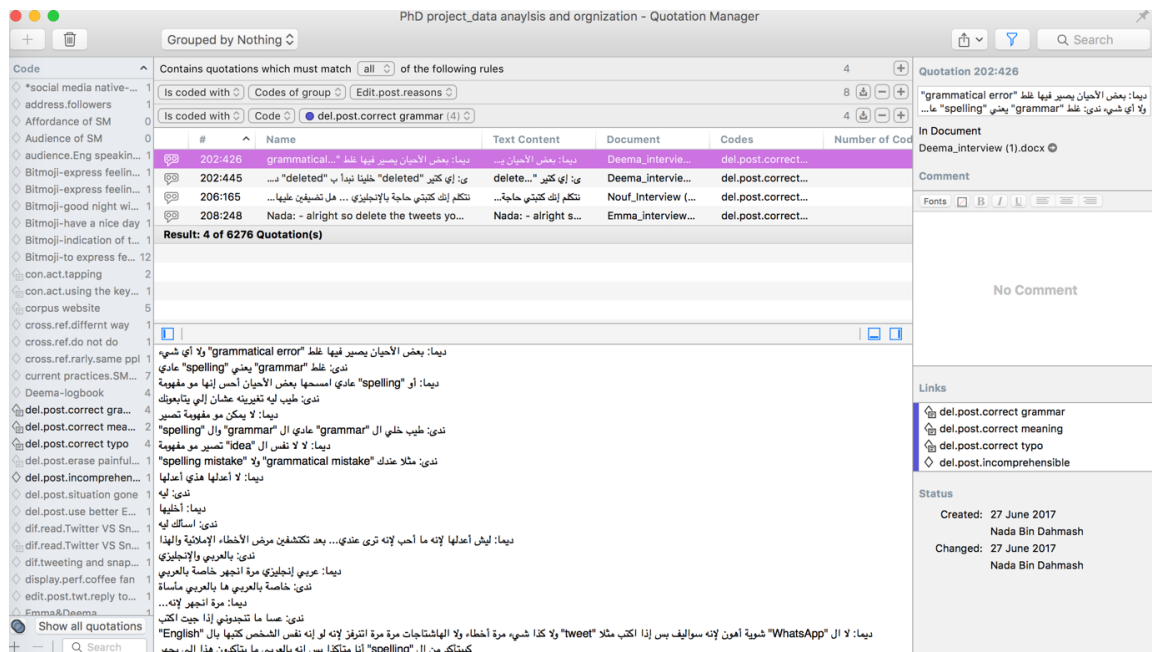


Figure 4.10: Complex query in ATLAS.ti

#### 4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed how I organised my various data types and the analysis approaches I drew on. I started by discussing the three stages of data analysis and describing the data organisation phases and coding cycles. In the second part, I described CAQDAS and explained the rationale for choosing ATLAS.ti in particular. In the third part, I discussed the data analysis approaches and how I developed themes in my study. This was followed by the process I drew on to analyse my data with ATLAS.ti by explaining the iterative process in six steps. I used different screenshots to illustrate how I used ATLAS.ti built-in tools on my data.

## CHAPTER 5

### FEMALE SAUDI UNDERGRADUATES' CONCEPTUALISATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In this chapter, I give the concept of social media as provided by these Saudi female undergraduates. I decided to examine the concept of social media as viewed by these Saudi female undergraduates after piloting my data collection, as I explained in section 3.2.2.3. During data piloting, the participants did not have a clear understanding of the concept of social media nor did they have a unified understanding of this concept in its entirety. As will be seen, I, therefore, argue below that these Saudi female undergraduates' conceptualisation of social media influences the literacy practices that emerge in English on these platforms.

This chapter, therefore, addresses my first research question, which is: **How do these female Saudi undergraduates conceptualise social media?** Based on semi-structured interview and focus-group interview data, three themes emerged as major factors influencing how these Saudi female undergraduates understood social media. I illustrate how these Saudi female undergraduates' conceptualisation of social media was generated from the roles they perceived for social media platforms, their personal histories of social media and their own ideas of the basic components of social media. I describe and offer illustrative examples from my data on each of these factors in the following sections.

#### 5.1 Perceived Roles of Social Media

These Saudi female undergraduates described the functions of social media in their lives with spatial metaphors, as well as explicitly mentioning the roles of these platforms as: a communication channel, a platform to socialise with people, a platform to record daily

activities, an entertainment platform, a news source, a pedagogy source and a platform to express feelings and thoughts. I explain each role in the following sub-sections.

### **5.1.1. Spatial Metaphors**

These Saudi female undergraduates used spatial metaphors to describe the roles of social media in their lives. In the face-to-face focus group, Norah mentioned that social media “*opens locked doors*” while Rawan, in the first interview, described this media as “*a window to the outside world*”. In the WhatsApp focus group, Emma mentioned that social media was “*a new world*”, while Sawsan described this media as “*everything, everywhere, between your hands*”. It seems that these participants greatly value social media as their descriptions of social media platforms reflect a magical key that unlocks barriers in the physical world and enables them to be transferred to a different world where power lies in their hands.

### **5.1.2 “Communication Channel”**

Social media was viewed as a “communication channel” with other people. In the WhatsApp focus group, Randa mentioned that social media was a means “*to communicate with others*”, while Deema named Snapchat a “*communication*” tool. Rawan, in the second interview, mentioned that communication is one of her “*daily needs*” that “*could not be fulfilled without social media*”. Rawan explained that she “*could not live without it ... since I study ... and I need to contact people ... family ... friends... teachers*”. Latifah, in the face-to-face focus group, indicated that social media was “*a communication channel with a group of people ... even those whom we never met*”. It seems that Rawan’s view of social media was based on her need to contact people whom she knows in the physical world, while Latifah’s view of communication included different people, regardless of her relationship with them.

### **5.1.3 Platform to Socialise with People**

Social media was also viewed as a platform to socialise with people. In the WhatsApp focus group, Sara indicated that social media *“keeps me sociable with friends”*, while Emma described social media as *“any media I use to socialise with people”*. It appears that social media assisted Sara in socialising with a specific group of people, while assisting Emma in socialising with various groups of people. Latifah, in the face-to-face focus group, indicated that she used social media if she wanted to socialise with people *“without having to see them face to face”*. It seems that social media provided participants with a tool to socialise and be sociable with others without having to be there in person in the physical world.

### **5.1.4 Platform “to Record” Daily Activities**

Social media was viewed as a platform to record daily activities. Norah, in the first interview, indicated that she used social media different platforms *“to record what happens to me during the day”*. Lama and Emma appeared to share Norah’s view about social media being a tool to record daily activities, although they mentioned a specific platform, which is Snapchat. Lama, in the first interview, mentioned that Snapchat was a social media app that was about *“posting daily life”*. Emma, in the first interview, mentioned that she viewed Snapchat as a social media app and the story feature in particular as her own *“diary”*. Emma stated that she used Snapchat *“only to document myself ... for example, what I DO THROUGHOUT THE DAY”*. The preceding evidence seems to reflect that social media, and Snapchat in particular, was used as a platform to save and display activities performed during their everyday lives.

### **5.1.5 An Entertainment Platform**

Social media was viewed as an entertainment platform. Lama, in the face-to-face focus group, indicated that social media was only used before as a platform for entertainment. This seems

to highlight that social media was introduced as a platform where people could spend their leisure time. Emma and Nouf, in the first interview, indicated that social media was a platform “*to have fun*”. Emma explained that she enjoyed chatting with her friend on Snapchat, as “*the tiny blue dots tell that someone is out there reading what I write*”. Nouf explained that she enjoyed posting on Snapchat story because she was informed when a particular person viewed her story “*in seconds*”, after which she “*interacts with her immediately*”. This view seems to highlight that social media was used as a platform to entertain and enjoy oneself in the physical space.

#### **5.1.6. Source of News**

Social media was viewed as a news source. Norah and Nouf, in the face-to-face focus group, indicated that social media provided them with local and international news. Nouf explained that “*people got used to opening their social media accounts to know about breaking news*” and did not wait to “*check a more trustworthy source*”. Abrar, in the same focus group, added that she regarded social media as “*a reliable news source*” and she “*depend[s] on it*”. Rawan, in the first interview, mentioned that she saw “*the hashtags trending on Twitter ... when there is news that has not been announced yet*”. This view seems to reflect that social media was a news source, although they appeared to disagree on the reliability of this as a source.

#### **5.1.7 Source of Pedagogy**

Social media was viewed as a pedagogical source where they can search, contact experts in English and follow social media accounts to improve their English language. Sawsan, in the WhatsApp focus group, indicated that social media was a place where she could search for experts who were willing to provide answers for her concerns. She explained that she contacted a dog coach to ask about issues related to her friend’s dog by using English, Sawsan’s L2,

because that coach did not speak Arabic. Deema, in the same focus group, shared Sawsan's view and added that she "converted" the answers of these experts into research references in one of her assignments. In the face-to-face focus group, Latifah indicated that social media was used to contact experts in translation. Latifah explained that she contacted an Arab expert in English translation to ask about the Arabic equivalents of some English words and he was helpful. In the same focus group, Lama, Abrar, Norah and Nouf indicated that they shared Latifah's view and added that experts were "very cooperative" on social media. Abrar added that following experts in translation on Twitter was of great benefit to their academic major (see excerpt 5.1). It seems that using Twitter as a platform to learn and contact experts in translation was a common norm among these Saudi female undergraduates.

Translated Focus Group Transcript	Raw Focus Group Transcript
<p>Latifah: I was translating a book about sport and I didn't have any experience or information on sports terms in Arabic ... I contacted an expert ... how do we say this in Arabic ... how do we say ... how do we say that in Arabic, like this? ... we contacted a professor in translation if a word was very difficult by mentioning it and asking how we should translate it and he usually provided the correct translation...</p> <p>Group: Yes ... great ... very cooperative [sounds mixed]</p> <p>Norah: We are provided with information quickly...</p> <p>Lama: Yes, quickly...</p> <p>Latifah: ...taught us common mistakes...</p> <p>Lama: Common mistake posts were very beneficial...</p> <p>Latifah: Indeed...</p> <p>Abrar: Professors' accounts like this...</p> <p>Lama: ...benefited us in our major</p> <p>Norah: ...even in politics and news</p> <p>Lama: Here comes [Norah] who loves politics [laughs]</p> <p>Latifah: Because we translate political stuff</p>	<p>لطيفة: يعني أنا مثلا كنت اترجم كتاب وكان يتكلم عن الرياضة وأنا ما كان عندي...خبرة أو معلومات بالمصطلحات الرياضية بالعربي... فرحت سألت مختص...إيش نستخدم هذا اللفظ بالعربي... إيش نستخدم... إيش نقول عنه كذا بالعربي فيعني من هذي الناحية... فيه مثلا دكتور كان مختص بالترجمة إذا استصعبت علينا كلمة أو شيء نروح نتواصل معه نسوي له mention "نسأله إيش الترجمة الصحيحة لهذي فكان يعطينا الترجمات الصحيحة..."</p> <p>مجموعة: صح...حلو.. متعاونين مرة [تداخلت الأصوات]</p> <p>نورة: حتى تأخذين المعلومة بسرعة... لما: ايه بسرعة... لطيفة: وتعلمك الأخطاء الشائعة... لما: اكثر شي يفيد الأخطاء شائعة.. لطيفة: ايوه... ابرار: حسابات دكاتره وكذا... لما: هذا نفعا مرة بتخصصنا... نورة: حتى بالسياسة والأخبار... لما: جاتنا [نورة] تحب السياسة [ضحك] لطيفة: لإننا نترجم أشياء سياسية... نورة: لأن بعد فيه بموادنا دائما يقولوا لنا شوفوا ال "CNN" اقرأوا عنها زي كذا يعني... صحف...</p>

<p>Norah: in our courses ... they advise us to follow CNN ... read these ... newspapers...</p> <p>Latifah: You can even follow people like CNN on Twitter...</p> <p>Nouf: I guess we want to say that we follow these accounts on Twitter to learn from them....</p> <p>Latifah and Arbar: yes...indeed</p>	<p>لطيفة: حتى ممكن تتابعين ناس يعني مثلا CNN "تقدرين تتابعينهم بتويتر... نوف: احنا نبي نقول اننا نتابع هذي الحسابات على التويتر عشان نتعلم... لطيفة و ابرار : ايوه...نعم</p>
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Excerpt 5.1: Excerpt from a focus group about following experts on Twitter to learn

In the WhatsApp focus group, Sawsan and Deema indicated that they followed accounts dedicated to teaching English on Twitter. Sawsan explained that these accounts aim to teach grammar and increase their vocabulary in English. Rawan, Norah and Nouf, in the second interview, indicated that they followed accounts on Twitter that were dedicated to teaching English. It appears that following people on Twitter who dedicated their accounts to teaching English was another norm among these Saudi female undergraduates.

Following accounts created by people whose L1 is English to improve English was reported by Lama, Norah and Rawan. Lama, in the first interview, indicated that she follows “*native speakers*” on Twitter to practise her English. Lama explained that “*native speakers*” are people who were born in an English-speaking country and who had “*nothing to do with teaching English*”. Norah, in the first interview, indicated that she followed people whose L1 is English on Twitter to see the phrases and words used by them. Rawan, in the first interview, indicated that she followed a user on Snapchat who was highly skilled in English and had an “*American accent*”, although he was Arab. This seems to reflect that following people on social media to learn and improve English does not necessitate English being the L1 of those people, nor must the content posted by them have a pedagogical orientation.

### **5.1.8 Platform to Express Feelings and Thoughts**

Social media was viewed as a platform to “*express feelings*” and “*thoughts*”. Norah, in the first interview, indicated that social media was a place where she could “*express my feelings and thoughts ... those that keep ringing in my head*”. Norah explained that she wrote on social media “*to relieve stress coming from studying*”. Deema, in the WhatsApp focus group, shared Norah’s view that social media was “*a place to express my thoughts*”. Nouf, in the first interview, mentioned that Twitter was used as a place to talk about “*stressful things or any thoughts that occupy someone’s mind*”. It appears that social media was used by these Saudi female undergraduates as a place to translate and express their feelings and thoughts in the form of words.

### **5.2 Personal Histories of Social Media**

The data suggest that these Saudi female undergraduates’ concept of social media has evolved as they give accounts of their early examples of social media experience before these examples ceased to exist and the social media they stopped using as they move to different ones. Emma, in the first interview, indicated that social media as a “*term*” was new and did not exist when she started using what she views as social media.

Emma, Rawan and Latifah, in the first interview, indicated that Hotmail Messenger (MSN) was their first social media. For Emma, MSN enabled her to socialise with her friends as she accessed MSN with her email address. Latifah explained that she used MSN to connect with her with friends and people whom she had never met in the physical world, while Rawan explained that she used MSN to connect with relatives living abroad. Nouf, in the first interview, when asked what her first social media was, named Skype, which she used to contact her sister who was living outside Saudi Arabia. Lama, in the first interview, indicated that

Facebook was her first social media as she used it to contact with friends whom she met in the physical world. It seems that social media started as Internet-based websites that were accessed via desktop computers to connect people with each other.

Deema and Norah, in the first interview, indicated that BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) was their first social media. Deema mentioned that *“every girl had a BlackBerry phone”* and it had a built-in messenger with a *“special pin”* that was *“more like a phone number or an account name to add friends and see their profiles”*. Norah explained that BBM was *“something on my mobile phone ... I could carry in my hand”*, with which she was able to socialise and *“befriend the people I meet every day”*. Deema and Norah seem to view social media as a mobile phone feature that was accessed via the Internet to socialise with others.

These Saudi female undergraduates stopped using specific social media platforms and moved to different ones for reasons related to people’s recommendations, the popularity of a specific platform and a change in their status. Deema and Emma, in the first interview, indicated that they stopped using Instagram because they downloaded Snapchat based on friends’ advice. Deema explained that her colleagues *“kept on convincing me to use Snapchat ... at that time ... the time of Instagram, and I liked it”*. Emma, however, tried Snapchat and found it *“better and replaced Instagram”* as Snapchat *“does the same things”*. Norah, in the first interview, indicated that friends recommended that she use Snapchat and to do that she *“dumped Instagram... Snapchat is faster and has something new every day”*. Nouf, in the first interview, indicated that she moved from one social media to another when *“Saudis flock to a new one”* and she found it *“useful”*. Rawan, in the first interview, indicated that she stopped using Instagram and moved to Snapchat as *“a lot moved there and told me to move”*. Lama, in the first interview, indicated that she stopped using Facebook because she graduated from high school and started studying in college. Lama explained that she moved to Instagram

immediately as it *“was the hit at that time”*. Lama mentioned that she *“resisted”* using Snapchat at first, when her friends told her about it, but *“tried it like everyone else and I LIKED it”*. The preceding evidence seems to reflect that these Saudi female undergraduates migrate from one social media to another, in groups, to explore the potential of the new social media platforms based on advice, popularity and status change.

### **5.3 Components of Social Media**

Data suggest that the basic components of social media was: 1) a smartphone app, 2) the ability to post content and interact with large numbers of people and 3) the use of a name to follow people and allow other people to follow them on these platforms.

Social media use is inextricably tied to the smartphone device. Emma, in the second interview, mentioned that her *“smartphone is worthless without social media”* and that social media apps are what make her *“charge her smartphone battery”*. Lama, in the second interview, indicated that she switched off her smartphone whenever she did not want to use social media. All my research participants mentioned that they only used their smartphones to access their social media accounts.

The ability to post content and interact with a large number of people was reported as one of the components of social media. Nouf, in the first interview, mentioned that social media helped them to *“broadcast what we write or what others have written to more people”*. Nouf explained that people on social media *“reply to what they read ... talk about posts in different ways”*, which other people can observe. For Nouf, WhatsApp is not social media as other people who are not involved in the conversation *“cannot see what people say about the content broadcast”*. Deema, in the first interview, shared Nouf’s view about having content posted to large numbers of people and stressed that having *“followers view what I write is what makes*

*social media different from email*". Deema seemed to use email as opposed to social media to stress the idea of having people as followers.

Another component of social media was using an account name to follow people and allow other people to follow oneself on these platforms. Emma, in the first interview, indicated that having a name on her account that enables her to link with people and allow other people to follow her is the defining component of social media. Emma explained that WhatsApp is not social media because *"the phone number is what makes me contact people, not the account name"*. Deema, Latifah and Nouf, in the first interview, shared Emma's view that an account name is an important component of social media. Latifah and Nouf viewed WhatsApp as a smartphone app to send free messages and connect with family members. Lama, in the first interview, mentioned that social media *"must have a name ... otherwise it is not useful"*. Lama explained that numerous smartphone apps connected her with other people by using phone numbers via an Internet connection and *"these cannot be regarded as social media"*. Norah and Rawan mentioned that an account name is essential, as is having a profile display.

Rawan and Norah, however, appeared to contradict the view that an account name is one of the basic components of social media when it came to giving examples of social media. For them, WhatsApp is social media as a user has a profile display with a name and a platform to upload any desired photo. For Rawan and Norah, WhatsApp enabled them to connect with others through a smartphone app that has an Internet connection, although they need a phone number to allow them to use the app and connect with others. Rawan and Norah did not see other smartphone apps that enable them to connect with others via a phone number as social media. In this view, they share Lama's view that not every smartphone app that connects via a phone number was social media, but they stress the idea that WhatsApp was social media because they use it numerous times each day.

This discrepancy regarding an account name as one of the basic components of social media seems to reflect the concept of social media being determined by the individual. It appears that the frequency of using a specific smartphone app to connect with other people might be another a component of social media.

#### **5.4 Summary**

This chapter has explained the concept of social media as understood by these Saudi female undergraduates. They generated their conceptualisations of social media from three factors: the roles they perceive of social media, their personal histories of social media and their own ideas of the basic components of social media.

For them social media comprises smartphone apps that can be accessed via the Internet to post content and interact with large numbers of people on a regular basis, involving a unique code to create an account. By ‘unique code’, I refer to the name or phone number that is required to create a social media account and which is displayed on the account profile enabling a user to ‘follow’ and ‘befriend’ other users as well as enabling other users to ‘follow’ and ‘befriend’ that specific user. This chapter paves the way for my explanation of literacy practices in the following chapter, where I consider the domains of everyday life in which these Saudi female undergraduates use English on social media.

## CHAPTER 6

### FEMALE SAUDI UNDERGRADUATES' LITERACY PRACTICES IN ENGLISH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In this chapter, I offer an account of the diverse literacy practices I inferred from online observation, the online logbook of social media usage and the informal and semi-structured interviews I conducted with seven Saudi female undergraduates. I inferred literacy practices from literacy events I observed as my participants use English on social media. I also inferred literacy practices from an emic perspective of situations that stimulated literacy events as provided by my research participants in their interviews, following Barton and Hamilton (1998). With literacy events, as I discussed in Chapter 2, I refer to activities which involve written texts in English on different social media platforms. Activities on social media are intertwined reading and writing that cannot be separated or treated as reading only or writing only. Activities, here, can take any form, as in tweeting, retweeting, liking on Twitter, posting on a Snapchat story, redirecting a story on Snapchat, posting on Instagram or Path, and these activities can be split into separate literacy events.

This chapter addresses my second research question, which is: **What are the literacy practices of these female Saudi undergraduates that emerge as they use English on social media?** – answered by drawing on data obtained from interviews, the online logbook of social media English usage and online observation. My data were coded by drawing on three out of the six areas of everyday life identified by Barton and Hamilton (1998) for organising vernacular literacies. I used two categories, ‘documenting life’ and ‘personal communication’, and modified the category ‘private leisure’ to entertainment. To present the data I collected in this chapter, I attempt to organise them into themes and categories to untangle the diversity of these literacy practices and illustrate them with examples. Some of the examples used to illustrate



## 6.1 Documenting Life

Documenting life is one of the six domains Barton and Hamilton (1998) identify in which literacy is essential. Barton and Hamilton, in this category, explain that:

People maintain records of their lives in many ways, through keeping documents such as birth certificates and school reports, and from cutting out reports of their lives such as weddings and sporting achievements from the local newspaper and keeping souvenirs from holidays and festivals. Some people take photos and have albums and scrap books. Many people make and keep recipe books, or records about car maintenance, or gardening diaries, as well as records of finances. People write diaries at various points in their lives, and then keep the diaries; they keep some letters for years, but not others; people keep old address books. (ibid., p. 249)

Here, Barton and Hamilton include diaries in their examples of literacy practices that were carried out in offline settings before social media. Keeping diaries and the features of diaries have changed with social media. Emma, in the first interview, indicated that the story feature on Snapchat functions as a diary (see Excerpt 6.1).

Nada: When you were talking about social media functions ... you were referring to Twitter ... how about Snapchat?
Emma: Snapchat is more of MY DIARY
Nada: Alright ...
Emma: It is not about learning ... or education or something ... it is only to document myself ... for example, what I DO THROUGHOUT THE DAY ... and I see people's lives ... and that is it with Snapchat

Excerpt 6.1: Emma explaining that Snapchat story is her diary

Emma values the story feature on Snapchat to document the activities she carries out from the beginning to the end of her day. For Emma, Snapchat story displays her own diary and other people's diaries. Emma posts videos and photos of the activities she does on a daily basis and uses English to describe these events. For her, captioning these snaps helps followers to understand events as each snap episode is limited to ten seconds (see Excerpt 6.2).

Emma: On Snapchat, sometimes I comment about myself ... for example the things I'm doing [pause]
Nada: alright, the things that you are doing ... okay...
Emma: sometimes if I only snap a photo ... the people will not understand what I mean ... why I post it ... a snap for example ... so I will add a comment for people to know what I'm talking about ... sometimes to explain things, that I could not continue ... A snap you know ... ten seconds ... sometimes it's not enough to finish what you intend to say ... so I comment, too

Excerpt 6.2: Emma explaining the purpose of captioning snaps

The Snapchat story feature seems to replace the classic diary with an online version that is ephemeral and can only be viewed by a specific group of people. Emma, in informal interview 3, stated "*it was not like I was telling my viewers I'm walking ... I don't CARE what they say ... this is my DIARY and I say what I WANT to say*" to explain the purpose of posting a video of herself walking on campus on Snapchat story (see Fig.6.2). Emma, in the second interview, indicated that writing diaries in English is a habit she started when she was 15 years old. She explained that she used diaries then as a space to "*write whatever I feel*" in a notebook.



Figure 6.2: A screenshot of Emma’s snap of her morning walk

From observing Emma’s Snapchat story, I inferred that she enjoys writing her diary on Snapchat story as she posts her activities on a regular basis. My data suggest that the participants in my study used English on social media to document their lives in 1) college and academic life, 2) for greetings, 3) to comment on food and coffee, 4) for receiving and thanking people for gifts and 5) for attending meetings and social gatherings. I illustrate these sub-categories of documenting life in the following sections.

### **6.1.1 College and Academic Life**

College and academic life are one of the domains where English is used to document one’s life on social media. Deema, in informal interview 2, indicated that she took a photo of her classroom captioned “#8 is mine” and posted it on Snapchat story to describe what she wrote on the board in one of her courses (see Fig. 6.3). She explained that she was having a French

class and had participated by writing a sentence in French on the board and wanted to share what she did in the classroom with her friends on Snapchat.

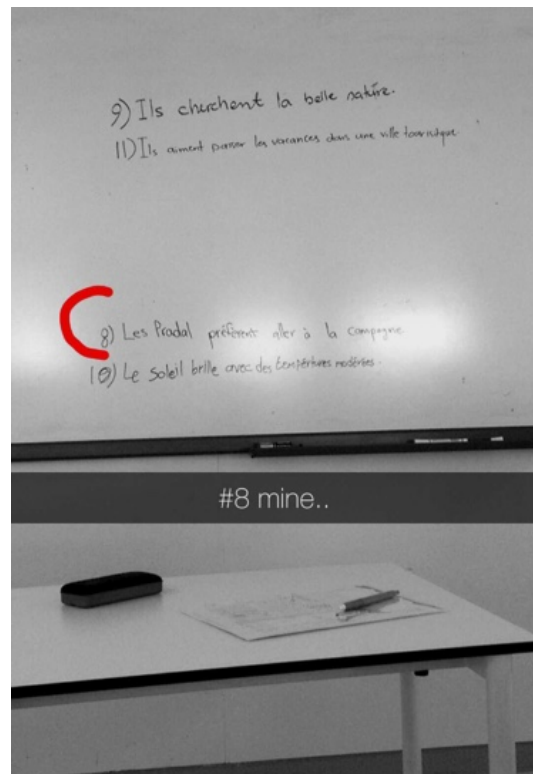


Figure 6.3: A screenshot of Deema snapping to describe her French sentence

Graduation anxiety as part of academic life where English is used on social media is inferred from Emma and Lama. Emma, in informal interview 2, indicated that she quoted a tweet to relate to her anxiety caused by graduation (see Fig. 6.4.A). She explained that she read a tweet comparing a girl in a video to a person who realised that graduation would be soon. Emma described that video as *“a girl scared to death ... running away from a dark monster... the dark monster is graduation ... for that the accuracy is real”*. Emma was not the only participant who was scared of graduation as Lama shared the same feeling. Lama, in informal interview 2, indicated that she tweeted after she submitted the last part of her project and was anxious about graduation (see Fig. 6.4.B). Lama explained that she loved going to university and being involved in various activities on campus, and so graduation would make a huge difference to

her routine. For Lama, tweeting “*allergic to the word graduation*” would “*send a message to my friends ... they always tease me ... not to say ... what are you going to do after graduation?*”.



Figure 6.4: Screenshots of Emma tweeting about graduation anxiety in A and Lama about being allergic to graduation in B

Submitting a graduation project is part of academic life where English is used on social media. Emma, in informal interview 2, indicated that she tweeted to talk about her last submission for her graduation project (see Fig. 6.5.A). Emma explained that she worked very hard on the project and the minute she submitted the final part she cried, although it was a happy moment and these were “*tears of joy*”. Lama, in informal interview 2, mentioned that she tweeted at 1.38 a.m. to talk about her final submission for her graduation project (see Fig. 6.5.B).



Figure 6.5: Screenshots of Emma tweeting about her project submission in A and Lama about her project submission in B

Studying with friends as part of academic life where English is used on social media is inferred from Nouf. Nouf, in informal interview 3, indicated that she took a video of her friend when they were practising before the mid-term exam and posted it on Snapchat story captioned with “pre-exam practice” (see Fig. 6.6). Nouf stated that “we were practising simultaneous interpretation before the mid-term exam ... on campus ... and wanted to share my studying moment with my followers”.

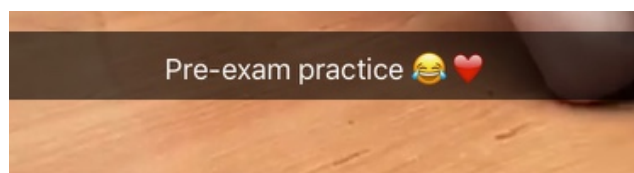


Figure 6.6: A screenshot of Nouf snapping while studying with her friend

### 6.1.2 Greetings

Greetings are one of the ways of documenting life on social media. Deema, in informal interview 2, indicated that she greeted her snapchat followers by posting ‘Good Morning’ on the story feature (see Fig. 6.7). Deema explained that she too greeted her followers with ‘Good Morning’ as she was preparing mint tea at 1.34 a.m. She asserted that snapping tea and captioning videos on Snapchat with ‘Good Morning’ is a habit she developed while using this app in particular.



Figure 6.7: A screenshot of Deema’s greeting with ‘Good Morning’ on Snapchat

Greeting a long weekend on Twitter is a literacy practice I inferred as I observed my study participants. My study participants had no courses on Thursdays and Sundays and for them this was a long weekend, and so they would greet each other with long weekend at the end of Wednesdays. Emma, in informal interview 3, snapped herself smiling on campus on

Wednesday and captioned it “Loooong weekend” (see Fig. 6.8). Emma was happy as she did not have any courses on Thursdays and Sundays and so for her it was a long weekend.

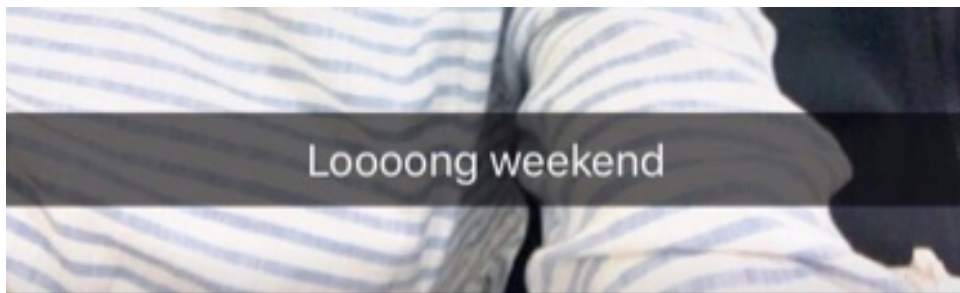


Figure 6.8: A screenshot of Emma greeting on a Wednesday with “Loooong weekend”

### **6.1.3 Commenting on Food and Coffee**

Commenting on food, coffee cups or coffee shops is one of the ways of documenting life on social media. Nouf, in informal interview 2, indicated that she posted on Snapchat story a photo of a pot of yoghurt mixed with cashew nuts and captioned it “Heathy snack” (see Fig. 6.9.A) to describe her snack. Nouf explained that she was leading a healthy life style and was doing a 30-day sugar-free challenge in which she avoided having refined sugar in her diet. On another occasion, Nouf posted on Snapchat story a photo of a crêpe filled with strawberries and bananas and captioned “sugar free crêpe” (see Fig. 6.9.B). Nouf values eating healthily and she demonstrates that on the Snapchat story feature.



**A**



**B**

Figure 6.9: Screenshots of Nouf commenting “healthy snack” in A and “sugar free crêpe” in B on Snapchat story

Nouf does not only snap her healthy food, she also snaps her “unhealthy” treats. From my observation notes, Nouf posted on Snapchat story a photo of two ice-cream cones captioned “*calories are one of the happiness secrets*” (see Fig. 6.10). Nouf appears to document her life by commenting in English on the food she displays.

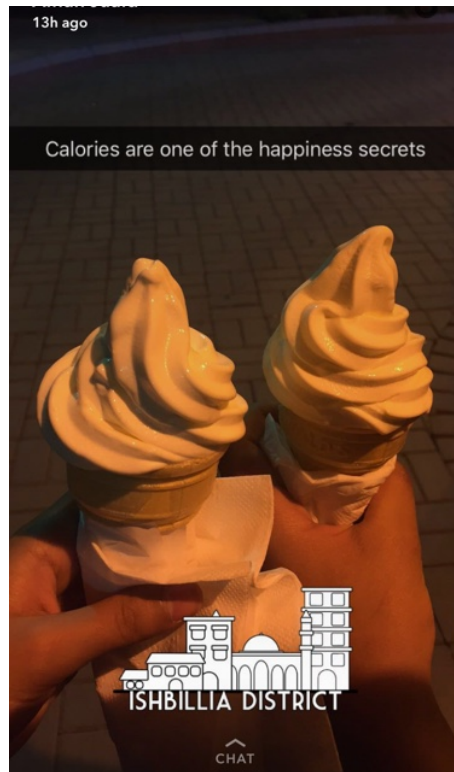


Figure 6.10: A screenshot of Nouf snapping ice-cream cones

Lama and Latifah commented on coffee cups on social media in English. Lama, in informal interview 3, indicated that she posted a photo of a ‘take-away coffee cup on Instagram and captioned it “*coffee mugs can function as diaries too*” to describe the coffee cup that was made of paper (see Fig. 6.11). She explained that she wrote on the coffee cup with a black pen and described the coffee cup as a diary. Lama, in the online logbook of English usage, stated that she used social media to post “*coffee mugs can function as diaries too*” to “*share this photo with followers on Instagram.*”

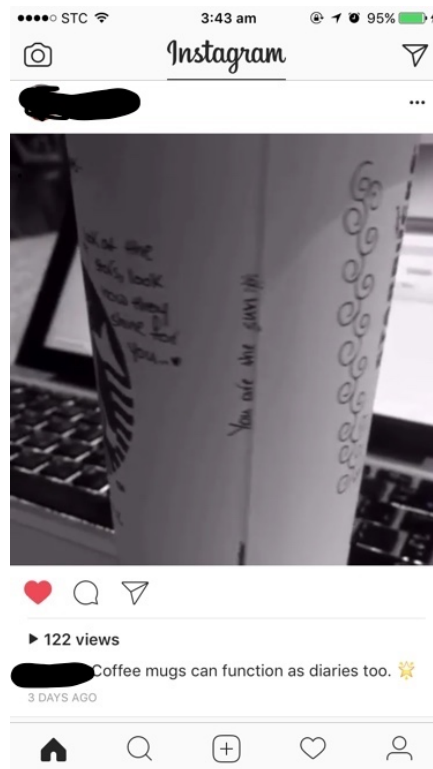


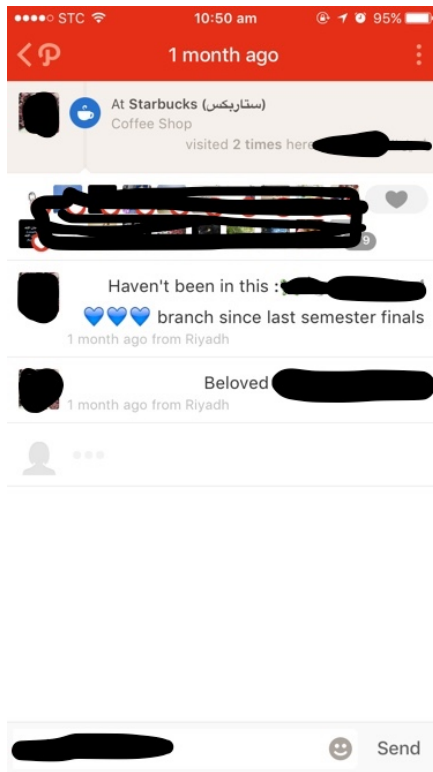
Figure 6.11: A screenshot of Lama’s post on Instagram to describe a coffee mug

Latifah sent a snap to me privately on Snapchat of a glass coffee cup captioned “*’cause one cup of coffee is not enough*” to comment on a cold cup of coffee she was having (see Fig. 6.12). Latifah, in informal interview 3, explained that she sent this snap to me privately because she did not allow me to view her Snapchat story and did not want me to miss this snap. She indicated that she was studying with her friends in this coffee shop, the glass coffee cup was her second one and wanted to comment on that in English. She stated that captioning coffee cups in English was “*very common among my friends to show what we are thinking of as we have coffee*”. Latifah, in the online logbook of English usage, stated that she used social media to post “*’cause one cup of coffee is not enough*” on Snapchat story, “*To take a photo of a nice moment and share it with friends and family.*”

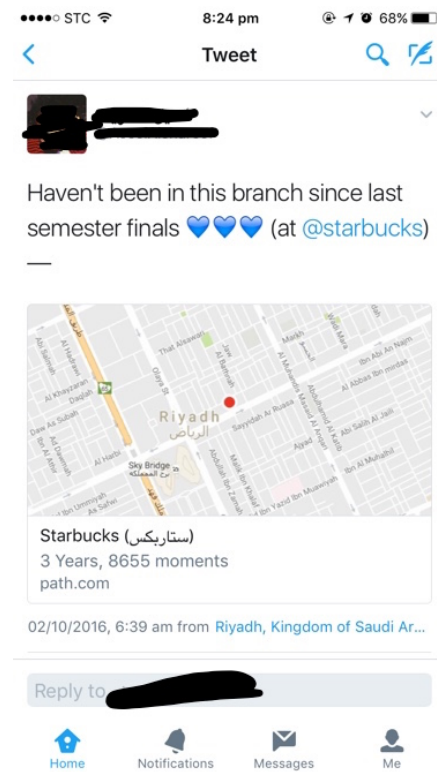


Figure 6.12: A screenshot of Latifah snapping a glass coffee cup

Deema, in informal interview 1, indicated that she posted on Twitter and Path, simultaneously, “*Haven’t been in this branch since last semester finals*” to talk about her favourite coffee shop which makes “*the best coffee*”. She explained that she wrote this comment on the Path platform (see Fig. 6.13.A) and tapped on ‘share’ to post the same content on Twitter (see Fig. 6.13.B), she did not copy and paste that comment. Deema indicated that she wanted to share the location of the coffee shop and the comment she wrote, and that was the reason for posting the same content simultaneously on two different social media platforms.



A



B

Figure 6.13: Screenshots of Deema commenting on her favourite coffee shop on Path in A and on Twitter in B

### 6.1.4 Receiving and Thanking for Gifts

My data suggest that receiving and thanking people for gifts was one of the ways in which English was used on social media to document life. Deema, in informal interview 5, posted several gifts she received from her sister on Snapchat story captioned “welcome to my collection”, followed by a hashtag and a number to indicate the number of gifts she received that day from her sister (see Fig .6.14). She explained that her sister travelled to the United States to attend a workshop and brought several gifts from there, and she wanted to share those gifts with her Snapchat followers.

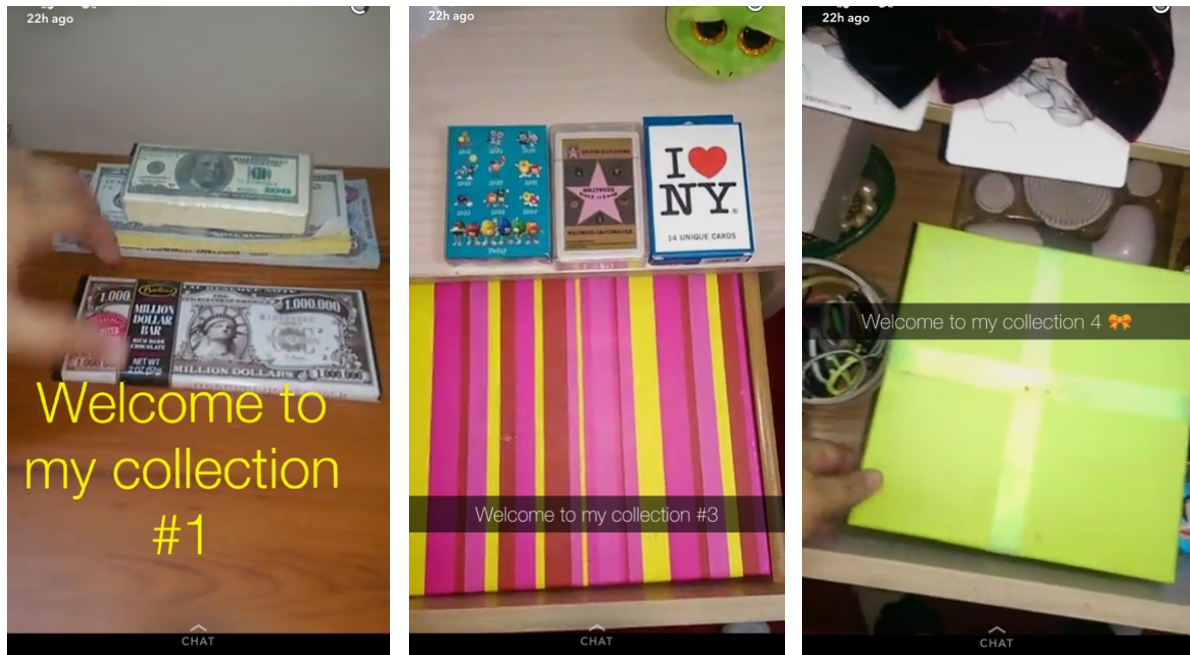


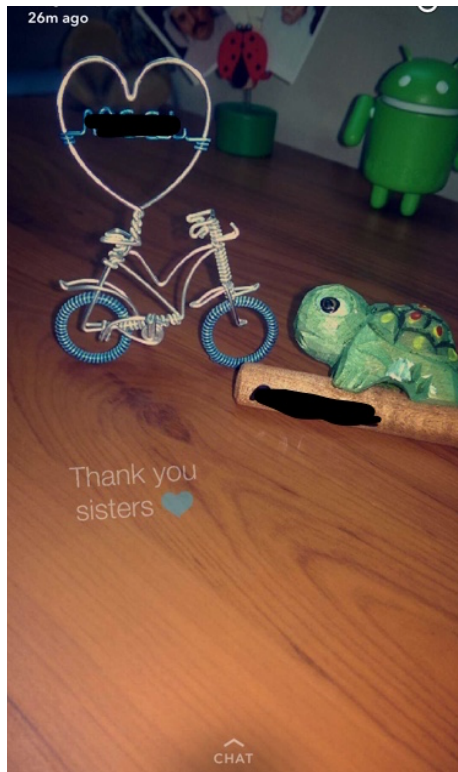
Figure 6.14: Screenshots of Deema snapping the gifts she received from her sister

It appears that thanking people for gifts on social media by taking photos of them and writing ‘thank you’ is a common norm among these female Saudi undergraduates. Lama, in the first interview, indicated that she captioned the photos she posted of gifts she received on social media to “say thank you” to the people who gave her them. Emma, in informal interview 3, indicated that she posted a photo of a balloon she received from her friend on Snapchat story “to say thank you ... in my snap... to her ... sort of a Saudi thingy” (see Fig. 6.15). For Emma, captioning photos with “thank you” is common in Saudi Arabian culture.



Figure 6.15: A screenshot of Emma thanking her friend for a balloon

In my online observation, I inferred that Deema posted on Snapchat story to thank people who gave her gifts. In Figure 6.16.A, Deema seemed to post this on Snapchat story to thank her sisters for these two gifts. In Figure 6.16.B, Deema seemed to post a photo of a colourful glass turtle to thank “Mays” for giving her this “*masterpiece*”.



A



B

Figure 6.16: Screenshots of Deema snapping to thank her sisters in (A) and Mays in (B)

### 6.1.5 Attending Meetings and Social Gatherings

Attending meetings and social gatherings is one of the ways in which English is used on social media to document life. Emma, in informal interview 7, indicated that she posted on Twitter and Snapchat story to talk about an “*accreditation team meeting*”. Emma mentioned that she was “*nominated by college*” to meet people from the international accreditation team who were coming to assess their college. Emma mentioned that she tweeted “*Institutional Academic Accreditation Meeting*” (see Fig. 6.17.A) and posted “*we are ready*” on snapchat story (see Fig. 6.17.B) to talk about the same event. Emma indicated that she posted on Snapchat story to say that she and her friend Lama were ready to meet the team.



A



B

Figure 6.17: Screenshots of Emma’s post about the accreditation meeting on Twitter in A and on Snapchat story in B

Lama, in informal interview 4, indicated that she tweeted to talk about meeting the accreditation team in which she and her friend were nominated to represent their college (see Fig.6.18). Lama explained that she and her friend Emma talked on behalf of the students in their college with an American lady who assessed their college, and Lama wanted to share this event with her Twitter followers.



Figure 6.18: A screenshot of Lama’s tweet about the accreditation team

English was used on social media to document a social gathering. Emma, in informal interview 3, indicated that she took a photo of an elegant dining table with prepared dishes (see Fig. 6.19) to post on Snapchat story as she was meeting her cousins. Emma explained that she went out with her cousins to enjoy their time together and have lunch at a restaurant, and she took this photo before dinner was served.



Figure 6.19: A screenshot of Emma’s snap about having lunch with her cousins

Emma, in informal interview 5, indicated that she snapped to tell her followers that she was “at Lama’s” house. Emma explained that Lama invited her for dinner in the mid-term break and she took a photo of a coffee table which showed dates, chocolates, water, an Arabic coffee thermos and two cocktail juices (see Fig. 6.20.A) and posted it on Snapchat story. Emma added another photo on the same story thread on Snapchat of a dining table before dinner was served and captioned it “*outdoor dining*” (see Fig. 6.20.B). It appears that Emma was documenting her visit to her friend Lama as she posted several photos showing their happy faces together, which showed that they were enjoying their time.



A



B

Figure 6.20: Screenshots of Emma snapping as she visited Lama (A) when she first arrived and (B) before having dinner

Nouf, in informal interview 5, indicated that she took a photo of herself smiling and captioned it “*unique lovely day*” and posted this on Snapchat story before going to a wedding (see Fig.6.21). Nouf explained that she was ready to attend the wedding and took a photo of herself dressed well and shared this with her friends on Snapchat.

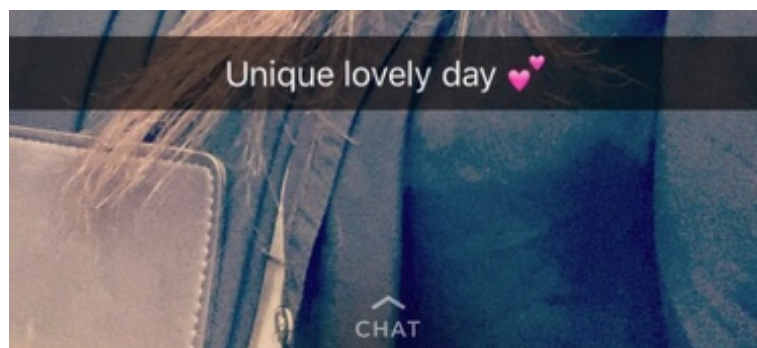


Figure 6.21: A screenshot of Nouf snapping before attending a wedding

## 6.2 Opinions and Advice

Among the situations where English is used on social media is giving or asking for opinions and advice. Voicing opinions during classes by tweeting was reported by Deema. Deema, in informal interview 2, indicated that she tweeted (see Fig. 6.22.A) at 9.21 a.m. to voice her opinion as she was attending a Simultaneous Interpreting class. She explained that she “*enjoys having this class but without working and translating from English to Arabic*”. Deema, in informal interview 4, indicated that she tweeted (see Fig. 6.22.B) to express her opinion as she was listening to her friends discussing their political views regarding the United States presidential elections in one of the courses. She explained that her friends were talking about Trump and how they wanted Hillary Clinton to win the election. It appears that Deema used Twitter as a space to voice her opinion during classes and to negate the restrictions of the physical world.



A



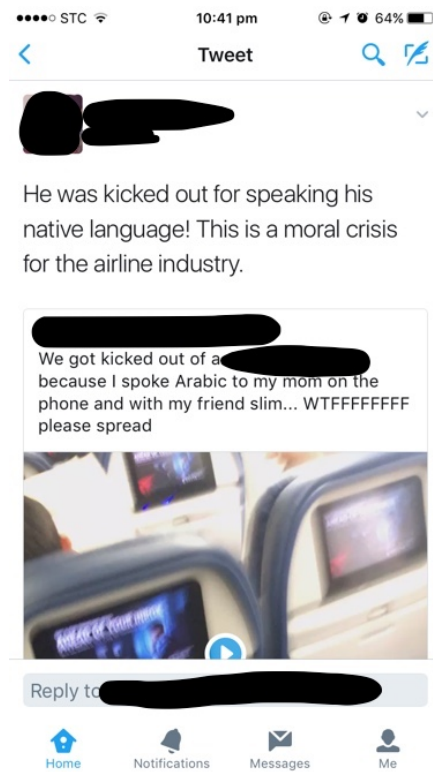
B

Figure 6.22: Screenshots of Deema tweeting to voice her opinion about a Simultaneous Interpreting class in A and the US elections in B

Expressing an opinion on an international issue on Twitter was reported by Emma. Emma, in informal interview 4, indicated that she tweeted (see Fig. 6.23.A) after the end of the U.S. presidential elections, before the winner was announced, to express her opinion that “*America is terrified*”. She explained that “*everyone on Twitter was terrified about the result so Merrica is terrified*” and noted that “*Merrica is America but without the A*”. Emma, in informal interview 8, indicated that she quoted a tweet about an Arab who was “*kicked off of an aeroplane for speaking Arabic to add her opinion*” (see Fig. 6.23.B). Emma explained that she was furious, as an Arab celebrity was ejected from a flight and wanted to express her opinion badly on that “*moral crisis for the airline industry*”. She also indicated that speaking Arabic on an aeroplane is not a crime and linking terrorism to Arabic language is not justified, and so for that the airline must be sued.



**A**



**B**

Figure 6.23: Screenshots of Emma tweeting about the US elections in A and an Arab who was ejected from a flight in B

Asking for the opinions of Twitter followers was reported by Deema. Deema, in the second interview, indicated that she retweeted a promoted tweet about a smartphone model from Huawei to ask her Twitter followers to give their opinions on this smartphone model, although she did not articulate this in the tweet. Deema explained that retweeting a promoted tweet usually invites followers to reply to the same tweet with their opinion, and retweeting only prompts followers to give their opinions.

Expressing an opinion by giving advice to oneself and to others was reported by Emma, Deema and Latifah. Emma, in informal interview 7, stated that she tweeted (see Fig.6.24) to “*give advice to myself and all people ... to stop worrying about things that happen and upset us*”. Emma indicated that she was inspired to tweet after a situation that happened to one of her

dearest friends and wanted this friend to take things easy, as these upsetting events would no longer affect her in the future.



Figure 6.24: A screenshot of Emma tweeting to give advice

Deema, in the second interview, indicated that she retweeted “*people who live - literally live - to show off, please go re-evaluate your life*” to give behaviour advice to all her Twitter followers. Deema explained that she expressed an interest in this advice and wanted to share this tweet with all her followers. Latifah, similar to Deema, indicated in the second interview that she retweeted “*do not make fun of what people find interesting*” to give advice on behaviour to all her Twitter followers. She explained that she gets upset when people underestimate others if they did not approve of what these people are interested in. It appears that Latifah’s values included respecting others’ opinions and she wanted her followers to have the same value.

Giving a piece of advice to someone indirectly was reported by Deema, Emma and Rawan. Deema, in the second interview, indicated that she retweeted “*the art of keeping it to yourself*” to send indirect advice to one of her followers. Deema explained that she wanted her followers to realize that their interference was not welcome and that keeping their views to themselves was in itself an art. Emma, in informal interview 5, indicated that she tweeted (see Fig. 6.25) to send indirect advice to one of her friends whom she valued. Emma explained that a situation happened on the same day on which one of her friends underestimated others to feel better about herself and Emma hoped that this friend would get moral advice by reading her tweet. Emma indicated that she valued her friendship and did not want to hurt her friend’s feelings by giving direct moral advice.



Figure 6.25: A screenshot of Emma giving indirect moral advice

Giving indirect advice to someone by tweeting was shared by Rawan. Rawan, in informal interview 3, indicated that she tweeted (see Fig. 6.26) to send indirect advice to someone in

particular to advise him/her to pay attention to their words and actions. She explained that she was upset because this person's actions did not match his words and she hoped that this person would read this tweet and heed this advice. It appears that Rawan, like Emma, valued this person and did not want to give him/her direct advice.

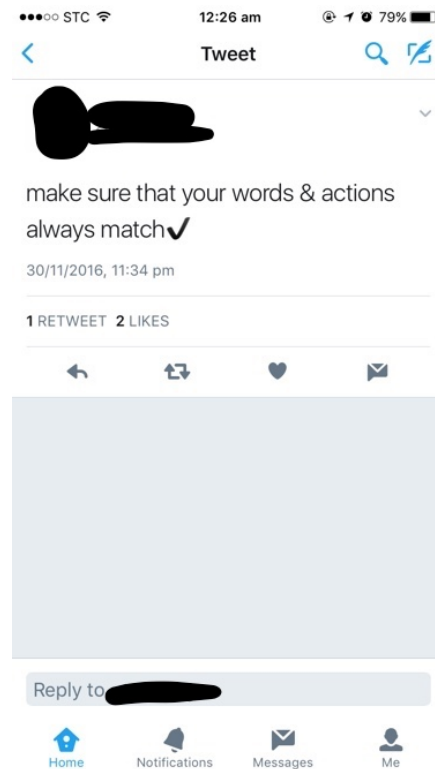


Figure 6.26: A screenshot of Rawan tweeting to give indirect advice

### 6.3 Enriching the Knowledge of the Known Audience on Twitter

Among the situations where English is used on social media is enriching the knowledge of a known audience on Twitter. A known audience on Twitter, as I discussed in section 2.2.4, refers to two groups of people who appear in a contact list on Twitter as followers: either as friends who never meet in the physical world or as friends who do meet in the physical world. Deema, in the WhatsApp focus group, indicated that she tweeted in English to enrich the knowledge of her followers in translation. She explained that by attaching two screenshots of

her own tweets to improve her followers' knowledge in translating idioms (see Fig. 6.27). She indicated that she attached photos in these tweets that had examples of mistranslated idioms from English into Arabic and vice versa, in context, and commented on these mistakes in English in these tweets.

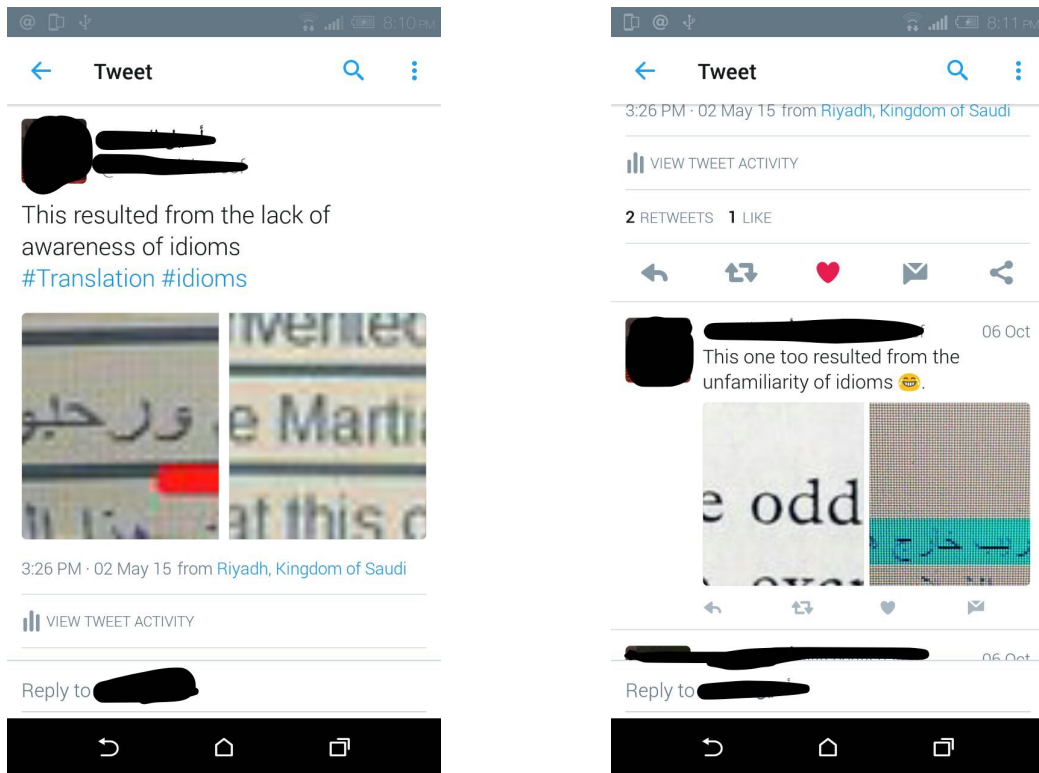
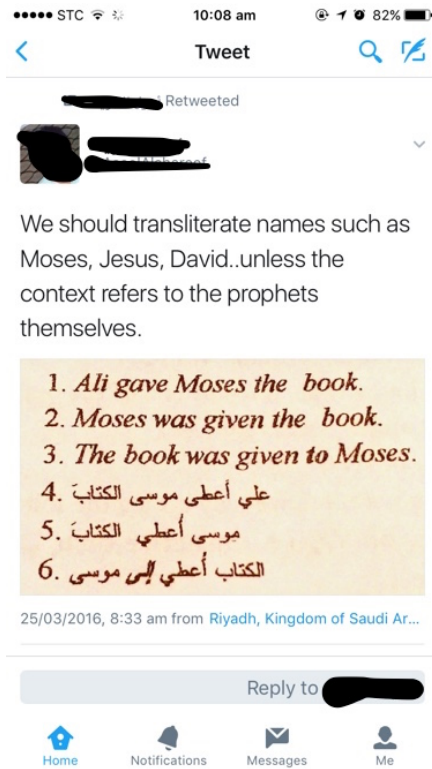
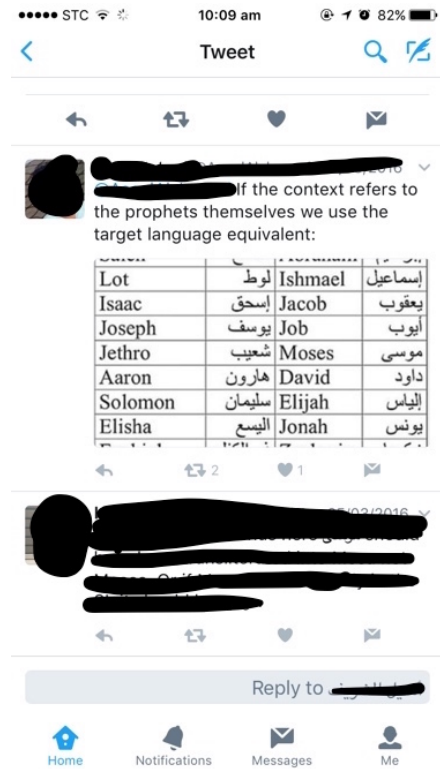


Figure 6.27: Screenshots of Deema tweeting to enhance the knowledge of her followers in translating idioms in A and B

Enriching the knowledge of followers in translation from English to Arabic is inferred from Deema. From observing Deema on Twitter, I inferred that she aimed to enrich her followers' knowledge in translating names from English into Arabic when retweeting an old tweet she posted herself on Twitter in which she added a tweet on the same thread clarifying the same idea. Deema retweeted Figure 6.28.A and the tweet in Figure 6.28.B appeared in the thread.



A



B

Figure 6.28: Screenshots of Deema enriching the knowledge of her followers in translating names in A and B

Enriching the knowledge of Twitter followers by improving their English proficiency level is inferred from Lama and Deema. Lama, in the second interview, indicated that she aimed to improve her followers' level in English pronunciation as well as their understanding of some English words by liking this tweet *"Wow! hear English words in context. Type in a word or a phrase and this site will show you videos of it pronounced."* Lama indicated that this tweet would appear in her timeline and her likes lists and that it contained a link to another site that might help her followers to pronounce appropriately and understand the meanings of their preferred words in English. She explained that she participated in the induction/ orientation week that was held at the beginning of the academic year to talk about her experience as a student studying in the English Language Translation Department, and many of those new students follow her on Twitter. Deema, in the second interview, indicated that she aimed to

enrich her followers' knowledge of English grammar by retweeting about the appropriate use of the prepositions 'at' and 'in'. She explained that this "*grammar rule is confusing*" and liked a tweet posted by a Twitter account that "*is dedicated to improve the English grammar of its followers by explaining the rule with examples*". It seems that Lama and Deema valued their followers as they were committed to enriching their followers' capability in English.

Enriching the general knowledge of Twitter followers was inferred from Emma and Latifah. Emma, in informal interview 7, indicated that she tweeted to enrich her followers' knowledge about their future careers by quoting a tweet containing an encouraging video (see Fig. 6.29). Emma explained that she was about to do an assignment when she saw that video and it "*helped me ... encouraged me ... and wanted to share this informative tweet with followers of my age ... who are graduating soon and think a lot about their future work*". Latifah, in the second interview, indicated that she retweeted a post about schools to share this knowledge about schooling policy with her followers. She explained that this post provided information about schooling and "*how everything changed in life except the general policy of schooling ... which is to teach children to be employees in the future*".



Figure 6.29: A screenshot of Emma tweeting to enrich followers' knowledge about future work

#### 6.4 Personal Communication

Personal communication with friends and classmates is among the domains where English is used on social media. By friends and classmates, I refer to people whom these female Saudi undergraduates meet in a physical place on a regular basis. Rawan, in informal interview 2, indicated that she posted on Snapchat story (see Fig.6.30) to ask her classmates who followed her on that particular platform to “*remind*” her to bring her dictionaries.



Figure 6.30: A screenshot of Rawan snapping as way of communicating with her classmates to “*remind*” her

Communicating an indirect message to a friend is one of the ways in which English is used on social media. Emma, in informal interview 8, indicated that she snapped to send an indirect apology to her friend for not doing the favour she asked her to do (see Table 6.1). It appears that the event that led to this post on Snapchat story was sending an indirect apology to a specific person, not what it seems to be as a description of a current mood.

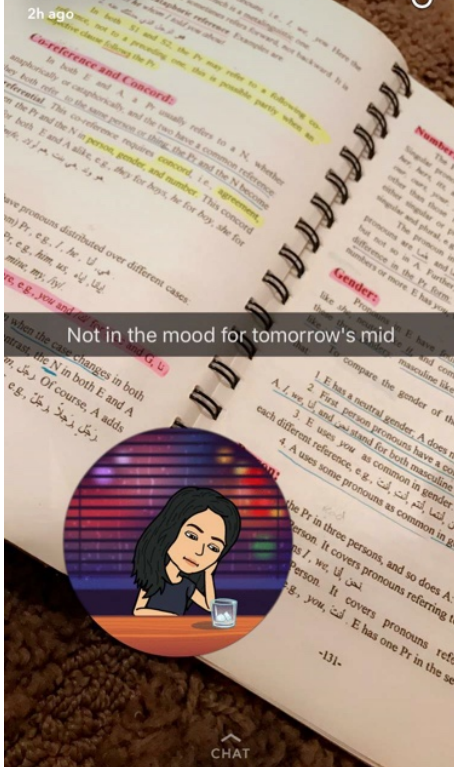
Interview Transcript	Screenshot Under Discussion
<p>Emma: I was going for an exam ... it was actually the day that my phone was smashed ... so that was really my bad day .... my phone and my exam were really bad ... so I didn't have ... I wasn't in the mood to study actually for the next day but ... it went well</p> <p>Nada: That is the reason for snapping this...</p> <p>Emma: Actually, one of the people ... on snapchat ... she asked me for a favour and I didn't have the time, actually, to do anything</p> <p>Nada: Why...</p> <p>Emma: Because I was really busy studying ... PRETENDING to study and I posted it ... she will know, SORRY I AM BUSY ... like having a mid-term exam</p>	 <p>The screenshot shows a Snapchat chat interface. At the top, it says '2h ago'. Below that is a video of a spiral notebook with Arabic text and English grammar notes. A semi-transparent black box with white text 'Not in the mood for tomorrow's mid' is overlaid on the video. In the bottom right corner of the video, there is a circular cartoon avatar of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue top, sitting at a desk with a glass of water. At the bottom of the chat, there is a 'CHAT' button.</p>

Table 6.1: Emma giving her account of snapping to send an indirect apology

Engaging in a chat on Twitter is one of the ways of communicating with friends and classmates in English. Emma, in informal interview 7, indicated that she “chatted” with her friend on Twitter as if they were chatting together in a physical space. Emma explained that she quoted a tweet to comment on the attached video, “*comparing it to a course*”, and received a reply from one of her friends that had “*nothing to do with what I tweeted*”, asking about her, and so Emma “chatted” with her on the same tweet thread (see Fig.6.31). Emma stressed that she went “*with the chat flow*” in that tweet thread.



Figure 6.31: A screenshot of Emma tweeting to engage in a chat initiated by her friend

Replying to or quoting a friend’s tweet as a way of communication is one of the aspects where English is used on social media. Latifah, in informal interview 2, quoted Emma’s tweet to communicate that she shared her view of “hating that company” (see Fig. 6.32.A). From observing Latifah, I inferred that she replied to her friend (see Fig. 6.32.B) to show her sympathy and support by tweeting that she experienced the same “three times in a row”. Emma is Latifah’s friend and Latifah appeared to reply to Emma to communicate that she thinks, feels like her and supports her emotionally on Twitter.



Figure 6.32: Screenshots of Latfiah tweeting to communicate with Emma in A with “+ millions” and in B with “\*hug\* been there done that 3 times in a row”

“Teasing” a friend as a way of communication is one of the aspects where English is used on social media. Lama, in informal interview 1, mentioned that she replied to her friend’s tweet to “tease her as she hated her name to be spelled like that ... using an A at the beginning instead of O” (see Fig. 6.33.A). Lama explained that her friend was tweeting to express her annoyance when someone spelled her name with an A and she found this to be a great chance to “tease her”. Nouf, in informal interview 5, mentioned that she took a video of herself walking captioned “morning walk @[Emma]” (see Fig. 6.33.B) to “tease my friend who always does the same on Snapchat story”. Nouf indicated that she was enjoying her walk and wanted to communicate with her friend Emma, who is one of her followers on Snapchat, by teasing her.



Figure 6.33: Screenshots of Lama tweeting to ‘tease her friend’ in A and Nouf to ‘tease her friend’ in B

## 6.5 Affordances of Social Media

Affordances, as I discussed in Chapter 2, are the characteristics of the built-in tools on social media as they are used by these Saudi female undergraduates in literacies in English. My data suggest that there are literacy practices associated with innovative ways of working with the affordances of social media platforms, such as hashtags on Twitter and Bitmoji on Snapchat. I discuss the literacy practices that are associated with these innovative ways of working with affordances in the following sections.

### 6.5.1 Bitmoji on Snapchat

My data suggest that Bitmoji are used with English on Snapchat to describe current situations and feelings. I find it essential to define what is meant by Bitmoji. Bitmojis are personal emoji created by chat users of themselves by choosing from a library of stickers (Bitstrips Inc., 2018). They are expressive cartoon avatars that can be used in Snapchat. Emma, in informal interview

3, indicated that she snapped to “say good night before going to sleep” (see Fig. 6.34.A) and to “describe my bad day to my followers” (see Fig. 6.34.B). Emma explained that she used a blank background in these two snaps because she “was exhausted and wanted to snap before I go to sleep”. By snap, Emma meant “posting on Snapchat story”.

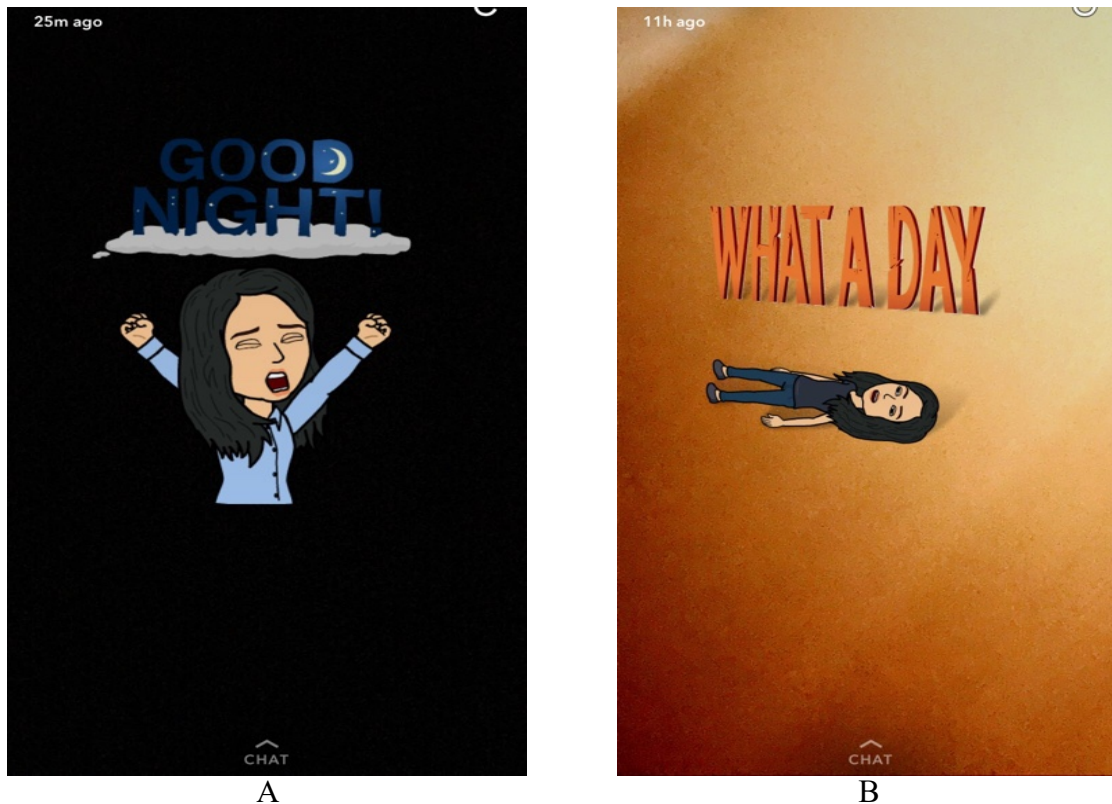


Figure 6.34: Screenshots of Emma snapping to say good night in A and to describe her day in B

Emma, in the same informal interview, indicated that she snapped to “tell my friends I’m tired” (see Fig. 6.35.A). Emma explained that she had to stay at home and spend her weekend studying while “everyone was out enjoying their time” and posted on Snapchat story a photo of scattered papers, a pen, a highlighter and Bitmoji with “so tired”. Emma, in informal interview 4, indicated that she snapped to tell herself to “be productive” on Snapchat story (see Fig. 6.35.B). She explained that she used two personalised Bitmojis as an indication of her two selves where one is giving the order and the other is obeying it. Emma, in informal interview

7, indicated that she snapped “have a nice day” (see Fig. 6.35.C) to wish all her followers to “*have the same happy feeling*” she was having at the time of snapping.



Figure 6.35: Screenshots of Emma snapping with her Bitmoji to describe her feelings in A , to talk to her two selves in B, and to wish her followers a nice day in C

Rawan used Bitmoji with English to celebrate special occasions. Rawan, in informal interview 1, indicated that she snapped to congratulate her cousin on her graduation (see Fig. 6.36.A). Rawan explained that she chose two Bitmojis, where one represents herself being “*so proud*” of her cousin’s accomplishment. Rawan, in the same informal interview, indicated that she snapped to celebrate submitting her graduation project, on that day, with her followers by choosing “party time” from the available filters (see Fig. 6.36.B).



A



B

Figure 6.36: Screenshots of Rawan snapping to celebrate her cousin’s graduation in A and her project submission in B

From the proceeding evidence, English was associated with Bitmoji on Snapchat to describe the current situation and feelings. In the next section, I illustrate how English is used in hashtags on Twitter.

### 6.5.2 Hashtags on Twitter

My data suggest that these Saudi female undergraduates participate with pre-existing English hashtags on Twitter to comment on international events, college events and events of personal interest. I discussed in Chapter 2 the meaning of hashtags on Twitter and I find it essential to describe what I mean by ‘already existing English hashtags’. By ‘already existing English hashtags’, I refer to words or phrases in English that are preceded by # and created by Twitter users other than my participants.

Commenting on international events is one of the literacy events where English is used in English hashtags. Nouf, in informal interview 4, indicated that she commented on a hashtag about Trump after he won the presidential election to remind Americans about Jim Crow racist rules (see Fig. 6.37.A). Nouf, in the same informal interview, indicated that she commented on a hashtag about the genocide in Aleppo to condemn it in an attempt to “rescue” the people there (see Fig. 6.37.B).

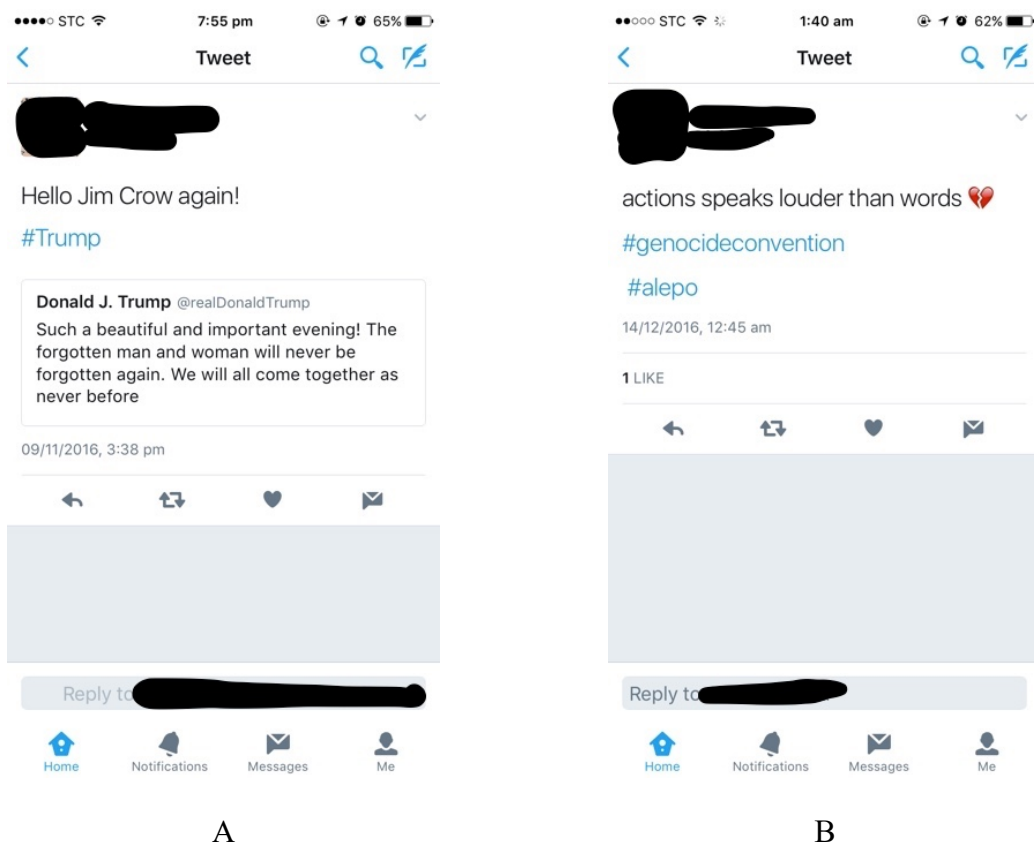


Figure 6.37: Screenshots of Nouf tweeting to add to existing hashtags about Trump in A and the genocide in Aleppo in B

Commenting on college events is among the literacy events where English is used in English hashtags. Lama, in informal interview 4, indicated that she commented on a hashtag about her college to share the accreditation meeting event with her followers (see Fig. 6.38. A). Latifah, in informal interview 1, indicated that she commented on a hashtag about a course she was

taking in college called Simultaneous Interpretation (see Fig.6.38. B) to encourage herself to get over her troubles, as will be discussed in section 6.6.

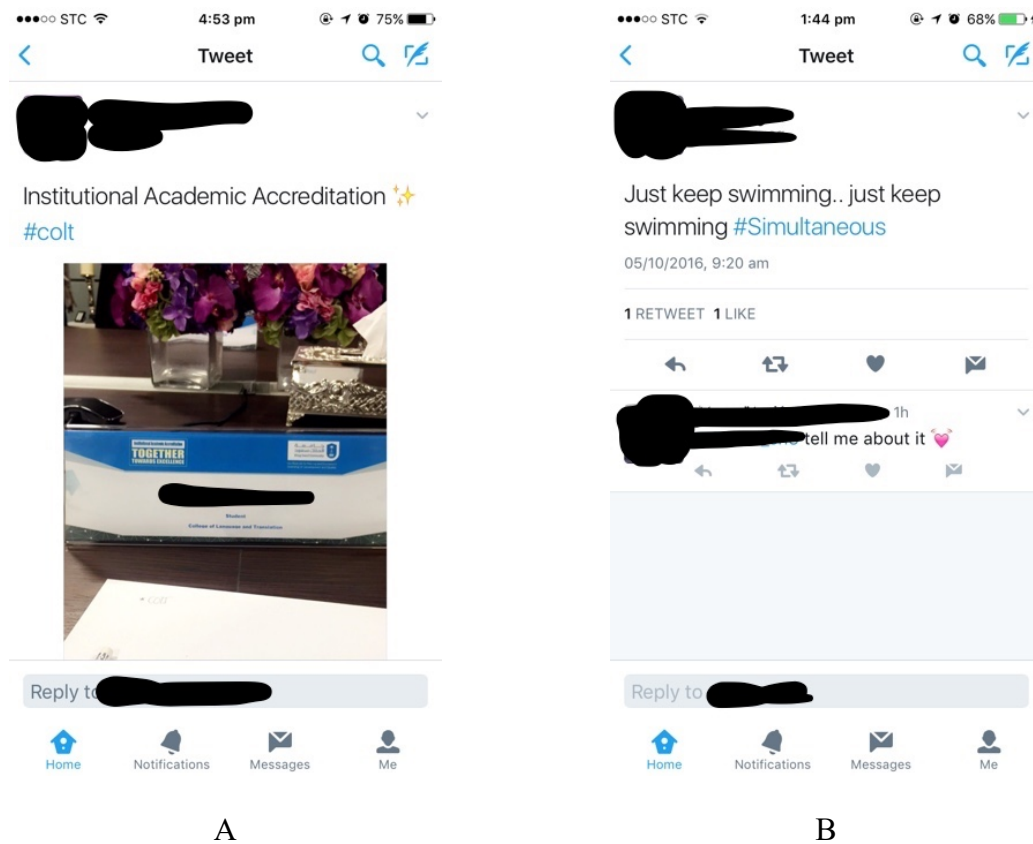


Figure 6.38: Screenshots of Lama tweeting to spread news about her college in A and Latifah to comment on a course in B

Commenting on events of personal interest is among the literacy events where English is used in English hashtags. Emma, in informal interview 5, indicated that she participated in a mannequin challenge hashtag by describing her favourite pose (see Fig. 6.39.A). She explained that this hashtag went viral and *“I realised I did the mannequin challenge because I was sitting at home like this basically [laugh]... I was sick and lazy”*, and so she wanted to attach the picture and comment on her favourite pose. From observing Nouf, I inferred that she commented on a “30 days sugar free” hashtag to inform her followers that she had

accomplished this challenge (see Fig. 6.39.B). Nouf indicated on several occasions that she was interested in “clean eating fashion” and being fit.



Figure 6.39: Screenshots of Emma tweeting about a mannequin challenge in A and Nouf about a sugar-free challenge in B

## 6.6 Addressing Oneself in Public

Addressing oneself in public is one of the situations where English is used on social media. Emma, in informal interview 5, indicated that she tweeted (see Fig. 6.40.A) as she was having a class at 8.54 a.m. to “*tell myself this is the last time for doing this*”. She explained that she had to work on her translation project at night, past her bedtime and became unwell because she did not have enough sleep. She added that “*I was sitting away from my friends [pause] like isolated from the girls because I was like ... I did not want to say anything ... I didn’t even participate ... even the teacher was telling me like ... can you please participate and I was*

telling her like no ... I couldn't say anything that day.” It appears that Emma was trying to warn herself not to repeat this action again in the future by talking to herself on Twitter. Emma, in informal interview 5, indicated that she was talking to herself when she tweeted (see Fig. 6.40.B) “because she was extremely busy the previous week”. She explained that she did not have any academic obligations on that specific day and to her “it was a little bit weird”, and this was the reason for addressing herself in public. She indicated that she did not expect anyone to reply to her tweet, nor any of her classmates to remind her about any assignments.

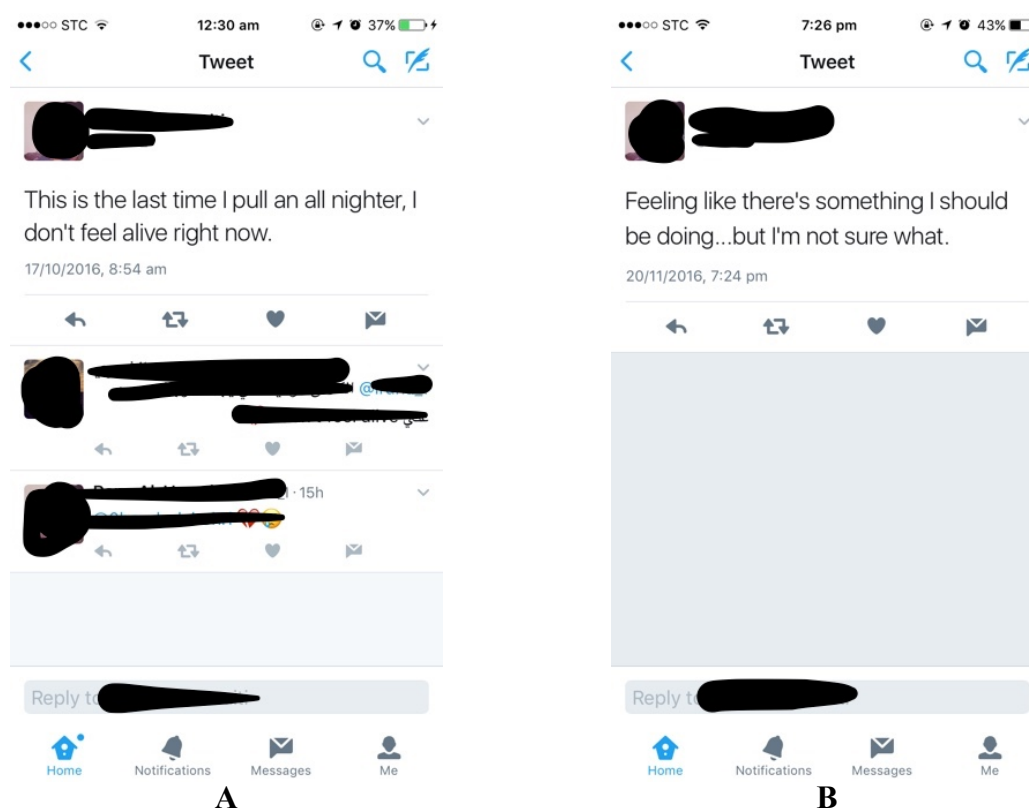


Figure 6.40: Screenshots of Emma tweeting to address herself in A and B

Addressing oneself in the classroom was shared by Latifah. Latifah, in informal interview 1, indicated that she tweeted in the classroom (see Fig. 6.41) to talk to herself in an attempt to encourage herself to get over her difficulty in listening to a recording of herself while translating from English into Arabic in the exam. She further indicated that she was attending a Simultaneous Interpreting class in which the instructor was playing all the students’

recordings of their own translations in the first mid-term exam and discussing their strengths and weaknesses. She explained that she was distressed as she “*did not like to listen to a recording of my own voice let alone be assessed for the quality of my own translation in front of everybody*”, and she drew on an encouraging statement from a movie, *Finding Dory*, which is to “*just keep swimming ... just keep swimming when you are in trouble*”.



Figure 6.41: A screenshot of Latifah tweeting to encourage herself in a Simultaneous Interpreting class

Addressing oneself to provide encouragement was shared by Nouf. Nouf, in informal interview 1, indicated that she took a photo of stairs captioned “healthier option” and posted it on Snapchat story (see Fig.6.42) to “*encourage myself to be healthy and provide strength to continue on my journey to be fit*”. She explained that she was in hospital and after her appointment she wanted to use the stairs instead of the lift and so she took a photo of the stairs and captioned it in an attempt to encourage herself.



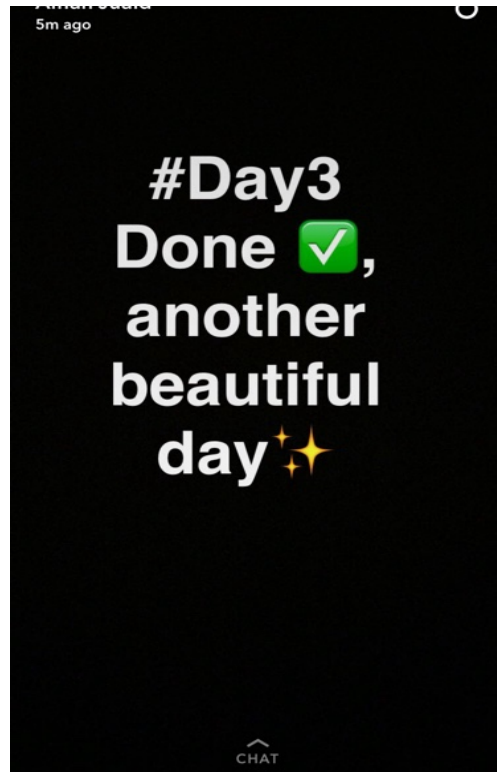
Figure 6.42: A screenshot of Nouf snapping to address herself

## 6.7 Expressing Feelings

Among the aspects where English is used on social media is expressing feelings, such as happiness and displeasure. Lama, in informal interview 1, mentioned that she tweeted to “*express how happy I was with coffee*” (see Fig. 6.43.A). Lama explained that she tweeted while drinking latte, her favourite coffee, after working out in the gym, at 8.50 p.m. Nouf, in informal interview 2, indicated that she posted on Snapchat story to express how happy she was for having had a successful day and accomplishing her volunteering work and communicating through Google Translate app in a language she did not know (see Fig. 6.43.B). Nouf explained that she was volunteering to work at a university in the evening and met a Korean lady aged 75 who could only speak Korean and had a long wonderful chat with her by using Google Translate app. Nouf was proud of herself for such an accomplishment and shared her happiness with her followers on Snapchat story.



A



B

Figure 6.43: Screenshots of Lama tweeting to express her feelings in A and Nouf about her accomplishment in B

Similar to Nouf, Emma shared her happiness with her followers on Twitter. Emma, in informal interview 4, indicated that she tweeted to share her feelings of being happy on her birthday (see Table 6.2). She explained that she was excited to pop up the balloons animation on Twitter and share it with other users on her birthday, although she did not have a party on that day to celebrate it. It appears that Emma did not count her tweet as a way of celebrating her birthday as she mentioned *“I did not actually celebrate it”* and counted her tweet as a way of sharing her happiness and feelings.


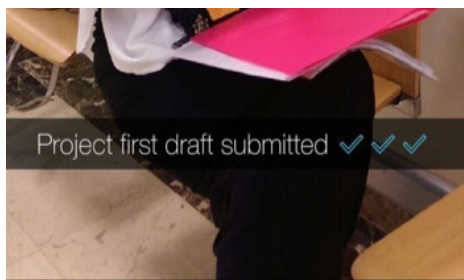
Interview Transcript	Screenshot Under Discussion
<p>Nada : How about this? [pause]</p> <p>Emma : This one, it was on my birthday .... and always when someone is on his birthday Twitter tells everyone about that ... on that day ... I opened Twitter ... I was very happy ... I clicked on these balloons and they pop out ... so that day it was mine ... I popped mine [laugh] so I said let's count how many times I open TWITTER ... because basically I did really open TWITTER many times just to see the balloons ... so yeah although I wasn't like ... that day I didn't actually celebrated it</p> <p>Nada : It was at 12.30 at night</p> <p>Emma : Yeah ... because at that time, 12, TWITTER would give you the balloons so ... I wanted to share my feelings</p>	

Table 6.2: Emma giving her account of sharing her happiness on her birthday with her Twitter followers

Sharing feelings of happiness is not restricted to oneself but is extended to friends on social media. Deema, in informal interview 2, indicated that she posted on Snapchat story to “*share the happiness of my friend*” (see Fig. 6.44.A). Deema explained that she took a photo of her friend holding a draft of her graduation project, captioned “project first draft submitted”, as a way of celebrating with her friend accomplishing part of her graduation project. I inferred from observing Nouf that she redirected a story on Snapchat, to share the happiness and success of her friend Lama (see Fig. 6.44.B), captioned “*can't be more proud*”. Nouf redirected a story on Snapchat from Lama’s account to express her feelings of being proud that Lama had printed her graduation project in a book.



A



B

Figure 6.44: Screenshots of Deema sharing the happiness of her friend in A and Nouf expressing being proud of her friend in B

Feelings of displeasure may be expressed in English on social media. Lama, in the online logbook of English usage, stated that she tweeted “*Time: the healer and the killer*” for “*ranting*” purposes. Deem, in informal interview 3, expressed that she tweeted to express her feeling of “*being irritated for having no internet connection in the house*” (see Fig. 6.45.A). Emma, in informal interview 8, indicated that she tweeted to express her feelings of being “*sad for having a bad day*” (see Fig. 6.45.B). Emma explained that she did not do well in the mid-term exam and her phone was smashed by her friend, who accidentally dropped the phone on the floor while charging it. Emma felt stressed as her friend was trying to help and for that she tweeted that she was the one who smashed her phone and was “*feeling sad*” that day.



Figure 6.45: Screenshots of Deema tweeting to express her feeling of being irritated in A and Emma of feeling sad in B

## 6.8 Removing Unpleasant Memories

My data suggest that there are literacy practices associated with removing unpleasant memories written in English on social media. Emma, in the first interview, indicated that among the reasons for deleting social media posts are: misunderstanding an upsetting situation and removing a “*painful situation*” from her timeline (see Excerpt 6.3). She implied that tweeting would help her control her anger and relieve life’s tensions.

Nada: Alright ... Have you ever deleted or edited a post in English?  
 Emma: Yeah ... a lot  
 Nada: Why?  
 Emma: Maybe ... sometimes when I’m UPSET at my friends or something ... I write a tweet about it ... then ... for example when I realize that I misunderstood them ... I delete it because they will know that IT IS about them ... so what's the point of leaving it? [pause] and sometimes ... I delete tweets because I don’t want to go back and see that my timeline is full of that painful situation ... like the tweets I do not want to read or to remember, for example ... when you write it when you are upset, so I just delete it when the situation is over ... I DELETE IT

Excerpt 6.3: Emma giving her account of deleting tweets to remove unpleasant memories

Norah indicated in the first interview that she deletes tweets she writes when she is “*furious*”. Norah explained that sometimes writing on social media was “*a way to get rid of my anger ... when I calm down ... I delete it.*” It seems that Emma and Norah used Twitter as a space to express their feelings of displeasure, but when those strong feelings subsided they tended to remove references to those unpleasant situations from their social media posts. It appears that Emma and Norah were attempting to avoid being associated with those bad memories.

## 6.9 Entertainment

Entertainment is one of the domains where English is used on social media. These female Saudi undergraduates retweeted and quoted tweets to entertain their followers on Twitter. Deema, in informal interview 6, indicated that she quoted a tweet about a joke in Arabic with “*Me as a kid*” to make fun and entertain her followers (see Fig. 6.46). She explained that the Arabic joke was about a child who called his mother from the phone of the person who was in charge of taking them home from school to ask about what the mother had prepared for dinner.



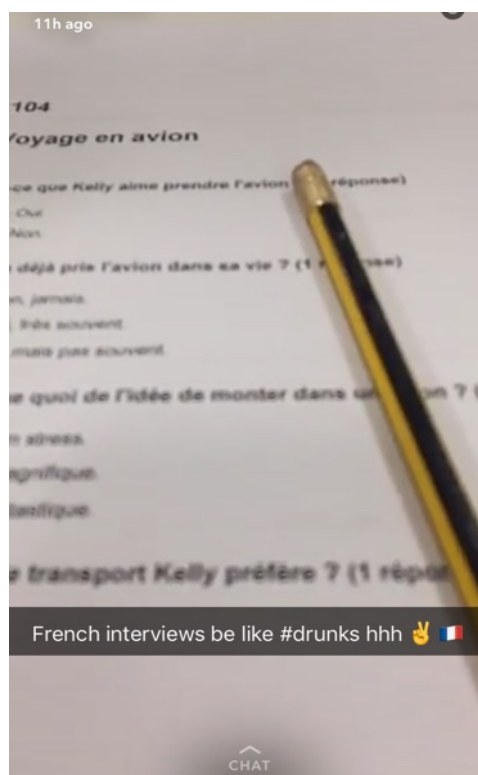
Figure 6.46: A screenshot of Deema quoting a tweet to entertain her followers with “*me as a kid*”

Latifah, in the second interview, indicated that she retweeted *“I’m going to stand outside. So if anyone asks, I’m outstanding”* to amuse her Twitter followers. Latifah explained that she laughed when she read that tweet and wanted to share this *“funny tweet”* with her followers.

Captioning videos and photos with comments in English on Snapchat story to entertain friends was reported by Deema, Nouf and Emma. Deem, in informal interview 6, indicated that she took a video of herself enjoying her time on a farm with her relatives, captioned *“Jack of all trades?? Master of none”* (see Fig. 6.47.A), to *“make a funny comment on my situation.”* She explained that she was enjoying her time there and trying to do several tasks at the same time and wanted to amuse her followers with this comment. Nouf, in informal interview 3, indicated that she captioned a video with *“French interviews be like #drunks hhh”* on Snapchat story to amuse her friends (see Fig. 6.47.B). She explained that she was making a video while having a French class and wanted her followers to hear the voice of the recorded interview in French and *“entertain them with this funny comment on the voice of the person who was speaking French in the interview”*.



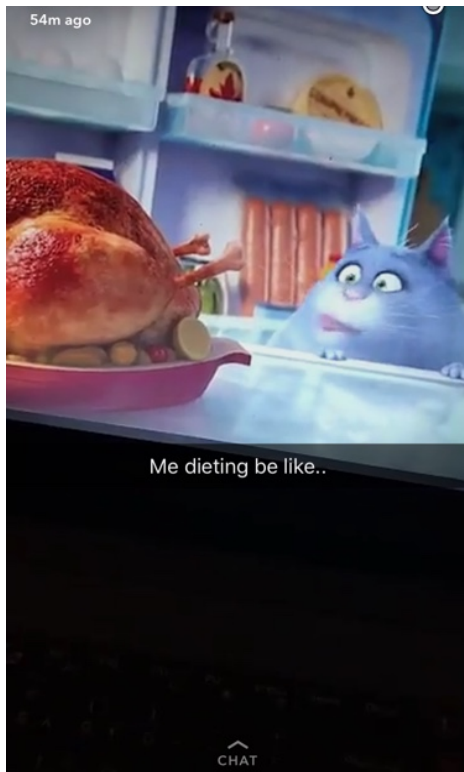
A



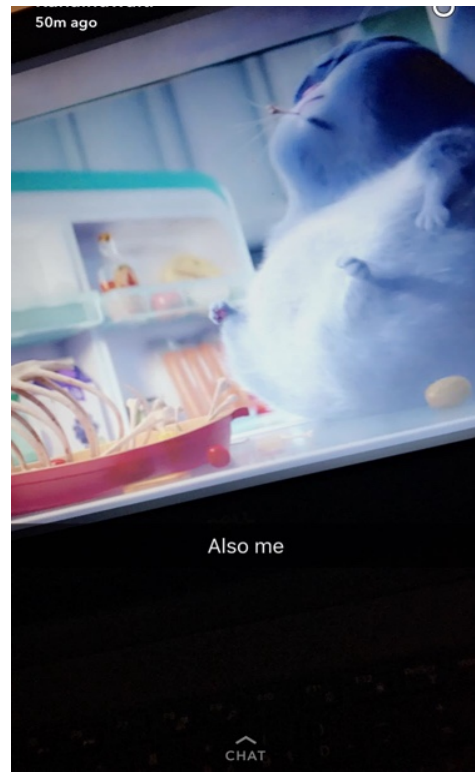
B

Figure. 6.47: Screenshots of Deema snapping to entertain followers in A, and Nouf snapping to entertain followers in B

Emma, in informal interview 6, indicated that she posted funny comments on Snapchat story to make fun of her dieting plan and amuse her followers. She explained that she was on a diet plan to lose weight and saw a “*Comedy movie produced by Disney and felt the same*”, as the cat went to the fridge and “*tried not to eat the chicken*” (see Fig. 6.48.A), and after several attempts the cat could not “*resist the temptation and ate the chicken*” (see Fig. 6.48.B). She was laughing as she was talking about these clips and indicated that she compared herself to this cat and the situation was “*hilarious*”.



**A**



**B**

Figure 6.48: Screenshots of Emma snapping “me dieting like” in A, and “also me” in B

Engaging in games by tweeting in English was inferred from observing Lama and Emma. Lama and Emma quoted the same tweet that asked people to “*type ‘I’m so’ and press the middle word*” and tweeted to participate in this game. Emma tweeted “*I’m so thankful*” (see Fig. 6.49.A), while Lama tweeted “*I’m so proud*” (see Fig. 6.49.B). It appears that Lama and Emma were spending their leisure time playing this textual game on Twitter and entertaining themselves.

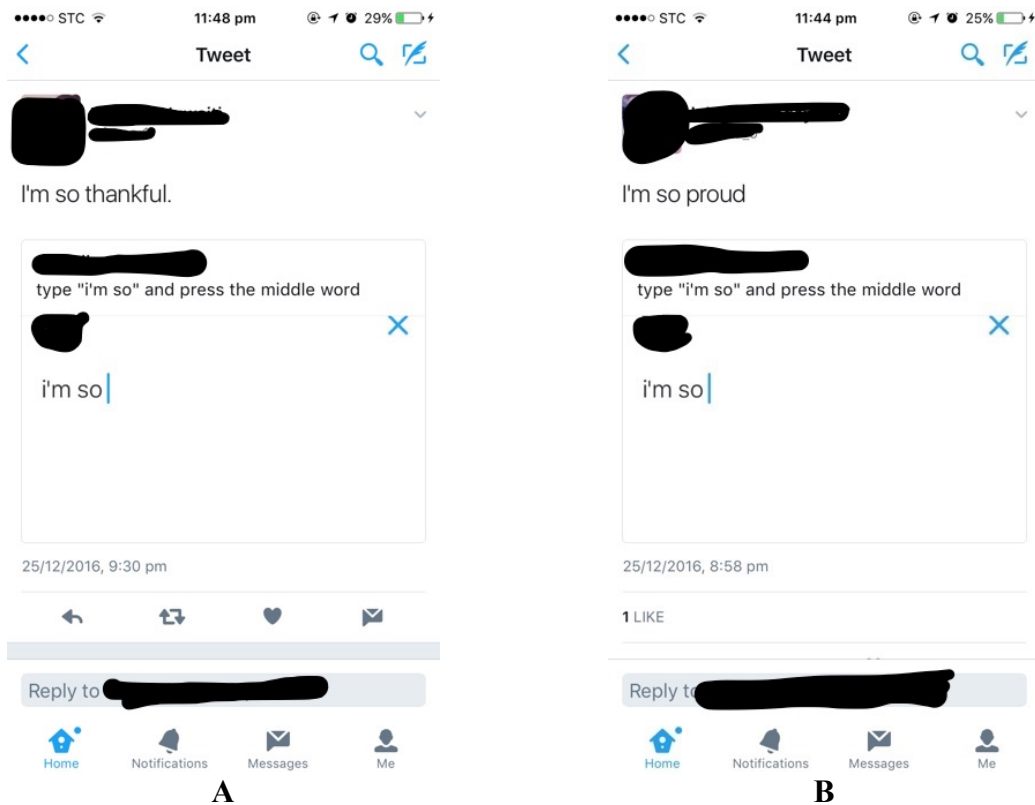


Figure 6.49: Screenshots of quoting a tweet for playing with “I’m so”: Emma in A, and Lama in B

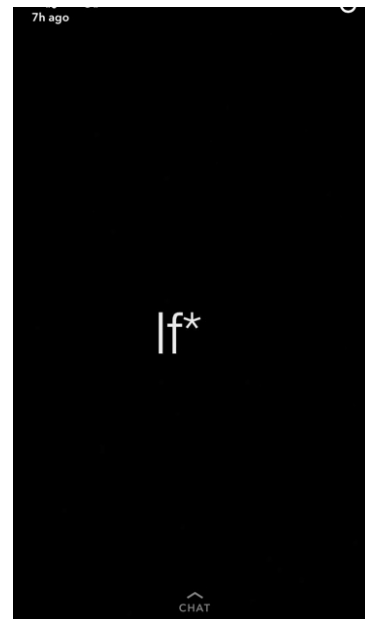
## 6.10 Correcting English

My data suggest that there are literacy practices associated with correcting English on social media. Deema, in the first interview, indicated that she deleted and added posts on social media to correct her spelling, use appropriate grammar usage or if the meaning was vague. She explained that “*Path has a new feature that allows me to edit the content and change whatever I have written*”, but Twitter and Snapchat do not allow users to edit a post after sending it. Deema indicated that she deleted tweets and tweeted again with the corrected word and added an additional snap episode to Snapchat story containing corrected words with a black background preceded by an asterisk. From observing Deema on Snapchat, I inferred that she added an additional snap episode to her Snapchat story (see Fig. 6.50.B) with a black background containing the word “if”, followed by an asterisk, to correct her grammatical error

(see Fig. 6.50.A). I also inferred that Deema corrected her spelling error by posting “how to study” followed by an asterisk (see Fig. 6.51.B) to correct her spelling error (see Fig. 6.51.A).



A

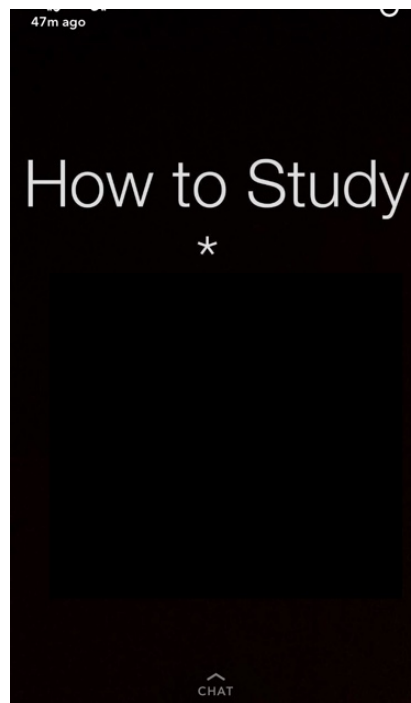


B

Figure 6.50: Screenshots of Deema snapping a grammatical error in A and the corrected error in B



A



B

Figure 6.51: Screenshots of Deema snapping a spelling error in A and the corrected error in B

Deema was not the only participant who deleted her tweets when she detected that she had made a grammar or spelling error, as Emma, Lama and Nouf deleted their tweets as well. Emma, in the first interview, indicated that she deleted her tweets as soon as she realised there was a spelling or grammar error because seeing that mistake on her timeline would “*kill my nerves*” (see excerpt 6.4). It seems that Emma could not tolerate leaving tweets that contained errors in spelling or grammar on her timeline. Lama and Nouf indicated that they deleted their tweets when they noticed mistakes without providing any reasons for their action.

Emma: If it is just a tweet or whatever post ... that cannot be changed ... I delete it ... rewrite it again ... because [pause] once I spot the mistake ... I just do not want to leave it ... I feel ... if I left it ... it will kill my nerves for leaving those things ... this is just a mistake and I cannot leave it ... so I have to correct it ... not for those who follow me ... I DON'T CARE about what they would say ... or say about me

Excerpt 6.4: Emma giving her account of deleting tweets to correct her English

Nouf, however, indicated that she added an additional snap episode with the corrected word or sentence, just like Deema. Nouf, in informal interview 1, indicated that she posted a blank background with the word “lovely” followed by four asterisks (see Fig. 6.52) because she misspelled a word in a previous snap, which I could not screenshot and save in my field notes. She explained that she took a photo of her face and her friend’s face captioned “*with my lovly friend*”, with a missing “e”. From observing Nouf on Snapchat, I inferred that she added a new snap to her snapchat story containing the phrase “every time” followed by an asterisk (see Fig. 6.53.B) to correct an error she made in a previous snap (see Fig. 6.53.A).

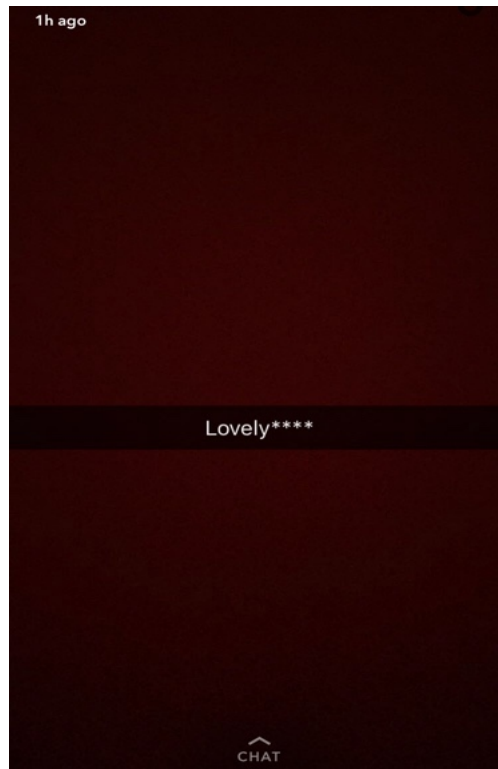
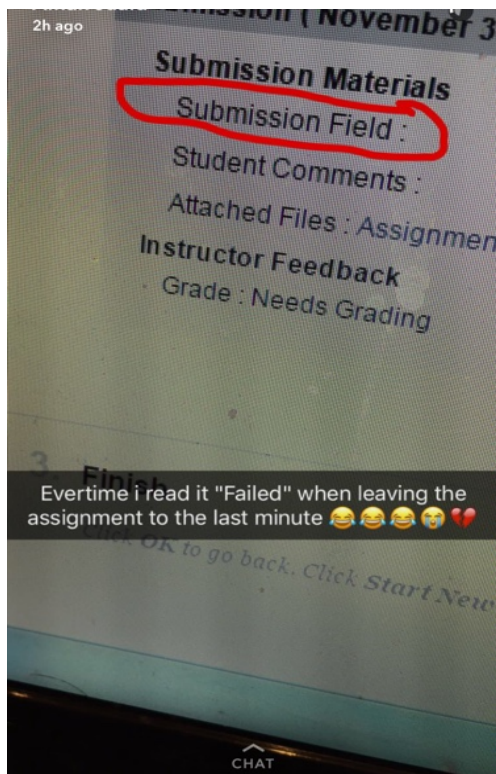
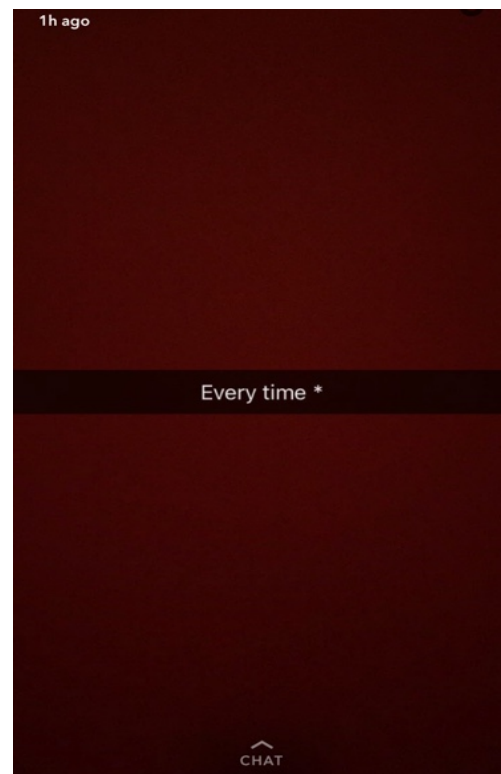


Figure 6.52: A screenshot of Nouf correcting her misspelled word on Snapchat with “lovely”



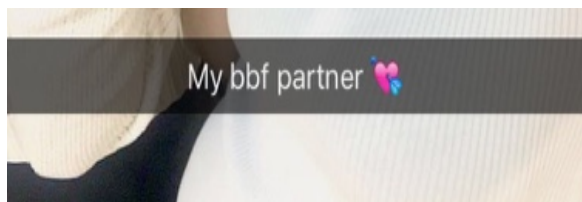
A



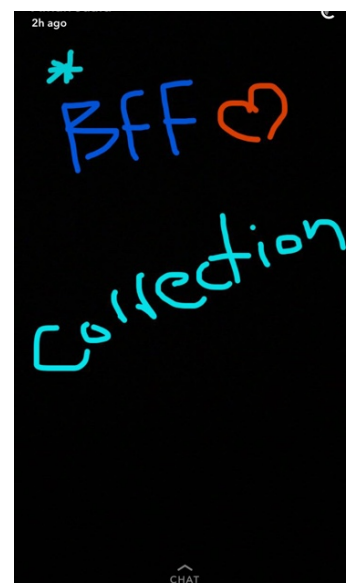
B

Figure 6.53: Screenshots of Nouf snapping an error in A and the corrected error in B

Nouf, in informal interview 3, indicated that she used her finger to write the correct acronym of “Best Friend Forever”. She explained that she snapped herself and her friend, captioned with “my bbf partner”, and posted it on Snapchat story (see Fig. 6.54.A), but discovered later that she had made an error and corrected that error in a new snap (see Fig. 6.54.B). She mentioned that she wanted to use her finger to write “BFF” on the screen, but the asterisk was not clear, and for that reason she wrote “correction”. Nouf had a habit before buying her present smartphone of writing with her finger on the touchscreen.



**A**



**B**

Figure 6.54: Screenshots of Nouf snapping the error “bbf” in A and the corrected error “BFF correction” in B

Adding a new post on social media to correct grammar errors or spelling is not restricted to Snapchat as Rawan mentioned that she followed the same process on both Twitter and Snapchat. Rawan, in the first interview, indicated that she corrected her spelling errors on Twitter by replying to the same tweet with the corrected word or words followed by an asterisk. To Rawan, the added tweet “*would appear in the timeline following the original tweet with an*

*arrow and my username” and correcting words in tweets would simply mean that “these are my own words not copied from another place”.*

## **6.11 Summary**

In this chapter, I have described the various literacy practices that emerge as these female Saudi undergraduates use English on social media. I have illustrated these literacy practices by identifying different situations in everyday life in which English is used in literacy events on social media. I grouped the literacy practices into ten categories which were linked by being about documenting life, opinions and advice, enriching the knowledge of a known audience on Twitter, personal communication, addressing oneself in public, expressing feelings, removing unpleasant memories, entertainment and correcting English. I also explained literacy practices that were created by working in innovative ways with the affordances of social media platforms. In the next chapter, I explain the reasons these Saudi female undergraduates give for choosing to use English on social media.

## CHAPTER 7

### PURPOSES FOR CHOOSING TO USE ENGLISH IN LITERACY EVENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The previous chapter conducted an analysis of the diverse literacy practices that emerged as these female Saudi undergraduates used English for different purposes on social media. I illustrated the many ways in which English was used as part of these Saudi female undergraduates' everyday lives. In this chapter, I argue that using English on social media was a matter of choice and I analysed the reasons these Saudi female undergraduates provide for their choices.

Choosing to use English might be in the form of reading or writing on social media. As I explained in Chapter 2 (see section 2.1.2.2), the nature of reading and writing in the digital age has changed and become more intertwined (Kress, 2010). Reading or writing can take any form, as in the act of tweeting on Twitter, posting on Instagram or Snapchat, either the private chatting feature or the story feature, or posting on any other social media platform. However, the act of retweeting, liking on Twitter and redirecting a snap on the Snapchat story feature are examples of how reading and writing are intertwined.

In this chapter, I answer my third research question, which is: **What reasons do these female Saudi undergraduates have for choosing to use English in their literacy practices on social media?** by drawing on data obtained from interviews, the online logbook of social media English usage and online observation. I identify five main purposes for these Saudi female undergraduates' choice of English in their literacy practices on social media. These purposes are: 1) furthering their academic major studies, 2) quoting in the same language, 3) a matter of preference, 4) technological issues, and 5) social media audience.

## 7.1 Furthering their Academic Major Studies

These Saudi female undergraduates indicated that they use English on social media as a result of their academic major being English Language and Translation. In the face-to-face focus group (see excerpt 7.1), the participants mentioned that their academic major affected their frequent use of English on social media. They indicated that studying English resulted in a tendency to use it.

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
Abrar: I guess our major makes us...	ابرار: اتوقع our major هو إلي....
Lama: Forces us ... honestly...	لما: يجبرك...الصراحة...
Abrar: To use English on social media...	ابرار: نستخدم انجليزي على "social media"...
Norah: I love English, honestly, and I want to improve in English so I use it ... my major is one thing ... I still love English, that is why I major in English ... I mean, I want to improve in English ... so I follow people who use English...	نورة: أنا أحب الإنجليزي صراحة وابعى أطور من نفسي فيه فعشان كذا استخدمه...عشان قسمي .... وأنا أحب ال English عشان كذا دخلت هالقسم وإلى الآن...يعني ابعى أطور نفسي في الإنجليزي ...عشان كذا لازم أتابع أشخاص يكتبون بالإنجليزي...
Lama: As for me ... I don't feel that I intentionally write in English ... my brain now tells me that English and Arabic are used equally...	لما: عني...ما أحس إني قاصدة إني اكتب English صار مخي خلاص now العربي وال English متساويين كلهم واحد...
Nouf: Sometimes ... the idea comes in English and at other times the idea comes in Arabic...	نوف: أحيانا...الفكرة تجي إنجليزي الفكرة تجي عربي..
Lama: We cannot control this	لما: فمو شرط نتحكم بها...
Nada: You cannot control this...	ندى: على حسب ما تقدري تسوي لها control
Lama: I cannot say let's write in Arabic...	لما: مو أنا بقول ياللا نكتب عربي
Abrar: I guess we tend to use English because we study English a lot	ابرار: من كثر ما درسنا صرنا كذا
Lama, Abrar, Nouf and Norah: YES ... YES	لما وابرار ونوف ونورة: ((ايوه))...((ايوه))

Excerpt 7.1: An academic major in English affects their usage

It seems that their academic major stimulated my participants to use English, their L2, instead of Arabic. They declared in the focus group that they “*have no control*” over the language they choose in their posts, and for this reason I asked them questions about their choice of English in the informal interviews after I observed them using English. I aimed to investigate if they had no control, as they claimed, by showing them screenshots of their English use on social

media. They actually did have control over their language choice as they gave reasons on some occasions. I explain their purposes for choosing English in this chapter.

This idea that their academic major had an influence on choosing to use English was repeated again in the first individual interviews with Norah and Emma. Norah mentioned that using English on social media was “*a must*” because she was studying English as a language and taking courses in English. It appeared that Norah valued English as it related to her future career. Emma, similar to Norah, indicated that using English was related to her major (see excerpt 7.2).

Emma: This is mainly why I use English ... I feel if you are majoring in something ... then you should use it ... like now I'm studying English so I have to use it ... otherwise what is the whole point of studying it if I am not going to use the language?
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Excerpt 7.2: Emma's account of using English as a result of her academic major

It seems that Emma felt obliged and committed to using English because she was majoring in it. Rawan, in the WhatsApp focus group, seemed to share Emma's idea of feeling committed and obliged to using English because of her academic major. Rawan indicated that there was no point in spending five years studying English if she did not use it on social media as well as in other aspects of her life.

My data suggest that furthering their academic major studies as one of the reasons for using English on social media can be divided into three sub-categories: English as a habit, English as a formal language and improving one's capacity in English. These sub-reasons are illustrated in the following sections.

### 7.1.1 English as a Habit

Using English became my participants’ habit as a result of their major in English. My participants implied that there was no conscious thinking behind their choice of English and this seems to reflect that using English became a habit in social media literacy practices. Deema, in the first informal interview, mentioned that she tweeted in English without noticing that she chose English (see table 7.1).


Translated Interview Transcript	Screenshot Under Discussion and Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nada: Why in English?</p> <p>Deema: I really don’t know ... I DON’T KNOW</p> <p>Nada: [Pause]</p> <p>Deema: I PROBABLY used English WITHOUT NOTICING ... I JUST FELT like using English ... I don’t feel that there is a convincing reason for English</p>	 <p>ندى: “why in English” ديما: ما أدري والله... ((ما أدري)) ندى: [صمت] ديما: ((يمكن والله بدون ما أدري)) استخدمت الإنجليزي... (كذا حاسه))... احس ما عندي سبب مقنع يخلي اختار English”</p>

Table 7.1: Deema’s feelings were her reason for choosing English

It appears that Deema used English spontaneously without intending to choose it over Arabic. Deema seemed to see her feelings as the reason for her choice as she indicated in informal interviews 5 and 6 that there were no specific reasons for her choice other than she “*felt like [posting] in English*”. Similar to Deema, Lama mentioned in the first informal interview (see

Table 7.2) that she could not provide a specific reason for her choice of English other than her “mind”.


Screenshot Under Discussion	Interview Transcript
	<p>Lama: I don't think I have a reason for using English</p> <p>Nada: Is it because you were using English in your project?</p> <p>Lama: NO ... actually I was translating into Arabic so I used Arabic ... I should have then engaged in Arabic ... I was writing in Arabic at that point not in English ... I was reading in English but writing in Arabic ... but as I told you before, I think Arabic and English are like equal in my mind ... so I don't always have a reason for using English or Arabic ... it comes like this</p>

Table 7.2: Lama’s account of using English as a habit

Nouf, in informal interview 3, indicated that she used English to comment on a photo (see Fig.7.1), that she took of her friend’s coffee ,with “True love” because it was the language that came into her mind first. Nouf posted this on Snapchat story and yet she could not provide a reason, other than thinking in English instead of in Arabic.



Figure 7.1: A screenshot of Nouf snapping coffee with “true love”

Lama and Latifah seemed to see their “mind” and the language they think and feel in as being responsible for choosing English. In the logbook of social media English usage, Lama stated that she chose English because “*it came in English in my mind*” and she “*Just felt like it*”, while Latifah stated “*I thought of the comment in English*” to give a reason for choosing English on Twitter.

Emma seemed to be more aware of the reason behind her choice of English, which was using it as a habit, as she stated in the online logbook that “*It's almost like I've gotten used to it.*” Deema, however, was not aware that her choice of English on some occasions was as a result of her habit and there is evidence of this in her written statement “*I don't know*”, when giving a reason for choosing English in the online logbook. It appears that Deema had got used to using English to the extent that she was unable to provide a specific reason for choosing English over Arabic.

My participants also explained that using some expressions in English is more common than in Arabic in their daily conversations. Deema indicated that she used “*long weekend*” (see Fig. 7.2.A) on Twitter because using this expression in Arabic is harder, so she always code-switched to “weekend” in her daily conversations. Deema further indicated that she used the expression “low quality” to caption a photo she took (see Fig. 7.2.B) and posted on Snapchat story for the same reason. Deema, in the online logbook, stated that the reason for posting “*way beyond low quality*” was that “*maybe the expression is commonly used in Arabic too (low quality)*”. For her, “*low quality*” had become more like an Arabic expression and she used it in her daily conversations.



A



B

Figure 7.2: Deema in (A) tweeted “long weekend” and in (B) snapped “way beyond low quality”

Latifah, Nouf and Rawan, similar to Deema, mentioned that using some expressions in English were more common than their Arabic equivalents. Nouf indicated that she used “healthier option” (see Fig.7.3. A) to caption a photo she took of some stairs because she code-switched to “healthier” in English in everyday conversations. Latifah indicated that she used “cup of coffee” (see Fig.7. 3. B) to caption a photo she sent privately to me on Snapchat because she always used “cup of coffee” when she code-switched to English. Rawan indicated that she used “3D” to quote a tweet containing a video (see Fig. 7.3.C) because she code-switched to the expression “3D” in English.

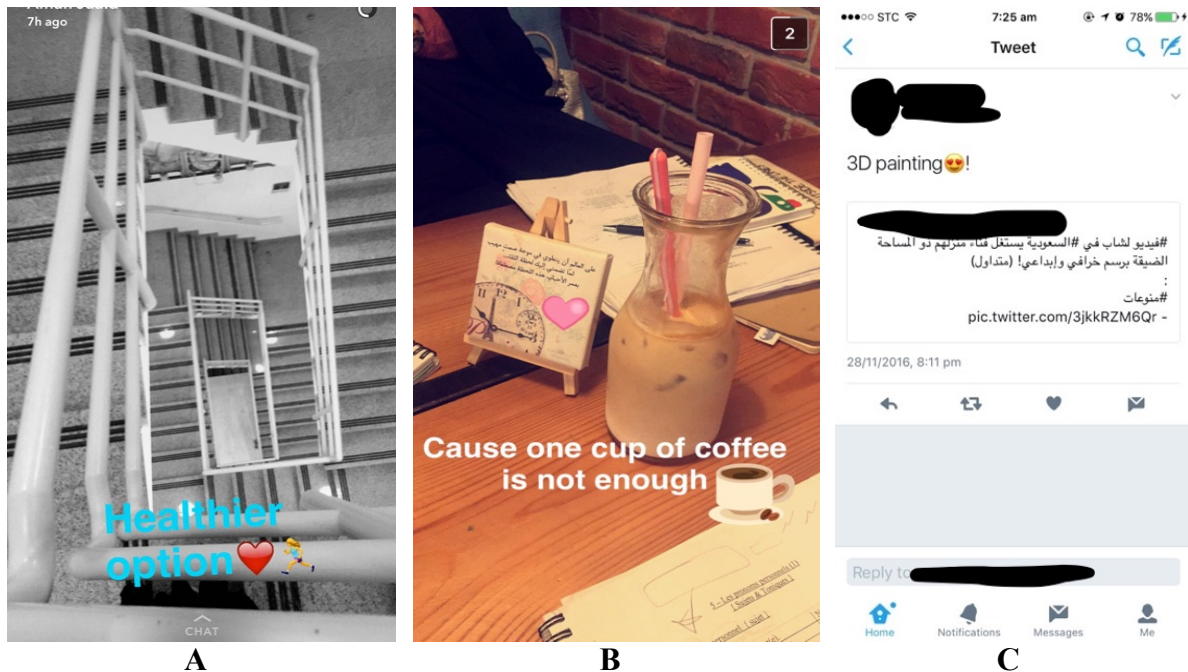


Figure 7.3: Screenshots taken from Nouf’s snap of stairs (A), Latifah’s snap of coffee (B) and Rawan’s tweet of 3D (C)

The preceding evidence implies that code-switching to English expressions in their everyday conversations conducted in the physical world had affected their choice of using English on social media. I inferred from the participants’ responses to their purpose for choosing English, “I don’t know” or “the idea just came in English”, was an indication of a habit. I also inferred

from their response that using “*some English expressions is more common than their Arabic equivalents*” was another indication of using English as a habit.

### 7.1.2 English as a Formal Language

Deema and Nouf indicated that English was used in formal situations when they contacted people on Twitter who were knowledgeable in English language translation. Nouf, in the face-to-face focus group, mentioned that she used English to contact an expert in English translation who had an account on Twitter. She indicated that she used Twitter private chatting to ask about issues related to her major. Deema, in the WhatsApp focus group, stated that she “*prefers*” to use English in formal situations on social media. Deema, in informal interview 6, mentioned that her reason for choosing to use English was to address her teacher of a course in English Translation (see Table 7.3).

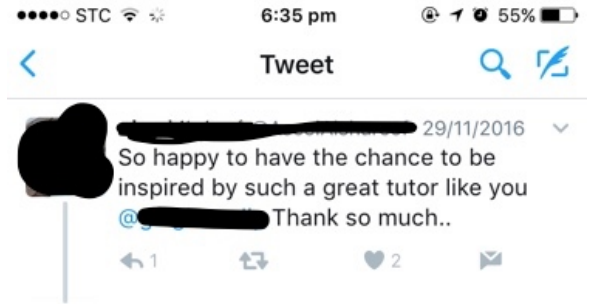
Translated Interview Transcript	Screenshot under Discussion and Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nada: Why did you use English here?</p> <p>Deema: Because I am addressing a teacher</p> <p>Nada: Addressing a teacher?</p> <p>Deema: She is a teacher of English and I feel that English is more formal</p> <p>Nada: Okay ... so you are using English because you feel this is a formal situation?</p> <p>Deema: Yes ... I am being formal here and so I must use English</p>	 <p>ندى : ليه كتبتني لها بالإنجليزي هنا ؟ ديما : لأنها Teacher ندى : لأنها Teacher ؟ ديما : English Teacher واحسها more formal ندى : آها يعني انتي تستخدمين الانجليزي عشان هذي الموقف Formal ؟ ديما : ايه...انا هنا formal فلازم اكتب English</p>

Table 7.3: Deema’s account of tweeting using English as a formal language

It appears that addressing people on Twitter who are experts in English translation is a formal situation that requires formal language. It seems that Twitter as social media has formal situations that necessitate the use of English when the account holders are experts in English translation.

### 7.1.3 Improving Competency in English

My research participants related their wish to improve their English competency to their academic major. Emma indicated in the WhatsApp focus group that she used English on social media to “*make sure*” that she practised her English major. Rawan added her voice to Emma’s in the WhatsApp focus group by stating “+I same as [Emma].”

Emma appeared to embrace the idea that social media was used as a place where she was able to use English again and again in order to become better in English, her L2. Emma, in the first interview, indicated that she needed people to practise her English with them, especially after returning from the United Kingdom (see excerpt 7.3). Emma seemed to use Twitter as a place to meet people who can use English and help her not forget that language.

Emma: I was in the UK, specifically in London, so when I came back here I did not find people to talk with in English so ... I tried to find a place where I can practise my English and I did not find anyone ... since I knew Twitter, I realized I can use my English language and practise it with people like ... I can talk to them and comment with them in English and then I found that this is a good way so that I won't forget the English language.
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Excerpt 7.3: Emma’s account of using English on social media to practise it

Deema, however, indicated that she used to tweet a word or phrase in English to learn to use that word or phrase and memorise it. Deema indicated, in informal interview1, that she tweeted “*too self-seeking*” (see Fig.7.4. A) in order to use the expression “*self-seeking*” in a context combined with a women’s sandal emoji so as to remember the meaning of self-seeking. She

mentioned that she was looking for a word and found this expression to describe her current situation as she was preparing herself to attend a wedding on the same day. Deema, in informal interview 2, mentioned that she wanted to tweet a word she had just learned from one of her assignments (see Fig. 7.4.B) and preferred to tweet that word without using it in a full sentence in order to memorise the spelling and meaning of that English word.

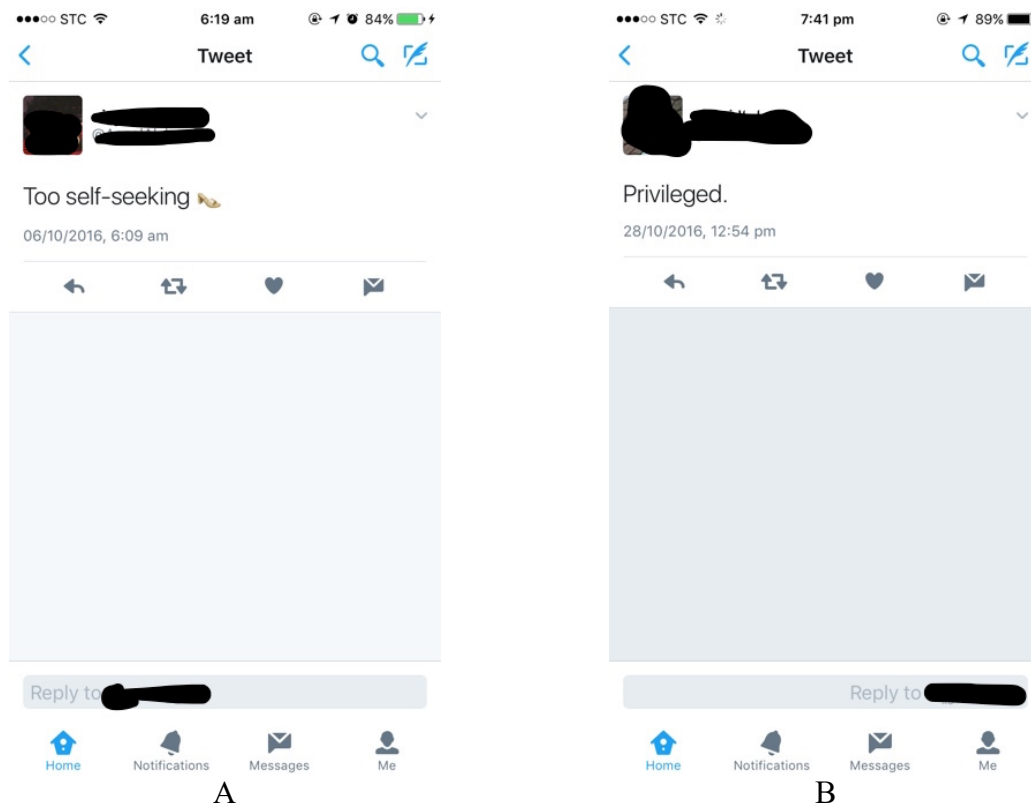


Figure 7.4: Screenshots of Deema’s use of “too self-seeking” in A and tweet with “privileged” in B

While observing my participants on Twitter, I inferred that they were aiming to improve their English grammar as well as the English grammar of their Twitter followers. Deema and Emma retweeted posts about common errors in English grammar posted by people who are interested in proper English grammar usage. They also retweeted tweets about the proper use of punctuation in English and tricky spellings. It appears that Nouf and Lama shared the same interest in improving their English and their Twitter followers’ English through retweeting.

Nouf retweeted a post explaining the meaning of “*No worries*”, while Lama retweeted a post explaining when to use “*in, on and at*” with time and location.

## 7.2 Quoting in the Same Language

My research participants mentioned that they sometimes used English because they were repeating the exact words that were written or said by other people. Randa, in the WhatsApp focus group, indicated that she used English on Snapchat by writing her favourite English quotes on a blank background or any photo. Randa stated that she was “*obsessed*” with quoting in English as these were “*crafted inspiring words*”. She was happy to share three screenshots of her English quotes on Snapchat (see Fig. 7.5) by attaching them as we were having the focus group via WhatsApp.

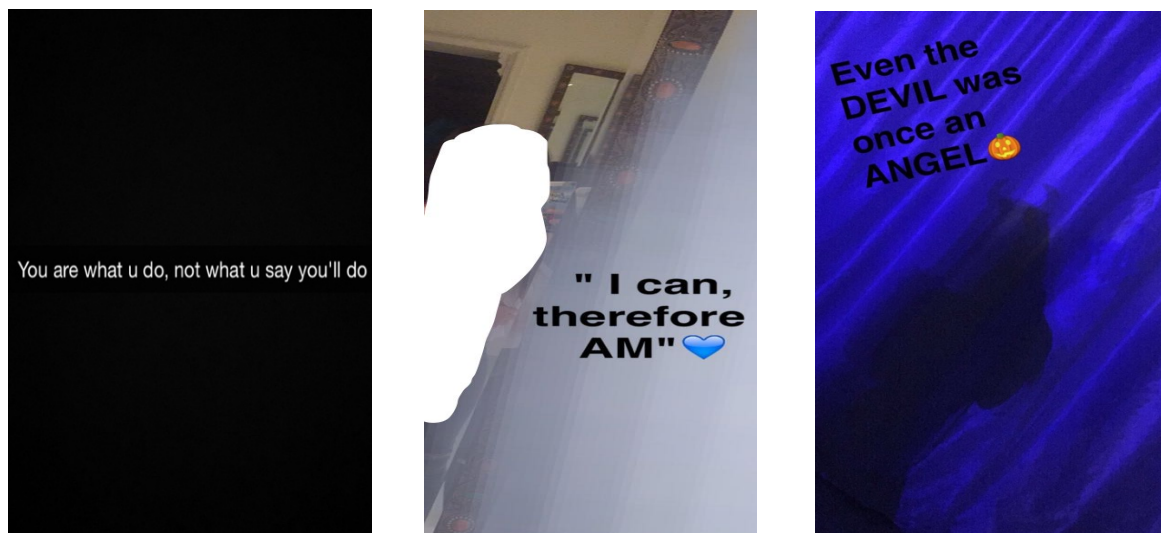


Figure 7.5: Three screenshots of English quotes provided by Randa in the WhatsApp focus group

Emma indicated, in informal interview 7, that she quoted a tweet to add words she admired spoken by Virginia Woolf (see Fig. 7.6). She mentioned that these words were Woolf’s words, although she did not use quotation marks.



Figure 7.6: Screenshot of Emma's tweet quoting Virginia Woolf

Norah in the first interview mentioned that one of the reasons for using English on Twitter was quoting in the same language. She indicated that she often tweeted quotes of words she liked from a novel. Similar to Norah, Latifah indicated in informal interview 1 that she tweeted (see Fig.7.7) as she was reading a novel in the physical world to share her favourite piece from *The Kite Runner* novel. She mentioned that she used quotations marks and a hashtag followed by the name of the novel to signal her favourite part.



Figure 7.7: Latifah’s tweet quoting from *The Kite Runner*

Quoting words written or spoken by teachers was mentioned by Deema and Norah. Deema, in formal interview 1, said that she quoted her teacher’s words in a recommendation letter when tweeting “*A thirst for knowledge*”. She indicated that she liked those words and wanted to share them on Twitter with her followers. Norah stated in the logbook of English usage that she tweeted “*Every word counts in scientific translation*”, quoting her teacher’s words simply because these were the teacher’s words that reflected her opinion.

Food recipes in English were retweeted by Rawan and Latifah. Both Latifah and Rawan, in informal interview 1, indicated that they retweeted the same pancake recipe in English because they found it in English and wanted to make those pancakes. Rawan also indicated, in an informal interview, that she retweeted a chicken nuggets recipe in English because she found a tweet in English. Rawan mentioned that she wanted to see the recipe on her timeline and to try that recipe in the future.

Quoting song lyrics in English was raised by Latifah and Rawan. Latifah, in informal interview 1, indicated that she tweeted her favourite song lyrics in English because it was the language of that song (see Fig. 7.8.A). She mentioned that the song was stuck in her head although she was not listening to it. In informal interview 3, Latifah mentioned that she tweeted song lyrics on her way home (see Fig.7 .8.B). In the online logbook of English usage, Latifah stated that she was listening to those song lyrics as she was tweeting.

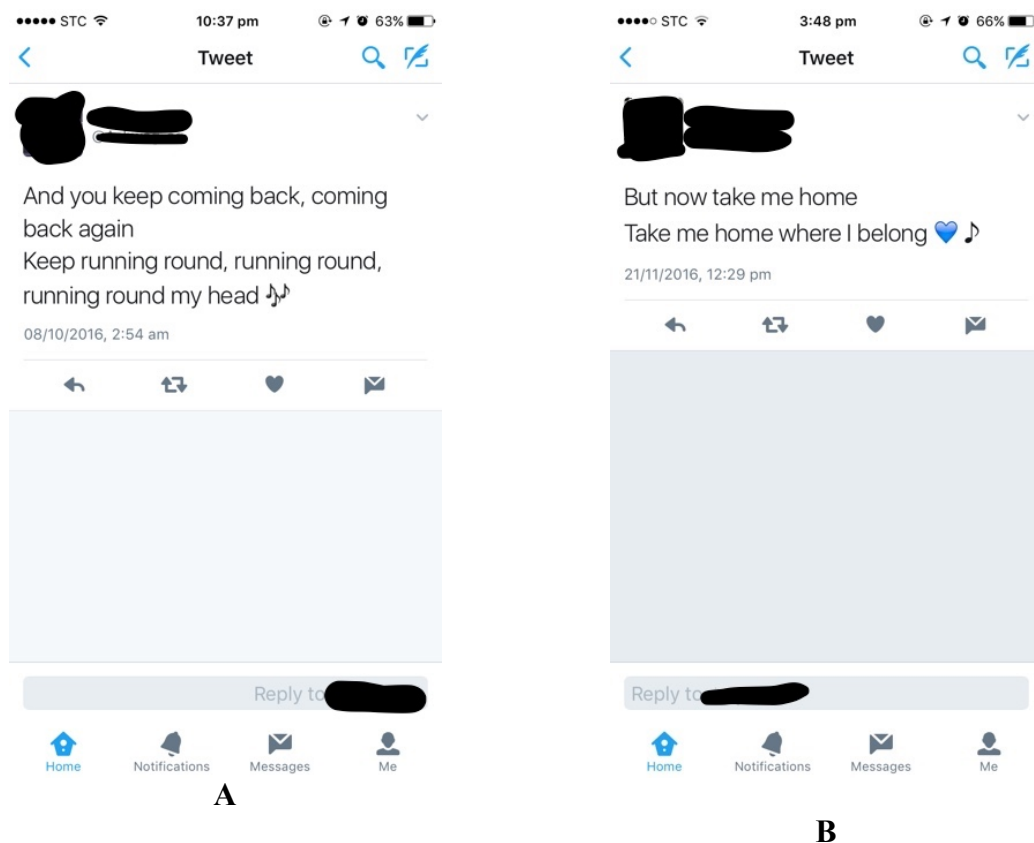


Figure 7.8: Latifah tweeting her favourite song lyrics in A and B

Rawan mentioned the same purpose for choosing English. Rawan, in informal interview 1, indicated that she tweeted words from her favourite song and did not expect her friends to continue tweeting the same lyrics. Rawan replied and continued the lyrics in the same tweet thread (see Fig.7.9).



Figure 7.9: A screenshot of Rawan tweeting her favourite song lyrics

From the preceding evidence, choosing to use English to quote in the same language can take any form. Quotes may be taken from “*crafted inspiring words*” written by unknown people, words said or written by people they respect, people’s favourite piece in a novel or song lyrics.

### 7.3 Matter of Preference

My interview and focus group data suggest that using English on social media by these female Saudi undergraduates resulted from their preference to use English instead of Arabic. Reasons for choosing English on social media as a matter of preference can be divided into three types: 1) preferring English for reasons related to feelings and a sense of self, 2) preferring English for reasons related to a literacy event situation, 3) preferring English for reasons related to “adoring” the idioms, figures of speech, structures and expressions available in the English language. These reasons are illustrated in the following sections.

### 7.3.1 Preferring English for Reasons Related to Feelings and a Sense of Self

These female Saudi undergraduates indicated that using English on social media was related to a sense of self and feeling comfortable. Emma, in informal interview 1, mentioned that she used English (see Fig.7.10) when tweeting about an upsetting situation where people behaved badly, because she felt comfortable tweeting in English more than Arabic.



Figure 7.10: A screenshot of Emma’s tweet criticising negative behaviour

Emma seems to value using English to help her feel comfortable. In the first interview, Emma related to her preference to use English and feel comfortable to her ability to express herself better in English. Emma implied that her past trajectory in learning English might have had an influence on her choices and how she got used to using English (see Excerpt 7.4).

Emma: Another reason for using English ... I guess ... I feel more comfortable when I talk in English ... I do not know why ... maybe because it is my major ... like my major is in English language but I feel more comfortable even when ... I write my diaries on Snapchat ... when I tweet about something ... I can write in Arabic but I feel more COMFORTABLE to write in English... because I feel I can EXPRESS myself more in English... I do not know ... maybe because before I expressed myself to people in English and I got used to it... so I carry on as I started.

Excerpt 7.4: Emma's experience of feeling comfortable using English instead of Arabic

Emma was not the only participant who felt more comfortable using English instead of Arabic on social media, as Sawsan shared a similar sentiment. Sawsan, in the WhatsApp focus group, stated *"I feel more comfortable because I like English language and it's culture"*, and this seems to imply that Sawsan's preference was stimulated by being comfortable using English as she likes English language and culture.

Rawan preferred to use English for reasons related to her sense of self and being proficient in English. Rawan, in informal interview 1, indicated that she used English to describe her bag accessory (see Fig.7.11) because English *"suits my character perfectly"* and she feels more proficient in English. She explained that she snapped this in the car to share with her Snapchat followers, what she called a *"new hair style"* for her bag accessory.



Figure 7.11: A screenshot of Rawan snapping her bag accessory

### 7.3.2 Preferring English for Reasons Related to a Literacy Event Situation

These female Saudi undergraduates related their choice to use English on social media to a situation that stimulated a literacy event. Rawan, in informal interview 1, indicated that she chose English when snapping to congratulate her cousin on graduating from a university in the United Kingdom (see Fig.7.12). For Rawan, the event itself required English and she felt that using English was more appropriate in that situation.



Figure 7.12: A screenshot of Rawan snapping to congratulate her cousin

Deema, in informal interview 2, indicated that she chose to use English to tweet (see Fig.7.13) because “*argue*” in English is polite and reflects respecting the other person, while contradicting his opinion. For her, this situation requires English as it is “*more polite*” to use “*argue*” than to use “*ادافع*” in Arabic. Deema explained that she quoted a tweet and added her opinion in Arabic, and once she got a reply to that tweet she chose to use English and quoted the tweet thread. For Deema, using Arabic to reflect this meaning might be rude and this is not what she intends to do, and so using English is “*more polite and gentle*”.



Figure 7.13: A screenshot of Deema tweeting “argue”

Lama, in informal interview 1, indicated that she chose English because the situation required a phrase that has no equivalent in Arabic. She explained that she tweeted (see Fig.7.14) in the car on her way home to express how she needed something to cheer her up. She believes that the expression “*day maker*” has no equivalent in Arabic, and this was the reason for choosing English.



Figure 7.14: Lama tweeting “a day maker”

### 7.3.3 Preferring English for Reasons Related to “Adoring” the Idioms, Figures of Speech, Structures and Expressions available in the English Language

These female Saudi undergraduates indicated that they preferred to use English for reasons related to the nature of the English language. Deema, in informal interview 6, mentioned that she used English to tweet (see Fig. 7.15.A) because she adores the English idiom ‘*couch potato*’. She explained that this idiom described her perfectly at the time of tweeting. On another occasion, Deema indicated that she snapped during her mid-term break (see Fig.7.15. B) and captioned a video on Snapchat story with “*Jack of all trades, master of none*” to describe how she felt at that time. She explained that she adores that phrase as it matches her situation.



A



B

Figure 7.15: Screenshots of Deem’s tweet “couch potato” in (A) and snapping “Jack of all trades?? Master of none” in (B)

“Adoring” some English expressions was reported as a reason for preferring to use English. Norah, in informal interview 1, indicated that she tweeted (see Fig.7.16) “*Life is nothing if you are not obsessed*” because she adores the word ‘obsessed’. For her, the sound of the word ‘obsessed’ is musical.



Figure 7.16: A screenshot of Norah tweeting “obsessed”

Similar to Norah, Rawan indicated that she loved certain words in English and she preferred to use English for her love of those words. Rawan, in informal interview 1, mentioned that she captioned her snap “My fav” (see Fig. 7.17.A) because she loved the word “fav”. She explained that she snapped her takeaway meal from her favourite restaurant before heading home and shared it with her Snapchat followers. Rawan mentioned the same reason for tweeting ‘edible’ (see Fig.7.17.B). She explained that she quoted a tweet in Arabic containing four photos of an adorable baby who had thick hair and used the English word ‘edible’ to express her feelings as she liked that baby.



A



B

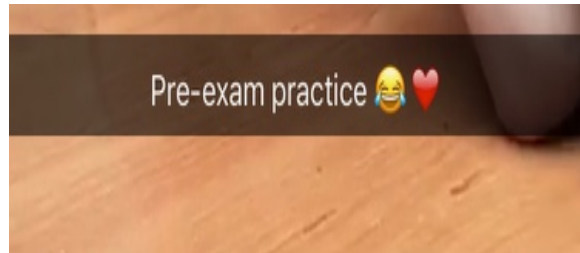
Figure 7.17: Screenshots of Rawan snapping ‘my fav’ in (A) and tweeting “edible” in (B)

It appears that Rawan translated the Arabic metaphor "بنوكل" as ‘edible’ in her head before tweeting. In Saudi culture, we use an Arabic metaphor that can be literally translated as “edible” to reflect how adorable and beautiful a thing or a person is.

“Adoring” English suffixes and prefixes was one of the reasons for preferring to use English. Deema, in informal interview<sup>3</sup>, indicated that she used English to tweet (see Fig. 7.18.A) because she adores the suffix “-less”. She explained that she tweeted to tell her followers that she did not have a wireless connection earlier and still had no wireless Internet connection in her house. Nouf, in informal interview 3, mentioned that she captioned a video she posted on Snapchat story in English (see Fig.7.18. B) because she adores the English prefix “pre-”. She explained that she and her friends were practising Simultaneous Translation before the exam and she commented in English simply because she adores the English prefix “pre-”.



(A)



(B)

Figure 7.18: Screenshots of Deema tweeting “Wifi-less” in (A) and Nouf snapping “pre-exam” in (B)

A positive attitude towards learning English syntax was another reason for preferring to use English on social media. Deema, in informal interview 2, indicated that she captioned a video of her friend smiling with “*Project first draft submitted*” (see Fig.7.19), because one should “*adore the English passive voice*”.

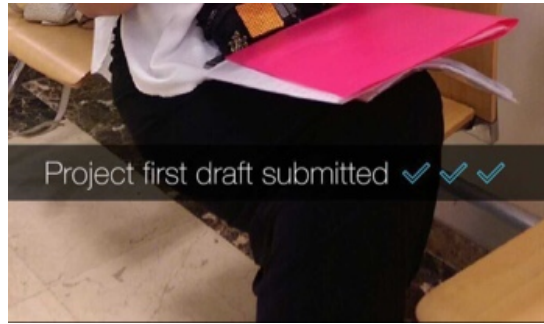


Figure 7.19: A screenshot of Deema snapping her friend on Snapchat story to celebrate her project submission

Emma, similar to Deema, had a positive attitude towards the English passive voice and this was one of the reasons for preferring to use English. Emma, in informal interview 3, indicated that she retweeted “*the tree that ate the stone*” simply because she admired the English passive voice. In her view, the grammatical structure of the passive voice does not exist in Arabic and this what made that construction more appealing. Norah, in informal interview 1, mentioned that she used English to tweet “*a moment I will never forget*” (see Fig.7.20) because she “*adores*” this structure. She explained that she tweeted three weeks after the beginning of the academic term as she was remembering a special event that happened in the summer holiday. She mentioned that she went to a hotel and accidentally met her favourite football team players, so she approached them and got their autographs. For her, choosing that structure in English brought back happy memories. It appears that Norah likes the future verb tense.

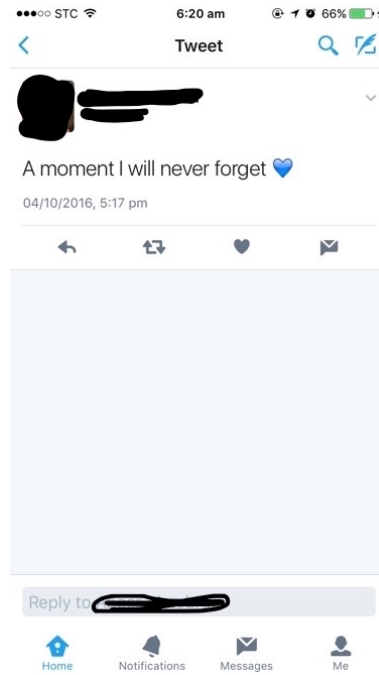


Figure 7.20: A screenshot of Norah tweeting “a moment I will never forget”

#### 7.4 Technological Issues

The technologies of smartphones and the Snapchat platform were reported to be a reason for choosing English when writing on social media. Smartphone technology, such as changing the keyboard input language, was reported to be a reason for choosing English as reported by Latifah, Rawan and Lama. By changing the keyboard input language, I am referring to the act of moving between an Arabic keyboard and an English keyboard after adding these two languages in smartphone keyboard settings. Latifah, in informal interview 1, indicated that she preferred to use the English keyboard layout when she was tweeting “*When you’re so excited about your weekend that you couldn’t sleep*” (see Fig.7.21). For her, changing the keyboard language was not something she usually did as she already chose ‘weekend’, because she is used to this expression (see discussion about English as a habit).



Figure 7.21: Latifah’s tweet about a weekend

Rawan, similar to Latifah, preferred to use the same keyboard input as she was snapping to comment on coconut chips she was eating while doing her graduation project. Rawan indicated that she chose English here (see Fig.7.22) because she was writing the name of the chips in English and simply did not want to swipe and move to the Arabic keyboard on her smartphone.



Figure 7.22: Rawan snapping coconut chips

Lama, in the face-to-face focus group, indicated that changing the keyboard language by moving between two keyboard pages is a reason for choosing English on some occasions. She justified this by stating that she does this when she is in a hurry and has no time to move between the two language keyboards she has on her smartphone.

Snapchat built-in technologies were reported as one of the reasons for choosing English. Deema, in informal interview 2, indicated that she chose English simply because the font in English supports transparent colours (see Fig. 7.23.A). I was confused during the interview and asked her to clarify what she meant. Deema opened her Snapchat app and wrote ‘good morning’ in both languages (see Fig. 7.23.B ) and stated that seeing these bold lines (circled in red) in a transparent font in Arabic irritated her. Deema was happy to screenshot what she did on Snapchat and sent it to me privately over WhatsApp chatting. Words in Arabic are always cursive and there is no non-cursive form of Arabic words. It could be the case that because English has a non-cursive word form, a transparent font was not affected and looked better.



A



B

Figure 7.23: Deema’s snap of “good morning” in (A) and an explanation of her choice in (B)

Using snapchat ‘Community Filters’ or ‘Filters’ was reported among the reasons for choosing English. Snapchat ‘Community Filters’ are overlays that Snapchat users create for a location or a moment that is special to them and they can allow a community filter to be used by other Snapchatters who are close to their location (Snap Inc, 2018). Nouf, in informal interview 4, indicated that she chose English because she wanted to use a snapchat community filter that indicated her current location. Nouf mentioned that she chose English when she was snapping during her holiday (see Fig. 7.24.A) because she liked that filter in English and did not like the filters available at that specific location in Arabic. Rawan mentioned the same purpose in informal interview 2 (see Fig. 7.24.B), stating that she wanted to use a filter that indicated that she was having a party at that moment and usually she chooses an English filter because it is more “creative” and “looks better”



A



B

Figure 7.24: Screenshots of Latifah’s snap “Halfmoon Beach” in (A) and Rawan’s snap “Party Time” in (B)

## **7.5 Social Media Audience**

These Saudi female undergraduates chose English when tweeting and snapping for reasons related to their social media audience. A social media audience, as I explained in section 2.2.4, consists of two main groups: a known audience and an unknown audience. An unknown audience is all the people who can view a post on social media over the Web, and a known audience is other social media users who are listed as contacts on social media. The known audience, however, consists of two sub-groups: friends in real life who meet in the physical world and friends on social media who only meet on social media.

My data suggest that these reasons can be divided into four: 1) variation in the language used with a known audience, 2) using the same language the known audience draws on to reply to them, 3) reaching a wider audience, and 4) filtering the audience

### **7.5.1 Variation in the Language Used with a Known Audience**

Norah, in informal interview 2, indicated that she used English to vary the language she used in her social media posts between Arabic and English. She mentioned that varying the language attracted the attention of her snapchat friends and kept their attention when she snapped “blue” (see Fig. 7.25).

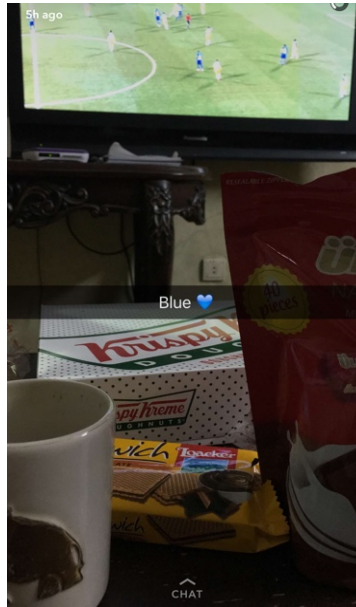


Figure 7.25: A screenshot of Norah snapping blue

It appears that Norah did not want to bore her Snapchat friends, or what I refer to as a known audience, with her use of Arabic. For her, using English entertains a known audience who follow her on Snapchat.

### **7.5.2 Using the Same Language a Known Audience Draws on to Reply to them**

These female Saudi undergraduates indicated that they used English on Twitter and Snapchat literacy events because it was the language used by their known audience. Rawan, in informal interview 1, mentioned that she replied to her friend [Emma] on Twitter in English, although she started the tweet thread in Arabic. Rawan indicated that she used English because Emma used English and so she felt obliged to reply in English (see Fig. 7.26).



Figure 7.26: Rawan replying to Emma about women driving cars in Saudi Arabia with “yeah I mean in the meantime there wont be such thing after 20 years maybe”

It appears that Rawan values replying in the same language used by her known audience. This seems to reflect Rawan’s ability to use English perfectly. Rawan was not the only participant who felt this way, Latifah and Nouf shared the same feeling. Latifah, in informal interview 2, indicated that she quoted Emma’s tweet about STC (see Fig.7.27) and used English to write “+ millions” because her friend Emma used English in her tweet.



Figure 7.27: A screenshot of Latifah’s tweet of “+millions”

Nouf, in informal interview 5, indicated that she used English to add her comments while redirecting a story on Snapchat (see Fig.7.28) because her cousin used English. Nouf mentioned that her cousin posted on Snapchat story a photo with “sisters & cousins, I miss you” and she redirected that snap on her snapchat story and added her reply “*we miss you too*”.

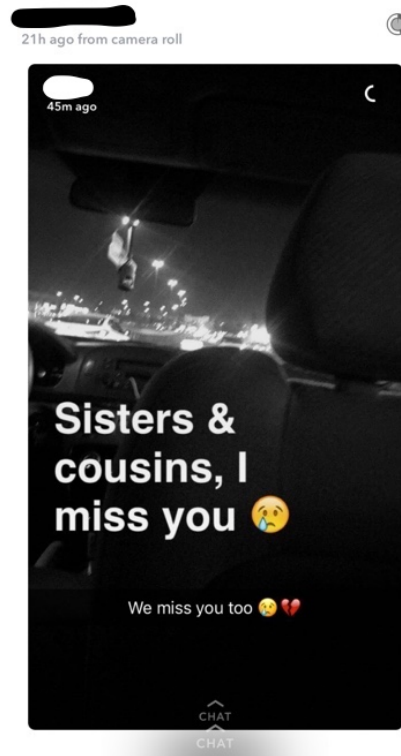


Figure 7.28: A screenshot of Nouf redirecting a story on Snapchat and adding “we miss you too”

Lama, in the face-to-face focus group, indicated that she always used English when someone addressed her on social media directly in English or if she wanted to reply to someone who used English on social media. Abrar added her voice to Lama’s opinion in the focus group and justified this by sending an indirect message to a person who used English to show that she “*can use and is fully capable of using English too*”.

From the preceding evidence, it appears that using the same language to reply to a known audience is an accepted norm in literacy events on social media for female undergraduates in Saudi Arabia.

### 7.5.3 Reaching a Wider Audience

My data suggest that English was used when writing posts on Twitter and Instagram to reach a wider audience. In naming this category, I draw on the reasons why people change their language from their local language to English when commenting on Flickr as stated by Barton and Lee (2011), which is “to reach a wider audience” (p. 53). By a wider audience, I am referring to an unknown audience who use English either as their L1 or L2 and view the content posted by these female Saudi undergraduates on Twitter and Instagram. Nouf, in informal interview 4, indicated that she used English to quote a tweet posted by the President of the United States, Donald Trump, to reach those American citizens in particular who were reading the trending hashtag #Trump on Twitter (see Fig. 7.29). She mentioned that she participated in a hashtag about Trump to remind American citizens of Jim Crow’s racist rules. It appears that Nouf attempted to reach American citizens to warn them about the consequences of choosing Trump to rule the United States of America by mentioning the name of the racist Jim Crow. Nouf was using English and trying to imply that Trump would revive these racist rules.



Figure 7.29: A screenshot of Nouf tweeting about Donald Trump

English was used to reach the people whose L1 is English, as well as to reach people who use English as their L2. Emma, in informal interview 8, mentioned that she used English to quote a tweet in order to “*communicate this to as much people as possible*”. Emma assumed that using English would enable her to reach a wider audience than could be done if she used Arabic (see Fig. 7.30).

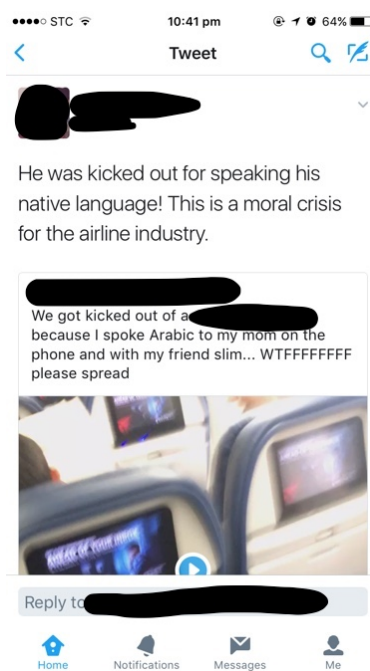


Figure 7.30: Screenshot of Emma tweeting to a wider audience

Lama, in the online logbook of English usage, indicated that she posted a photo on Instagram and commented “*Elephant Artwork #endlesslove*” in English. Lama stated in the online logbook that the purpose of using English was “*to share the photo with the shop in a language they understand*”.

Nouf, in informal interview 4, indicated that she used English to reach as big an audience as possible on Twitter in order to “*rescue*” the people in Aleppo from genocide (see Fig. 7.31). Nouf condemned the genocide in Aleppo and wanted to help the people there with her use of English by participating in two trending hashtags on Twitter: #genocideconvention and #alepo.

It appears that Nouf was trying to reach the people who read her tweet in the trending hashtags all over the world.



Figure 7.31: Nouf tweeting about the Aleppo genocide

#### 7.5.4 Filtering the Audience

Unlike the previous section, English was used on social media as a way of filtering the audience. That intends to limit the post to a particular group among the known audience and exclude unwanted people either in the known audience or unknown audience. Lama, in formal interview 2, indicated that she tweeted in English to limit the news about submitting part of her project to her classmates who know English and exclude her friends who could not speak English from knowing that she had partially done her graduation project (see Table 7.4).

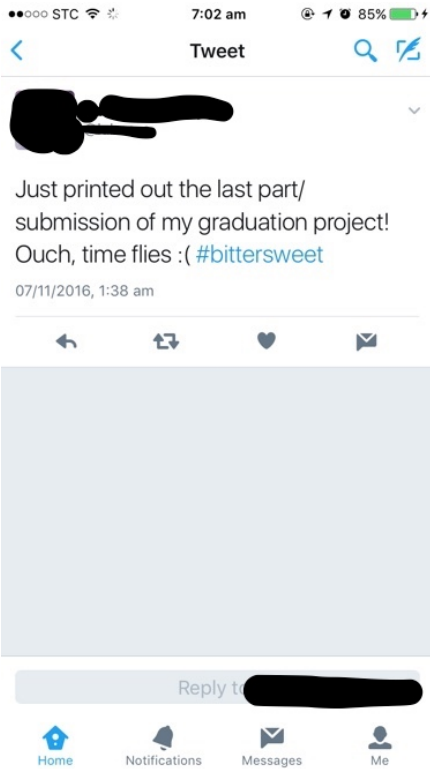
Interview Transcript	Screenshot under Discussion
<p>Lama: This tweet ... but actually ... I didn't want everyone to comment on that ... WHY ... because people will understand that I'm done with my project ... OKAY ... all my followers ... who are my friends ... let's say ...and who do not understand English much ... are going to think that I'm done with my project and I'm not ... NOW ... Still I need a lot ... Just like one submission last part ... my classmates would understand this</p> <p>Nada: The word submission implies that you are done with it ... cannot be changed</p> <p>Lama: Yeah ... well not yet ... I said part ... so ... I didn't want people to congratulate me ... I remember that ... so I wrote it in English ... for my classmates</p>	

Table 7.4: Lama giving her account of using English to limit the content of her tweet

Using English on social media to limit the content posted on social media to classmates was shared by Latifah and Rawan. Latifah, in informal interview 1, indicated that she quoted a funny tweet containing a video of the Egyptian president when he misunderstood the presidential protocols with “*me in the last French class*” (see Fig. 7.32.A). Latifah used English to tweet although the original tweet was in Arabic and contained a video in Arabic just to remind her classmates of the funny situation she had in class. She explained that the teacher in the French class surprised her by asking her to answer a specific question and Latifah at that time stood up and moved to the board to answer the question, but this was not the accepted classroom protocol. She indicated that she was supposed to sit and answer the question, but for some reason she missed that. Latifah, in informal interview 2, mentioned the same reason for using English, to limit the content of her tweets to her classmates (see Fig. 7.32.B). Latifah

explained that she used an Arabic hashtag, an Arabic saying meaning “cries for the least reason”, to express how she felt regarding her mid-term exam.



Figure 7.32: Screenshots of Latifah’s tweet in (A) about her classroom situation and in (B) about her exam

Rawan mentioned that she used English to limit social media posts to her classmates. In the first interview, Rawan indicated that she uses English so that her classmates who follow her on different social media platforms could understand the content of the post. She justified her choice of English by explaining that she had friends who came from different countries and different age groups (see Excerpt 7.5).

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nada: You mentioned that you use Arabic and English ... Are there specific reasons for using English?</p> <p>Rawan: YES YES As I said, I use English if I want specific people to know ... only this group ... for example, I wanted to ... today ... about my class today... not every follower is going to understand what I mean by Simultaneous Translation ... especially that I have followers from different countries and different age groups ... when I post something related to Simultaneous Translation ... I only want my classmates to understand ... [Deema Emma Latifah Lama ]... those who are around me...</p>	<p>ندى: أنتي قلتى تستخدمين العربي والانجليزي... ليش تستخدمين الإنجليزي؟  روان: ((ايه)) ((ايه)) قلت لك أنا أحب أستخدم الEnglish... إذا مثلا شئ ما أبغى أحد يعرف عنه... إلا الناس المعنيين... يعني مثلا أبغى أتكلم عن class الفورية اليوم... ما حدا راح يفهم شو ال... " simultaneous translation " خصوصا أتوا أنا عندي followers من كافة الأعمار وكافة الجنسيات... فلما أنا أبغى أتكلم عن ال " simultaneous translation " أنا أبغى بس ال " classmates " اللي عندي هما اللي يفهمون... [ديمه ايما لطيفة ولما]... اللي معي في محيطي</p>

Excerpt 7.5: Rawan’s justification for choosing to use English in the first interview

Rawan appeared to use English as a way of filtering or categorizing her known audience on Snapchat. Rawan, in informal interview 1, indicated that she snapped her hand and posted it on Snapchat story and used English to ask her classmates to remind her to bring her dictionaries with her to the university (see Fig. 7.33).

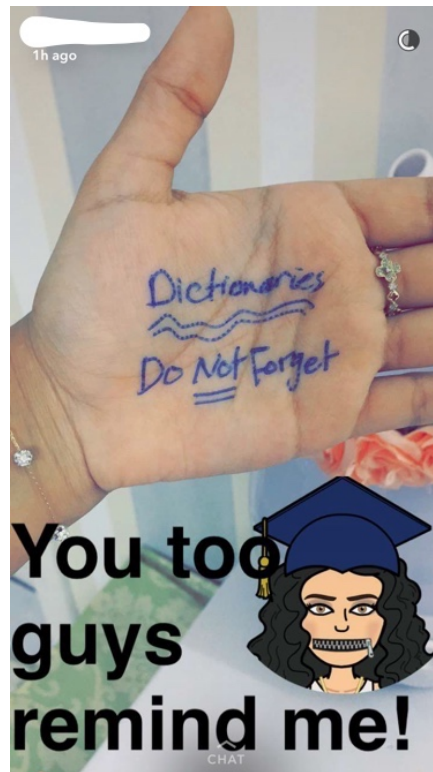


Figure 7.33: Rawan snapping to be reminded to bring her dictionaries

Lama and Rawan appeared to share the idea of using English to filter their audience in general. Lama, in the face-to-face focus group, indicated that she used English to post content on her Twitter and Instagram to prevent unwanted people viewing her posts there. This sort of audience is what I refer to as the unknown audience. Lama described these people with the term “stalkers”, because they “aim to meddle in my private affairs” by viewing the content she posts on social media quietly, without leaving a trace. She further explained that these stalkers do not make their presence known by being on the friends list of Instagram or Twitter but type her account name in the search bar to view her posts on those media. Lama justified her view with an old woman, one of her relatives, who explicitly asked her at a party in front of everybody about something she tweeted and criticized her for the content of that tweet. Lama explained that she was embarrassed, humiliated and shocked, because she could not identify the user name of this woman among her Twitter followers. After that ordeal, Lama

decided to use English when she does not want that specific woman to understand, because she knows that that woman cannot speak English. Rawan, in the WhatsApp focus group, stated that *“sometimes I opt to use English so not everyone can understand what I mean, apart the ones whom I want to get what I mean”*. It appears that Rawan, through her use of English, was trying to address a specific group of followers with what she writes on social media and eliminate unwanted people.

## **7.6 Summary**

In this chapter, I have described the purposes that stimulated these Saudi female undergraduates to choose to use English in their social media literacies. I have illustrated that my research participants chose English for reasons related to their academic major, quoting in the same language, a preference to use English, technological issues and social media audience. I have also illustrated that their academic major resulted in using English as both a habit and a formal language. I explained that these Saudi female undergraduates justified their choice of English so as to improve their capacity in English, which is required for their academic major. I also explained that they preferred to use English for reasons related to their feelings, a sense of self, the situation of a literacy event and a positive attitude towards the idioms, figures of speech, structures and expressions available in the English language. I also illustrated how they found themselves opting to use English for reasons related to the technologies of smartphone and social media platforms and for reasons related to the effect of sensing the audience on social media.

In the next chapter, I will illustrate the material resources and concrete activities these Saudi female undergraduates draw on as they read and write in English.

## CHAPTER 8

### SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACIES IN ENGLISH: MATERIAL RESOURCES AND CONCRETE ACTIVITIES

In Chapter 6, I conducted an analysis of literacy practices that these Saudi female undergraduates engage in English on social media. I argued that using English was a matter of choice and I conducted an analysis of the reasons for their choices in the last chapter. When discussing their choice to use English on social media, my data suggest that these Saudi female undergraduates employ material resources and concrete activities as they use English in their preferred social media spaces.

In this chapter, I address my fourth research question, which is: **What material resources and concrete activities do these Saudi female undergraduates employ as they read and write in English on social media?** By ‘material resources and concrete activities’, I refer to the resources and activities these Saudi female undergraduates employ to assist them in learning the meaning of English words or improving their capability in English when they read social media content on their smartphones. I also refer to the resources and activities these participants draw on to check the accuracy of their spelling, grammar and use of words before they actually write their words on social media using their smartphones.

My interview and focus group data suggest that the material resources and concrete activities my participants draw on as they use English are situated in their social practices and are not concerned with the affordances and technologies of the specific social media platforms they are currently using, such as Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram or Path. The data obtained from the online logbook of social media English usage, that was completed by the participants, provided evidence that some of these Saudi female undergraduates check their spelling as they use

English on social media but did not provide any evidence that these participants check appropriate grammar usage or the meanings of unfamiliar words in English. I describe the concrete activities and material resources and offer illustrative examples from my interview and online logbook of English usage data arranged according to their aims into English-spelling checking approaches, English grammar-checking approaches, English-meaning checking approaches and other approaches related to using English on social media.

### 8.1 English-spelling Approaches

When writing in English on social media, my research participants paid particular attention to their spelling. For instance, in my first interview with Latifah, I noted that she would pay attention to her L2 spelling before writing on social media (see Excerpt 8.1). She mentioned that she does not pay attention to her (L1) Arabic spelling simply because she knows it, and this implied that she was not confident in her L2 spelling.

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
Latifah: In fact, I WOULD NEVER EVER post any word in English unless I was 100% sure of its spelling, not like Arabic ... in Arabic I just post and that is it	لطيفة : أصلا بال "English" (مستحيل أصلا) أحطها إلا إذا متأكدة ١٠٠٪ بال "spelling" موزي العربي... العربي اكتب وخلص ندى : ما يهكم بالعربي بس يهكم بالانجليزي ...
Nada: You don't care about Arabic spelling but you care about English spelling?	لطيفة : إي ...لإني أحس إنه... خلاص انا عارفة العربي ندى : ليه طيب؟
Latifah: Yes ... that is what I said ... in fact, I know Arabic and that is it	
Nada: Why is that?	لطيفة : انا عارفة ان "spelling" العربي اكيد انه صح...لاني اعرف عربي أكيد إنه صح علي... أما ال "English" اتأكد دايم قبل ما اسوي "post"إني متأكدًا من ال "spelling"
Latifah: I am sure of my Arabic spelling ... I know Arabic ... In English, I always double-check my spelling before I post	

Excerpt 8.1: Latifah drawing on her approach to writing in English on social media

It seems that using correct English spelling suggests that Latifah valued correct spelling in her writing on social media. My interview data showed that my research participants drew on similar resources to check their spelling before writing on social media. They drew on technologies built into their smartphones, such as a predictive keyboard, a built-in dictionary and a red squiggly line that appears under a misspelled word.

Norah, Latifah and Deema used the predictive built-in keyboard to check their spelling. By a predictive keyboard, I am referring to the text bar that appears above the keyboard predicting words being typed on a smartphone. It is important to stress that the predictive keyboard is a technology built into smartphones, not a unique feature of social media. Figure 8.1 illustrates a predictive built-in smartphone keyboard as it appears on three different social media platforms. I used my smartphone to illustrate the meaning of a predictive keyboard as shown on three different social media platforms. I typed 'sou' to generate the words predicted by my smartphone keyboard on Twitter in Figure 8.1.A, typed "wri" on Snapchat in Figure 8.1.B and typed "mon" on WhatsApp in Figure 8.1.C.

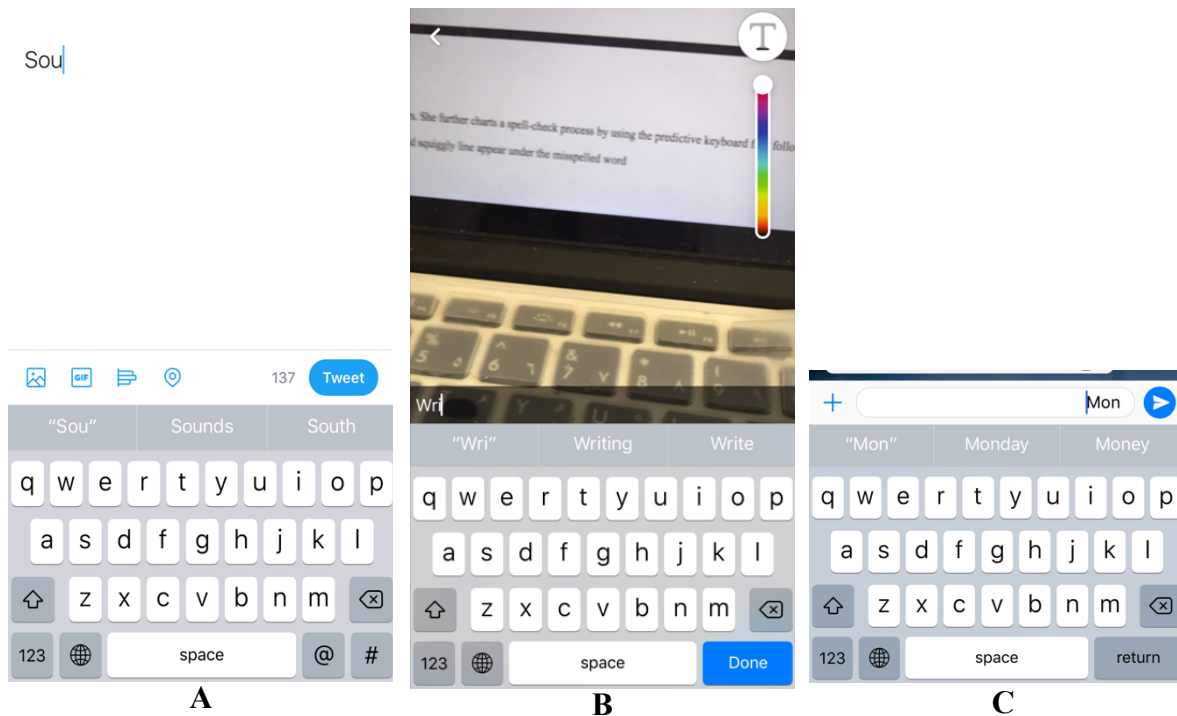


Figure 8.1: Predictive built-in keyboard as it appears on Twitter (A), Snapchat (B) and WhatsApp (C)

This predictive keyboard was used along with other resources to check the correct spelling. In the first informal interview (see Table 8.1), Norah indicated that she used her built-in predictive keyboard to suggest the correct spelling of words as she types the first three letters. She uses her predictive built-in keyboard as she types, but if she writes an entire word without choosing one of the suggested words, a red squiggly line appears under a misspelled word. She indicated that tapping a misspelled word would usually result in the suggestion of a correct spelling of that word, and if that did not work out, she would usually write the translated word in Arabic in Google app or Google Translate app, which are available on her smartphone. Google app is a smartphone app that enables its users to search by text and voice whatever these users wish to know. This app enables users to find what they need such as getting inspiration, information and ideas on the go (Google, 2019).

Translated Interview Transcript	Screenshot Under Discussion & Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nada: How did you check your spelling when you did this?</p> <p>Norah: I used the prediction tool, the one that appears above the letters ...it is really helpful ... I mean ... it saved me time ... when I see the red line</p> <p>Nada: When you see the red line ... can you clarify what you mean by this?</p> <p>Norah: Well ... I meant to say that I write the first three letters 'obs', then usually three words appear ...if the word does not appear ... I write the whole word ... if a red squiggly line appears under the word ... the word is then misspelled ... I go back to the word I wrote and tap on it</p> <p>Nada: So you use both the predictive keyboard and the red squiggly line under a word to check your spelling?</p> <p>Norah: I use the predictor first ... if a red squiggly line appears under the word I tap on the word and correct it ... so I use both</p> <p>Nada: How do you correct the misspelled word?</p> <p>Norah: I just replace the word</p> <p>Nada: What do you mean by replace ... how do you do this?</p> <p>Norah: I tap on the word with the red squiggly underline ... tapping only ... then I get the suggested words</p> <p>Nada: Does it always suggest a correct spelling?</p> <p>Norah: Not always but usually ... if it is not near the correct spelling it does not suggest ... in this case I write the word in Arabic in Google app OR Google Translate app and get the correct spelled word ... that is all</p>	 <p>ندى : كيف تاكدتي من spelling وانتي تكتبين هذي ؟  نورة : من prediction اللي يطلع لك فوق الاحرف ...  مرة يساعد احيانا بعد ... يعني ... يختصر لك  وقت بعد ... مجرد ما اشوف الخط الاحمر  ندى : يعني مجرد ما تشوفين الخط الاحمر ... وضحي اكثر؟  نورة : يعني أولا اكتب مثلا اول ثلاثة حروف 'obs' تطلع  لي اقتراحات الكلمة ... اذا ما لقيت الكلمة اكتب  الكلمة زي ما عرفها ... و اذا طلع خط احمر ...  ارجع واشوف اللي تطلع لي فوق  ندى : تستخدمين ال predictor و الخط الأحمر الاثنين مع  بعض عشان تشيكن على ال "spelling" ؟  نورة : اولاً predictor بعدين اذا طلع لي خط احمر ارجع  لفوق ... اجمالا استخدم التنتين عرفتي ... علي حسب  ... يعني اذا شوفتها خطأ ارجع فتطلع لفوق  واصحها  ندى : اذا خطا كيف تعدلينه  نورة : اسوي replace  ندى: وش "replace" من وين بالضبط؟  نورة : اضغط على الكلمة نفسها اللي تحتها خط  احمر ... عرفتي بالضبط فقط ... تطلع لك الاقتراحات  ندى: دايم كذا يطلع اقتراح  نورة: لا مو دايم بس غالباً... اذا مرة غلط ما تطلع ... كذا  اروح Google ((او)) Google Translate الكلمة بالعربي  وبعدين تطلع الترجمة حقتها ... بس</p>

Table 8.1: Norah's account of her predictive keyboard and the red squiggly line under a misspelled word

Latifah, in the first informal interview, referred to words predicted by her smartphone keyboard as “pop-up words” (see Excerpt 8.2) as she gave her account on writing in English on Twitter. It seems that “pop-up words” is a resource that Latifah usually uses as she did not mention having a red squiggly line under the misspelled word. In fact, Latifah associated her use of a predictive keyboard with her use of Google Translate app on her smartphone. Latifah indicated that she checks a spelling by typing a word in Google Translate app. If the word is translated from English into Arabic, this would indicate that the word is spelled correctly, if not it “surely” indicates that the word is misspelled.

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
Nada: Okay ... as you were writing this, did you use a specific method?	ندى: طيب...و إنتي تكتبين هل تستخدمين حاجة معينة؟
Latifah: When I write, usually the words pop up ... suggested words ... you know this	لطيفة: وأنا اكتب تطلع لي الكلمات مثلا... اقتراحات ... عرفتي
Nada: Where does it pop up from... ?	ندى: من وين بالضبط...
Latifah: Below your typed words ... I mean above the keyboard ... these predicted words ... If I want to double-check the spelling ... I write the phrase in Google Translate app ... if the phrase is translated it indicates that all the words are spelled correctly ... if the phrase is not translated a word is surely misspelled ... then, I go elsewhere to check the spelling	لطيفة: من تحت...فوق الحروف اللي استخدمها ..... "predictors" فأخذهم...إذا جيت ابغي اتأكد من ال "spelling" صحيحة...زيادة يعني...أخذ الجملة أحطها بتطبيق "google translate" أترجمها... إذا كانت صح تترجم اذا غلط ما تطلع لي ترجمة فأروح ادور spelling الصحيح

Excerpt 8.2: Latifah’s account of using her predictive keyboard for spelling

From the online logbook of social media English usage, Norah and Latifah reported that they used a “*spell checker*” among the on-screen activities they are involved with as they used English on social media. However, “spell-checker” is not the same for Norah and Latifah. Norah, in the second interview, defined “spell-checker” as a built-in smartphone feature where a red squiggly line appears under a misspelled word and tapping the misspelled word usually suggests a correct spelling of that word. Latifah, however, in the second interview, defined “spell checker” as a predictive keyboard that predicts a word being typed.

Lama indicated in the first interview that she used the same smartphone feature, that is a “*spelling checker*” (see Excerpt 8.3). Similar to Norah, Lama defined “*spelling checker*” as the red squiggly line that appears under a misspelled word and on tapping the misspelled word the correct spelling is usually suggested. She further indicated that if the spell checker did not suggest a correct spelling, she typed the misspelled word in Google app and this usually resulted in providing her with the correct spelling.

Nada: What do you use to check your spelling?
Lama: Spelling ... spelling checker on my phone
Nada: Spelling checker?
Lama: Yeah ... the one that puts a red line under a misspelled word ... and just gives ...or suggests the correct one
Nada: Can you talk more about this feature?
Lama: Well ... when I write misspelled words ... a red line comes ... under the word ... I touch the word and the spell checker suggest a word ... if I didn't find the word ... I sometimes go to Google app to check if it is right... and it always give me the correct word

Excerpt 8.3: Lama’s approach to checking spelling with a spelling checker

It appears that Lama was not familiar with a predictive built-in keyboard, unlike Norah and Latifah. This, of course, seems to imply that a predictive built-in keyboard is not widely used, as Latifah would argue. Norah seems to follow a unified spell-checking process before Tweeting. In her account this time, she added a step that was not mentioned before, which is copying and pasting her misspelled English word into Google app to see a suggested word. In informal interview 2, Norah detailed her step-by-step spell-checking process (see Table 8.2). In step (1) she uses a predictive keyboard, if it does not work well she moves to step (2), which is tapping the word with a red squiggly line under it to see a suggested spelling, and if this does not work she moves to step (3), which is copying and pasting the word into Google app to see suggested words, and if this too does not work, the final step is to write the word in Arabic in Google Translate app and see the English equivalent.

Translated Interview Transcript	Screenshot Under Discussion & Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nada: Did you check anything when you wrote this?</p> <p>Norah: Well, I always check my SPELLING ... it is a must and I checked the word desperate</p> <p>Nada: Desperate?</p> <p>Norah: Honestly ... I always check my SPELLING ... I have never written a word without checking it</p> <p>Nada: Can you talk more about this?</p> <p>Norah: [pause] Honestly, I first use the predictive keyboard because it suggests words when I write the first three letters ... if I do not find my word among the suggested words ... I ...go and write the whole word ... if a red squiggly line appears under the word ... I tap on the misspelled word and see a correctly spelled word ... if I did not find the correct spelling ... I copy and paste the word into Google app ... if I do not find my word ... I write the translated word in Google Translate app and I get the English word ... and I follow the same process every time</p> <p>Nada: So you write the word first in Arabic, then you get the correct spelling in Google Translate app, instead of writing the word in English?</p> <p>Norah: No, I write the word ... in English first instead of Arabic, if the word appears fine ... if not I write it in Arabic</p>	 <p>ندى : هل شبكتي على حاجة وانتي تكتبين ؟  نورة : شوفي ((spelling)) طبعا لازم ...  Desperate شبكت عليها  ندى : desperate ؟  نورة ((spelling)) دائما أشيك صراحة ... ما كتب كذا  ندى : ممكن توصفين اكثر ؟  نورة : [ صمت ] صراحة اول شيء بال “  predictor” لان اول ما اكتب اول ثلاثة  حروف تطلع لي الاقتراحات. . . ان ما طلعت  لي الكلمة اللي ابوها. . . اروح . . . اكتبها كاملة  بعدين يطلع لي خط احمر .. فاضغط على  الأحمر ... الفاها تطلع فوق ال SPELLING  الصحيح ..... اذا ما لقيته ... اخذ الكلمة copy  .... and paste” وواحتها في تطبيق  GOOGLE..... اذا ما عرفتها ... اروح تطبيق  “GOOGLE TRANSLATE..... اكتبها  بالعربي وتطلع الترجمة ..... وكذا  ندى : تكتبينها بالعربي بتطبيق Google translate  تطلع لك بالإنجليزي ولا على طول تكتبي  بالإنجليزي ؟  نورة : لا اكتبها . . . بالإنجليزي بدل ما اكتبها بالعربي  اذا طلعت زين.... اذا لا اكتبها بالعربي وكذا</p>

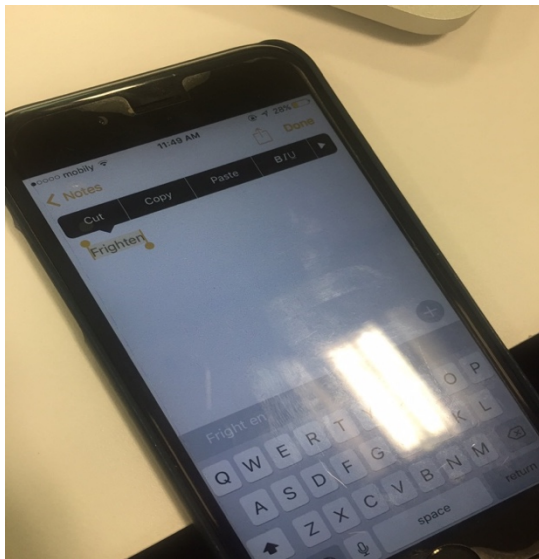
Table 8.2: Norah’s account of her spell-checking procedure

I asked Deema in the second informal interview if she ever used a predictive keyboard as she did not mention doing so (see Excerpt 8.4). In fact, in that interview, I referred to a predictive keyboard with ‘predictor’ only, and she seemed familiar with this expression. She indicated that she used it and described it as a feature that works “miracles”. Deema’s account seems to imply that there is an inextricable link between her use of a predictive keyboard and writing in English on social media, because she did not mention using a predictive keyboard without me asking her in a direct way.

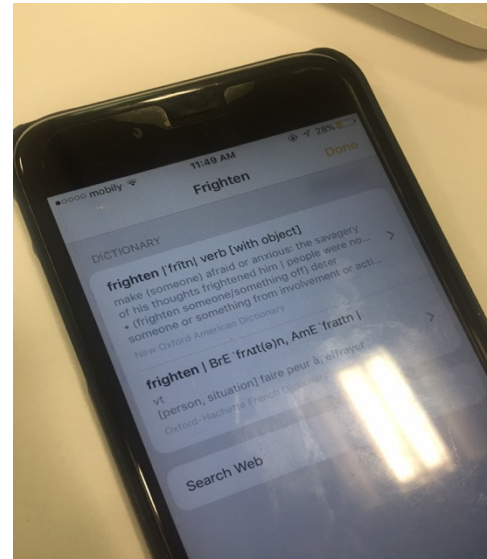
Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nada: Have you ever used a predictor when you write?</p> <p>Deema: YES YES, you mean the one built into the keyboard ... that suggests words as I type ... oh that does miracles</p>	<p>ندى : هل سبق استخدمتي ال predictor وانتي تكتبين ؟</p> <p>ديما : ((ايه))((ايه)) اللي بال keyboard نفسه... يعطيك اقتراحات للكلمة اللي اكتبها... ايه هذا يحل الأزمان الصراحة</p>

Excerpt 8.4: Deema’s account of using a predictive keyboard

Nouf, in the first interview, used a built-in smartphone dictionary without referring to it as a dictionary. She referred to her process of spell-checking as writing a specific word in the Notes app on her iPhone, tapping look up and if the word is spelled correctly a definition will appear, otherwise no definition will appear. I was confused in the interview and did not understand her account of checking spellings and asked her to show me her way. She was happy to share her experience and gave an example, the word ‘frighten’. She opened her smartphone, tapped the Notes app and used the keyboard to type her word. I noticed that she ignored the predictive keyboard, tapped the word frighten and tapped and selected ‘frighten’ until a pop-up menu appeared (see Fig. 8.2.A). She then tapped the menu arrow on the right and an extended menu appeared, then she tapped look up and a definition of the word appeared (see Fig. 8.2.B).



**A**



**B**

Figure 8.2: Two photos of Nouf's smartphone screen

Rawan indicated in the first interview that English spelling is her weakness and she often checks her spelling before writing in English on Twitter. For her, correct spelling is only important on Twitter, not Snapchat. She justified this by indicating that all posts on Snapchat are ephemeral. By ephemeral, she means that a snap disappears immediately after viewing it if sent privately, and after 24 hours if posted on the story feature in Snapchat. Rawan seemed surprised when I asked her if she had ever used a predictive keyboard or knew that a word is misspelled if a red squiggly line appears under that word. I had to show her an example by typing on my smartphone and she was astonished to discover these two built-in smartphone features: a predictive keyboard and a red squiggly line under a misspelled word. Rawan indicated that these two features had to be activated from the smartphone keyboard settings and that this was not the default setting on her keyboard. She indicated that she uses Google app to check her spelling before writing on Twitter, but not posting on Snapchat, by typing a word and seeing the suggested spellings.

Typing on Google app using the keyboard to check correct spelling was mentioned by Norah, Lama, Latifah, Deema and Rawan. Nouf, however, indicated in the second interview that she

used Google app to check her spelling quickly in a different way (see Excerpt 8.5). She mentioned that she uses her voice to search for the correct spelling on Google app by tapping on the microphone while saying the word. The word then appears spelled correctly without Nouf having to touch letters on the keyboard with her fingers. This implies that writing on a smartphone can be accomplished in a different way, which is by using one's voice and tapping the microphone on Google app, instead of touching the smartphone screen to select letters from the keyboard.


Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nada: Do you use a specific tool when you write in English on Twitter?</p>	<p>ندى: هل تستخدمين حاجة وانتى تكتبين بالإنجليزي على التويتر مثلاً؟</p>
<p>Nouf: I probably do ... sometimes if I am in a hurry and want to write correctly &amp; quickly ... I tap on Google app microphone ... just use my voice and the word appears ... I don't always do this, but sometimes I do, instead of using my finger ... you know</p>	<p>نوف: ممكن... بعض الأحيان اذا ما عندي وقت وابي اكتب بسرعة وأتأكد استخدم الميكروفون اللي بتطبيق قوئل... انقله كذا بصوتي وتطلع الكلمة... مو دايم كذا بس بعض الأحيان بس بعض الأحيان بدل ما استخدم الاصبع... عرفتي</p>

Excerpt 8.5: Nouf's account of using her voice to check spellings in English via Google app

Emma indicated that she always posts without checking her spelling on Twitter and Snapchat. It seems that Emma's past English learning trajectory and experience gave her this confidence in English spelling. She mentioned in the second interview that she started to learn English when she was young, in Libya. After living in Libya, she moved with her family to the United Kingdom and continued to learn English. Emma was eight years old at that time and stayed there for seven years, studying in British state schools. She mentioned that she used English at school as she studied it in primary school and in high school, and in almost all aspects of her life when she was in the United Kingdom.

## 8.2 English Grammar-checking Approaches

My interview data show that English grammar-checking approaches are carried out using Google app, a corpus website, asking a person for specific information and searching content on Twitter where the account holder uses English as their L1. Norah, in the first informal interview, described how she checks her grammar using Google app (see Table 8.3). She begins by writing a sentence on Google app and searching for the same sentence. For her, finding a sentence in the same order indicates that the sentence is grammatically correct.

Translated Interview Transcript	Screenshot Under Discussion & Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Norah: I checked my grammar before I TWEETED this?</p> <p>Nada: How?</p> <p>Norah: With GOOGLE app</p> <p>Nada: How did you check your grammar with Google? Can you talk about this in detail?</p> <p>Norah: [pause] I first wanted to see if ‘nothing’ comes with ‘is’ or not ... I went to Google app and wrote ‘life is nothing’ and tapped search ... when this sentence appeared on many sites ... I knew that ‘life is nothing’ is CORRECT grammatically ... this is my way of checking grammar ... I write the word in Google and if the sentence is repeated in different places this means that it is correct ... if the sentence does not appear I know the sentence could be incorrect grammatically ... I have PROBLEMS with grammar and this way had helped slightly in improving my English</p>	 <p>نورة شيكنت على الـ “grammar” قبل ((اكتب))؟  ندى : كيف ؟  نورة : من تطبيق ((Google))  ندى : كيف شيكتي على الـ “grammar” من قوئل او صفي بالضبط ؟  نورة : [صمت] كنت ابي اشوف اول ان “nothing” يجي معها “is” او لا...رحت تطبيق قوئل و كتبت “life is nothing” وضغطت بحث...لما شفت الامثلة كثير موجودة...كثير مرة..عرفت ان “life is nothing” ((صحيحة))...هذي</p>

	<p>طريقتي في التشبيك...اكتب الجملة في قوئل اذا  تكررت معناته "grammar" حقي صحيح...اذا  كانت غير موجودة الجملة كاملة ادري انها ممكن  تكون غلط... عندي ((مشاكل)) بال  "grammar" والطريقة هذي ساعدتني احسن  شوي من لغتي بالإنجليزي</p>
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Table 8.3: Norah recounting her experience of checking proper grammar usage

It seems that using Google app to check a sentence is grammatically correct is an advanced way of using Google app to check a misspelled word. The latter concerns the appearance of one word, but the former concerns the appearance of a group of words in the same order on several websites.

Deema, in the first interview, indicated that she uses a corpus website to check her choice of prepositions. She explained that she goes to the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) website, searches for a specific word and sees the words that appear with it. It is important to state that COCA website is a free website that offers the largest corpus of American English and has more than 560 million English words of text (Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2019). Deema demonstrated her approach to check her choice of prepositions by opening her smartphone and typing the corpus website address in Safari. She showed me her way of doing it by providing an example and was very cooperative, as she took screenshots of her approach and sent them to me privately over WhatsApp app. She gave an example of the verb 'fill' and wanted to know which preposition goes with it, as she was confused between 'in' and 'out'. Figure 8.3.A illustrates how Deema checked her choice of preposition that comes with the two words "fill" and "form" by tapping 'search', then tapping 'collocates' and writing the two words in the allocated spaces and tapping 'find collocates'. After that, she was taken to another website page (see Fig. 8.3.B) and could see all the prepositions that can be used with her desired words in context.

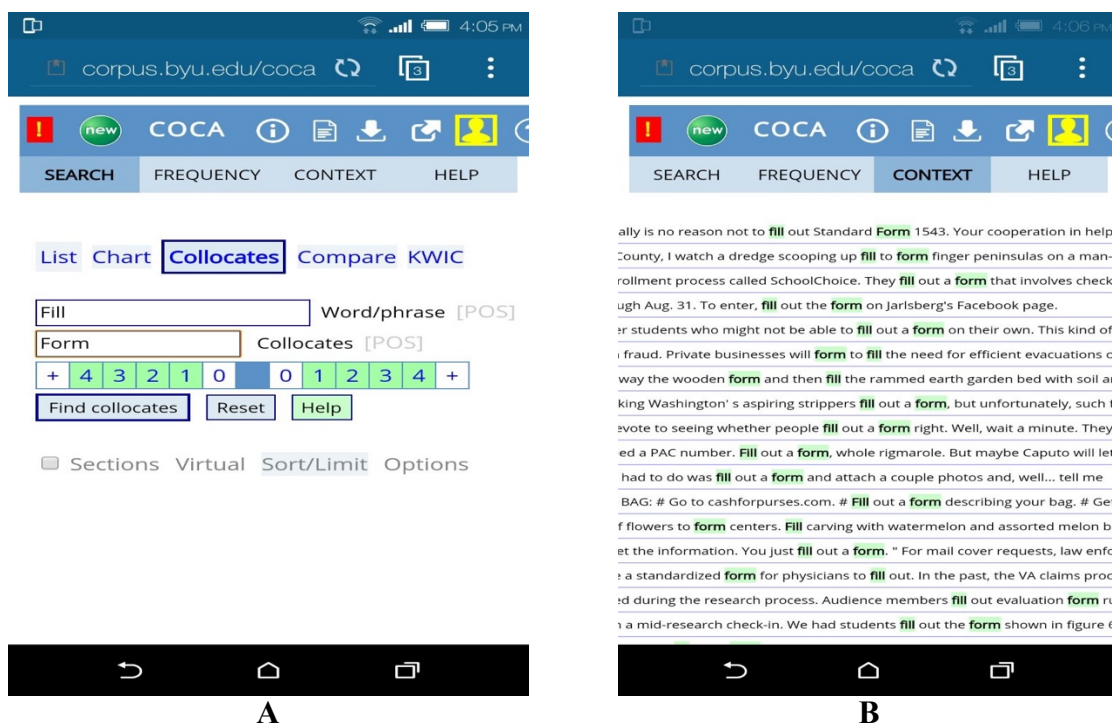


Figure 8.3: Screenshots of Deema checking her comprehensible use of propositions through the COCA website

Deema indicated that seeing words in context has helped her in choosing appropriate propositions. She noted that she was taught to use the COCA website in one of her courses at university. It seems that Deema applied one of the techniques she used as a student to check her appropriate use of prepositions before writing in English on Twitter as part of her literacy techniques.

Asking someone to check if a sentence is comprehensible grammatically before writing on Twitter was mentioned by Deema and Latifah. Deema indicated in the first interview (see Excerpt 8.6) that she asks her friends if a sentence she intends to use on Twitter is correct grammatically. She explained that she usually asks her friend Emma by contacting her over WhatsApp app or asking her face-to-face. Deema writes a sentence on WhatsApp app and asks her friend whether the sentence has any grammatical errors or not; she speaks the sentence orally if Emma is present with her in a physical space.

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
Deema: Sometimes ... not always ... I ask my friends about my grammar ... I usually ask [Emma] and she replies with correct or wrong	ديما: بعض الأحيان ... مو دايم... اسال صديقاتي ممكن على ال "grammar" ...بالعادة اسال [ايمما] وهي تقول صح او خطأ
Nada: You ask [Emma] if it is correct ... how do you do this?	ندی: تسالين [ايمما] اذا صح...كيف بالضبط؟
Deema: I write the sentence in Twitter, select it and then copy it and paste it in WhatsApp ... or just write it in WhatsApp ... and ask if it is correct or not ... then write it afterwards in Twitter	ديما: اكتب الجملة اللي ناوية اكتبها مثلا "Twitter" واطلله واسوي لها "copy & paste" بال "WhatsApp" ... او اكتبها كذا بسرعة بال "WhatsApp" ...واقول صح علي والا خطأ...ثم اكتبها با"Twitter"
Nada: So ... you basically move from Twitter to WhatsApp and back again to Twitter?	ندی: اها ...يعني تنتقلي من "Twitter" الى "WhatsApp" ثم "Twitter" مرة ثانية؟
Deema: Exactly ... if she ws in front of me ... I ask her directly without showing her the sentence ... you know	ديما: إيوه بالضبط...اذا كانت قدامي... اسالها على طول بدون لا اوريها ...عرفتي

Excerpt 8.6: Deema's account of asking a friend about the proper usage of grammar constructions

It seems that Deema uses an online space, WhatsApp app, to contact her friend in order to ask her about the correct grammatical structure of a specific sentence and does not care about making grammatical errors on WhatsApp. Deema was not the only participant to ask someone about grammar as Latifah followed the same approach. Latifah, in the first informal interview, indicated that she would usually ask her sister orally in a physical space about whether a sentence had any grammatical errors or not before writing it in English on Twitter. It appears that Latifah only uses her sister to check her grammar, as she does not use any other resources.

Nouf, in the first interview, indicated that she searches Twitter to check her proper grammar usage in English before posting on social media. She explained that she writes a specific sentence or phrase and searches on Twitter to see if "*native speakers*" of English have ever used that phrase before, and if she finds the phrase this indicates that it is grammatically correct (see Excerpt 8.7). By "*native speakers*", Nouf means those people whose L1 is English.

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nouf: I search Twitter sometimes ... and see how native speakers write</p> <p>Nada: Just to make sure I have understood you correctly ... you are talking now about checking your grammar before writing a post...</p> <p>Nouf: Yes ... I go to Twitter and search, just like searching on Google</p> <p>Nada: Twitter?</p> <p>Nouf: YES ... I write in the search bar a short sentence or a phrase ... in the search bar, and see if native people have ever written the same ... I mean native speakers ... I know that they are native from their tweets and the information written in their profiles ... if I find my sentence ... it means it is grammatically correct ... because native speakers use it [laughs] ... and so I am correct</p>	<p>نوف: ابحث ب " Twitter أحيانا... وأشوف الناس الأصليين إيش يكتبون</p> <p>ندی: بس عشان أتأكد... إنتي الحين قاعدة تتكلمين عن طريقة التأكد من "grammar" قبل تكتبين "post" ...</p> <p>نوف: إي...أروح ل "Twitter" وابحث زي ما نبحت ب"Google"</p> <p>ندی: "Twitter"؟</p> <p>نوف: ((ايوه))... اكتب بخانة البحث جملة قصيرة او شبه جملة...من خانة "search" واشوف الناس الأصليين كيف كتبوها...يعني "native speakers"...يعرف انهم اصليين من تغريداتهم وكتابتهم عن انفسهم بالعرض...اذا لقيت جملة...يعني صحيحة ب"grammar"...لان الأصليين استخدموها [ضحك]...وصح علي</p>

Excerpt 8.7: Nouf’s account of searching Twitter to check her grammar usage in English

From Nouf’s account, it appears that she uses Twitter content written by people whose L1 is English as a resource for proper grammar usage. In this way, Twitter content is treated as a corpus representing how English is used in real everyday life, away from English grammar books.

### 8.3 English-meaning Checking Approaches

My interview and focus group data show that checking the meaning of English words as my research participants read or write posts on social media was done through Google app, Google Translate app, dictionary apps and corpus websites.

Nouf, in the first interview, indicated that she uses Google app to search for the meaning of a specific word before writing it in English on social media (see Excerpt 8.8). For Nouf, finding

a word on several sites indicates that the word exists and reading that word in context helps her to guess its meaning.

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nouf: If I want to know the meaning of a specific word ... I write the word in a sentence in Google app ... if I find the sentence ... it means that this word is used by many people</p>	<p>نوف: إذا ابي اعرف معنى كلمة محددة... اكتب نفس جملتي بتطبيق "Google"... إذا طلعت لي معاناتها "it is used by many people"</p>
<p>Nada: If you find it...</p>	<p>ندى: إذا طلعت لك...</p>
<p>Nouf: If people say the word ... it means that I will see and read that word in context ... the most important thing is I do not invent the word [laughs] ... and can guess the meaning from the surrounding context</p>	<p>نوف: إذا كان الناس يقولونها...معاناته بشوفها واقراها... داخل "context"... الالههم اني ما سويت "invent" هذي الكلمة [ضحك]... واخمن معنى الكلمة من "context"</p>

Excerpt 8.8: Nouf’s account of using Google app to check the meanings of some English words

Emma, in the second interview, indicated that she checks the meaning of a specific word if she reads it, without intending to write it, on social media. Emma drew on a similar approach to Nouf’s approach for English-meaning checking by using Google app (see Excerpt 8.9). Emma memorises the spelling of a specific word and then types it in Google app to search for it. She then guesses the meaning of that word by reading it in context. Emma emphasised that she has only one approach for checking the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

<p>Emma: Well ... when I find a word sometimes I don’t bother to search for it ...but sometimes I feel that, no ... I have to know it ... so ... what I do is ... I don’t actually copy and paste ... I try to memorize the letters then I write it in Google app on my phone and see what the meaning is</p>
<p>Nada : This is one way...</p>
<p>Emma: Yeah ... and ... so in that way I know what the word means ... from reading it in context ... so this is my APPROACH</p>
<p>Nada: Is this your only approach?</p>
<p>Emma: Yeah ... only approach</p>

Excerpt 8.9: Emma’s approach to checking the meaning of words in English

It appears that Emma and Nouf use Google app to check the meaning of a specific word in a way that resembles Norah's approach of using Google app to check if her sentence is grammatically correct (see section above).

My research participants also drew on the Google Translate app to check the meanings of specific words. Latifah, in the first interview, indicated that she uses Google Translate app to check the meaning of the English word by typing that word and seeing the equivalent in Arabic. For her, this is the most appropriate way to discover the meaning of an English word before writing it on Twitter.

From the focus group conducted over WhatsApp, Sawsan uses four resources to check the meaning of a specific word as she reads on Twitter. These resources are all smartphone apps. Sawsan values understanding the meaning of English words and relates this to her being "*a teacher of English*" in the future. She uses Google app, Google Translate app and two different dictionary apps to check the meaning of what she refers to as "*a difficult word*" (see Excerpt 8.10). She explained that she searches for the meaning of a word by copying and pasting it into four different smartphone apps. She indicated that both Google Translate and Almaany are smartphone apps that give the equivalent of that word in Arabic, while the Dictionary and Google apps give the meaning of that word in English, as well as putting the word in context.

18/10/2016, 8:24:19 pm: Nada: When you read in English on social media do you understand the meaning of all the words?

18/10/2016, 8:25:33 pm: Sawsan: When I read and find a difficult ENG word in Twitter, I go search for it. I must know the meaning to be a teacher of English

18/10/2016, 8:26:09 pm: Nada: How do you do this?

18/10/2016, 8:29:21 pm: Sawsan: I copy & paste – I use either google translator or AlmAany apps = they give you the Arabic equivalent >>> the Dictionary app and Google app = both give you the English meanings and contexts etc...

Excerpt 8.10: Sawsan's account of English-meaning checking in the WhatsApp focus group

It is important to note that the Almanny dictionary app gives the meaning of an English word in Arabic and vice versa, while the Dictionary app gives the meaning of a word in English and provides examples of using that word in context. Deema, in the first interview, mentioned that she uses a dictionary app referred to as “*English Dictionary*” to check the meaning of English words. She indicated that she downloaded the “*English Dictionary*” app to her smartphone (see Fig. 8.4.A) and accesses that app whenever she finds an English word that is “new” to her. She gave an example of the word “nevermind” to illustrate how she uses that app to find the meaning (see Fig. 8.4.B). She indicated that she prefers to use this approach, which is reading the meaning of an English word in “*simpler English*” to improve her English.

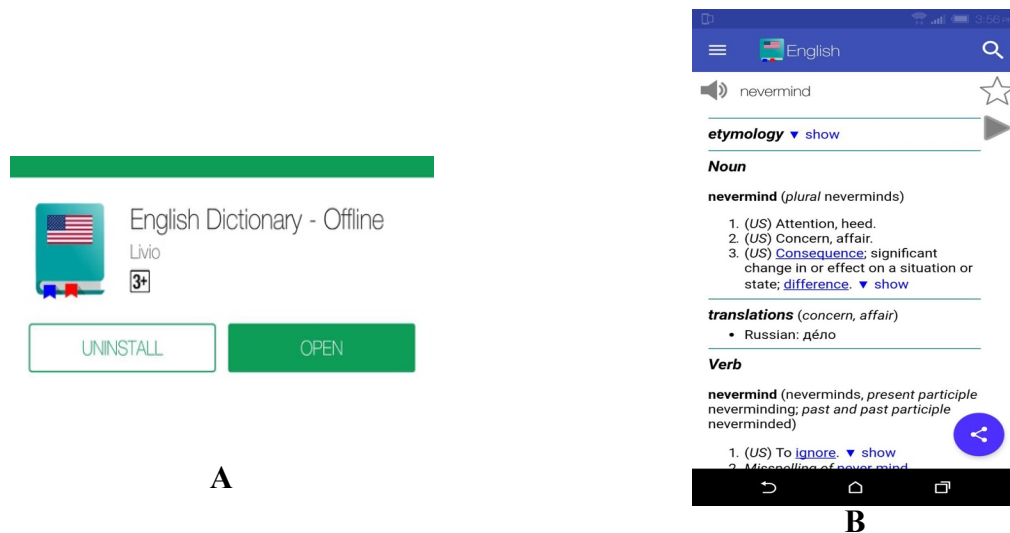


Figure 8.4: English Dictionary smartphone apps as provided by Deema

Deema indicated that she uses another approach to check the meaning of “new” English words, which is using the COCA website. Deema explained that she accesses the COCA website from her smartphone’s search engine, not an app, then types a specific word and taps search. She illustrated this approach with an example, typing the word ‘aim’, then tapping search and then tapping context (see Fig.8.5). She is then moved to another page showing the word ‘aim’ in

context in different sentences. Deema noted that by reading a word in context she can guess the meaning of that word.

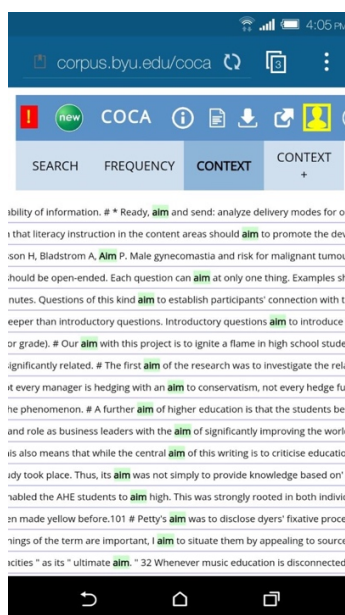


Figure 8.5: Screenshot of Deema using the COCA website to guess the meaning of ‘aim’

As I discussed in section 8.2, Deema applied one of the techniques she learned in one of her courses to check the meaning of English words she encounters while reading on social media. In the next section, I will explain how Deema improves her English as she reads on social media by collecting screenshots in a separate folder on her smartphone.

#### 8.4 Other Approaches related to Using English on Social Media

Deema, in the second interview, noted that reading social media content in English has helped her improve her English, which is her L2. She shared her experience of collecting screenshots of English content on social media by detailing her approach to using her smartphone (see Excerpt 8.11). She indicated that she had a folder called ‘language’ on her smartphone in which she had collected more than 40 screenshots taken from Twitter, Snapchat and Path. She said that she takes screenshots of English-learning related content as well as content written by

native English speakers as she reads on social media. She then saves these screenshots to a 'language' folder and returns to read them to improve her English. The reason for having a specific folder, as she explained, was to separate her English learning material from other materials. She explained that most screenshots were taken from Twitter to explain the meaning of expressions in English, common grammatical errors and tweets of native speakers of English in which they use English to describe common everyday topics.

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
Deema: I'd like to show you something ... it might help to answer if I use social media to learn English	ديما: ودي أوريك شيء... يمكن يجاوب على اذا ادرس انجليزي على "social media" ندي: تفضلي... خذي كل الوقت
Nada: By all means ... take your time	ديما: okay... دايماسوي "capture" على
Deema: Okay ... I always capture tweets that contain English ... I guess I never showed you this ... [opens her smartphone] I created this language ... this one [points to her phone screen]	twitter وكده من الأشياء اللي بالإنجليزي فمن كثر الصور... ماتوقع اني وريتك قبل كذا.... [تفتح شاشة الجوال] سويت شيء سميته "language"... هذا هو [تشير لشاشة الجوال]
Nada: A folder in your smartphone	ندي: ملف بجوالك
Deema: Yes ... a folder with all these pictures ... most of these are taken from Twitter ... I created this because I always capture ... things in English on social media	ديما: ايوه... فولدر "folder" بالصور حقتي وهذا كلها أكثرهم جبتهم من twitter... سويتها عشان دايماسوي "capture" للأشياء بالإنجليزية الاقيها وانا على "social media"
Nada: You mean screenshots...	ندي: تقصدين "screenshot"...
Deema: Yes ... Yes	ديما: ايه... ايه
Nada: Okay ... so you created a folder gathering together all your screenshots	ندي: Okay... حطيتي فولدر "folder" كل ال screen shots "
Deema: Yes ... a specific folder ... I called it language and most of the stuff is from Twitter ... these are from Twitter ... this one from Snapchat ... this one from Path	ديما: ايه... سويت "folder" لوحده ... سميته "language" او أكثر الاشياء من twitter... هذه أشياء جيبتها من twitter... هذي "screen shot" من "Twitter" و هذي من "Snapchat" و هذي من "Path"
Nada: Okay ... that is why you called it language	ندي: okay عشان كذا سميتيه language..
Deema: Yes ... you know why ... when I screenshot... it is automatically saved in the photos ... and I delete these after a while ... but I created this folder... I read in attempt to memorise this information ... and words in English	ديما: عرفتي ليش... لأنني لو سويت "screen shot" و حطيتيه بالصور... بيضيع بعد فترة... فصرت ادخل هذا... و أقرأ أحاول أثبت المعلومات ... والكلمات اللي بالإنجليزي
Nada: You go back and read these screenshots?	ندي: بس تقرين بس ترجعين ل "screenshot"؟
Deema: YES	ديما: ((ايه))
Nada: When?	ندي: متى ترجعي لها؟
	ديما: [صمت] ممكن قبل انام... او اذا امشي فاضية ندي: عشان ((تطورين لغتك))؟

Deema: [pauses] Usually before I go to sleep ... or if I am waking Nada: To IMPROVE YOUR ENGLISH... Deema: YES	ديما: ((ايه))
---	---------------

Excerpt 8.11: Deema giving an account of the language folder on her smartphone

It seems that taking screenshots of content in English is one of the concrete activities that Deema performs as she reads in English on social media. This social media content may be written by users whose L1 is English or by users who design content for language learning purposes. It appears that Deema was motivated to do this to improve her capacity in English, her L2.

### 8.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have explored various materials, resources and concrete activities these Saudi female undergraduates draw on as they read and write in English on social media. The data suggest that these material resources and concrete activities are an amalgam of resources and activities related to built-in smartphone technologies supporting English spelling, a smartphone feature allowing the creation of a separate folder, smartphone apps and social relations. The data also suggest that these Saudi female undergraduates use research abilities learned as part of a course to support their English learning process and expand their research capabilities via Google app to accomplish their individual aims.

My participants were careful to check their spelling and grammar before posting on Twitter and this is consistent with Gleason's (2016) findings. Gleason, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, examined the Twitter practices of teenagers in the United States who used English as their L1 and found that these teenagers concerned themselves with what she refers to as traditional dimensions of literacy, such as correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. My study finds that these Saudi female undergraduates also concern themselves with correct spelling and grammar

of English their L2 before writing on Twitter specifically, and social media in general. Gleason mentions that Lucy, one of her participants, preferred to access the desktop version of Twitter and use the spell-check feature to avoid spelling errors and does not mention any resources that may be found on smartphones. However, these Saudi female undergraduates drew on different resources and concrete activities to check their spelling while accessing Twitter and social media on their smartphones.

This chapter has also illustrated the approaches my research participants adopted to understand English words they find are “new” or “unfamiliar”. Some of these approaches are related to their major, as they are interpreters and translators of English language. They use Arabic translation to understand the meanings of English words and dictionary apps that give meanings in simpler English. They also guess the meanings of English words by searching for words using Google app and the COCA website.

## Chapter 9

### FEMALE SAUDI UNDERGRADUATES' IDENTITY PROJECTION IN ENGLISH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In the previous chapter I analysed the material resources and concrete activities these Saudi female undergraduates employ when they use English in their literacy practices on social media. Literacy, as I explained in Chapter 2, is an “identity resource” for the making of persons and meaning (Barton & Hamilton, 2012). In this chapter, I illustrate the ways in which these Saudi female undergraduates display and perform aspects of themselves on social media through English. I align with Barton and Lee (2013) in their view that people present their different senses of themselves when they write online. They further assert that:

Writing online is writing oneself into being. In other words, whenever we write a post, make a comment on another person’s post, upload an image, create a profile, we are also constructing an auto-biography, a narrative of who we are and what kind of person we want others to see us. These writing practices may project new identities or enable us to extend our offline selves. As our identities travel between on and off the screen, we are blurring the traditional boundary between the online and the offline. (ibid., p.84)

This chapter, therefore, addresses my fifth research question, which is: **How do these female Saudi undergraduates project their identities through their literacy practices in English on social media?** by drawing on data obtained from informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, a focus group, an online logbook of English usage and online observation. I organise my data according to themes, and I illustrate how these Saudi female undergraduates perform their different identities when using English on social media by displaying their

character traits. They also perform their identities by displaying their current feelings and situations.

## **9.1 Displaying Character Traits**

The data suggest that these Saudi female undergraduates are aware that content posted on social media shows traits of their character in public. Lama, in the face-to-face focus group, expressed that social media “*defines aspects of our character whether we like it or not*”. Lama explained that opening the account of any user on Twitter will “*reveal*” who the user is. Deema, in the second interview, indicated that one of the purposes of “*liking*” tweets is to “*allow others to know my character better*” by reading tweets she liked. Deema and Lama’s views seem to suggest that posting content on social media show a user’s character traits. Here, I organise the approaches these Saudi female undergraduates follow to perform their character traits when writing on their own social media profiles and expressing appreciation in public.

### **9.1.1 Social Media Profiles**

These Saudi female undergraduates present themselves on social media profiles when writing their names and bios about themselves in English. Using names in English in profiles ranges between full name, first name and nicknames. From my online observation, I noticed that Emma, Rawan, Deema, Norah, Nouf and Lama used their full names on Twitter profiles, while Latifah used only her first name. I also noticed that Lama used her first name on both her Tumblr and Instagram profiles. Norah, in the first interview, indicated that she used her full name to avoid being a “*stalker*”. To Norah, a stalker is someone who does not use her real name and so secretly reads the posts of others to know more about them. Nouf, in the first interview, indicated that she uses her full name in her Twitter profile because she presents her “*real life*”, not “*a fake*” one (see Excerpt 9.1). It seems that Nouf used her full name to draw

her followers' attention to the authenticity of the content she posts by comparing herself with other social media users who post content in public and prefer not to be “*recognised*”.

Translated Interview Transcript	Raw Interview Transcript
<p>Nouf: I do this ... because THIS IS ME, IF YOU WANT ME ... this is [saying her full name] this is me ... if you want to follow me [laughs] ... I don't want the content to be ... fake ... I really present my real life as it is ... I don't hold the idea ... I mean there are people who prefer ... to write things without being recognised ... I don't hold with this</p>	<p>نوف: لأنني ... خلاص ((هذي أنا تبغونني)) هذي أنا [الاسم الكامل] "This is me...if you want to follow me" [ضحك] ... وما أبغي أصلا حتى المحتوى يصير ... "fake" ... لأنني أنا أصلا حياتي هي نفسها إلي بقدمها يعني ... أنا ما عندي ... يعني مثلا فيه ناس يحبون ... يكتبون أشياء ما حد يدري إنهم هم عشان ما يحسون ... أنا لا</p>

Excerpt 9.1: Nouf's account of using her full name on her Twitter profile

Emma, in the first interview, indicated that writing her full name keeps her “*true self ... my real me*” on Twitter. She explained that all her writing on Twitter comes from her thoughts and thus the content represents her. Rawan and Deema, in the first interview, indicated that they write their names in full only on their Twitter accounts. Rawan explained that she tweets what she desires regardless of those who follow her as she prefers to be “*clear so that everyone gets to know me*” and does not own “*many personalities*”. Deema mentioned that she uses her full name because she “*hates to be two persons*”. Deema explained that some people have two accounts, one with a full name representing a “*formal life*”, and the other with a nickname representing a “*non-formal life*”, and in doing this they are performing two different identities.

Lama and Latifah each have two accounts on Twitter, one with their full name and the other with a nickname. Lama, in the first interview, mentioned that she chose to write her full name in one Twitter account because she has “*nothing to be ashamed of*”, and a nickname in a second Twitter account. Lama explained that the first Twitter account represents her as a “*translator*” and “*student*”, while the other represents her as a writer (see Excerpt 9.2). Lama explained that

having two accounts was a result of relatives who “stalk” her, seeking to know all the details of her private life by reading her tweets and treating those tweets as evidence of her feelings in her offline life. Lama indicated that these relatives “*might*” ask her to justify her tweets at a social gathering and “*build on*” them to explain her gestures in public.

Lama:	Relatives who like ... they ... STALK you, REALLY, THEY STALK you, they know every single thing you WRITE ... MENTIONS ... ANYTHING ... ANYTHING ... LITERALLY ... and they might say it out loud ... at a gathering ... they might say like ... what did you mean ... don't ... don't ... what is said on Twitter ... what is on Twitter STAYS on Twitter ... maybe that bothers me ... in terms ... like, I like to write so when I am writing, like, dark thoughts or something it doesn't really represent me and it doesn't really mean that I am depressed ... it doesn't really mean I am depressed now or anything ... so people take it personally a little bit
Nada:	And what happens then?
Lama:	They build on it ... add to it ... oh ... she smiles in public but she is pretty dark on Twitter ... NO ... I have ... I have different feelings, everyone ... I have different feelings ... the difference is ... not everyone can express it ... I express it in public
Nada:	Okay ... so ... the other account
Lama:	The other account is my writing account ... so I just ... no one knows about it ... it doesn't have my name ... it's a nickname ... and ... not many followers but it hasn't been ... it is been like 5 months ... it is not like an old one, and that is what I meant when I said just now my account is more like ... my public account is more like as a translator, as a student as ... I am a leader of many programmes

Excerpt 9.2: Lama's explanation for using a nickname in her other Twitter account

Latifah, in the first interview, indicated that she uses her full name in her “*public*” account and a nickname in her other account to “*write*” whatever she wants without being recognised by relatives. Latifah, similar to Lama, explained that some relatives “*stalk*” her by “*reading too much into everything I write*” in an attempt to know “*every single bit*” about her personal life. Latifah justified having a nickname in her other account to express her opinion on controversial issues without being “*misjudged*” by those who are related to her by blood. It seems that Latifah is seeking to protect herself by avoiding conflict with her relatives for voicing her opinion on controversial issues in public. Latifah and Lama seem to be conscious of the content they post on Twitter and categorise their writing as being appropriate either in their public

accounts or their writing accounts. They appear to treat their public accounts as extensions of their offline lives and their writers' accounts as a new form of anonymised identity.

The bios on social media profiles project these Saudi female undergraduates' character traits. From my online observation, I noticed that Lama wrote in her bio "*I cherish memories ... I'm a pluviophile*" on her Instagram profile, "*I wander and wonder*" on her Tumblr profile and "*an astrophile and a pluviophile*" on her Twitter profile. Lama, in the second interview, indicated that the bio on her different social media profiles is merely a description of her character. Lama explained that she used "*pluviophile*" because she is "*obsessed with rain and the English word is concise*" and she used "*wander and wonder*" as these are two very similar words that depict her "*real self*". Emma shared Lama's view, in the second interview, by indicating that she wrote "*bookworm, morning person and anglophile. I trust my pen and write ... (still trying to find myself)*" on her Twitter bio to describe her character. Emma mentioned that she wrote this bio two years before to describe her "*eternal*" character, not a temporary status as a student about to graduate. Emma also mentioned that she did not want to "*merge her personal life*" in her Twitter bio with her "*studying life*", although the content of her tweets merges all her different "*lives*" together. Rawan, in the second interview, indicated that she wrote "*interested in languages and translation; Arabic, English and French*" in English to express being proud of her professional self and her academic major. Norah, in the second interview, indicated that she quoted "*work until you no longer have to introduce yourself*" to describe her persistent career character. The preceding evidence appears to show that the bios on social media profiles are descriptions of the offline selves of these Saudi female undergraduates and how they see themselves.

### 9.1.2 Expressing Appreciation in Public

The data suggest that these Saudi female undergraduates show their character traits by expressing their appreciation in public. Nouf, in informal interview 2, indicated her determination to lead a healthy life and to display this choice on Snapchat story. Nouf explained that she was doing a “30-day sugar-free challenge” that required her to stop adding refined sugar, or any form of sweetener whether artificial or natural, to her food and drinks for 30 days but was allowed to consume sugars that occur naturally in fruit or vegetables. Nouf also mentioned that she displays parts of her journey to accomplish this challenge and provide alternatives on Snapchat story. From observing Nouf on Snapchat story, I inferred that she was describing part of her journey when she posted a photo there of a crêpe she had made captioned “sugar free crêpe” (see Fig. 9.1.A), because she did not use any refined sugars or sweeteners. I also inferred that Nouf had started to eat bananas as part of her 30-day sugar-free challenge by posting a carton full of bananas captioned “my new love” (see Fig. 9.1.B).



A



B

Figure 9.1: Screenshots of Nouf displaying her sugar-free journey by posting a photo captioned “sugar free crêpe” in A and one of bananas captioned “my new love”

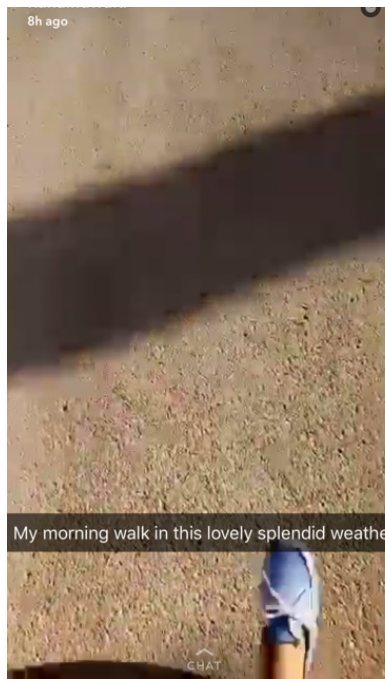
From my observational notes, I inferred that Nouf successfully accomplished her sugar-free challenge as she tweeted (see Fig. 9.2.A) and posted on snapchat story (see Fig. 9.2.B). It appears that these two posts are instances where Nouf used the same literacy event in two different media to inform her different audiences. Nouf, in the first interview, indicated that she occasionally posts the same content in different media to reach her different audiences, as *“those who follow me on Twitter may not necessarily follow me on Snapchat”*. I also inferred that Nouf was giving her opinion during the challenge about the food she consumed by voicing her opinion with the hashtag #sugarfree (see Fig. 9.2.C).



Figure 9.2: Screenshots of Nouf posting about accomplishing a “sugar-free challenge” in A and B and her experience of the challenge in C

Emma, in informal interview 3, stated *“you will see this a lot”* when I asked her about a video she posted on Snapchat story (see Fig. 9.3.A). Emma explained that she is *“a morning person”* who appreciates waking up early and adding a snap in the morning to share her morning joy with her Snapchat friends, and a snap captioned *“morning”* and Figure 9.3.B are examples of

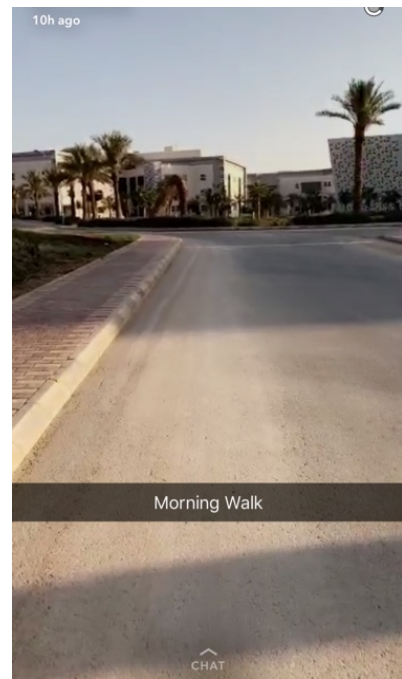
these regular snaps. From my observational notes, I inferred that Emma posted a video of the university campus captioned “morning walk” to add a new episode to her morning walk series (see Fig. 9.3.C). Emma, in informal interview 7, indicated that she woke up early as usual and decided to tweet about her morning joy (see Fig. 9.3.D). In the same informal interview, Emma indicated that she tweeted as she was enjoying the sky in the morning and attached a photo she took of the sky and another photo of a “Teletubbies scene” (see Fig. 9.3.E). From my observational notes, I inferred that Emma snapped to extend her offline identity is of a person who finds joy in the morning, as she posted the photo at 7 a.m. on Snapchat story (see Fig. 9.3.F).



A



B



C

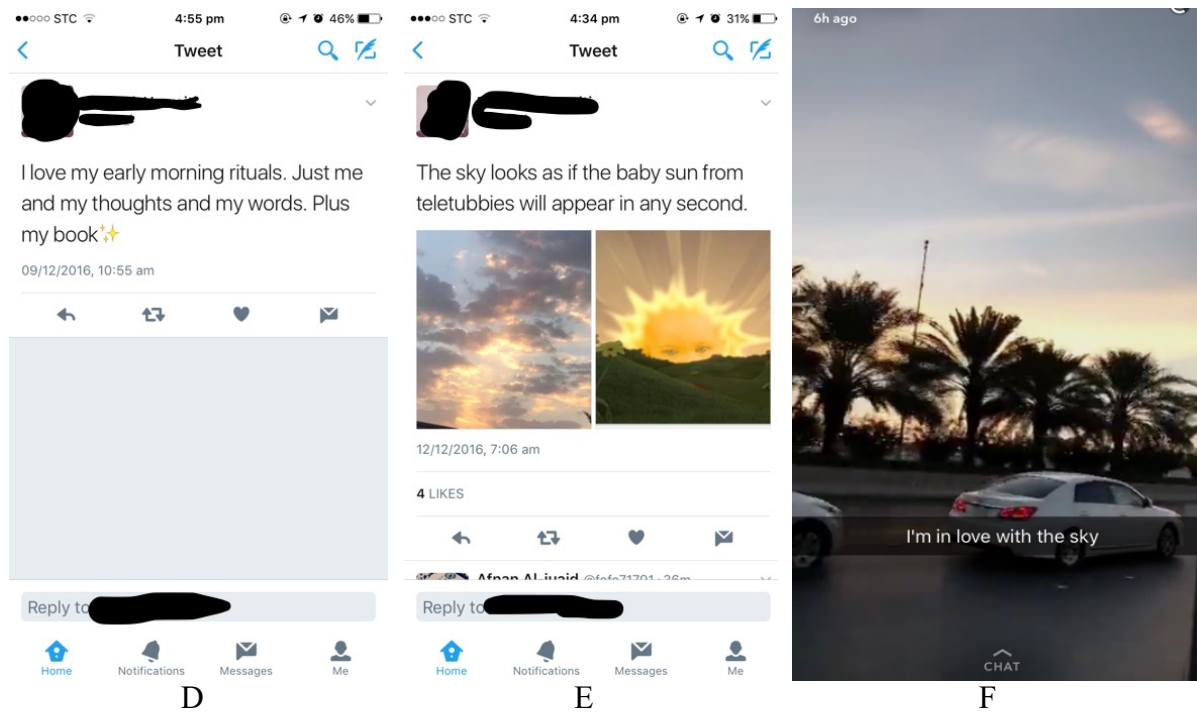
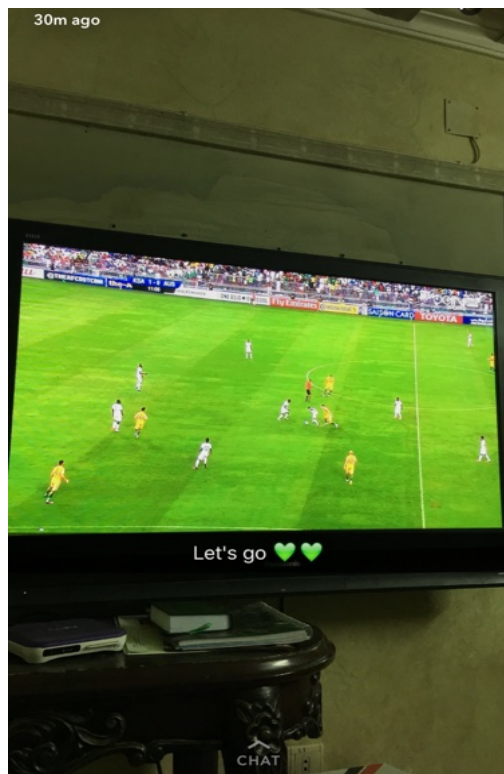


Figure 9.3: Screenshots of Emma posting on Twitter and Snapchat to display “*being a morning person*”

Norah displayed her appreciation of football on a Snapchat story feature. Norah, in informal interview 1, indicated that she posted a photo of a TV screen showing a football match, including the Saudi Arabia national team, captioned “*Let’s go*”. Norah explained that she wanted to share the moment where she was cheering for the national team with her Snapchat friends and she used a green heart to represent the colour of the Saudi Arabian flag. Norah, in informal interview 2, indicated that she posted a photo of a TV screen showing a football match of her favourite team captioned “*Blue*” and used a blue heart to represent the colour of her favourite team’s outfit. In these snaps, Norah seemed to show herself as a person who is a fan of football.



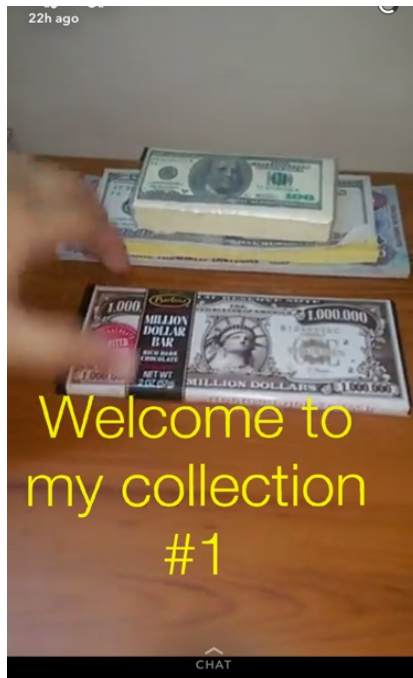
A



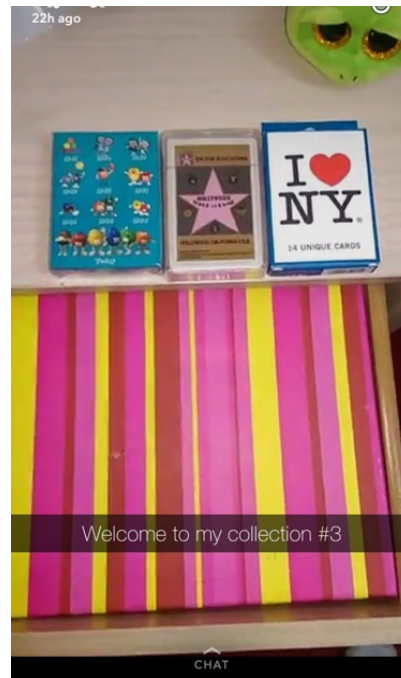
B

Figure 9.4: Screenshots of Norah snapping to cheer for the national football team in A and her favourite team in B

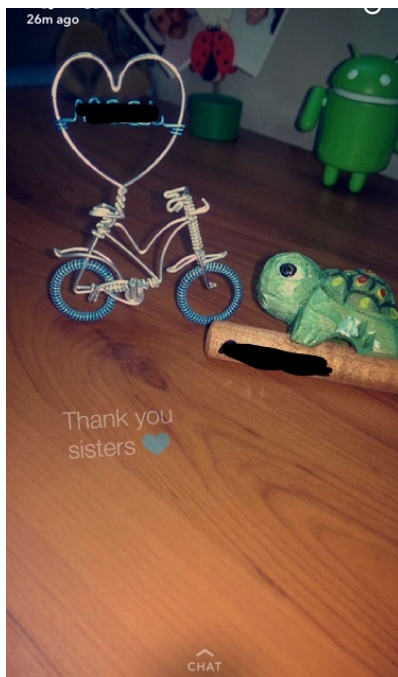
Deema displays her appreciation for the gifts she receives on Snapchat story feature. Deema, in informal interview 5, indicated that she displayed the gifts she received from her sister on Snapchat story by posting photos of those gifts captioned “*welcome to my collection*”, followed by a hashtag symbol and a number indicating how many gifts she got that day (see Figs 9.4.A and B). From my observational notes, I inferred that Deema was thanking her sister (see Fig. 9.4.C) and thanking her friend (see Fig. 9.4.D) for giving her those gifts. In posting on Snapchat story, Deema reached other people besides those who were being thanked, and this seemed to show that she is a grateful person.



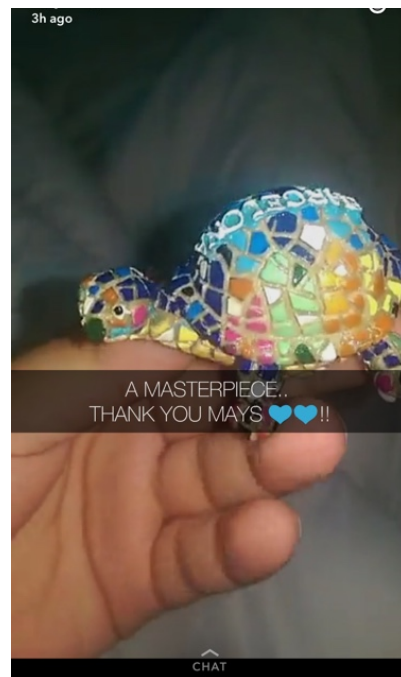
A



B



C



D

Figure 9.5: Screenshots of Deema snapping to share the gifts she received with Snapchat friends

From the preceding evidence, these Saudi female undergraduates use a variety of strategies to present key facets of identity they want to present persistently. I inferred that Nouf wants to

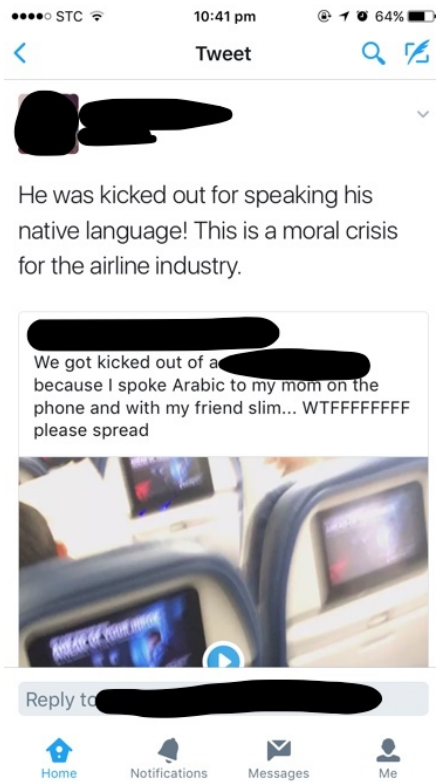
present herself as a healthy person, Emma as morning person, Norah as a football fan and Deema as a grateful person.

## 9.2 Displaying Current Feelings and Situations

The data suggest that displaying current feelings and situations is another approach these Saudi female undergraduates used to perform their identities by writing in English on social media and sharing this writing with social media audience. I chose instances where my research participants gave accounts of their posts to display or describe their current feelings and situations. These Saudi female undergraduates imbue and infuse their descriptions of their current situations with their feelings when they give accounts of their tweeting and posting on Snapchat story feature in English.

Saudi female participants performed aspects of themselves by displaying their feelings regarding international issues by tweeting in English. Emma, in informal interview 8, indicated that she wanted to add her opinion by quoting a tweet about an Arab celebrity who was ejected from a flight for speaking in his own language (see Fig. 9.6.A). She explained that she felt “*furious*” at that situation and wanted to express her opinion plainly on Twitter. From my observational notes, I inferred that Latifah shared Emma’s feeling. Latifah quoted the same tweet as Emma, about an Arab who was ejected from a flight, to add her opinion (see Fig. 9.6.B). With Latifah’s tweet, it appears that she did not approve of what the airline did as she implied that this situation had caused people working for the airline “*a lot of trouble*”. Deema, in informal interview 4, indicated that she tweeted (see Fig. 9.6.C) to voice her opinion as her friends were discussing their political views on the American elections. Deem appeared to express her feeling of not being interested in engaging in political issues and performed that side of herself to her Twitter audience. Unlike Deema, Nouf appeared to be interested in sharing her views on political issues with her Twitter audience. Nouf, in informal interview 4, indicated

that she participated in a hashtag about Trump as she quoted Trump’s tweet to remind American citizens who were reading the hashtag that was trending at that time about Jim Crow racist rules (see Fig.9.6.D). Nouf indicated that she targeted an unknown audience on Twitter, citizens of the United States of America, implying her fear that Trump would revive Jim Crow rules. Nouf seems to perform her identity as a person who expresses her political opinions on international issues.



A



B



C



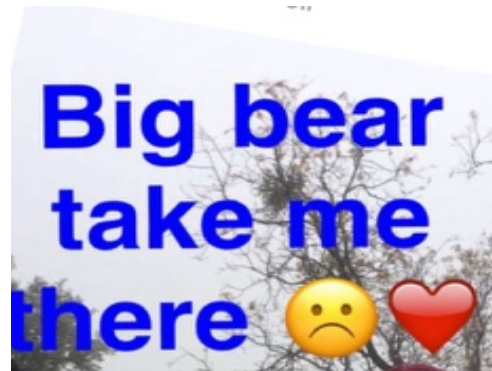
D

Figure 9.6: Screenshots of Emma tweeting about a person who was kicked off a plane in A, Latifah tweeting about people who caused “themselves a lot of trouble” in B, Deema tweeting about her interest in politics in C and Nouf tweeting to add her views to a Trump hashtag

Saudi female participants performed aspects of their selves by displaying their feelings regarding going to a place in the physical world in English. Latifah, in informal interview 3, indicated that she was studying in her bedroom and was attracted by the smell of burning wood coming from a room downstairs (see Fig. 9.7.A). Latifah explained that she resisted the temptation to take a break and enjoy sitting around the fireplace in the beginning and decided later to give up and go “down” to the place she desired. With “*go to hell honey*”, Latifah mentioned that she was addressing “*studying*”, and with “*I’m going down*” she voiced her decision to move to a different place. Rawan, in informal interview 3, indicated that she posted a photo on Snapchat story of her sister playing with snow, captioned “*Big bear take me there*” to express her feeling of wanting to go to Big Bear, a city in California (see Fig. 9.7.B).



A



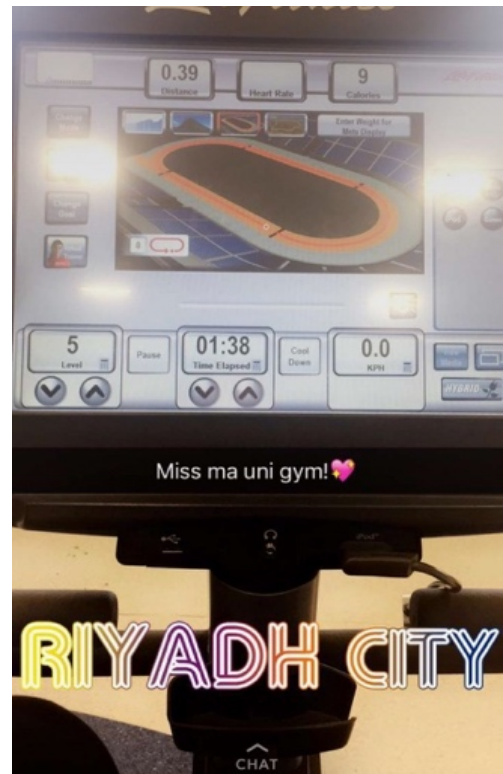
B

Figure 9.7: Screenshots of Latifah tweeting about going “down” in A and Rawan snapping about going to Big Bear in B

Saudi female participants performed aspects of themselves by displaying their feelings while being in a physical place in the offline world in English. Nouf, in informal interview 5, indicated that she described her feelings while she was heading back home at the end of the mid-term break (see Fig. 9.8.A). Nouf explained that she took a photo when she was on a train going back home, captioned “*a very pleasing trip*” to share how “*satisfied*” she was with this trip (see Fig. 9.8.A). Rawan, in informal interview 2, indicated that she took a photo while she was walking on a treadmill in the gym, captioned “miss ma uni gym” to show how she “*missed*” that place (see Fig. 9.8.B). Rawan explained that she wanted to share her feelings “*in a professional way*” at that time with her Snapchat friends, as she was occupied with her academic obligations and did not go to the gym located on campus for a long time.



A



B

Figure 9.8: Screenshots of Latifah snapping about having a “pleasing trip” in A and Rawan about missing the “uni gym” in B

Saudi female participants performed aspects of themselves by displaying their feelings about their current situation by quoting song lyrics on Twitter in English. Emma, in informal interview 6, indicated that she tweeted song lyrics at 7 a.m. to show her happiness at seeing the sun (see Fig. 9.9.A). Emma explained that she had just woken up and saw the bright sun and was motivated to tweet to share her feelings with her Twitter followers. Rawan, in informal interview 1, claimed that she tweeted lyrics of her favourite song to enjoy herself. Rawan explained that she did not expect her friends to tweet the same lyrics and she replied to the same tweet thread by continuing with these song lyrics (see Fig. 9.9.B). Latifah, in informal interview 1, indicated that she tweeted song lyrics at 2.54 a.m. because they expressed how she felt at that moment (see Fig.9.9.C). She explained that it was the night after the weekend and the song was “*running around my head*” and so she tweeted those lyrics to “*represent myself*”.

Latifah, in informal interview 3, indicated that she was feeling happy as she was in a car on her way home and tweeted these song lyrics (see Fig.9.9.D). In the online logbook of English usage, Latifah stated that she was listening to those song lyrics as she was tweeting “*But take me home, Take me home where I belong.*”



A



B



Figure 9.9: Screenshots of Emma tweeting lyrics in A, Rawan tweeting lyrics in B and Latifah tweeting lyrics in C and D

Saudi female participants performed aspects of themselves by displaying their feelings about their current situation on Snapchat story in a creative way in English by using Bitmoji. Bitmoji, as I defined them in section 6.5.1, are personal emoji created by chat users about themselves chosen from a library of stickers. Emma, in informal interview 5, indicated that she posted a photo of her *“untidy cupboard”* and used that cartoon to show herself feeling surprised (see Fig. 9.10.A) on Snapchat story. Emma explained that she decided to clean and organise her cupboard at that day and was surprised to see that *“messiness”*, so she wanted to say to her Snapchat friends, *“here comes all the avalanche of clothes [laughs]”*. Rawan, in informal interview 1, indicated that she posted a photo of her favourite meal on Snapchat story with an emoji of herself expressing *“love for that meal”* (see Fig. 9.10.B). Rawan explained that she wanted to share her feelings with Snapchat friends and that *“face of mine ... the cartoon one”*

assisted her in expressing her *“feelings of love”*. Emma, in informal interview 7, indicated that she posted a photo of a cup of mint tea she was drinking with *“that emoji of myself”* to describe how she *“felt cold at that time”* (see Fig. 9.10.C). Emma explained that she wanted to share her feelings regarding the weather with her Snapchat friends by posting that on the story feature. From my observational notes, I inferred that Emma posted a cup of tea with a Bitmoji of herself captioned with *“I’m sick”* to display feeling sick at the time of snapping it with her Snapchat friends (see Fig. 9.10.D). Rawan, in informal interview 1, indicated that she posted a photo of a bag of chips she was having while working on her graduation project on Snapchat story to show her feeling of *“liking those coconut chips”* (see Fig.9.10.E). Rawan explained that the emoji she used told how she felt at that time as that emoji *“recommends my friends on Snapchat to try this out”*. From my observational notes, I inferred that Rawan redirected a photo of a person captioned *“welcome back bro”* to snapchat story accompanied by her personal Bitmoji carrying a red love heart to show feeling happy at having her brother back in Saudi Arabia (see Fig. 9.10.E). It appears that Rawan used Bitmoji on the story feature on Snapchat to express how she felt in that specific situation. From hanging out with Rawan, I learned that one of her brothers was studying in the United States of America and this might be the brother she was talking about.



A



B



C



D



E



F

Figure 9.10: Screenshots of Emma and Rawan posting on Snapchat story, accompanied by their personalised emoji

From the preceding evidence, these Saudi female undergraduates used various strategies to present themselves displaying their current feelings and situations on Twitter and Snapchat and sharing them with their audiences. They performed aspects of themselves by tweeting their feelings regarding international issues in English, displaying their feelings regarding going to a place in the physical world and their feelings while being in a place in the physical world.

They also constructed their identities by displaying their feelings with song lyrics in tweets and working in creative ways with Bitmoji on Snapchat.

### **9.3 Summary**

In this chapter, I have illustrated how these Saudi female undergraduates performed aspects of their identities in their literacies in English on social media. They perform aspects of their identities with the names and bios they write in their social media profiles. I have explained that their names range between their first name, full names and nicknames and I have provided their justifications for such choices. These Saudi female undergraduates perform aspects of their identities by expressing their appreciation of certain issues and items in public in their social media posts in English.

These Saudi female undergraduates display their current feelings regarding certain situations, such as international issues, going to a place in the physical world and being in a physical place in the offline world. They also display their current feelings regarding current situations by quoting song lyrics and in innovative ways by using Bitmoji of themselves on Snapchat story feature.

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION

In this last chapter of my PhD thesis, I offer a summary of my study by revisiting its findings organised according to my research questions, reflecting on the methodology and presenting its contribution. I then acknowledge the limitations of my study and make suggestions for further research to be conducted based on this study. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the implications of this study.

#### 10.1 Summary of the Study

This study was conducted with 11 females in Saudi Arabia who were majoring in English Language and Translation in their last semester before graduation at a university in Saudi Arabia. I drew on a connective approach to ethnography and collected both online and offline evidence over three months starting in October 2016. I conducted two focus-group sessions, one face to face with five participants and another over the WhatsApp platform with six participants. I observed the activities in English on social media of seven female Saudi undergraduates, wrote 276 field-note entries and collected 560 screenshots of these participants when they used English. I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews and 31 informal interviews with seven participants. I also collected 23 entries of online logbook of English usage on social media filled in by seven participants.

I drew on a Literacy Studies perspective and viewed social media literacies, that is, the reading and writing done on social media, as social practices involving more than technical skills. I focused on the literacy events and practices that emerged on social media and considered the values, feelings, thoughts and social relations that informed these literacies. I analysed my data thematically to answer my research questions. My study has five research questions:

1. How do these female Saudi undergraduates conceptualise social media?
2. What are the literacy practices of these female Saudi undergraduates that emerge as they use English on social media?
3. What reasons do these female Saudi undergraduates have for choosing to use English in their literacy practices on social media?
4. What material resources and concrete activities do these female Saudi undergraduates employ as they read and write in English on social media?
5. How do these female Saudi undergraduates project their identities through their literacy practices in English on social media?

#### **10.1.1 RQ1: How do these female Saudi undergraduates conceptualise social media?**

These female Saudi undergraduates' conceptualisation of social media was generated by three factors. These factors were related to the role that social media play in their lives, their personal histories of social media and their ideas about the basic components of social media.

The data in Chapter 5 suggest that the perceptions that these female Saudi undergraduates had about the role social media play influenced the literacy activities that emerged in English on their preferred platforms. Their perceptions shaped the domains of their everyday lives in which reading and writing in English occurred on social media. They understood social media as platforms to socialise with people and to record daily activities, and these two roles seemed to underpin their literacy practices in English in areas of everyday life as: personal communication and documenting life. They understood social media as entertainment platforms which underpinned the literacy practices they carried out for entertainment purposes. They also understood social media as a source of pedagogy that underpinned the reading and writing in English they carried out to enrich the knowledge of known audiences on Twitter. More importantly, their understanding of social media as platforms to express thoughts and

feelings seemed to underpin reading and writing in English to address oneself in public, express feelings and remove unpleasant memories. It also underpins the reading and writing that occur in the opinion and advice domain.

These female Saudi undergraduates' personal histories of using social media bring to the fore the standard view of social media (Ito et al., 2010) and the view of Social Networking Sites (SNS) (boyd & Ellison, 2008) I presented in Chapter 1. I mentioned that Ito et al. (2010), on social media, refer to "a set of new media that enable social interaction between participants, often through the sharing of media" (p. 28), while boyd and Ellison (2008) view SNS as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). My participants indicated that they started to experience what they viewed as social media long before the introduction of social media as a concept. My participants broadened that standard definition in their perception by including older digital technologies. They regarded Hotmail Messenger (MSN), Skype, Facebook and BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) as examples of social media. However, their understandings of social media were also broader than the standard definition, in that they had come to encompass smartphone apps, such as Snapchat, Twitter, Path and Tumblr.

The data indicated that these female Saudi undergraduates migrated from one social media platform to another with the advances in technology and the constant creation of new social media apps for smartphones. Their migration was characterised as being carried out in groups to explore the potential of new media based on advice, popularity and changes in status, and with their migration the concept of social media evolved (see section 5.2). Their shared understanding of the concept aligns with the definition of social media proposed by Page

(2012), emphasising the effect of networks of friends on these female Saudi undergraduates' choice of stopping using a particular platform and starting to use another one.

Based on this study, their definition of social media becomes Internet-based smartphone apps that perform various roles in the lives of their users, as well as enabling users to post content and interact with large numbers of other users on a regular basis through accounts with unique codes. A unique code is required to create an account on social media and appears on the profile page, allowing a social media user to follow and befriend other people and other people to follow and befriend that user. This unique code can be a phone number, a name or a nickname, and it is determined by the social media user and the technologies of the platform. Therefore, the device they use to access social media app, that is the 'smartphone', is added to Page's (2012) definition of social media. Page views social media as "Internet-based applications that promote social interaction between participants ... social media delivers content via a *network of participants* where the content can be published by anyone but is still distributed across potentially large-scale audiences" [emphasis added] (ibid., p.5).

### **10.1.2 RQ2: What are the literacy practices of these female Saudi undergraduates that emerge as they use English on social media?**

I found that these female Saudi undergraduates had diverse literacy practices in English that could be grouped into ten categories that overlap. These categories are:

- documenting life;
- opinions and advice;
- enriching the knowledge of a known audience on Twitter;
- personal communication;
- affordances of social media;

- addressing oneself in public;
- expressing feelings;
- removing unpleasant memories;
- entertainment;
- correcting English.

My findings about personal communication practices align with the “hanging out” practices (see Ito et al., 2010) and the friendship practices (boyd, 2010) I discussed in section 2.2.5.2. The affordances of social media include the creative use of hashtags on Twitter and Bitmoji on Snapchat in literacy practices, and these practices align with “messaging around” practices (see Ito et al., 2010). The opinion and advice category includes voicing opinions that cannot be expressed in the physical world for reasons related to restrictions in physical settings, and this resonates with what Jones (2017) refers to as “mobility” (p.294). Jones claims that “mobility” is one of the features of digital literacy practices, in the sense that it is less tied to a specific physical setting.

As I discussed in section 6.3, enriching the knowledge of a known audience on Twitter indicates that these literacy practices are shaped by their awareness of the audience on this platform (Barton & Lee, 2013; Buck, 2012; Davies, 2012; Gleason, 2016). These studies reveal that sensing the audience on social media influences the kinds of literacy practices that emerge on these platforms. I found that the act of ‘liking’ a tweet was done to improve the English proficiency level of a known audience of Twitter followers and this adds to the findings of other researchers about the multiple, complex reasons for clicking “like” on Twitter and Facebook (Davies, 2012; Georgalou, 2015; Gleason, 2016).

I found three domains among the vernacular literacies’ six domains developed by Barton and Hamilton (1998) were present in my study. Barton and Hamilton examined the practices that

emerge in L1 in everyday life, and I examined the practices that emerge in L2 on social media in everyday life. This result suggests that literacy practices that emerge in English as L2 are similar to the literacy practices that emerge in English as L1.

However, I also found an additional domain that arose as a result of using English as L2, which is literacy practices to correct English. This domain aligns with Gleason's (2016) finding that teenagers correct their English spelling, part of their L1, on Twitter by deleting a tweet and then tweeting in a new thread without leaving a trace of the spelling error. In my study, I found that all these female Saudi undergraduates did the same on Twitter, except Rawan. I also found that they leave traces of their English errors on Snapchat. Rawan preferred to tweet on the same tweet thread that contained a spelling error and to correct the error she made, followed by an asterisk. Rawan's practice of leaving traces of her errors on Twitter underlines the authenticity of her practice. All the participants added new episodes to the story feature on Snapchat to correct their English errors by writing corrected words or phrases on a blank background followed by an asterisk (\*). This result, about the use of an asterisk to denote correcting English, adds to the findings about the use of asterisks on Facebook to denote stage directions (see Davies, 2012) and the use of asterisks on WhatsApp to correct English errors (see Almekhlafy & Alzubi, 2016).

### **10.1.3 RQ3: What reasons do these female Saudi undergraduates have for choosing to use English in their literacy practices on social media?**

I argued, in Chapter 7, that using English in social media literacy practices by these Saudi female undergraduates was a matter of choice, and I identified five main purposes for using English. These purposes are 1) furthering their academic major studies, 2) quoting in the same language, 3) a matter of preference, 4) technological issues, and 5) social media audience.

The data presented in Chapter 7 also suggest that these female Saudi undergraduates' "situated language ecology" (Barton & Lee, 2011, p. 52) influenced their language choices. Barton and Lee (2011) claim that the language chosen by an individual user on Flickr is shaped by her cultural, social, educational, geographical and linguistic background. My finding about the female Saudi undergraduates' choice to use English as a matter of preference aligns with the suggestion made by Barton and Lee (2011) that Spanish Flickr users prefer to use English "as it is shorter and more phonetically appealing than the Spanish equivalent" (p. 52).

Considering the social media audience as one of the reasons for choosing to use English when writing on social media different platforms suggests that Barton and Lee's (2013) "intended audience" factor was present in my study. They identified three audience groups in an online setting: "the general unknown audience on the web (especially on Flickr and YouTube); 'friends' who are listed as contacts (especially on Flickr and Facebook), and friends in 'real' life especially on instant messaging)" (ibid., p. 56). I clarified the types of 'social media audience', building on their view (see Fig. 10.1).

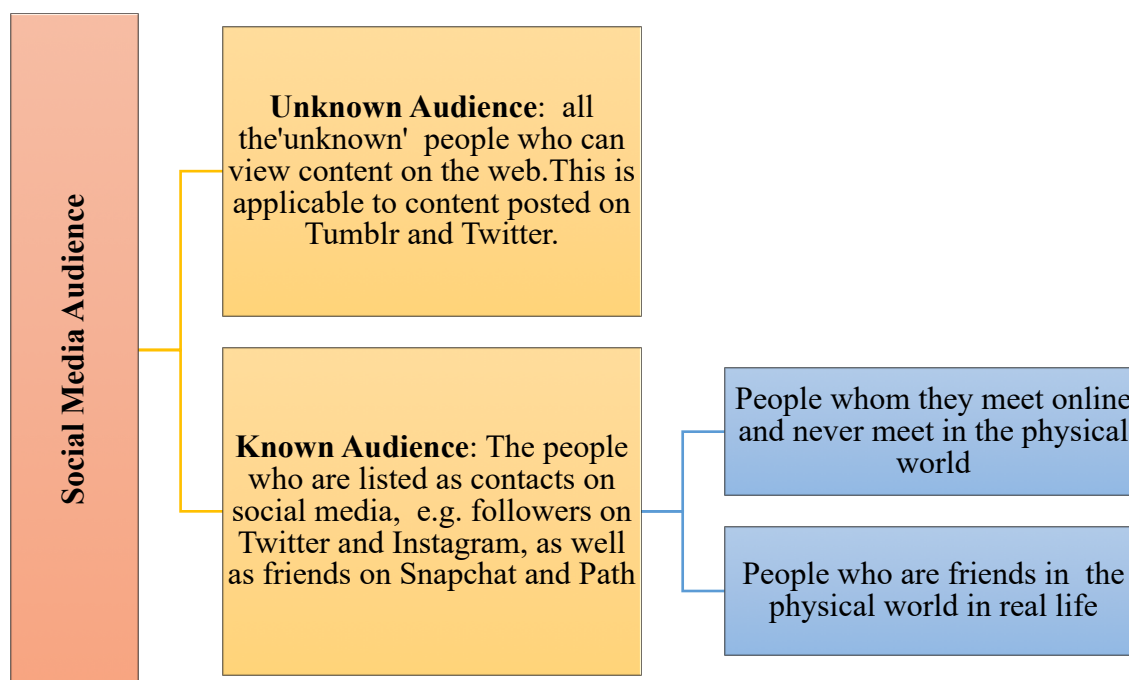


Figure 10.1: Social media audience types

Being conscious of the language used by the social media audience influenced the purposes for using English as provided by these female Saudi undergraduates. This finding, however, is related to the findings of Barton and Lee (2011):

Our participants usually select their language according to what language the primary target audience speaks. If their target audience is a friend in real life or someone who shares their first language, it is more likely that they write in Chinese or Spanish; English is used to an unknown audience or to someone who only speaks English. (ibid., p. 52)

Similar to Barton and Lee's finding, these female Saudi undergraduates use English if they think that their 'unknown audience' knows English, whether it is their L1 or L2, and this

contradicts their finding as my participants opt to use English to reply to their known audience, even when they share the same L1, which is Arabic.

Choosing to use English on social media as a way of filtering the audience is also reported as one of the reasons to opt to use English. My participants filter their audience by limiting the content on social media to a particular group of the known audience and excluding the unwanted audience, whether known or unknown, and this adds to the finding that link language choice practices to the relationship of Flickr users with their audience (see Barton & Lee, 2011, p. 53).

#### **10.1.4 RQ4: What material resources and concrete activities do these female Saudi undergraduates employ as they read and write in English on social media?**

As I explained in Chapter 8, I identified a mixture of material resources and concrete activities that these female Saudi undergraduates draw on as they read and write in English on social media. These material resources and concrete activities are divided according to their aims into four approaches. These approaches were

- English-spelling approaches;
- English grammar-checking approaches;
- English meaning-checking approaches;
- Other approaches related to using English on social media.

These findings fill a gap in the literature identified by Barton and Potts (2013), when they asserted that research on language learner's practices in L2 on online spaces is "very limited" (p. 818). These findings also add to those of Vázquez Calvo & Cassany's (2016) findings with an extra aspect. Vázquez Calvo & Cassany examined the digital language practices of six teachers in Catalonia and found that these teachers taught students to use dictionaries,

automated translation software and grammar and spelling checkers. Vázquez Calvo & Cassany also reported the names of dictionaries, such as DRAE and WordReference, and websites, such as Wikipedia, but not how language learners used these material resources themselves. These Saudi female undergraduates, in my study, mentioned smartphone apps and the COCA website and clarified what they mean by ‘spelling checker’ as opposed to grammar checker.

As I discussed in section 8.1, I found that English spelling approaches were related to smartphone keyboard features and two smartphone apps; Google app and Google Translate app.

As I discussed in section 8.2, I found that participants checked their English grammar by drawing on Google app, the COCA website, asking a friend about the accuracy of a specific sentence and searching Twitter content written by users whose L1 is English. Using the COCA website to determine the correct usage of prepositions in English was taught to my participants in one of the courses they take as part of their academic studies. However, using Google app and searching Twitter content to check their English grammar before posting on social media were not taught in formal settings. This reflects the participants’ creative innovative ways of checking the grammar of their L2, as they were not taught to use these two resources but learned to do this informally on their own. These creative ways of checking the accuracy of the their L2 grammar align with the characteristics of vernacular practices proposed by Barton and Hamilton (1998). These creative ways are less observable, not regulated by social organisation and learned in non-systemic informal settings.

The strategies used to check the meaning of English on social media are associated with smartphone apps and the COCA website. The smartphone apps are Google, Google Translate and three different dictionary apps. These resources can be accessed via a smartphone when connected to the Internet, which reflects that these participants are highly skilled in technology

and incorporate these skills in their social media literacies. Using Google Translate app to check what a word means in English reflects the influence of their academic major studies on their everyday literacies. They were taught to use Google Translate app to assist them in translating texts from English into Arabic in one of their academic courses.

The other approaches that these female Saudi undergraduates drew on as they read on social media were related to improving their proficiency level in English. Deema accomplished this aim by taking a screenshot as she read in English on Twitter, Snapchat and Path. These screenshots were then collected in a separate folder on her smartphone and studied later. This reflects that this participant selected materials in English from social media on her own to fulfil her future aim without being taught to use this particular approach.

#### **10.1.5 RQ5: How do these female Saudi undergraduates project their identities through their literacy practices in English on social media?**

As I explained in Chapter 9, I found that my participants performed different aspects of their identities in English by displaying their character traits via the content they posted on social media, their acts of liking, their names and the bios they wrote about themselves on social media profiles. They also projected their identities by displaying their current feelings and situations.

Lama stated that social media defines aspects of the character of its users even if they do not wish that to happen. This is evidence that content on social media projects character aspects of the person who creates it. It seems that content, even when written in English, their L2, projects their identities. I found that Deema wanted her followers to know her authentic identity by linking her act of “liking” a tweet to reasons related to enabling her Twitter followers to know what she favoured and admired. This finding, which relates “liking” a tweet to aspects of

identities, adds to the string of findings about the meaning of clicking “like” on Facebook and Twitter (Davies, 2012; Georgalou, 2015; Gleason, 2016).

The name displayed on a Twitter profile is linked to the content posted, and this confirms Lee’s (2014) claim that the name on a social media profile determines the content a person wants to share with other people. I found that the use of a full name in English on a Twitter profile restricted the content these female Saudi undergraduates posted because other people regard the content they tweet as an indication of their ‘real’ identity. All my participants used their real names on their profile pages, though two of them had an additional account. These two participants created an additional Twitter account where they kept their identity anonymised by using a nickname. These two participants had more freedom in the content they could tweet because their identity was anonymised. It appears that perceptions about the audience on Twitter influenced the names used in profiles and the content they tweeted about their private lives. This result confirms Davies’ (2012) claim that teenagers’ sense of audience affects how they narrate their private lives on Facebook.

I also found that the use of a real name on Twitter adds to the authenticity of someone’s identity and prevents them being a stalker. Based on my study, a stalker is someone on Twitter who obsessively views the tweets of a particular person, without making their identity known, and aims to know the details of the everyday life of that person. A stalker may be listed as a follower and use a nickname on Twitter or could be a non-follower who views the tweet of a particular person by typing the name of their account in the search bar on Twitter. A stalker might be a close relative of the account holder or any person who has an account on Twitter.

My participants projected themselves in the bios of some of their social media profiles in English by describing their character traits in the offline world. One of my participants used English in her bios on Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram to perform aspects of her identity in the

physical world. She was a person obsessed with rain who adores rhyming words in English and projected this identity in her bio. Another participant projected aspects of her identity on Twitter bio as a person who appreciates both reading and the morning, and for her these identity traits are not temporary. Others projected their professional career identities on their Twitter bios. This evidenced that my participants were confident and had a creative grasp of the conventions of an effective social media profile.

I found that these female Saudi undergraduates projected their character traits by expressing their appreciation of things in English on Twitter and Snapchat so as to present key facets of their identities, such as being a healthy person, a morning person, a grateful person or a football fan.

These female Saudi undergraduates also projected their identities in English by displaying their current feelings and situations on Twitter and Snapchat, and this goes in line with Davies' (2013) finding about trainee hairdressers, who displayed their personal lives on a moment by moment basis on their Facebook walls. Davies' finding relates to participants whose L1 is English, while my participants projected their identities in English as their L2, not their L1. My participants displayed their feelings of being happy by tweeting song lyrics in English, their L2, as well as singing in a tweet thread, and this is further evidence of a common practice of quoting songs noted by other social media researchers (see Buck, 2012; Georgalou, 2015).

#### **10.1.6 Reflections on the Methodology**

In this section I reflect on the methodology employed by commenting on its strengths and a limitation. I drew on a connective approach to ethnography (Leander & McKim, 2003), whereby I used both online and offline evidence. A fruitful aspect of my methodology was the

creative use of Zoho Creator and WhatsApp app, while a limitation lay in using a logbook of English usage.

I developed an innovative online method by using Zoho Creator website that assisted me in building a template for my field notes. In building the template for my field notes, I overcame the challenge of the unstructured nature of traditional field notes, as well as saving the screenshots I collected. The template I devised had built-in analysis by specifying areas I categorised as the names of participants, literacy activities, the social media platforms used and the images I took (see section 3.2.3). This method can assist researchers in organising their field notes by building their own templates, which can be accessed via a smartphone app. This method has the potential to be helpful to researchers who collect offline evidence, such as photos or any form of online evidence in their data, and want to synchronise images to a secure website instantly when they fill in a template they have devised for their field notes from Zoho Creator smartphone app. Researchers can edit field note entries from Zoho Creator app and Zoho Creator website. These entries can be downloaded to a desktop computer from the Zoho Creator website in the desired format by clicking on the download icon and selecting the file format, as well as downloading images in their actual size. Downloading images in their actual size helped me in presenting screenshots as high-resolution images in informal interviews with the participants. Screenshots in high resolution matched the quality of the social media posts the participants made, and in these images the details are clear. These high-resolution screenshots provoked the lived experience of the participants and enabled them to remember and discuss their literacy events in informal interviews.

The Zoho Creator website also assisted me in building a template for my conceptual memos. In doing this, I developed a systematic way of keeping a research diary. I devised a template, accessed via Zoho Creator smartphone app, in which I filled in entries on a weekly basis (see

section 3.2.4). This method can assist researchers in keeping their research diary organised and enable them to fill in a template they have devised from their smartphone app and synchronise their entries to a secure website instantly.

I developed another innovative method in conducting one of the focus-group sessions, which was using the WhatsApp smartphone app. The use of the WhatsApp platform when conducting the focus group was a useful method that allowed me to gather participants together at a specific time in a specific space. Using WhatsApp platform when conducting a focus group could be an alternative to an offline face-to-face space when meeting several participants at a specific time and in a specific place is impossible (see sections 3.4.2.1 and 3.4.2.1.1 for further details). This method could save the time and effort of the researcher by having the transcription of the focus group discussion ready quickly by exporting the chat history. It also saves the researcher's time and effort by saving images attached during the discussion by exporting the chat history and tapping attach media. It is important to note that this method must be used with caution, as it only works if the participants are willing to engage with others online and view this positively.

A limitation of my methodology is related to one of the methods I used to collect data, which is the logbook I designed in the hope it would be a usable means of data collection. The participants in my study did not fill in the logbook as I imagined when I designed the entries. This is because, as they informed me in the second semi-structured interview, the logbook was too demanding, as it required them to describe the details of their activities, and they were very busy people. They also informed me that there was a technical issue at the beginning, which was the logbook page freezing when they uploaded their screenshots, and in a way that discouraged them and resulted in them losing interest in filling in logbook entries.

Nevertheless, the entries they provided me with were helpful and added to my understanding of their social media literacies in English.

### **10.1.7 Contribution of this Study**

To the best of my knowledge, my research is one of the first studies conducted in Saudi Arabia that explicitly adopts a Literacy Studies perspective to investigate the use of English on social media, drawing on a connective approach to ethnography. It applies a Literacy Studies perspective to a new setting, which is these female Saudi undergraduates majoring in English Translation, their L2. This Literacy Studies perspective allowed me to investigate female Saudi undergraduates' use of English on social media by situating their literacy practices in English within the social context in which these literacy practices occurred, and by considering the thoughts, values and meanings behind these literacies. That means how these female Saudi undergraduates read and wrote in English on social media in their everyday lives and treating reading and writing as activities. Previous studies conducted in Saudi Arabia have investigated how to teach and learn English as L2 on social media by drawing on the CALL perspective, and in these studies reading and writing in English were viewed as an isolated set of skills to be learned out of context (see section 2.3.1). In this way, my study contributes to the current understanding of social media literacies in English as L2 where there is a dearth of studies dealing with social media literacies from a social practice perspective in Saudi Arabia.

### **10.2 Limitations of the Study**

In this section, I present three limitations of this research. First, it was limited by the small sample size, despite the varied and rich detailed ethnographic data I was able to collect from seven participants over three months. The sample consisted of a group of friends, 11 participants in total, of whom four chose to participate in focus-group sessions. This group of

friends were studying in the same department and were all females. Choosing females only was a result of the norms of Saudi society, such that I found myself obliged to exclude males from my study. This brings me to the second limitation, which is the sample being relatively homogenous. The last limitation relates to the rapid updates and advances in the environment of social media. However, although these might be considered limitations, I would also argue that all powerful ethnographic studies are restricted in terms of place, time and participants, but my ethnographic study is rich in its deep investigation of the use of English on social media by these female Saudi undergraduates.

### **10.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

In this section, I present two possible directions for future research. The first direction for further research is to conduct research that explores the use of English on social media by other groups of users, such as males or students with other backgrounds and motivations. Little is known about the use of English as L2 on social media from a social practice perspective. For example, research could be conducted to examine how English is used on social media by Saudis of different ages and economic backgrounds who are not pursuing academic studies in English. Such research could inform whether literacy practices in L2 on social media change with different majors, age groups and economic backgrounds. Another direction to extend this study might be to conduct a longitudinal study with Saudi male undergraduates majoring in English. Such research could inform how gender influences social media literacies in L2 and thus add another layer to our understanding of social media literacies in English as L2.

### **10.4 Implications of this Study**

I discuss the implications of this thesis in two sections: implications for language educators and implications for social media users in Saudi Arabia.

#### **10.4.1 Implications for Language Educators**

The findings reported in Chapter 8 have a number of implications for language learning and the teaching of English as L2. I responded to the suggestion made by Barton and Potts (2013) to use the knowledge gained about language learners' practices in L2 to inform classroom decisions about the content to be taught. These female Saudi undergraduates drew on an amalgam of approaches to check the accuracy of their English, their L2, as they give their accounts of using English in reading and writing on social media in interviews and focus-group sessions. These female Saudi undergraduates were not aware that their approaches to checking their correct spelling, appropriate grammar and word choices are not widely used. They drew on tools built into their smartphones and stated that they were not taught these approaches. They needed to change the default settings of their keyboards and this was not known to all female Saudi undergraduates in my study sample. These female Saudi undergraduates extended their search capabilities by using Google app, Google Translate app and the COCA website to check their spellings, grammar and word choices in ways that are not necessarily widely used by language educators.

Using English in social media literacies by these female Saudi undergraduates is often not encouraged, and they were not trained to carry out activities in English on social media from their smartphones to improve their English. Based on this evidence, I suggest that language educators include a section in the English language learning curriculum to inform language learners of the potential of their smartphones and include the approaches to check the accuracy of English I found in this study. I suggest that language educators train their language learners to activate the 'predictive' and 'check spelling' keyboard features in their smartphones.

Raising awareness of these approaches and the importance of using English on social media literacies could lead to a positive effect on Saudis' learning of English as their L2, bearing in

mind the widespread use of social media apps on smartphones among young people in Saudi Arabia. This could be done by designing workshops to inform language learners as well as language teachers about the potential of the approaches reported in this study. In these workshops, how English is used on Twitter and Snapchat could be outlined and possible ways of achieving comprehensible English spelling, grammar and word choices based on the findings from this study could be presented and discussed.

#### **10.4.2 Implications for Social Media Users in Saudi Arabia**

Issues of “stalking” and social media “stalkers” were identified in this study (see section 9.1.1).

Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, & Cratty (2011) define stalking on Facebook as follows:

“Facebook stalking,” a somewhat joking term for *obsessively monitoring* the social information presented on Facebook by friends, acquaintances, or even virtual strangers who are Facebook “friends.” Examples of Facebook stalking include obsessively reading wall posts, checking status updates, and scanning through uploaded photos. [emphasis added] (ibid., p. 711)

I defined stalkers on Twitter in section 10.1.5, and I feel it important to restate the definition of “stalkers” on social media. Social media stalkers in Saudi Arabia, however, are those people who obsessively monitor Twitter or Instagram content or profiles to “*know every single bit*” (Latifah, first interview) of information about the private affairs of a particular person, without making their presence visible on social media. “Stalkers” either hide behind a nickname or type the name of an account in the search bar on Twitter or Instagram. These people might know the person they stalk in the physical world as a relative, or as any other person not related by blood.

There is a possibility that “stalkers” in Saudi Arabia are not aware of the effect of their behaviour. I encourage people in all sections of Saudi society to debate and discuss their practices on social media and how different people in their audiences, or those they follow, might be affected. The findings of this study may contribute to this discussion.

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## **Appendices**

## APPENDIX A



### Participant information sheet

Title: Social Media Personal Literacy Practices of Female Saudi Undergraduates Using the English Language: An ethnographic case study from Riyadh

Researcher:

Nada Bin Dahmash ([n.bindahmash@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:n.bindahmash@lancaster.ac.uk))

**You are invited to take part in this research study. Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.**

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

My name is Nada Bin Dahmash and I am a PhD candidate at Lancaster University. I am working on my research study that will be conducted with participants from King Saud University. The aim of this study is to explore your own ways of reading and writing that are engaged in social media through the English language by examining the nature of these practices and the purposes of using the English language.

#### **What does the study entail?**

My study will involve collecting some data from your activities in your personal social media platforms and taking field notes. It will also involve recording conversations and individual/focus group interviews as well as filling in an electronic log.

#### **Why have I been invited?**

I have approached you because I am interested in understanding the way female Saudi undergraduates in King Saud University use English in their personal social media daily literacy practices.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in my study.

#### **What will happen if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, this would involve the following process

1. The study will mainly take place from 2nd October to 31st December 2016 in personal digital spaces (social media platforms) and in King Saud Campus and some physical spaces of your choice.

2. I will be conducting and audio-recording interviews with you two times (October and December) and ask you about the social media platforms that you use. The interviews should not take more than 60 minutes and they would take place inside the approved settings.
3. I will be conducting focus group interview with you and other participants who study in the same department once (timing to be negotiable).
4. I will seek your permission to allow me to join you in your social media platforms (digital context) and become one of your friends/ followers during the period from 2nd October till 31 December 2016 in whatever platforms and to whatever extent you decide.
5. In these platforms/ digital context, I will collect data from your activities and describe them in my notes.
6. I will collect samples of the materials you use in your social media accounts (your comments/posts, images with English texts, or any other multimedia in the English language to the extent you have allowed).
7. I will anonymise data from friends/followers, identifying information such as names, images, faces will be blurred. In addition, if there is specific information given that could otherwise lead to their identification I will substitute this with paraphrases or not quote it.
8. I will be carrying out occasional individual digital recorded chats or audio-recorded conversations with you after watching you in these social media platforms. In these conversations/chats, I will talk about any recent posts you have shared with me. The conversation should not take more than 5 minutes.
9. I will offer you a template for an electronic log or accept information in any form preferable to you.

**What are the possible benefits from taking part?**

Taking part in this study will allow you to reflect on your social media literacy practices in English. Also, your participation will provide some insight that will contribute to our understanding of the social media literacy practices of Female Saudis undergraduates in English.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. Taking part will mean investing 120 minutes in individual interviews and 60 minutes in focus group interviews. The time invested in occasional conversations will be in the extent you have allowed.

**What will happen if I decide not to take part or if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your studies and the way you are assessed on your course.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and you do not have to give a reason. If you withdraw while the study takes place or until 1 month after it finishes, I will not use any of the information that you provided. If you withdraw later, I will use the information you shared with me for my study.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any identifying information, such as names and personal characteristics, will be

anonymised in the PhD thesis or any other publications of this research. I assure you that your real account name will not be mentioned anywhere. Moreover, I will not use any photograph which depicts you or your friends/followers. Your followers'/friends' comments/posts will be reproduced if all identifying information is blurred. The data I will collect will be kept securely. Any paper-based data will be kept in a locked cupboard. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer and files containing personal data will be encrypted.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. I am also planning to present the results of my study at academic conferences.

**What if there is a problem?**

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself or Professor Julia Gillen [j.gillen@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:j.gillen@lancaster.ac.uk) or by phone on 1524 510830.

**Further information and contact details**

Nada Bin Dahmash ([n.bindahmash@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:n.bindahmash@lancaster.ac.uk))

Tel: +966504198951 (Saudi Arabia)

Tel: +447415594109 (United Kingdom)

Department of Linguistics and English Language

Lancaster University

County South D08

Lancaster LA1 4YL

United Kingdom

<http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk>

This study has been approved by Lancaster University's ethics committee (UREC).

**Thank you for considering your participation in this project.**

## APPENDIX B



### Consent Form

**Project title:** Social Media Personal Literacy Practices of Female Saudi Undergraduates Using the English Language: An ethnographic case study from Riyadh

I have read and had explained to me by Nada Bin Dahmash the information sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the information sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I agree to the interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that I will be asked to share my digitally generated materials in the English language through social media and that I decide what and how much I want to share.

I understand that I will be asked to accept Nada Bin Dahmash invitation to be my friend on the different personal social media platforms and that I choose the extent to which I agree.

I am willing for screenshot images of my phone to be used in the research if usernames are anonymized.

I am willing for screenshot images of my personal social media platforms as long as all identifying details are anonymized.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, but no longer than 1 month after its completion. If I withdraw after this period, the information I have provided will be used for the project.

I understand that all data collected will be anonymised and that my identity will not be revealed at any point.

I have received a copy of this consent form and of the accompanying information sheet.

Name:

Signed:




Date:

## APPENDIX C

### A logbook of social media activities in English

Please keep a record of how you use **English** via social media for at least six days of any Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays of the following four weeks.

Keep the following points in the logbook:

- Your name.
  - The date and time.
  - The name of the social media platform you use. If you did not find the name, write it down in the available space.
  - The device you use.
  - Where you use social media. E.g. at home in bed, in class, in the car, in a shop, etc.
  - Why you use social media. This refers to the purpose(s) e.g. private chatting, ranting about an issue, discussing homework, buying items, reading friends posts, tapping the like on Twitter, replying to someone or commenting on a post, etc.
  - Do you use social media with others? E.g. friends, classmates, family, etc. You may include their names.
  - Do you use more than one social media platform at the same time? If yes, specify.
  - What else do you do when you use social media?
    - On-screen activities: e.g. using spell-checker, using applications to do your home- work, listening to music, checking email, browsing websites, etc.
    - Off-the-screen activities: e.g. talking to people around you, doing exercise, scribbling notes on paper, having a cup of coffee, etc.
  - Why you use English not Arabic.
  - Copy and paste your contribution via Social media. You can delete if you want. You don't have to share everything.
-  You can use the template provided in the link or use any format and any language of your own choice.
-  You are invited to share **at least** 6 days of your own usage of social media in English. So, choose any Mondays, Wednesdays or Saturdays of the next four weeks.
-  You can tab submit on the provided link. If you choose to write in your own template you can email it or print it out and give it to me whenever it suits your schedule.