Facebook Usernames and Their Attendant Identity Construction: Voices from Ghana

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Abstract: *Social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now, X) and Instagram, have now become an important part of communication in our world today. As a socio-technical system, SNSs have given users the opportunity to create, to expand, and to maintain new relations in a wider community; resulting in negotiation of varied identities in that social space. The present study, thus, aims at identifying the nature of Facebook usernames that are adopted by Ghanaian technical university students and to ascertain the kinds of identities enacted by such names. The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) was, essentially, adopted for the explanation of the rampant use of social media, and the intentions behind such use. An onomastic corpus of one hundred Facebook usernames was randomly and purposively sampled for the study and analyzed qualitatively. Personal names and nicknames emerged as common Facebook usernames. Concerning the kinds of identities that are projected, the local names were perceived to indicate an identity of patriotism to both ethnic groups and the nation as a whole. Nicknames were also observed to reveal a friendly platform for communication. The present study contributes to literature on naming practices, social networking sites and identity construction.*

Keywords: Facebook, Ghana, identity construction, social media, usernames

INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years, social media has brought dramatic changes to the online world, where both young men and women, now, exchange ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures and videos,

an observation being made by Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2015); and this has led to the construction of different identities. According to Asiedu and Badu (2018), social networking sites (SNS), like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now, X) and Instagram, have, thus, become an important part of communication in our world today, considering their wide use. Kaskazi (2014) indicated that, as a socio-technical system, SNSs have given users the opportunity to create, to expand, and to maintain new relations in, a wider community; resulting in negotiation of varied identities on such social media.

Recent statistics on the use of social media specifies that Facebook, in particular, has over 800 million users; and that, approximately, 37.2% of the world's population, presently, are signed unto Facebook. West Africa, alone, records 57.7% users (in relation to the above). In January of 2023, 20.2% of Ghanaians were, also, found to be Facebook users, with the majority of Ghanaian Facebook users having been between the ages of 25 and 34 years (https://napoleoncat.com). These figures corroborate the fact that, among the existing social networking sites being used by the youth globally, Facebook has become the most common; and it is the case, especially, among university students (Basak & Calisir, 2015). This social networking site has, actually, become a useful, and vital, platform, mostly, for the millennial generation; in the development of their social lives, and personalities (Bene, 2017; Docherty, 2020; Kent et al., 2019; Russmann & Hess, 2020). It is, therefore, needful to turn attention to Ghanaian Facebook users; with focus on examining the nature of their Facebook usernames, as well as the identities that they (consciously or unconsciously) create, for themselves, from using such an enormous social platform. Indeed, a meticulous analysis of Facebook usernames will divulge the kinds of identity that Ghanaian university students contrive. After all, people are known by different names at different times; by different people, and in different situations (Dijck, 2013).

While some studies, such as Ajiboye et al. (2020), and Awedoba and Owoahene-Acheampong (2017), have been conducted on names that are offline, other studies, like Jung et al. (2017), Ajis and Salleh (2020), and Sheldon et al. (2021), have been done with regard to Facebook usernames. Awedoba and Owoahene-Acheampong (2017), precisely, explained that a person's name is his, or her, formal identity, and an indication of the person's ethnicity, historic background, as well as the society with which he, or she, identifies. Furthermore, according to Ajiboye et al. (2020), names of persons mirror what people believe in, such as deities, chieftaincy and war. To others, names are, also, indications of people's values, events around them, reincarnation, and family occupations. Bright (2003) presented two main types of proper names – personal names, or anthroponyms, and place names or toponyms. Of these two, anthroponyms, under which Facebook usernames fall, is, only, the focus of this paper.

A number of studies on Facebook as an SNS have been done, and reported, in varied ways (Ajis & Salleh, 2020; Junaidi et al., 2020; Sheldon et al., 2021). It is reported, by Ajis and Salleh (2020), that self-expression (through social interaction and sharing information), relaxation, as well as

entertainment, are some motivational factors which influence Facebook users among the Malaysian army. These analysts, actually, revealed that most Facebook users, through conscious effort and personal reflection, actively, use their profiles to construct the kind of online identity that they wish to put across. It is noteworthy, however, that, in order to sign unto the platform, Facebook profiles require information about users, including their names, photos, personal interests, business, and educational life; as true representation of themselves (Kelley, 2007). In addition, when some researchers delved into what motivates students to hook unto the Facebook platform, their findings showed that there are differences in what influences them to join, and to use, such an SNS. Here, it was indicated that the different motivations behind, and gratifications from, utilizing Facebook are culturally-based. A study by Jung et al. (2017), moreover, revealed that older adults use Facebook to keep in touch with others, to share photos, and for mere curiosity; otherwise, for the purpose of privacy, and frustration with site tools, among others, some adults do not patronize Facebook. Similarly, Sheldon et al. (2021) found that adults, especially, patronize Facebook for the purpose of alleviating loneliness, and improving their social lives, as well as to make up for their daily lack of social activity and face-to-face interactions. According to these researchers, this has been the case following the advent of COVID-19. A study by Junaidi et al. (2020), in fact, indicated that cognitive-/affective-based trust, somewhat, influences social capital in a meaningful, and positive, way. This, as implied by Docherty (2020), significantly, assists users to, easily, and, freely, search for, and share, information; as well as to become useful in the area of managing social capital.

In Ghana, specifically, some attention has been given to the use of SNSs (Asiedu & Badu, 2018; Karikari et al., 2017). Tuurosong and Amadu (2014) ventured into the worrying trends of abuse on social media, especially, among students of tertiary institutions, and found that students use SNSs for fraudulent activities. These analysts, also, identified that there is the dire effect of social media on students' personal finances. Besides, Markwei and Appiah (2016) studied the extent of social media use by the young people of Nima and Maamobi, two suburbs of Accra, Ghana, and found that social media is popular among the youth of Nima and Maamobi, with over 70% having profiles on SNSs, especially Facebook and WhatsApp. Nevertheless, previous research has not investigated the nature of usernames that are adopted by Ghanaians, specifically, on Facebook (as a social media platform), and the kinds of identity that are projected from these usernames. Therefore, the two worth-exploring research questions are: (1) What is the nature of usernames that are employed by Ghanaian technical university students on Facebook, and (2) What kinds of identity do Ghanaian technical university students project from their usernames on Facebook?

In filling the above gap, two significant contributions to the existing body of literature on SNSs in Ghana will be established. Firstly, it will bring, to bear, the nature of the usernames that are adopted by Ghanaian technical university students on Facebook. Secondly, it will make known, especially, to Ghanaian youth, the identities that these adopted Facebook usernames project for a user. Self-presentation is much more complex, and evolves in tandem with social context (Dijck, 2013). So,

the findings of the present study will enable such nationals to make informed choices in the kind of name that they coin, and adopt, for their profiles, in order for them to know how to negotiate, and manage, the world around them.

Names and the Use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

One of the earliest studies on onomastics is the study by Yanga (1978); which discovered proper names as a reflection of the sociocultural changes, or events, in the community. Actually, this study pointed out, and explained, the significant sociocultural roles that proper names, and terms of address, play in the Republic of Zaire. To begin with, proper names, and terms of address, have been observed to form part of their daily activities, though they have been taken for granted. Moreover, in Zaire, they have been seen to operate as 'linguistic indicators' of socialization, to represent the kinds of indexical relationship that exist among family members. Finally, proper names, and terms of address, have been known to differentiate people from each other.

Batoma (2009), purposely, examined the communicative use of allusive names in the onomastic system among the Kabre of North Togo, pinpointing the complex nature of the message that is conveyed by names. This researcher, in fact, indicated that the most common verbal strategies, which are employed by most ethnic groups, are the use of personal names, and animal names, as indirect ways of communicating feelings and opinions, especially, during conflict-laden situations.

Names, such as day names, family names, circumstantial names, achievement names, religious names, stool names, kinship names, bodily-structure names, and occupational names, have, also, been found to be exhibiting various functions, and meanings, within the Akan society in Ghana (Agyekum, 2006). It was asserted by Agyekum (2006) that names are arbitrary labels, and sociocultural tags with sociocultural functions and meanings. Investigating personal names among the Akans, and/or considering naming within the scope of linguistics anthropology (as an important aspect of the Akan society), Agyekum (2006), hence, concluded that names are not meaningless labels; rather, they have either positive or negative indexical relationship to place, time, people and events.

The use of names as address forms have, furthermore, been studied at length by Afful (2010), Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), and Afful and Nartey (2013), focusing on its socio-pragmatic functions in both academic and non-academic settings. Considering the relationship between the uses of address forms and gendered identities, Afful (2010) saw the use of personal names, nicknames, and endearment terms, and titles, of/by students as address terms in their interaction among themselves, as well as between them and the academic, and non-academic, staff. Specifically, students' use of first names, and last names, among themselves, in such an academic world, has been reported to disclose their gendered identities. In like manner, Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012) reported of students' use of three principal forms of naming faculty: titles, personal names, as well as nicknames. In the same milieu, from their investigation of the kinds of address term,

and reference term, that are used by students for faculty in a public university in Ghana, and by employing James Scott's sociological theory on resistance to domination, these analysts asserted that such terms, some of which have been identified as proper names, do function as symbols of domination, and resistance to domination. They, as well, were viewed to function as markers of identities which are co-constructed by students. In a similar fashion, aside the use of flora terms, epithets, and royal terms, coinages from proper names have been identified as key terms of endearment, that are being used among university students (Afful & Nartey, 2013).

Other researchers in the field of onomastics have turned their attention to the study of nicknames that reveal their semantic structure. Among such scholars are Garayevaa et al. (2016) who explored the semantic features of antroponymic nicknames among British, and American, public officials and government leaders, describing the positive, and negative, connotations that are associated with the nicknames. These analysts, in fact, indicated that the main semantic features of nicknames, as a kind of naming, are connected to their informative value, expressiveness, and emotional content, as well as national and cultural identities. Nicknames, according to their study, have, meanwhile, been used to create certain images, and ideas, in the minds of people through the media. Aside nicknames portraying national and cultural identities, as echoed by Garayevaa et al. (2016), nicknames have been recognized to be, closely, linked to the gender of the bearer; the users as well. Precisely, it is ascertained that nicknames for females are gentler, more childish, and more affectionate, than male nicknames; the latter nicknames, on the other hand, have been seen to depict negative intention, compared to (the situation for) the former nicknames. In terms of the users of nicknames, male nicknames are found to be, mostly, used by peer group members, relative to (the case for) female nicknames which have been viewed to be, typically, used by friends, and family members, as terms of endearment.

Mensah (2016) examined the sociolinguistic, and ethnographic, significance of nicknaming among female adolescents in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on those living in Calabar Metropolis within south-east Nigeria. The researcher found that female nicknames are creative cultural symbols, and styles, by means of which female adolescents express themselves; as a form of critical resistance to the stereotypical image of women in a conservative society, given their psychological, sexual, and aesthetic, appeal.

Recently, attention has been turned to the English nicknames of male boxers; concentrating on the semantic structure of such nicknames, as was done in the study by Garayevaa et al. (2016). Here, Omrčen and Pečarić (2018) discovered that nicknames which are given to boxers, directly, or, indirectly, showcase them as strong, vigorous, and gargantuan, figures who possess features as swiftness, valour and dominance. These names are found to, indeed, express the attributes of boxers; regardless of their positive or negative connotations.

It seems that the socio-pragmatic use of names, whether proper names, nicknames, or as terms of address or endearment, has, in one way or the other, reared its head in the world of social networking for various reasons. Here, the conscious effort by users to coin, or create, such names is (as well) for the construction of desired identities online (Kelley, 2007). Melcombe (2011) asserted that, in the case of Facebook, thus, people can use a self-presentation strategy, and construct an identity, through a personal profile which includes the user's name, or 'username'. According to this analyst, a woman, especially, transforms her identity online as she takes on new, and different, roles in her life; adjusting her self-presentation strategy, appropriately, for each role, whilst using her profile. Even though Krombholz et al. (2012) detected some fake identities that are created from user profiles on Facebook, Dijck (2013) believed that, over the years, users of Facebook have (rather) adopted various strategies to (positively) position themselves online. In this vein, according to the latter researcher, Facebook is, particularly, focused on facilitating self-presentation or self-promotion.

In Ghana, aside studies, such as Agyekum (2006), Afful (2010), Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), and Batoma (2009), that have been done on naming practices, the use of social networking sites by Ghanaians has received some considerable attention from scholars as Asiedu and Badu (2018), Karikari et. al. (2017), and Tuurosong and Amadu (2014). Notable is, also, the current study by Awoonor-Aziaku and Ampofo (2024); which examined the factors that inform the choice of WhatsApp usernames by University of Cape Coast students, and the identity that these students display online from employing such usernames. These analysts, in essence, found that real name only, nickname only, real name plus nickname, and emoji only, are the most commonly-employed WhatsApp usernames among the university students; and that, these are influenced by reasons such as ease of identification, and privacy.

Additionally, Awoonor-Aziaku and Ampofo (2024) observed that sport, family, and religion, identities, are (the ones that are) projected through the choice of the usernames from the university students' WhatsApp profile. Asiedu and Badu (2018), as well, indicated that majority of tertiary students are on one social networking site (SNS), or another; mostly, using them as tools to chat, keep in touch with loved ones, or maintain distant relationships. As a result, SNSs have been observed to be principal means of communication for tertiary students, on and off campus, in Ghana. Karikari et al. (2017), furthermore, found that, in Ghana, age, gender, and personal values, are not significant determinant variables concerning the use of social media. Yet, external pressures, such as peer groups and social circles, were found to, expressively, inspire the use of social media among Ghanaians; to achieve a sound social life and personal wellbeing. In the same vein, the main purpose of the study by Markwei and Appiah (2016) was to explore the extent to which the young people of Nima and Maamobi, two suburbs of Accra in Ghana, are involved in the use of social media; and found that, just as other researchers have reported, social media use is prevalent, or very rampant, among the youth (in these areas) for various reasons, regardless of their poor economic, and educational, state. Moreover, in assessing the effect of the use of social media

on academic performance of tertiary students in Ghana, Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2015), indirectly, reported a direct correlation between social media use and poor academic performance. The findings from their study, essentially, explained that a great number of tertiary students in Ghana are in possession of an android phone, with easy access to internet; and, thus, spend appreciable amount of time on social media during the day, specifically, for things other than academic work. Similarly, Tuurosong and Amadu (2014) discovered that Ghanaian university students, frequently, patronize Facebook, and WhatsApp, more than Twitter (now, X), Skype and YouTube; mostly, to chat with friends and relations, but not for academic purposes. In fact, these researchers reported of students' use of SNSs for fraudulent activities; aside the fact that maintaining a social media page takes a toll on students' personal finances.

Though the use of names has received a measure of attention in Ghana, and the various facets, and/or use(s), of social networking sites (SNSs) have (also) been considered, and appreciated, by some scholars in Ghana, researchers in the field of onomastics seem to not have focused, solely, on how people (especially, in Ghana), intentionally or unintentionally, construct identities from their names on SNSs. Thus, the exploration of the kinds of identity, that are contrived by/for university students (in relation to their Facebook usernames), in such an under-researched area is appropriate; because it can clarify what influences the choice of usernames on SNSs, like Facebook, and the kinds of identity that users portray, or hope to portray, on the platform before they start using it.

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)
The theory which underpins the present study is the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) that was, partly, advanced by Katz et al. (1973). This theory affords a frame of reference which is valuable for the analysis of issues pertaining to social media use; such as the kinds of identity that Facebook users tend to create from/with their usernames. Put in another way, this theory offers assistance in the explanation of the rampant uses of social media, and the intentions behind such uses. The basis of the UGT is, in fact, a sociological proposition which concerns people's intentions in utilizing social media (Lariscy et al., 2011). Thus, since the inception of studies on computer-mediated communication, the UGT has become an essential tool in the area of technology, and media, research to help understand, and mark out, the copious intentions, and reasons, behind people's use of social media (Ifinedo, 2016).

Given that the utilization of social media by many individuals is centered on a variety of reasons that are based on the unique needs of such individuals, this having been affirmed by Katz et al. (1973), and Whiting and Williams (2013), these reasons may include the expansion of the social circle of individuals, and, predominantly, the sharing of media content. Wu et al. (2010) added, to these reasons, the purpose of gaming. It has been established by scholars, such as Ku et al. (2013), that, as long as social media satisfies users' desires and gratification, the latter will continue to interact with the former. Precisely, as Katz et al. (1973) noted, the needs of users of social media

can be categorized into Cognitive Needs, Affective Needs, Personal Integrative Needs, Social Integrative Needs, and Cathartic Needs.

Indeed, a number of studies have, successfully, employed the UGT to bring forth comprehensive, and extensive, reasons for the use of social networking sites (SNSs) by individuals. For instance, by this theory, some motives for the use of SNSs by individuals include conducting businesses online, obtaining job opportunities, forming international connections and/or acquaintances, developing self-acculturation, and having a sense of belonging to a virtual community (Apaolaza et al., 2014; Chen & Kim, 2013; Hossain et al., 2020; Luo & Remus, 2014; Roy, 2009). Similarly, other scholars have, based on the theory, indicated that SNSs have been used by individuals for (the purpose of) receiving a kind of psychological, and spiritual, support, for record-keeping, and conveyance-of-information, purposes, for professional progress, as well as for broadening their social circle by meeting new people (Anderson, 2011; Pai & Arnott, 2013; Smock et al., 2011).

Thus, drawing on the UGT, the present study examines the nature of usernames of Ghanaian technical university students on Facebook. The analysis of (the nature, and/or choice, of) the Facebook usernames helps to unearth the kinds of identity that are projected by these students on Facebook; so, this becomes the second objective of the present study.

RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative research paradigm, and, more specifically, the content qualitative analytical approach, is adopted in this work. This design is acceptable, given that the current study aims to interpret, or make sense of, a human phenomenon or a social construct. Here, the study is based on the analysis of the nature of Facebook usernames, as well as their bearing on identity construction. However, it is interesting to know that quantitative methods, like frequency counts (and percentages), were used to supplement the qualitative research methodology.

The onomastic corpus for this study is one hundred (100) Facebook usernames of technical university students. Participants, from whom names were sampled, were made to write both their usernames and their actual names. The participants were selected for this study because they were accessible to the researchers, and were willing to have their usernames used as part of the data set. In fact, participants for the study were both male and female students in Takoradi Technical University in Ghana of various levels and programmes of study. It must be mentioned, however, that the age, gender, level and programme of study, played no significant role in the collection and analysis of the data. The sole focus was, thus, on their Facebook usernames only.

For the sake of ethics, participants were informed of the purpose for the collection of their usernames; which they consented to. This, ultimately, gave some insight, or understanding, into (the nature of) some of the usernames, making it easier to differentiate real names from nicknames.

Thus, it could be realized that some usernames were coinages from the user's actual name. Indeed, these 100 Facebook usernames were, conveniently, and, purposively, sampled for the study.

The researchers of this study analyzed the usernames qualitatively; and the data was categorized according to their nature (linguistic features). Since some of the participants were the researchers' Facebook friends, as well as students, an unstructured informal interview was held; seventy percent (70%) having been done through Facebook private chats, and the rest, by face-to-face interaction on campus, in order to solicit their approval to use their usernames for the present study. The reason for the interview was, also, to seek further clarification(s) for the meanings of some of the nicknames, and local names, especially. Succinctly, an attempt was made to consider the reasons behind the nature, and/or choice, of some of the usernames, as well as the identities that are intended to be constructed by virtue of those usernames.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Structure of Facebook Usernames
The first objective of this study is to identify the nature of usernames that are adopted by Ghanaian technical university students on Facebook. The data, upon analysis, reveals two (2) broad categories of Facebook usernames. These include local names (those with surname, and those preceded by titles) and nicknames (which are, also, in the form of clippings and/or coinages). These, with their percentages, are, thus, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Facebook Usernames, and Their Percentages

FACEBOOK USERNAMES	PERCENTAGES
Local Names with Surname	46
Local Names without Surname	11
Nicknames	24
Clippings and/or Coinages	19

Source: Authors' Field Data

Local Names (with & without Surname)
The foremost type of usernames to be discussed is referred to, in this study, as local names plus surname. In the view of Agyekum (2006), such local names are referred to as birthday names; and, to Afful (2010), they are known as day names (the local names being observed to be dependent on the day on which the user was born), or house names, which, also, indicate the gender of bearer or addressee. Here, the most common local usernames, identified from the entire data, form forty-six percent (46%). Table 2, thus, presents the 46 usernames with the structure of a local name plus a

surname. Meanwhile, a cursory look at some of these surnames indicates that most of them are 'anglicized' names; such as *Davis*, *Quainoo*, *Vroom*, *De-Graft*, *Turkson*, *Haward*, *Moses*, *Brown* etc.

Table 2. Local Names with Surname

Kofi Acquah	Ekow Davis	Kojo Aidoo
Efua Mills	Kofi Duah	Edem Semordzi
Yaw Boakye	Kofi Aidoo	Nii Lartey
Kwesi Antwi	Kofi Quainoo	Aba Vroom
Nana Ama Annan	Opokua Forson	Naana Thannie
Papa Kwesi Mensah	Maame Fenzuah Nzoley	Nyansakyere Aidoo
Nana Aba Annan	Ewuradjoa Ampah-Mensah	Maame Efua Annan
Kojo Essah Davis	Efua Frimpong Alimoh	Nana Aba Assifuah
Nana Agyeman Amponsah	Yaw Addai-Yeboah	Abena Assempah
Nana Aba Otchere Darko	Maame Ama Moses	Mensimah Kwaffo
Maame Efua De-Graft	Adwoa Serwaa Amanfo	Abena Asiedu Kuofie
Ebo Abaka Turkson	Maame Efua Brown	Nana Adjoa Awuku
Abena Boatemaa Wadee	kweku Abeiku Ansaeku	Alhassan Siedu
Nana Ampem Haward	Megyefotsease Turkson	Kakra Anumel
Maame Ekua Dostey	Kofi Essuman Addo	Nana Abeiku Andam
Kwesi Hughes Akromah		

Source: Authors' Field Data

Birthday, or local, names are the first automatic name that every Ghanaian possesses. The ascription of such names to people, by family members, is dependent on the day on which a person is was born; making them to be, essentially, referred to as day names (as described earlier). Thus, a local name is given to a Ghanaian child even before he, or she, is, officially, named. For example, within the Akan community in Ghana, a male child who is born on Monday is named *Kwadwo*, or *Kojo*, and a female child who is, also, born on Monday will be named *Adwoa* or *Adjoa*. Given that these local names are accompanied by surnames, such as *Thannie*, *Antwi*, *Mensah* and *Davis*, the latter names are indicative of the family to which a person belongs; ones that are, usually, acquired from the father of the bearer of the surname. These surnames, as well, indicate their ethnicity, or religious background. For instance, *Antwi* shows a person with an Akan background, and *Semordzi* illustrates a person with an Ewe background. Also, *Haward* and *De-Graft*, that seem to be 'anglicized', indicate people coming from a Christian background. Thus, this is one form which some Facebook usernames take.

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Other usernames take the kind of local names without surname. These names, as given early on, constitute eleven percent (11%) of the data. Table 3, thus, exhibits all of such Facebook usernames.

Table 3. Local Names without Surname

Honorific Titles	Local Names
Maame	Efua Takyiwaa
Nana	Akosua Agyeiwaah
Nana	Adwoa Darkowa
Maame	Ama Seguwa
Naa	Lameley
Maame	Darkowaa
Maame	Darkoa
Nana	Adwoa
Nana	Ama
Nana	Yaa Serwah
Maame	Esi

Source: Authors' Field Data

Specifically, these local (birthday) names are, commonly, used, but are preceded by what Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012) refers to as honorific titles (*Nana*, *Maame* and *Naa* etc.), dependent on the user's ethnic group. Although, it can be observed from the data that there are, only, female names, such names are, often, used as Facebook usernames by the gender.

Nicknames (including Clippings and/or Coinages)

The second category of usernames, identified from the data, comes in the form of nicknames. It is noteworthy that nicknames are used for various social reasons; and are, usually, noted as nonce-derivations and equivocal. Research, as De-Klerk and Bosch (1997), shows that these names are used by members of particular subcultures; usually, the family, or a class of children or adolescents. In Ghana, most nicknames are, thus, used among senior high school (SHS) students; and the bearers of such names tend to carry it throughout their tertiary level of education, and, even, in their lifetime. These names are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Nicknames

Peace Favor Eph	I-am Tom
Gonja Breed	Flora Sweet
Buddy Bills	Fada Romeo
MzKay AD	Broxy Hinn
She Ford	Bbj Oge Pretty
Mends Kay	Lit Mod
MzAl Kra	King Ras Ebo
Starboi Ballack	Afya Sparks
Frans Will	SirJo Baakop3
Darlyn-Ella	Akosua Dee
Lady Victoria	May Lord
Oboi Natty	Naa Tia

Source: Authors' Field Data

Nicknames have, actually, become a form of identity that most people make effort to maintain in life; for easy identification by school mates and friends, in and out of school. Of course, nicknames are strictly informal and aside their use, especially, by high school students, they are used at other public places (Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2012). Here, nicknames, which are adopted as usernames on Facebook, form twenty-four percent (24%) of the gathered data for the study. In this category of nicknames as usernames, which have been identified from the data, there are, as well, diminutives of what, in commonplace, are referred to as 'Christian names.' Thus, *Gabby*, *Herty*, *Charie* and *Ernie* are the diminutive forms of *Gabriel*, *Henrietta*, *Charity* and *Ernest* respectively. These usernames are, in fact, classified as clippings and/or coinages. They are found to be used in addition to the bearer's surname or family name, and they form nineteen percent (19%) of the entire data. Table 5 presents such usernames.

Table 5. Clippings and/or Coinages

Mykel Mensah	Ceccy Sam
Gabby Mensah	Austin Mensah
Ben Owusu	Eve Nowell
Ernie Hayford	Mela Hagan
Tess Moses	Tasia Boakye
Raya Zamien	Bea Arthur
Herty Davis	Benjy Bennet
Jessy Jay	Kynah Sekyere
Charie Quans II	MzJena Botsio
Lucie Mo	

Source: Authors' Field Data

Usernames & Identity Construction

The second objective of this study is to identify the identities that are created, for the selected Ghanaian technical university students, by the usernames (local names and nicknames) on Facebook. Based on the analysis of data, the following sections present a detailed discussion of the identities that are contrived by such Facebook usernames.

Local Names

Ideally, local names, be it day names, or religion-based names as Zainab, Issahaku, Salamatu and Ibrahim, are known to, only, the bearer's 'inner circle' persons, or close relations, such as family, and friends who are neighbours. Therefore, for one to use a local name on a public platform, like Facebook, divulges a particular kind of identity. Since these names, which are dependent on the day a person is born, are unique to Ghanaians, in that, they reflect the tribe of the bearer, an exhibition of patriotism is established; bringing out both tribal and national identities on such an international platform. Aside that, in Ghana, to address a person by the local name depicts a level of closeness; as family, friend, or a dear one. Thus, the choice of being known on such international social networks by the local name portrays the user's identity as one who is ready to overlook the barriers of formalities on such a platform; to establish some closeness with virtual friends from all over the world, and/or to get to know them better and closely.

Nicknames

In line with the findings by Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), the nicknames, identified in the data, portray creativity, and renders positive intimations that, for instance, reveal an identity of intelligence. Nicknames as usernames, thus, present a friendly platform for communication, eliminating formalities. The bearer of a nickname as a Facebook username, undeniably, comes across as a person with an easy-going personality who is willing to relate with others on a friendly level. De-Klerk and Bosch (1997) reported that the use of nicknames is suggestive of a need to express warmth, and affection, between the bearer and the user; to create a sense of belonging between them. For the present study, indeed, the decision to use nicknames as usernames presents the identity of the bearer as a warm, and affectionate, person to whom everyone can relate. According to De-Klerk and Bosch (1997), some nicknames could, however, have negative connotations; and, as a result, can (sometimes) be resisted by the bearer, or can, even, be restricted by their users.

By and large, a person's decision to reveal his, or her, nickname as the username on an international platform makes such a person to stand out as accommodating; willing to fit in with the wishes, and requests, of Facebook friends. Like what was found by Afful (2010), this confirms the fact that some nicknames are used as a sign of familiarity, and a symbol of acceptance into an in-group.

CONCLUSION

The current study intended to provide answers to two (2) research questions that are positioned within the broad domains of onomastics; thus, naming practices and identity construction. Thus, the first query was to identify the nature of usernames that are adopted by Ghanaian technical university students on Facebook. The second question aimed at identifying the kinds of identity that are constructed from Facebook through the employment of such usernames. In this regard, a total of one hundred (100) Facebook usernames of Ghanaian technical university students were, conveniently, and, purposively, sampled as the data set for the study; and were analyzed qualitatively.

The analysis of the data set revealed the presence of both birthday names, or local names, and nicknames as the commonly-used Facebook usernames. Majority of the birthday names were found to be used in addition to the surname of the bearers; and minority of the Facebook users were found to deploy, only, the birthday names that are preceded by honorific titles. The use of nicknames as usernames, on the other hand, was identified to result from creativity with one's language(s), and/or as clippings (and/or coinages) of religious-based names such as Christian names.

Concerning the kinds of identity that are projected from usernames on Facebook, the local names were seen to be indicators of patriotism; upholding ethnic-based, friendly/informal, and national identities. Here, the users' identity was noted to reflect persons who are ready to overlook the barriers of formalities; in order to establish some friendship with virtual friends from all over the world, and to get to know them better and closely. Similarly, the nicknames, used as usernames, were noted to reflect friendly, or informal, identities; while alluding to the users' sense of creativity, and positive intimations. The findings from this study supports others' conclusion that names are not meaningless labels, but, rather, have either positive or negative indexical relationship to place, time, people and events.

The present study contributes to studies on names, and to the body of knowledge on social networking sites (SNS). It, also, brings to the notice of the Ghanaian youth the kinds of identity that they contrive for themselves from their usernames on Facebook. It is, indeed, an expansion of, or addition to, the collection of studies that are interested in online naming and identity construction. The findings of the present study thus implies that Ghanaians, especially the youth, must be guided to be intentional with the kind of names they adopt as usernames, not only on Facebook but, on all social media platforms, knowing that names, including social media usernames, project and reflect a particular identity of a user. Given that the current study concentrated on Facebook, further research on naming conventions in other SNSs, such as Instagram, Twitter (now, X), can, however, be done.

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