African Students' Self-presentation through Social Media Profile Images in University of Nicosia, Cyprus

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Abstract

This study examined African Diaspora students' behaviour towards their social media profile images in relation to self-presentation and impression management at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus. The study sought to find out why African students in diaspora manage their social media profile images and how they present themselves and manage impression through online social media platforms. In-depth interview was used to collect data on the subject investigated. The researchers used available and convenient sampling technique to select seven individual African students at the University to enable the researchers obtain extensive data. Findings from the study indicated various factors that prompt and motivate African students to manage their social media profile images. These factors include maintaining social ties with friends, relatives and associates at home in Africa, as well as sharing moments, aesthetic environment and nature with them. The study concluded that African students in the University of Nicosia managed their social media profile images in order to share their experiences with their relatives and friends. This assisted them to manage their self-images. Hence, the study recommends further research on a large scale that will explore specific African Diasporas 'personality traits and gender differences in relation to managing social media profile images.

Keywords: Diaspora, online self-presentation, impression management, profile image, social media, digital photography.

Introduction

Social media provide users the opportunity to share personal information as user generated contents. This practice is very common among young individuals that are considered to have relative internet skills, and are often engaged actively with social media to interact with peers, friends, family members and significant others (Wang, 2012). This interaction usually takes place through posting comments, photos or videos

that can attract attention and comments from other users. Perhaps, it is a way of strengthening social ties; maintaining social status and building self-esteem which often appeared essential in young people's life (Brandtzerg & Heim, 2009; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009; Mallan, 2009).

Some scholars, in recent times have attempted to investigate images people use for their social media profiles (e.g. Rutledge, Gillmor & Gillen, 2013; Tominaga & Hijikata, 2015); the interpretation of the images (e.g Hum et al., 2011; Saslow et al., 2012); motivation behind the photo selection and even the hidden meanings embedded in some photographs (e.g Boyd & Heer, 2006; Strano, 2008).

People more often than not use photographs of self and other images as part of their social media profile images. These images are digital in nature and are easier to produce and even to discard at less expense, as such social media users can select from their huge number of everyday photographs and upload as profile cover image. Those images that are not considered socially attractive are usually eliminated easily, since they are not in any physical form other than in soft copy. Digital photography of images has significantly made things easier for social media users to have an available number of potential photos from which to choose. Users can take multiple pictures to capture just the right effect they want, and photographs are easier to be modified (Kapidzic, 2014). Siibak (2009) also noted that individuals select and use photographs not only to visualise their looks but to prioritise qualities that are important to them. The users select photographs and images with more descriptions of themselves that would be successful in attracting others to their profile. This display of images on social media profile pages are done largely by youths who may be residing in their proximate or distant environment. For instance, young Africans who live in other continents such as Europe for studies purpose, represent their self-images on social media platforms.

Reports by Mainsah (2009), Southern African Migration Programme (2011) and International Organisation for Migration (2013) state that social media in the digital age as platforms provide opportunity for migrants to keep ties with their relations and friends back home. The tie is maintained through social media profile images, which is new trend that has dramatically reduced time and space between migrants and their relatives. Though, the concept of migrant could be obscure, however, it can be used evenly to denote students who have left their respective countries, especially from Africa to Europe, in search for knowledge. Such students are part of diaspora community and they would like to maintain social relationship with their relatives at home, not only orally and textually but also through the use of pictorial images so that people can see how they are surviving. This trend has always been with human being especially African students as education tourists who take photographs to document and represent their experiences to others (van Dijck, 2008).

Generally, African Diasporas constituted a category of people, which include students that have their own peculiarities in terms of experiences and living in a foreign land. The word 'diaspora' is a Greek word, and is associated with "scattering" and

maturing of "seeds". 'Diaspora' was adopted and contextualized by people to metaphorically mean people who were dispersed and settled in a place other than their original environment. Originally the concept was used to describe the exile of Jewish people from their historical homeland; and in more recent time the word is used to describe several categories of people that include: expatriates, alien residents, refugees, immigrants and ethnic/racial minorities (Mainsah, 2009). While citing Hall (1994), Mainsah (2009) explained that, what principally defines this group of people designated as 'Diasporas' is their shared experience of living through a cultural difference.

Thus, one of the peculiarities about Africans in diaspora; somewhat similar to other non-nationals in other countries is also their engagement with new technologies and internet social platforms to connect to their countries of origin as people living far from their homeland. This partly informs the reason for undertaking the present research that seeks to examine the African Diasporas' behaviours towards use of social media profile images. This aspect of their social life has drawn the attention of scholars that are interested in studies about diaspora, especially that which relate to Africans. Africans are known for their historical relevance, such as the time of Transatlantic slave trade and decolonialism which eventually defined the concept of "Modern African diaspora" as widely used today by scholars and professionals.

In view of the mentioned dynamics characterizing African Diaspora, this study explored why and how Africans students studying in the University of Nicosia use social media profile images to represent and manage themselves. Such form of online self-presentation has the tendency to produce different outcome when the Africans are not in their homeland. They can engage in self-presentation using the profile image by posting images that carry certain message to distant friends, relatives, family and significant others, and in turn receive feedback that is important to them. The University, which is located in the capital of Cyprus, has significant share of students from Africa who are studying different courses at different level of scholarship. The institution reflects the touristic structure of the country that attracts a large number of tourists, being an Island that enjoys competitive advantages in terms of tourism, consultancy, shipping, telecommunication, banking and insurance. It also provides a conducive and ideal setting for higher learning; as such it has become a center for international education, attracting scholars and students from all over the world (University of Nicosia, 2006).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to examine African students' self-presentation through social media profile images in diaspora. The objectives of this paper are to:

(i) find out the how African students in the University of Nicosia represent themselves through social media profile images.

(ii) find out the reasons why African students in the University of Nicosia manage their social media profile images.

(iii) identify the factors that motivate African students in the University of Nicosia to manage their social media profile images.

Research Questions

(i) How do African students in the University of Nicosia represent themselves on social media profile images?

(ii) Why do African students in the University of Nicosia manage their social media profile images?

(iii) What are the factors that prompt and motivate African students in the University of Nicosia to manage their social media profile images?

Images and Photography as means of Self-presentation on Social Media

Susan Sontag's observation in 1973 that tourists take photographs of foreign places as part of their experiences, implicitly suggested that photography would turn to everyday social practice (Van Dijck, 2008). In this age of digital photography people consider photography more as a means of communicating self-images and experiences than simply a tool for memory preservation as the case was in the past.

During the analog era of the 19th and 20th century, photography revolved around families wanting to save their memories of past experiences in material form, such as physical photo albums for future reference. However, today's generation, instead see photography simply as an instrument of communication and sharing experience (van Dijck, 2008). This has not changed the traditional function of photography as a tool for memory preservation, because even in the digital age photography still brings back memories. People share images on the internet and those images remain permanently there, and are often used as references. However, the emphasis on using photography as a tool for social communication today appears more significant. Harrison Barbara in his *Photographic Visions and Narrative Inquiry* (2002) identified three social uses of photography: preserving memories about the past, narrating and organizing everyday experiences, and communicating and building social relations. Similarly, van Dijck (2008) noted that personal photography is a tool for communication and experience, identity construction and memory preservation. According to van Dijck, there is a profound shift over the years in the balance between these various social uses: from family to individual use, from memory tools to communication devices, and from sharing (memory) objects to sharing experiences.

The significant change in photography in recent time, especially for younger generation, is the emphasis on the interactive function of photography in terms of communicating experiences. Van Dijck (2008 p.5) observes that, "the older group generally adheres to the primacy of photography as a memory tool, particularly in the construction of family life, whereas teenagers and young adults use camera-like tools (such as smart phones) for conversation and peer-group building." Pictures are sent as brief messages (photo-message) for the purpose of connecting and keeping in touch rather than "reality capturing" or "memory preservation."

However, the individuality that characterizes personal photography today further suggests that self-presentation rather than family re-presentation is now a major function

of photography (Harrison, 2002). This new trend has been augmented by the concept of "Everyday photography," (Harrison, 2004, p.23). Harrison (2004) suggests that "everyday photography" is not a professional or amateur photography but an ordinary social and cultural practice of taking snapshots of ordinary daily occurrences. Individuals today engage in taking photographs everyday as part of their self-expression and self-presentation, especially when the photos are meant personally to share with others online. According to van Dijck (2008) digital photography is part of this larger transformation that gives emphasis on the "self" as "…the centre of a virtual universe made up of informational and spatial flows; individuals articulate their identity as social beings not only by taking and storing photographs to document lives, but by participating in communal photographic exchanges that mark their identity as interactive producers and consumers of culture," (van Dijck, 2008, p.7).

On the other hand, social media users engage in photo sharing in order to seek validation and admiration (Jomhari, Gonzalez & Kurniawan, 2012; Morris, 2014; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015). This emerging trend of seeking validation and admiration as benefits from social media, introduced many college students to engage more with social media such as *Facebook*, Twitter, Instagram and popular Instant Messengers (IM) like WhatsApp and Viber. In view of this trend, scholars like Seidman, (2013), Walters and Horton (2015) looked closely at issues about narcissism and extraversion which are related phenomena to the general idea of validation, gratification and admiration. Walters and Horton (2015 p.329) found that narcissism tended to influence users' attitude towards their use of social media: "…*Facebook* profiles seem to reflect actual, rather than ideal personalities, and those who post the most exhibitionistic photos and use the most self-promotional language in status updates are those who score highest on grandiose narcissism."

Walters and Horton (2015) further explained that a number of *Facebook* users that are narcissistic tend to select profile photos that are "attractive", "cool" and more "glamorous" to create appealing impression about their physical appearance, more than those that are less narcissistic. Thus, it is an assumption that narcissism and extraversion are prevalent traits among people that are not living in their original environment, such as students studying abroad who are active on social media and are frequently engaged in self-presentation and impression management. These individuals can therefore be considered ideal subject group for analyzing the aforementioned emerging social media behaviour. Such users' behaviours may be exhibited through the users' social media profile images in form of self-presentation and impression management.

One of the most significant features of social media that users actively take advantage of is the profile image. The profile images serve as users' identity. Zhao et al. (2008) reported that users often have additional profile pictures ranging from 2 to 399, averaging 88.4 per user; and those who displayed their profile photos and wall post ranged from 90.5% to 95.0%, based on a sample of 83. Similarly, Hum et al. (2011) noted that a greater number of college student *Facebook* users have more than 20 profile photos in their album on *Facebook*.

The profile image is considered the most important feature because a profile owner is identified through that particular domain and this has over the years become a means of presenting self. Hum et al. (2011) indicated that a profile photograph offers an important first attempt to construct online identity, thus it logically follows that a significant amount of deliberate and conscious thoughts is put into the selection in order to offer the first clue. Rutledge, Gillmor and Gillen (2013) noted that the profile domain do not only allow users to view images of themselves and others but also give and receive feedbacks on appearance. Their findings also showed that users who were more emotionally connected to *Facebook* were more oriented towards their appearance. Thus, visual medium might be appealing to social media users who are concerned about their looks, because it allows them to carefully construct an image-albeit virtual-of themselves.

Social media users are selective in uploading their profile images. Some profile owners prefer to use photos that explicitly project their identity claim or implicitly tell about their identity. Zhao (2008: 1826) indicates that:

> …*Facebook* users…appeared to prefer the most implicit, with the almost universal selection of dense displays of profile photos and wall posts, followed by highly enumerated lists of cultural preferences associated with youth culture, and finally the minimalist, first-person ''about me" statements.

Zhao et al. (2008) further explained that there were great variations in the type of self-images produced by *Facebook* users; that some were carefully choreographed and well-polished, others were simple and rough but regardless of the sophistication, their findings revealed that *Facebook* users selected images that are socially desirable. This suggests that social media users do not select profile pictures that are inappropriate and capable of hurting others as contrarily reported by some critics. Hum et al. (2011) in their research on *Facebook* users profile image equally found that majority of college students uploaded only pictures that could be deemed appropriate in nature, which according to them, the findings were in consistent with Watson et al.'s (2006) study, which showed little to no *Facebook* profile photographs that contained alcohol use, drug use, sexually suggestive content, or partial nudity. These are obviously photos that are not socially appropriate and can generate a lot of negative comments in society. However, emphasizing on the significance of profile picture in seeking employment, Hum et al. (2011 p1832) noted that "Microsoft's study also found that 85% of employers were positively influenced by a positive online reputation, which involves a ''publicly held social evaluation of a person based on his or her behavior, what he or she posts, and what others (such as individuals, groups, and Web services) share about the person on the Internet (p. 3)."

Hum et al. (2011) findings generally indicated that *Facebook* users especially college students, in their attempt to construct an online identity tended to upload profile photos that they look inactive, posed, appropriate and alone in the photographs.

Saslow et al. (2012) in their study on *Facebook* images and relationship satisfaction with 115 individuals recruited in the United States through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, hypothesized that *Facebook* profile photos would provide a novel way to tap into romantic partners' merged identities; and their results indicated that the more satisfied participants felt with their marriages and the closer they felt to their spouses, the more frequently they reported posting a profile picture of themselves and their partners on *Facebook*. This is consistent with studies that reported that a profile picture is more important to users in terms of posting images that are socially desirable and appropriate. The researchers further indicated that posting dyadic photographs that depict relationship has no connection with personal well-being and satisfaction with life but heavily determined how people were more satisfied in their romantic relationship. This means, spouses who are highly satisfied in their relationship at a particular moment are more likely to post their dyadic profile pictures. Strano (2008) reported in her study on self-presentation through *Facebook* profile image what a respondent said about his profile picture:

> A photo of myself and my wife (girlfriend at the time) in the snow in front of my academic place of work. (Why photo) I was mainly looking for a good picture of the two of us, mainly to clarify my non-single status for people who were wondering and secondarily to demonstrate to her my commitment.

Turner and Hunt (2014) identified four types of profile images based on their participants' responses with regard to reasons for choosing certain profile photos: (a) A profile picture chosen because of who was in the photograph (e.g. friends or family); (b) a picture used because it reminded them of a good memory; (c) or because they felt they looked good in the picture; (d) and other pictures because they had wished to update their profile picture. The researchers further explained that some participants were most likely to use a picture of themselves with others in the photograph as their profile picture, a picture of themselves smiling, or a picture of themselves making eye contact with the camera; and are least likely to use pictures that did not include themselves such as drawings, pictures of landscapes, animals and other objects. Turner and Hunt's findings also indicated that some photos were more likely to be used more than others, meaning the users were likely to repeat that particular photo as their profile picture. They however concluded that their findings were in consistent with previous studies that reported attractive individuals possessing more personality traits in the context of *Facebook*.

Considering the significance of number of times users change their profile picture, Strano (2008) found that *Facebook* users specifically changed their profile images on an average of 6.89 times in a year. This according to Strano is a significant change when compared with the number of time people change photographs in their physical albums before the advent of digital photography. The researcher also noted that young people below the age of 31 were more likely to change their profile pictures more

frequently than older users who might have never changed it. Strano's view suggests that the emergence of new technologies and the introduction of a digital photo have contributed immensely to the way people use images online.

Social Media and African Students Diaspora

African students, as stated earlier, constitute a very large community of African diaspora. It was established that some of the strongest factors in addition to the historic slave trade, colonialism and decolonialism that accounted for migration of Africans to other countries such as Cyprus, were the deplorable conditions of their motherlands which were characterised by wars, political instability, poverty, diseases as well as educational backwardness. These historic incidences resulted to a large migration of Africans to Europe and North America in search for better working or educational opportunities. Today, the African Diaspora is considered one of the most active communities of citizens outside of their countries. According to a Global Migrant Database (2007), Europe is the second destination for African migrants (29.4% of the African migrants choose to go to Europe) (Experience Africa, 2015).

Africans in diaspora, particularly those living in Europe and North America, enjoy certain level of social amenities compared to their counterparts in Africa, where information and communication technology infrastructures and educational development are still in their infancy in many Africa countries. Thus, students enjoy internet services as e modern forms of communication service facilitate the emergence of social media, emailing and online t call that have become very accessible to African students in Diaspora. These internet services also enable them to take advantage of some available social media platforms to present themselves and as well share their experiences of living in a foreign land with their distant friends, relations and significant others through chat, pictures and messages. For instance, Komito (2011) stated that social media practices afford diaspora students an opportunity to share their experiences with friends and relations living outside Ireland which is not simply an elaboration of social relations enabled by earlier internet applications, but a sophisticated means that enables passive monitoring of others through a circulation of text, audio, video and pictures that maintains a low level mutual awareness, and supports a dispersed community of affinity.

On the other hand, as discussed, the social media platforms have been offering the opportunity for such Africans and students in particular living in other countries and continents to upload their photos that were publicly viewed by other users; such platforms include Facebook, Flickr, Linkedin, Myspace, Twitter and Photopage. This opportunity brought in by social media relatively e could serve as part of the factors that could motivate students' habits of self-presentation through images.

Theoretical Framework

Early study on self-presentation and impression management laid the conceptual foundation for this current study. Goffman's (1956) book: *The presentation of self in everyday life* is a study that examined individuals' self-presentational behaviour and

impression management which paved way for subsequent other related studies (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Baumeister & Hutton, 1987); and more recently studies conducted on online-self-presentation (Walther, 2006; Strano & Wattai, 20107; Siibak, 2009; Ong et al., 2011; Ruin & Stefanone, 2013) that point direction for this current study.

Self-presentation theory by Goffman (1956) is adopted as the theoretical framework for this present study. According to Goffman (1956) the goal of self-presentation is to make others accept the images that individuals claim for themselves. The theory contests that individuals apply techniques during social interaction to exert control over perception of others about their images or identities (Schulz, 2012).

Self-presentational theory which is also known as impression management is a metaphoric theory that contextualized social reality as a theatrical performance. Goffman describes individuals as actors in a social interaction which the analysis is also termed as *dramaturgy*. The *dramaturgical model* has two main concepts which are: *All the world's is a stage* and the *performer* (Tan, 2014).

One of the major propositions of Goffman's theory is that everyday settings are viewed as a stage where people are considered actors that engage in theatrical performance to create an impression on audience. Thus, the perspective of this theory in relation to this study is presented as below:

Figure 1. Goffman's perspective of social media profile images analysis

The Theatre	Social Media
Play	Managing profile images
Characters	Persons on a given social media
Actor	Social media profile owner
Role	Interaction
Audience	People observing or viewing the profile image (other users)
Front stage	Social media profile image
Back stage	Offline image and self-presentation

Thus, this theory is utilized in this study to further explain the concepts of self-presentation and impression management as they relate to Africans' behaviours and experiences towards social media profile images, specifically Africans in diaspora studying at the University of Nicosia.

Method

This research is a case study of African students at the University of Nicosia. It adopted a qualitative approach that enabled the researcher to collect data through in-depth interviews. This study conducted in-depth interviews with seven (7) individual African students between the 1st and 2nd December, 2016. The researchers used semi-structured questions to allow interviewees to gain more space to express their views. The flexibility in the interview session enabled the researchers to seek clarification and as well asked

follow up questions. Thematic analysis methods which integrated both deductive and inductive analytical techniques were utilized for data analysis. The population of African students in the University of Nicosia at the time of this study was 120. These students came from different regions and countries of Africa. They were at various levels of their programmes and studying different courses.

They were selected because they were foreigners who mainly stay for the purpose of studies in Cyprus. They had different socio-cultural orientations from their European counterpart that can also influence their behaviours towards use of social media platforms. Available and convenient sampling techniques were used to select seven (7) students which are part of of non-probability sampling. According to Vanderstoep and Johnson (2009), convenient sampling "involves selecting people for your research who are available (or convenient) for study. The selected seven (7) available African students represented African students from various disciplines (i.e social sciences, humanities, natural sciences and engineering) and regions (West Africa and East Africa). The selection of seven students cannot be an adequate representation of the estimated population. It would, however, demonstrate how the African students use social media profile image to represent themselves to other users on their network. The demographic characteristics of the interviewed available African students in the University of Nicosia are presented in the table below.

Demographic Data of Interviewees

Interviewee ID	Nationality	Programme of study	Age range	Gender
Interviewee 1	Gambian	B.Sc. Accounting	25-30	Male
Interviewee 2	Nigerian	LLB Law		Female
Interviewee 3	Tanzanian	MBA	25-30	Female
Interviewee 4	Nigerian	M. A. International Relations	25-30	Male
Interviewee 5	Kenyan	Human Biology		Female
Interviewee 6	Kenyan	B.Sc. Oil and Gas Engineering	18-24	Male
Interviewee 7	Gambian	Human Biology	31-40	Male
Total 7				

Findings of the Study

Findings from interview conducted with availably selected Africans studying at University of Nicosia suggested the following themes: (1) keeping social ties and sharing moments (2) love for aesthetic nature and environment (3) protective personality display and (4) quality of life. These themes were deduced from the responses of the interviewees. They were itemized in order to address the questions raised at the initial

stage of this study. They would also help in achieving the overall objective of the study. The themes are presented under specific, identified research objectives.

Objective 1: African Students in the University of Nicosia and reasons for self-representation through social media profile images.

From the data generated from the interview, it was discovered that students represented themselves. The representation deals with the images and illustrations. The students stated that they represented themselves on the social media profile through individual personal pictures, pictures of place, museums and edifices. These representations of images try to show the personality of the person who displayed an image on any social media profile as further indicated other objectives.

Objective 2: African students in the University of Nicosia and reasons of managing their social media profile images.

The data from the interview suggested that they change and manage the profile images for **keeping social ties:** This suggested that some interviewees managed by changing their social media profile images in order to maintain social ties with friends and families back home. **Interviewee 1** says:

> *I think photos tend to send a message to your family especially when you are not with them. I'm in a different continent, so sometimes I say ok let me just take a picture of an event or somewhere, where I'm standing or an environment or a scene to project a message to my family back home and friends.*

There is an issue of sharing moments with relatives and friends. This is part of the reasons of managing social media prolife images by African students in the University of Nicosia. Once an African student in the studied institution attended an event or programme that appears to be interesting, the student changes the profile image in order to send message home. The images that are managed on social media profiles are related to studies and sometime social events that are unique to Cyprus and its people but new to Africans and African culture. This reason can be deduced from the response of the interviewee quoted above.

Objective 3: Factors that motivate African students in the University of Nicosia manage their social media profile images

It was discovered from the interview that the factors that motivated some of these African students to manage social media profile images include. **Love for aesthetic nature and environment:** This deals with the nature of the country of studies. Cyprus as a country is an Island that attracts tourists with its natural landscape, beach, mountains and historic places. Findings indicated that most of the African students at the University of Nicosia seemed to be influenced by these natural settings and the ancient historic places in Cyprus to take photos for their social media profile images. A question asked

to find out whether Cyprus has social or environmental features that motivate taking pictures for social media profiles**, Interviewee 3** responded that: *Yes, it has – especially when I visit museum or historic places or outside the city, if I see geographical features that are very attractive then I take photographs; like in downtown- ancient buildings.* Furthermore along this line of thought, **Interviewee 7** explains that:

> *Exactly that, in particular is like since you have your family back home, sometimes you will want to take photo for them to get the impression how the place look like or how you feel in that environment. You know, that's what prompts me to sometimes take those photos.*

Interviewee 4 emphasized on the natural setting of his host country saying:

> *In the case of Cyprus I will say season, like in the winter the mountains will be good to go and take photos because there will be a lot of snow and the scenery is really good at the time. In the summer of course, the beach side, the clear blue sky, the water…*

Thus, the interviewees probably take more profile pictures in these places because most of them said that they prefer taking photos in public places to private. **Interviewee 6** affirmed this notion, saying: *Public, of course. I barely take photos in private. I don't see reason. I may like my personal space but I don't like enjoying things by myself.* **Interviewee 7** also shares this view. He says:

> *I think the one I take in public probably, you know, sends a message about how social I'm in the community so at least. Taking only photos privately you know will also send negative message to your people that you might be living in Isolation. So you know taking pictures in public where you have people around on the background, yeah, says that you are not alone. You might be feeling at home while living abroad.*

Another reason that motivated African students in the studied institution to manage social media profile images is **protective personality display.** Responses from the interviewees suggested that Africans studying at University of Nicosia are more protective of their personal reputation. Most of the interviewees want their profile images showing them as responsible, respectful, friendly and social. This is perhaps to maintain positive feedback they often receive from friends and families back home. **Interviewee 2** responding to the kind of photo she prefers for her social media profile image says:

> *The pictures will be like me, fully dressed; looking like a responsible girl. May be a write –up of something I believe in… those things that will not show me half-naked; trying to be provocative or sexy out there. I think I just want*

> *everybody to get to know that I'm someone that treats you
> how I want to be treated. I try to treat people with respect.*

Speaking in line with this notion, **Interviewee 7** says:

> *Yeah, that is being modest you know. Modesty, I really love
> that you know so whatever I do, be a photo or whatever
> activity I want to portray that in my profile photos, you
> know, modesty, being gentle. So these things I want always
> people to see.*

However, most of the interviewees shared similar view that their current host community has in one way or the other impacted on their self-personality as some perceive them back home. **Interviewee 1** says that:

> *Sometimes, yes. It does, because people see you in a
> different thing that you are not into. 'Wow so some
> changes occur.' Yeah, I think there should be some little
> changes that you might not see it as changes but other
> people will see it as changes.*

However, in spite of the need to project responsible image to online followers, some interviewees' responses suggested indifferent attitude towards what they think about their profile images. **Interviewee 1** says: *This is me when I'm posting. I don't think about any repercussion. I just post it because I want to.* Moreover, there is issue of **Quality life.** Responses from the interviewees imply that quality of life is often associated with social media profile images. The findings from the in-depth interviews indicated that living abroad is perceived by many Africans back home as an improvement in quality of life. This could be observed from the feedbacks that the interviewees, individually said to have been receiving when they change social media profile images. Such feedback is probably an influence behind certain profile images that Africans studying at University of Nicosia often want to share with friends and family back home. The interviewees perhaps post pictures that especially portray them as having good living abroad**.**

Interviewee 1 shares his experience: *There are a lot of comments, like for example, others will look at you and say 'oh you are enjoying'; 'oh life is life is good in Cyprus or 'wow nice environment!'; 'wow your school is beautiful.' Things like that.*

Similarly, **Interviewee 3** believes the notion that the profile pictures send message about one's good living abroad:

> *Yes, a lot. For example when you post a picture, you are
> smiling, you're looking happy or a picture with friends; it
> tells a lot that you are enjoying; you are happy. It tells a
> lot about you, you that, yes that you are enjoying your life.
> You are living with people- your friends.*

Posting images that depict smiling and fun implies the reason most of the interviewees prefer self-portrait images, and often emphasis more on their faces while taking pictures for social media profile images as well. Besides, group photographs, though few prefer them for profile images, interviewees considered them to portray fun, company and happiness to their friends and families back home.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study indicated that African students at University of Nicosia do manage and change their profile images; they have reasons for the management and periodic change as well as the factors that necessitated the management and change of the social media profile images.

The African students represent themselves through social media profile images that they change and manage periodically and alternatively based on the available image of a place, person and event. This finding that aimed to address research question one, can be linked to   Strano's (2008) findings that stated that *Facebook* users significantly change their profile images on an average of 6.89 in a year. However, Zhao et al. (2008) reported that users often have additional pictures ranging from two to 399, averaging 88.4 per user, and those who displayed their profile photos and wall post ranged from 90.5% to 95.0%. This has also supported Hum et al. (2011) that a greater number of college students *Facebook* users have more than 20 profile photos in their album on *Facebook*. Interviewees, who spoke in respect to those who do not often change their profile images, attributed the issue to individual differences. **Interviewee 4** said some people might be having issues with self-confidence or self-esteem. Other interviewees believed that those who do not change their profile images might be inactive social media users.

For research question two, maintaining *social ties and sharing moments* emerged from the data received from interviews. Findings indicated that the key reasons why most of the interviewees changed and managed their social media profile images in order to send messages to their friends and families back home. Responses showed that the profile images give them the opportunity to keep in touch with friends and families and also to share moments**. For example, **Interviewees 1** and **7** shared their stories on how they find profile images important in keeping their friends and families about their activities abroad. **Interviewee 1** reveals that he takes pictures for profile that portrays his environment or a particular scene. **Interviewee 7** says he posts profile pictures to give friends and families the impression of how his new place look like and how he feels in his new environment. Thus, this finding supports Komito (2011) and Dekker and Engbersen (2012) that social media platforms are used by people in diaspora to maintain social ties and share experiences with their family and friends back in their home country. Ruin and Stefanone (2013) similarly reported that one purpose of using social media is to maintain relationships, as such social media users keep their contacts informed about themselves and their activities. However, the findings contradict Hendrickson, Rosen and

Aune (2010) that international students have less contacts from their home countries on their social media than friends they have in their host country.

With regards to research question three which is on factors that motivate African students to manage social media profile image, themes on *Quality of life* emerged as one of the findings the responded to it. It implies that Africans studying at University of Nicosia change their social media profile images in respond to the perception of people back in Africa; that living abroad is an improvement of quality of life. This notion, in part, might be in line with the report by Global Migrant Database (2007) that indicated Europe as the second destination for African migrants (29.4% of the African migrants choose to go to Europe). In most cases Africans travel to these countries either for studies or in search for better living condition. **Interviewee 1** and **Interviewee 3** shared their experiences in relation to the theme on *quality of life* which according to them, their friends and families back home often got impressed with profile pictures portraying them as having fun and living a happy life. This implies that most of the interviewees are encouraged to post appealing profile pictures that will agree with the established mentality back in Africa. The study also, in support of this theme found that both interviewees and the participants prefer taking pictures depicting their smiles or in company of friends to portray happiness, fun and good living. This findings show consistency with Turner and Hunt (2014)'s report that some users were most likely to use a picture of themselves with others in the photography as their profile image and a picture of themselves smiling. However, users are least likely to use profile pictures that did not include themselves such as drawings, pictures of landscapes, animals and other objects.

Other themes related to the research question three are themes on *Aesthetic nature and environment*, *Protective personality display* and *Technology/ social media platforms.* The *Aesthetic nature and environment* is a theme that implies that Africans studying at University of Nicosia are motivated to change their profile images in Cyprus because of the beautiful natural setting of the Island and other attractive social and environmental sceneries that include museum and other historic buildings and antics. This could be attributed also to the fact that Cyprus is a tourists' attractive place. The findings supporting this theme indicated responses of **Interviewee 3** and **Interviewee 4** on social and environmental features in Cyprus that often prompt them to take pictures for their profile images.

The other theme is *Protective personality display.* It is   a theme that served as factor that motivates Africans in Diaspora present themselves through social media profile images with caution to avoid anything that will tarnish their personality or image, and as well to avoid negative feedback. **Interviewee 7**'s response supported this theme, when he said he changed his profile pictures to images that portray him as modest and gentle person. Thus, this findings supported Walters and Horton (2015) that a number of *Facebook* users select profile photos that are "attractive", "cool" and more "glamorous" to create appealing impression about their physical appearance. The findings is also in line with Goffman (1956)'s suggestion that people engage in protective self-presentation

in order to avoid disapproval and thus tend to make neutral expressions, conformity and modest self-disclosure to avoid rejection from others.

Conclusion

This study draws its conclusion based on the themes that emerged from the findings. The themes contributed significantly to the understanding of the subject investigated in line with its main research questions and objectives of the study with further support from the chosen theoretical framework. Hence, to determine whether social or environmental factors are likely to influence Africans in diaspora to change and manage their profile images, this study found that Africans at the University of Nicosia are motivated by beautiful environment and nature here in Cyprus to change their profile images as indicated in the theme: *Aesthetic nature and environment*.

However, c*reating good impression* and *maintaining social ties and sharing moments* are two themes that suggest Africans in Diaspora attach meaning to their social media profile images. The study found that Africans select pictures for their social media profile images that send specific messages to their people back in their home countries. Also, the profile images are chosen to share moments and send messages about satisfactory quality of living abroad. This study has not established specific personality traits of African students in relation to their use of social media profile images and also any difference between male and female (gender) attitude towards managing profile images, which the study recommends in further research,. However the limitation of the study lies in its inadequacy of the results to be generalized across a larger population which can as well be addressed in further studies on a larger scale..

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