

## Self-Branding, Identity Construction and Social Media Use by Chief Executive Officers in Ghana

Delight Jessica Agboada<sup>1</sup> and Andy Ofori-Birikorang<sup>2</sup>

1. University of Education Winneba, Ghana, Department of Communication and Media Studies  
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana
2. University of Education Winneba, Ghana, Department of Communication and Media Studies  
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

E-mail of corresponding author: [andyobk@gmail.com](mailto:andyobk@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This paper examines the kinds of posts some selected Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in Ghana share on social media and how the concept of self-branding is enacted through such posts. Using qualitative content analysis of posts shared on Facebook by five purposively selected CEOs in Ghana, and anchored on identity construction theory and Goffman's Presentation of Self, the paper reveals that the selected Ghanaian CEOs share diverse themes in their posts including issues on governance, globalization, social and organisational subjects as well as their individual personae. Again, the study reveals that the CEOs who engage social media actively present themselves positively to appeal to their social media followers by branding themselves as organisational leaders, corporate spokespersons, social commentators and influencers, globetrotters, religious affiliates and gender advocates. The paper concludes that CEOs consciously and subtly construct, modify, maintain, and promote their personal identities through multiple, diverse and vibrant branding techniques on social media.

**Keywords:** *Social media, Chief Executive Officers, Self-branding, Identity construction and Goffman's presentation of self*

### Introduction

**Social media** is the democratization of content and the understanding of the role people play in the process of not only reading and disseminating information, but also how they share and create content for others to participate (Solis, 2007). Despite the fact that social media empowers users to be 'producers' (Bruns & Jacobs 2006) and offers a much more effective and efficient method of communication (Tench & Jones 2015), Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) are one unique group of social that most research findings have qualified as laggards in the adoption of social media (Brandfog, 2016; Weber Shandwick, 2012) usually due to their lack of time and the fear that they may contradict the image they already have for themselves should they join the social media train (Reeves, 2013). However, the era of CEOs remaining aloof and in the shadows and never mixing with mere mortals is over (Holmes, 2016) as social media use by CEOs is now more of a given than a choice due to the fact most of their customers have an online presence. This phenomenon has led to a modification in the communication practices of CEOs as they are now digitized (Girginova, 2013) and can generate and distribute content globally, cheaply and instantaneously (Marwick, 2010). Based on this background, three main issues arise in researching on CEOs social media use: 1) the contents of posts CEOs share on social media 2) the kinds of identities that arise through CEOs social media use and 3) the brand tags that are projected through CEOs' posts.

The existing body of research on CEOs social media use mainly focuses on CEOs in western countries with emphasis on their interaction with stakeholders and the benefits accrued from such engagements using mostly quantitative approaches with exemplars such as Fortune 500 and Inc. 500 companies (Brandfog, 2016; Jameson, 2014; Tsai & Men, 2016). However, little is known about how CEOs construct identities and ultimately brand themselves in social media spaces. The abovementioned key areas therefore present an understudied area of research which this paper explores using a multi-theoretical approach and anchored on a qualitative content analysis methodology.

### Self-Branding and Identity Construction

Marwick (2010) observes that self-branding is "primarily a series of marketing strategies applied to the individual which is both a mindset, way of thinking about the self as a salable commodity to a potential employer and a set of practices" (p. 307). To her, self-branding practitioners identify truths, passions, strengths and goals and strategically use advertising and marketing techniques to frame them for an interested audience.

Moreover, social media technologies have made the concept of self-branding easy and affordable since self-promotion on a wide scale is impossible without the affordable services that the internet provides (Marwick, 2010). Furthermore, Marwick likened self-branding to the strategic creation of identity to be promoted and sold to others. This brings to the fore, the intersection of self-branding, impression management and identity construction.

Self-branding experts engage in what Goffman refers to as *impression management* where individuals consciously or unconsciously make efforts to control the impressions others have of them. In Goffman's view, impression management is about "successfully staging a character" (p. 203). Staging a character here paves way for Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor where he considers life as a stage for performances with actors/humans having access to both back and front stages. Impressions are, however, fostered on the front stage in front of an audience with preparations at the backstage which is not opened to the audience. In Young's (2013) words, the goal of impression management "is to present a positive self by exhibiting the most desirable impression possible" (p. 2). Marwick (2010) corroborates the above views by asserting that self-branding is a technology of subjectivity that encourages the creation and presentation of an edited self, which requires the pursuit of emotional, immaterial labor.

Also, various identities are constructed, modified and maintained during self-branding. The portrayal of varied identities fall within the performative lens of identity construction also known as the non-essentialist view of identity construction (Orsatti & Reimer, 2012). Under this view, identity is not a pre-given; it is performed which grasps the multiple and social nature of identity formation, where identity is 1) not simply an accumulation of memories, 2) comprised of multiple identities, 3) socially constructed, and 4) grounded in actively living our everyday lives in a material world (Orsatti & Reimer, 2015). Burke and Stets' (2009) substantiate the above by suggesting that we take on many identities over the course of a lifetime, and at any point in time we have many identities that could be activated. Similarly, Butler (1990) states that identity is not something that one 'has', but rather something that one 'does', or 'performs' and recreates through concrete exchanges, discourses and interactions between human beings.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) worked extensively on identity and interaction through a sociocultural linguistic approach and proposed five principles which they believe are fundamental to the study of identity. These are:

**a. The emergence principle**

"Identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon" (p. 588). This principle subverts the traditional belief that identity is housed primarily within the individual mind.

**b. The positionality principle**

This principle also contests the view that identity is a collection of broad social categories. First, the principle assumes that the demographic categories of individuals play a role in defining their identities. Second, the local and cultural positions of an individual also build an identity. Lastly, it suggests that the identity of social actors arises as they assume positions in interactions. This assertion is substantiated by the view of Bucholtz and Hall that identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants (p. 591).

**c. The indexicality principle**

Here, identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including: (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups (p. 594). In its basic form, this principle is concerned with the mechanism through which identity is constituted. It is hinged on the way linguistic forms are used to construct identity positions.

**d. The relationality principle**

The basic idea that underscores this principle is that "identities are intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy" (p. 598). This means that the process of identity construction does not reside within the individual neither is it autonomous or independent but in intersubjective relations of sameness and difference, realness and fakeness, power and disempowerment.

**e. The partialness principle**

Finally the principle of partialness states that:

Any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence

often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction. It is therefore constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts (p. 606).

### **Online Identity Construction**

As new media technologies have become part of us, the theory of identity construction too has consequently moved beyond what it used to be to the virtual world where internet users get to construct, modify and alter their preferred identities online. The above assertion is affirmed by Walton and Rice (2013), who posit that the internet age offers varying forms of presenting multiple selves. Orsatti and Reimer (2012) explain a 'performative lens' of identity in social media terms as how one's identity is perpetually articulated, co-constructed and 'lived' through participation in social media-enabled work practices, where one's identity is not something given to be (re)presented but arises holistically and is shaped and changed through every-day participation in social media.

To better appreciate how the theory of identity construction manifests in online environments, Orsatti and Riemer (2015) developed a non-essentialist multimodal approach for understanding identity-making on social media. The modes they presented are: *reflective identity-making*, *narrative identity-making* and *active identity-making*. They explained reflective identity-making as

...how we experience ourselves when we think about who we are or who we want to become. It describes how we set explicit goals for ourselves and execute deliberate strategies in shaping our identity. It further captures how we come to experience a coherent self in the face of contradicting events and life episodes (p. 9).

The second mode – narrative identity-making:

captures how we narrate our own life story when we make sense of episodes and turning points in our lives and how we narrate ourselves into (or understand ourselves against) the shared stories that capture the social expectations in various social contexts (p. 9).

Finally, active identity-making:

Captures how our unreflective acting in the world already shapes who we are. It captures how we appropriate social identities when we learn the skills and intricacies of social practices and how our various identities are always bound up with activity and the use of tools and technology in our everyday lives (p. 9).

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the theories of identity construction and Goffman's Presentation of self and the concept of self-branding are interrelated in the sense that self-branding experts basically present an identity that has been worked on at the backstage in an attempt to shape the impressions their followers have of them. Finally, the novel dimensions and strategies social media has given to identity researchers and self-branders are also worth mentioning.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

The findings presented in this study are in two-folds with the first part focusing on the themes CEOs weave their social media discourse around and secondly the self-brand tags that arise from CEOs social media use.

To arrive at the findings, the CEOs were purposively sampled based on their active social media use of sharing at least a post a week (Porter, Anderson & Nhotsavang, 2015). The selection was followed by the retrieval of any written text believed to have been originally authored by the CEOs for the period of one (1) month (December 2016) which served as the exploratory stage. Texts believed to be originally authored by the CEOs were operationalised as written texts that were posted with CEOs accounts and do not have shared and links to other sources except to another social media platform of the CEOs. After the exploratory data gathering, four more months of data were collected from January 2017 – April 2017. This period of study was chosen due to its seasonal affordances including Ghana's general election, Christmas and Easter festivities which often call for an increase in intentional and conscious communication (Girginova, 2013). The posts were retrieved and stored in MS Word documents which were later converted to PDF files in order to prevent changes being made mistakenly to the data. This is due to the fact that qualitative content analysis focuses on pre-existing data independent of the research process and not ongoing interactions (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, Leavy, 2014). Following Austmann (2015) and Girginova (2013), each post was considered a single, unique unit of analysis.

The data collected were engaged closely by putting down descriptive notes at every stage in order to gain a general understanding of the contents. After having a full grasp of the issues that were espoused in the data, the following thematic categories emerged: *personal*, *organisational*, *inspirational*, *industry*, *Africa's development*,

women's participation, leadership, sarcasm, religion, philanthropy, faith, social, political and economic. A coding scheme was subsequently designed with the categories that emerged from a month's exploratory study. This was used to code the rest of the data. Dominant themes were later developed out of the categories since some of them were interwoven. The dominant themes were: *governance, personal, global, organisational* and *social*. The rest of the data was coded based on the themes that emerged. Finally, the data were critically observed to tease out the posts that pointed to the concept of self-branding of the CEOs.

Generally, a qualitative content analysis approach was adopted in analysing data whereas a descriptive statistical approach was employed in presenting the kinds of posts the CEOs share on their social media platforms. These approaches afforded additional opportunity to present the findings in a graphical representation through a table and bar chart.

### Findings and Discussion

The first part of this study sought to identify and examine the themes that run through CEOs social media posts. A thorough coding of five (5) months posts of the CEOs totalling 682 indicated that the CEOs weave their social media discourse around *governance, personal, global, social* and *organisational subjects*.

This manifestation of CEOs sharing posts on diverse subjects on social media is substantiated by the assertion of Papacharissi (2012) that an online presentation of the self must "convey polysemic content to audiences, actual and imagined" (p. 1989).

**Table 1**

*Cumulative frequency distribution of posts shared on Facebook by the CEOs from December 2016 – April 2017*

Kinds of posts	Facebook	Percentage (%)
<b>Personal</b>	189	<b>28</b>
<b>Governance</b>	186	<b>27</b>
<b>Social</b>	153	<b>22</b>
<b>Organisational</b>	108	<b>16</b>
<b>Global</b>	46	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>100</b>

### Personal posts

Personal posts ranked first on the cumulative list of the kind of posts CEOs share on Facebook with 28%. Personal posts are posts that basically relate to and reveal the private and professional life or identities of the CEO. Identity captures the ways in which we actively live our lives in various contexts (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015) thus an individual is said to have a private or professional identity if he or she performs roles in relation to these two. To better understand the terms private and professional identity, we adapt the definition given by Tomer and Mishra (2016) that private identity is an identity derived from character traits, personal attributes and their conduct. Professional identity is a self-descriptor that addresses the 'self' of an individual, and in this instance, the professional self-concept based on motives, values and experiences regarding their work.

Applying Goffman's (1959) presentation of self to this theme, it is evident that all performances on social media are front stage acts as followers are not privy to the backstage where preparations go on for the performance on the front stage. However, the assertion that social media users can control what others know of them by making some choices in life (Wood & Smith, 2005) is substantiated as the CEOs were wary of not revealing too much detail about their private life. Further, Wood and Smith (2005) continued that people infer qualities of their identities based on our gender, race, clothing, and other nonverbal characteristics in face-to-face interactions but since many of these cues are invisible online, internet technologies (social media) offer us the possibility of controlling more aspects of our identity for public consideration than has been possible before. Also, the CEOs under study shared posts on their professional selves. These posts were mainly related to their work, the roles

they played at work and their relationship with their employees.

Below are some of the social media posts that allowed the followers of the CEOs to have a feel of their private lives.

Meanwhile, I am dead serious about my weight. 2/3rd of my clothes now make me look like one on hunger strike. So, if you see me please I am not hungry. Just being serious with my life. Good evening.

- *Cudjoe (March 2, 2017)*

I am looking forward to joining a remarkable group of women at Mobile World Congress next week to share ideas on what more we can do to achieve this.

- *Quist (February 22, 2017)*

Sharing these kinds of posts about themselves is a way of constructing and performing their identities on social media. Marwick (2013) affirms that users self-consciously create virtual depictions of themselves and one way of understanding such self-representation is the information and materials people choose to show others on a Facebook profile or Twitter stream. Performing an identity through posts shared on Facebook becomes a way of reaffirming or strengthening their private and professional identity as CEOs of their organisations. Papacharissi (2012) corroborates the above assertion by positing that social roles associated with a profession are performed through repeated behaviours. From the data, the CEOs perform how they go about their professional roles in their organisations in an iterative mode on social media.

Furthermore, posts that are meant to inspire were categorised under personal posts as it became evident that the inspirational posts are a combination of the private and professional identities of the CEOs. The CEOs were seen revealing some of their private and professional identities through sharing of personal success stories to motivate or uplift their followers. CEOs are considered a group of seasoned individuals who have had a lot of experiences either in the world of work or in their private lives. Due to this, they share posts on the successes they have chalked, the failures they have encountered and challenges they have surmounted so as to serve as living testimonies for those followers who aspire to tread similar paths or simply, aspire to higher heights. Below is an example:

This is the generation of entrepreneurship and self-help. These days, the world has nothing to offer you but rather looks out for what you have to offer it.

- *Nyinaku (December 15, 2016)*

In the above, the CEO is seen urging his audience members to appreciate the relevance of entrepreneurship in this age and practically do things themselves. This particular post emanates from a phenomenological point of view as the CEO is a successful young entrepreneur.

## **Governance**

This theme ranked second on the cumulative list of the kind of posts CEOs share on Facebook with 27%. It includes posts that incorporate all processes of governing either in the nation, an organisation, a family and others. A scrutiny of this theme reveals the possibility that each of the selected CEO's line of work has an influence on the kinds of posts they share on social media. For instance, Cudjoe who is a leader of a think tank which has the goal of providing public policy research, analysis and advice (McGann, 2005) has an upper hand when it comes to contributing to discourse on governance. In terms of identity construction, it is evident that Cudjoe identifies himself as a think tank leader and also wants his followers to see him as such so he simply reaffirms the identity he already has as a think tank leader by sharing more on his line of work on Facebook. This is also affirmed by Wood and Smith's (2005) definition of identity as a complex personal and social construct, consisting in part of who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceive us. During the course of the analysis, it manifested that Cudjoe added his voice to all hot issues in relation to governance and the economy of the country and it is during these seasons that his social media posts increase. This active use of social media to share his thoughts on governance has given him an identity not just as a think tank leader but also a political analyst. He also portrays himself as a critical thinker who is capable of evaluating government policies and openly expresses his disgust for anomalies like bribery and corruption in the public sector in his posts. He indicates in the post below:

Soon the annual ritual of lamentation over excessive waste with our public accounts will be upon us. The sittings of the Parliamentary Accounts Committee have become funeral grounds for ordinary observers like us while the demeanour of public officials appearing for questioning is simply dismissive. But please what will be playing out mostly is not necessarily stealing- at least with the many

instances of excessive expenditure over allocations sometimes by over 450%. It is simply an agreement between the politician and the civil servants to pay themselves odious allowances beside their salaries!

- *Cudjoe (January 26, 2017)*

However, the other CEOs also have their domains inasmuch as Cudjoe seems to be very active on social media when it comes to issues relative to governance. Quist, for example is an award-winning business woman who leads a multinational telecommunications company. She gives herself varied identities on social media which afford her the opportunity to touch on a whole range of subjects. The performances of the identities she possess are manifest in her social media posts as she shares more on indicators of governance like leadership and women participation. Quist as a leader shares posts in relation to her leadership role and also uses her experiences to inspire other women to reach greater heights. Through her posts, she promotes the idea of gender balance in the area of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) mostly through the hashtag #Women4Tech. A post from her platform reads,

#EvolveWithSTEM

Accelerating development requires dramatically increasing participation in STEM. In Africa I believe we need increased participation across board - both male and female. We must ensure that participation in STEM is inclusive. Sometimes this means giving women extra encouragement into STEM. I am looking forward to joining a remarkable group of women at Mobile World Congress next week to share ideas on what more we can do to achieve this.

We are #women4tech

- *Quist (February 22, 2017)*

Followers of Quist also get to know her as a leader who has constructed her identity on Facebook as person passionate about business and impactful leadership. Through her use of social media, her followers get to know of her programme - the Business Case Hub where she brings together astute business men and women from diverse sectors to share ideas with others.

In the above exemplars, the CEOs were seen creating identities for themselves even though they may be seen as just sharing posts in an attempt to contribute to the narrative that is already ongoing about relevant topics in the society. This form of identity construction is what Orsatti and Riemer (2015) term as active identity-making. Here, the unreflective action of users of social media shapes who they are. Therefore, some identity cues picked by their followers are given off unknowingly. However, the CEOs may intentionally create an identity for themselves as they are well aware of their audiences and may want to be perceived in a particular way. This phenomenon is what Orsatti and Riemer (2015) refer to as reflective identity-making where social media provides a platform for an intentional self-presentation that enables one to actively and strategically express aspects of him or herself to their friends and followers through profile pictures, status updates and photos. This intentionality favours the presentation of a self that has been worked on and perfected because front stage performances need to be rehearsed so as to be staged well (Girginova, 2013).

### **Social**

This theme placed third the cumulative list of the kind of posts CEOs share on Facebook with 22%. It discusses posts shared on issues about any other topic that is of interest to the CEOs including religion, sarcasm, humour, entertainment, football, among others. Inasmuch as CEOs are presumed to be serious-minded individuals focusing on business and how they can make profit, they also take a breather by sharing posts on soft topics.

Last year in Church, one homily was based on dreams. Essentially, "Our dreams reveal ourselves to us" the priest said to us. And I can relate: The story is told of one Musah who had a dream that his bank was going into liquidation and he had lost his savings. The next day he went to the bank to withdraw all his money. You know why? Because the motto of the Bank is "Your Dreams Come True". May all your dreams come true and dream on. Good morning again everyone

- *Cudjoe (January 3, 2017)*

### **Organisational**

This theme ranked fourth on the cumulative list of the kind of posts CEOs share on Facebook with 16%. As Glick (2011) asserts, a CEO is the head of an organisation and therefore leads the organisation in a greater part of its dealings with their stakeholders. In many cases, CEOs and other top executives are seen as the company's spokesperson as they are naturally assumed to reflect the views and vision of their company thus anything they say or do in public may impact their company (Fetscherin, 2015). Corroboratively, Girginova (2013) asserts that in the case of sharing posts in relation to their organisations, CEOs create an identity for themselves as

representatives of the organisations and assume the role of the main spokespersons for their organisations. This was evident in the findings as the CEOs were seen assuming the role of the communications specialists of their various organisations as they share posts in relation to what the organisation does, what it stands for, the employees behind the day to day activities of the organisation among other related issues.

Cudjoe, for instance, pays a considerable attention to his organisation – Imani Africa, on social media. He gives regular updates on the projects the organisation undertakes as a think tank and also about the employees. Below is an instance when he talked about Imani Africa:

IMANI is looking for a creative graphic designer with working experience in photography and video editing. Interested candidate should send their CV & digital portfolio to [social@imanighana.org](mailto:social@imanighana.org)

- *Cudjoe (January 29, 2017)*

Also, Martey allows his audience to have a feel of his organisation's reach, Websoft Ghana through the post below.

In the past few weeks we have received calls and emails from India, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Just a moment ago an old client sent a text that he saw and read about Websoft Solutions whilst resting in his hotel room at Tang Palace. Thank you "The Times of Africa" for identifying us.

See what is new at Websoft Solutions at [www.websoftghana.com](http://www.websoftghana.com)

- *Martey (March 10, 2017)*

### **Global**

The theme ranked fifth with 7%. This particular theme indicates that the CEOs are not parochial neither do they focus on local issues only but rather are also interested in other countries and also travel widely. This theme encompassed posts related to any country other than Ghana and Africa's development. The executives share posts on any issue in relation to other countries ranging from politics to governance to famine among other issues. Below is an instance a CEO shared a post on another country:

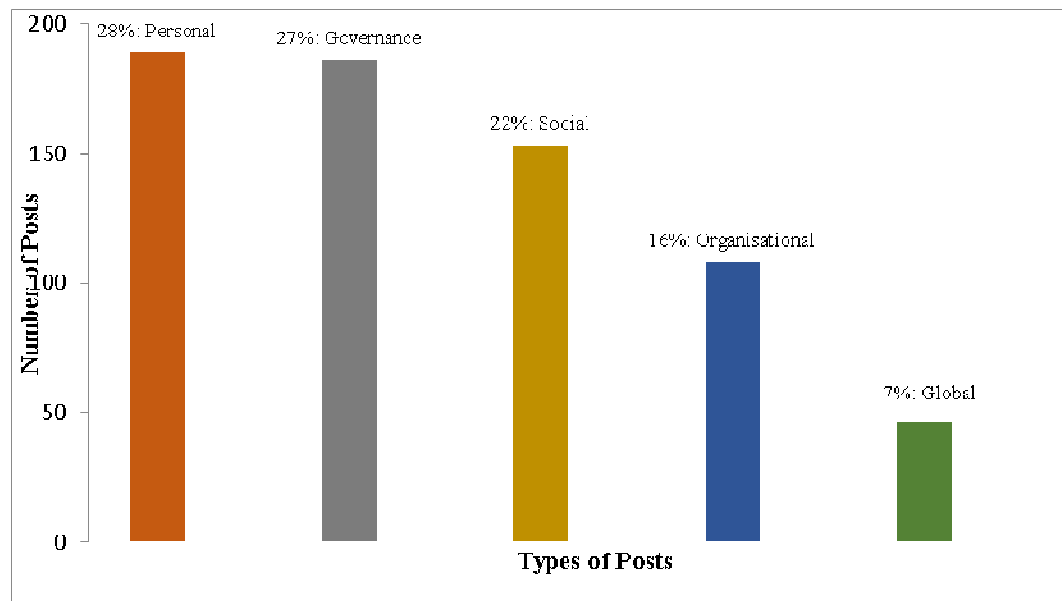
Rwanda continues to shine a light and show the way...If Rwanda can, all of Africa can. We just need to focus and act on the right visions with dedicated consistency.

- *Quist (February 14, 2017)*

Here, it was noted that the line of work and ideologies (political and religious inclination) of each CEO influence the angle from which they delve into global issues. For instance, on the development of Africa, Cudjoe's interest stems from his work as a think tank leader as he believes Africa can develop if corruption and other activities related to ineffective governance that cripple the progress of Africa are thoroughly dealt with.

Through posts as these, CEOs indirectly communicate an identity to their followers as leaders who are not just focused on Ghana but also interested in the development of Africa and how the world has or may have an impact on Ghana and Africa. They ultimately create an identity for themselves as Pan-Africanists since they stage performances in relation to their passion for Africa through posts shared on social media.

**Figure 1:** Bar graph of the cumulative frequency distribution of the five thematic categories of the Facebook posts as shared by the CEOs from December 2016 – April 2017.



### Social media as a self-branding tool

In an ultra-connected world where the democracy of information rules, today's corporate leaders have an individual brand which is separate from the corporations they run and outlined by their opinions, comments, values, stories and even personal quirks (Lu, 2015). Moreover, the internet has become the number one branding tool in this era and the advances in social media are offering an unprecedentedly easy, convenient and flexible ways for corporate leaders to manage their public relations and personal images (Alghawi, Yan & Wei, 2014). This part of the study, sought to bring another dimension to understanding CEOs social media use by analysing strategies CEOs use in presenting a salable self to their Facebook audiences and finally reveal the self-brand tags that are iterative through CEOs posts. Generally, the data confirmed that the CEOs build, develop and maintain an online personal brand through the use of social media.

### Strategies CEOs employ in self-branding

Visibility and attention have emerged as core properties necessary for accruing status and perceived influence (Page, 2012), CEOs therefore appropriate Facebook to create that visible, distinctive and consumable self that is appealing to their audience. They tactically employ strategies that project identities that have been worked on. Some of these strategies include:

#### *Distinctive hashtags (#)*

This act places the post in a favourable position that can be searched for at any time and also aggregates all posts that have been tagged as such in one category. Hashtags also increase visibility by generating attention to the posts. Most of the CEOs sampled were seen making use of personalised hashtags at the end of their posts. Tags come in different kinds but what the CEOs mostly use can be categorised under idiosyncratic tagging which function as expressive punctuation (Page, 2012). Below is an example from Martey:

#violentlydisturbyourcomfortzone #thebiggodwin #butterflyyourworld.

These hashtags emanate from Martey's consistent use of social media to inspire his followers. Quist also uses #EvolvewithSTEM and #Women4Tech. In her case, it can easily be deduced that her career path influenced that and the corporate social responsibility initiative of the organisation she leads also plays a major role in the hashtags she uses. To Page (2012), the use of hashtags resources can be leveraged in the service of self-branding as discovered patterns can be used to tailor the system's output to a user based on the user's tagging behavior (Gemmell, Shepitsen, Mobasher & Burke, 2008). Another strategy used to generate traffic to their posts which in effect projects a peculiar identity is tagging several media houses in a post. These media houses get to know you, share your views and voila, you are on your way to being a recognised social commentator. This is notable in Cudjoe's posts. For instance, he ends one post with these hashtags:



#citicbs #joysms #citinews #citi973#TV3GH #UTVGhana #GTVGovern #PeaceFMOnline  
#GHOneTV #Starr1035fm #Okay1017fm #MetroTVGhana #Adom1063fm #Viasat1Ghana  
#JOYNEWSONTV #Joy997fm

Here, he tags over twelve (12) media houses in one post so as to enhance visibility.

### ***Visually distinguishable elements***

Also, the CEOs were seen making use of branded products including, shirts and staying true to one unique way of dressing so as to create an inimitable identity for themselves in the social media space. For instance, Nyinaku wears white shirt with a bow-tie whilst Martey wears apparels with his brand name *TheBigGodwin* embroidered on it. Finally, Quist and Nyinaku write under the brand name LQ and MK respectively indicating their initials.

### ***Topics that resonate with ideologies***

Another notable strategy CEOs employ in their strategic self-presentation is to share posts extensively on their ideologies. These ideologies have subject matters which the CEOs have mastery over. This places them in a comfortable position to express their identities and in effect present an appealing self. For instance, Quist as a woman showcasing her interest as a person in technology shares a lot on her desire to see STEM incorporated in educational curricula and taken seriously especially by females. Her belief that Africa can be great again through the adoption and implementation of STEM also stands out in her social media engagements.

## **CEOs Self-brand tags on social media**

### ***Organisational leaders***

CEOs are now increasingly regarded as the faces, the advocates and the spiritual leaders of the ships they helm. In general, CEO brands follow the same rules as corporate brands, except that CEOs are humans. The men and women who wear these hats have real, distinct personalities, which often evolve into their personal brands (Lu, 2015). Girginova (2013) is of the view that CEOs' personal tweets, however seemingly banal, shape and reinforce their professional identities. Of course, by default, they are CEOs known in their sphere of influence but social media has provided an opportunity for these social CEOs to project an image for liking and possible consumption by their followers. Accordingly, they reestablish the identity of organisational leaders through posts that inherently convey the power they wield in the organisations they lead. For example,

Over the past weekend I learnt, with great fascination, the impact fake news can have. It was about me and my role as MD/CEO of Airtel Ghana and it was fake. Nothing has changed about my role.

- Quist (February 27, 2017)

From the aforementioned excerpt, it can be deduced that Quist is subtly managing the impression people have of her. It is evident that the fact that Quist occupies a position in the organisation gives her an identity. This occurrence sits well with the third angle of the positionality principle where identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Furthermore, the manifestation of CEOs reaffirming their status through social media posts can equally be explored through the lens of the definition of identity by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) as the social positioning of the self and the other and also through their principle of relationality. This principle stipulates that the process of identity construction does not reside within the individual neither is it autonomous or independent but in intersubjective relations of sameness and difference, realness and fakeness, power and disempowerment. In this case, The CEOs are organisational leaders because there are employees to lead. Therefore, the existence of the employees who are on a lower level gives the CEOs the high status they occupy. The fake news circulated about Quist's position for instance was so because she has the position in reality.

Also, to have an identity as an organisational leader, one has to perform this identity as Butler (1990) states that identity is not something that one 'has', but rather something that one 'does', or 'performs' and recreates through concrete exchanges, discourses and interactions between human beings. In simple terms, audiences get to know that the CEOs are business leaders based on their revelations on Facebook of the roles they perform in their respective organisations.

Further, Goffman posits that when an actor takes on an established social role, for example as a CEO, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it. Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both. This can be seen in the instance where the CEOs were seen branding themselves as organisational leaders. The front had already been established and all they had to do was to *perform roles that fit in*.

### ***Influencers***

The power that comes with leadership equips leaders with the quality of influence. This influence can flow through all aspects of their lives and they thus brand themselves as people who can influence decisions and most importantly the lives of people by being role models and mentors. This form of brand identity is created by the CEOs with the embedded goal of being patronised by their followers. Below are examples of such posts:

Update: It has been 2 months of peace since I got the NPA & EPA to stop the gas station close to my home from operating. Thank them.”

- *Cudjoe (February 27, 2017)*

This post inadvertently brands Cudjoe as someone who has the power to influence certain decisions in the society as he was able to stop an act like the one described in the above quote.

Also, since CEOs are acknowledged as seasoned individuals and thus have had a lot of experiences, they sell themselves as people who should be looked at as role models and mentors. Chen and Chung (2016) affirm that a CEO behaves in the capacity not only of a manager but also of a role model. Though the above assertion is true, it is noteworthy that CEOs are not role models only to their internal publics but also to their external ones as the branding is done on social media platforms to a diverse group of audiences. Below is an excerpt:

Leadership Representation! Our young people need to see relatable examples of leaders to inspire them into greater action...We need to mentor our small business owners to grow their enterprises into large businesses – to transform Africa, and of course my beloved Ghana, into the amazing place that I believe and I know is possible. Let us redefine what is normal in Africa

- *Quist (April 3, 2017)*

Through the above posts, Quist builds her personal brand as a leader and mentor for her followers to see and patronise.

### ***Religious Affiliates***

The CEOs studied present themselves as religiously inclined to a particular faith through their Facebook engagement. Some of the posts they share typify them proclaiming the Christian faith. This is a post that point to this type of brand:

My Church Choir can sing! A choir of about 10 sing and you feel like heavenly angels are marshalling you to a feast with the Lord God. As a Catholic, any good Latin spiritual can get me to donate my heart. Church was good. I bring you blessings from the Lord God. Make it a good week

- *Cudjoe (January 22, 2017).*

### ***Globetrotters***

The CEOs also present themselves to their audiences as people who travel widely and have bagged a lot of experiences. Through posts related to this theme, they share activities they embarked on in the countries they travel to, the people they met and also, the experiences they have had. In other instances too, the posts are kept short, just to notify their followers about their location but all these go a long way to create an identity that can be patronised. It is also evident that they sometimes use this as an escape from their busy schedules but not from their self-branding activities because self-branding requires hard work. Here are two illustrations,

Enjoy your holiday and have a good morning from me here in Buckinghamshire, UK.

- *Cudjoe (December 2, 2016)*

The real news is the fact that this week I have the great privilege to participate in two discussions at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona. MWC is the global meeting of all telecom leaders.

- *Quist (February 27, 2017)*

### ***Corporate spokespersons***

An individual's image and reputation may be the most important intangible asset, whether it is a movie actor, a political candidate who acts as a spokesman for a party or a CEO who represents a company. In many cases, CEOs and other top executives are seen as the company's spokespersons as they are naturally assumed to reflect the views and vision of their company. Anything they say or do in public may impact their company and vice versa (Fetscherin, 2015). This phenomenon is exemplified in the social media posts of the CEOs. For example,

DreamOval Limited has introduced a new version of the Slydepay mobile App – a disruptive mobile money app that enables smooth money transfer, merchant and person to person payments into the Ghanaian market.

- *Dadzie (December 12, 2016)*

Corporate spokespersons of organisations literally hype their organisations so as to generate goodwill for the organisations and this is exactly what the CEOs did through their social media posts. For instance in announcing a new product his organisation, Websoft, came up with, Martey stated:

Our new innovative product is creating market disruption, never in the history of Ghana has there been a comprehensive ERP for SMEs that works both on Cloud ☁ and on your own Local Server, and yet doesn't break the Bank. It's BreezeERP.

- *Martey (March 15, 2017)*

The above post by Martey qualifies as an elevator pitch as he strategically positioned it at the beginning of a long post to throw more light on the new product. This placement was strategic as it is bound to catch the attention of the reader.

### ***Social commentators***

A social commentator is someone who explores the issues of the day and can note connections between politics, sociology and economics. They put forward their opinion of the meaning of these connections either through the media; traditional or new or writing books. Contributing to the narrative of the society is a peculiar indicator of this theme. All the selected CEOs were seen contributing to the discourse in society by appearing on TV and Radio talk shows or basically, taking advantage of social media's ability to reach a larger number of audience instantaneously. Some of such posts have been illustrated in the following posts:

The Minority Chief Whip is really asking serious policy questions of the nominee minister for Agriculture. I'm afraid the nominee should be able to answer why Cocobod has now been moved from the finance ministry and placed under the Agric ministry. It is a policy oriented question and not one at the pleasure of the President as the nominee suggests rather evasively. Im on metro tv from 9:30pm discussing the vetting

- *Cudjoe (January 24, 2017)*

### ***Gender advocates***

Finally, the CEOs brand themselves as leaders who are concerned about the representation of women in socio-political spaces and consequently show that they support women to achieve their potentials. The CEOs also believe that women also have equal rights and abilities. However, this theme runs through Quist's posts more than that of the other CEOs. This can be attributable to the fact that Quist shares such themes from a phenomenological perspective in the quest to motivate and empower women to break the glass ceiling. Below is an example:

Bias presupposes what a person is capable of based on their physical attributes. Our most obvious physical attribute is our gender. The greatest bias against women realising their potential is created by the subliminal messages people receive over time. When men were hunting and gathering women spent their time home-making. How is it alright for men to progress beyond hunting and gathering but women must stay the same? Should only half of the human race evolve?

- *Quist (March 8, 2017)*

The findings of this part of the study debunk the traditional representationalist view that identity is a static and single essential personality tied to an earthly body which remains constant (Marwick, 2013). We get to see CEOs put on different identities through their social media posts. The findings also corroborate the fact that identity is emergent as the identities projected by the CEOs through the diverse posts on social media emerge through social action.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the CEOs build and communicate their brands in a positive manner. This is substantiated by personal branding experts (Montoya et al. 2002; Peters, 1997) who suggest that the online personal brands are to be built on the quintessential aspects of human personality and it should highlight the strength, goals and personality in a persuasive manner (as cited in Hillgren & Connor, 2011). Also, the personal

brand of the CEOs is likely to be more effective in generating goodwill for the organisation they lead (Chen & Chung, 2016), therefore the onus lies on them to present their best attributes only.

On the theoretical level, this work on the self as a means of presenting the best attributes is what Goffman (1959) termed as impression management. The findings here further confirm Goffman's assertion that in order to stage a favourable character, one has to employ impression management through an engagement in strategic actions toward creating and maintaining a desired image. Also, as the actors (CEOs) get on stage (social media) to perform (share posts), they implicitly request observers to take seriously the impression fostered on them. This is how the observers get to know how the actor wants to be seen. It is important to note here that all these performances and the art of impression management are portrayed on the front stage.

Moreover, the CEOs were seen engaging in what Orsatti and Riemer (2012) project as identity work. In this concept, people engage in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness. It was gathered that the CEOs at the entry points formed several identities for themselves because multiplicity of identity characterizes social media identity construction and performances. Over time, the multiple identities are either repaired, maintained, strengthened or revised due to situations. Situations, according to Goffman (1959) determine how performances are staged. This view of Goffman is corroborated by Orsatti and Riemer's (2015) that, "identity evolves over time and it is a product of our engagement in various contexts such as work, family and other social contexts" (p. 6).

Finally, it is worth noting that personal brands sustain and build up corporate brands through personal charisma; therefore, the CEOs convey a carefully pre-selected set of skills, ideas, and values which are associated with their personality and accomplishments (Chen & Chung, 2016).

## Conclusion

The study establishes that the selected CEOs join the social media narrative by generating and sharing content on subjects they are most familiar with thus making their posts skewed mostly towards their line of work and their personal lives. Relative to how the concept of self-branding is enacted through the social media posts of the CEOs, it was deduced that the CEOs use strategies like distinctive hashtags, visually distinguishable elements and topics that resonate with ideologies to shape and present themselves as salable commodities to their audiences. Also, the fluidity of identity enables the CEOs to construct, modify, maintain and promote multiple identities through their social media use in order to be and remain appealing for consumption by their audiences.

In conclusion, all the preparations CEOs go through before sharing a post and the management of the multiple identities that are given off are geared toward the creation of a work-safe professional brand.

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Delight Jessica Agboada is Research Assistant at Department of Communication and Media Studies, University of Education Winneba. She holds a Master of Philosophy in Communication and Media Studies with a major in Business Communication. Her research interests include, social media, public relations, gender and media and development communication.

Andy Ofori-Birikorang is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Communication, University of Education Winneba, Ghana. He holds Doctor of Philosophy in Media Arts and Studies from Ohio University. His research focuses on Africa with a concentration on media arts theories, development communication, critical communication pedagogy, and popular culture and gender studies.