AN INVESTIGATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A DIMENSION OF THE SOCIAL IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG FEMALE ADOLESCENTS IN KING WILLIAM'S TOWN

by

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my loving and faithful parents, Patrick Mashika Mbinjama and

Nise (Kilambe) Mbinjama.

Your sacrifices and support has helped me survive the challenges.

May God bless you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1   Introduction

According to Jensen (2000:215), though we talk of the growing digital divide between rich and poor countries, Africa has shown encouraging signs that it is rapidly adopting the Internet and making innovative use of the technology. Nevertheless, the continent is still well behind other developing regions of the world in taking advantage of the information and communication revolution. The main reasons for this are the limited and expensive telecommunication infrastructure, small markets, and lack of skills and awareness.

At the end of 1996, just 11 of Africa's 54 countries had local Internet access, but by February 2000 all of the continent's countries had access in the capital cities (Jensen 2000:215). Excluding South Africa, the number of computers permanently connected to the Internet in Africa exceeded 10,000 early in 1999 (Jensen 2000:215). By January 2000, the total had increased to about 25,000, which means Africa, with an estimated population of 780 million people, has about as many Internet-connected computers (hosts) as Latvia, which only has a population of 2.5 million (Jensen 2000:215). Measuring the actual number of Internet users is difficult, but figures for the number of dial-up accounts supplied by Internet service providers (ISPs) show that Africa has more than 500,000 subscribers (Jensen 2000:215). Each computer with an Internet or e-mail connection supports an average of three users, a recent study by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has found (Jensen 2000:215). This puts current estimates of the number of African Internet users at somewhere around 1.5 million. Most are in South Africa with approximately 1 million (Jensen 2000:215).

Apart from the widespread use of Internet for business and entertainment purposes, social networking sites are becoming widely popular in South Africa. Although there has been little academic research on social networking sites in South Africa, there have been a few articles on websites, newspapers, and magazines that have touched on this phenomenon. Social networking sites, particularly Facebook, have

become very popular among the adult internet user population, as both business and private applications.

BMW South Africa, for example, has a Facebook page where video posts of recent car models and photos of cars are placed. The Facebook page also has a link to the company's website (www.bmw.co.za) on the profile which takes a user straight to the commercial website.

FM Tech (www.fmtech.co.za) is technology industry news and opinion website edited by Duncan McLeod, associate editor at the *Financial Mail*, South Africa's top-selling and best-read weekly business, technology and current affairs magazine. McLeod's article, What SA Internet users searched for in 2008, revealed that "Facebook", "Cape Town" and "games" are the terms that South African Internet users searched for most often in 2008. Farber (2008) suggests that this is according to the results of US Web search giant Google's annual "Zeitgeist" survey of the top searches worldwide. Farber also includes the year's list of fastest-rising search terms which showed an enormous interest in international social networking sites.

1.2   Articles from popular media

The following four popular articles describe the nature of social networking sites and its influence on South African users.

Article 1:

Cathryn Reece (2007) wrote an article entitled *Facebook fever grips SA.*

"Cape Town - South Africans have embraced the internet social networking revolution, with over 50 000 new users signing on to the local Facebook network. The Facebook "South Africa" network currently has over 87 000 members - up from 35 000 in May. When a user registers on the site, they are given a blank profile page which they can update with their personal information and are encouraged to join a network. Members can then search the site for their friends and link up to each other, re-creating their social circle on the internet. .

-    News24"

In Reece's article, she mentions how quickly South Africans caught on to using Facebook as a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them. Launched in 2004 as a website for Harvard college students, it currently boasts over 25 million members worldwide. She mentions that local South African organizations are also using Facebook as a marketing tool. Cape Town-based The Independent Armchair Theatre uses the site to promote upcoming events. Reece explains that the social networking phenomenon first caught on with South Africans in the form of MySpace.com, but local internet users seem to be following the worldwide trend of belonging to more than one social network at a time. Her article explains the phenomenon of social networking sites as platforms for advertising. Reece Facebook has recently introduced advertising and allows members to "poll" Facebook users on any topic for only $6 (about R43).

Article 2:

Timberg's (2008) article ***Teens in South Africa fight 'Kissing Law'. Appeal on Facebook garners backing across the nation*** commented on the controversy that news of the Sexual Offences Act had generated first of the social networking site Facebook, then in radio and newspaper reports. The article featured on the *San Francisco Chronicles* (www.sfgate.com) which is an online newspaper.

"(01-13) 04:00 PST Johannesburg -- The lights dimmed. Couples skated purposefully onto the ice. And at the command of an unseen DJ, teenaged lips touched in defiance of what even authorities here have grudgingly come to call "the Kissing Law." "The law to me is nothing. I don't think it's going to stop anyone," said Bianca Secchia, 14, who participated in the demonstration Saturday and shared another less-political smooch afterward with her boyfriend Attie Nortje, 17, at the darkened Northgate Ice Arena. "You should have the space and time to do that. We're young. We need to experiment," said Natalie Winston, 12, shortly before the protest here. "When you're 21, you're old already, and ugly."

The new law, which authorities said were made illegal any physical, romantic contact involving anyone under 16, regardless of consent was intended to make it easier to prosecute sexual liaisons between adult men and much younger girls. Timberg

mentioned the law criminalized a remarkably broad range of adolescent behavior, including mouth-to-mouth contact of any sort, or any other form of touching that could cause sexual arousal among those under 16. News of the law elicited powerful reactions among thousands of high students who prepared to fight against the law with little more than computers, Facebook accounts and an acute sense of outrage at what they regarded as the clueless behavior of repressive adults. Timberg also added that many teens also posted pictures of themselves in amorous, but largely PG-rated, exchanges. The article based its story around Frances Murray, 14, an instigator of the movement. Murray learned about the law from a friend shortly before Christmas, with just a few weeks to go before starting 10th grade under South Africa's scholastic calendar, she learned about the law while chatting via instant messaging. Murray created a Facebook group called *"Everybody Against The New Kissing Law."* The description of the group included information on the law's effect and a passionate call to action: *"Lets bond together and stop this law!!!!! It's taking away our freedom of choice and is against Our Human Rights."* Murray said she messaged many of her friends, urging them to take up the cause. After one day, 166 people had joined the group. Then it was 664 on the second day, and she soon began suggesting in her postings a mass action of some sort. Timberg's article revealed that the protest was becoming revolutionary that a couple of news reports soon note of the eruption expressed among teens on Facebook. As the new year arrived, postings by other teens began calling for a month of public kissing demonstrations at malls across the nation, at noon every Saturday in January. The membership in Murray's group, meanwhile, is more than 14,000. Timberg also added that through interviews, authorities said most teens had little to fear. A Justice Department spokesman said of kissing by those under 16, "Technically it is illegal, but obviously those children are not going to be charged."

Timberg's article exposes the extent that teenagers will go to get attention from the public. The instigator Murray started her campaign against the "Kissing Law" on Facebook, from there encouraged a large number of users to be motivated to act in public by kissing and showing other forms of 'affection' during the protest. The article further highlights the use of Facebook for political statements and activism by under-aged citizens. The third article, posted by a member of SAPA (South African Press

Association) on the 31 October 2008, indicated that politicians are attempting to "cash in" on this potential for self-advertising.

1.3   Political use of Facebook

The following two popular articles describe the use of Facebook by South African politicians.

Article 3:
SAPA's *Shilowa enters Facebook*

"Johannesburg - A profile under the name of former Gauteng premier Mbhazima Shilowa has been created on the social networking site Facebook and is slowly gaining supporters. But organizers for the national convention Shilowa supports could not immediately confirm that the profile was legitimate. Shilowa did say recently that sites such as Facebook would be used to market this weekend's convention. However, in an interview with the Mail and Guardian on Friday, Shilowa, talking about the secrecy surrounding the name of the new opposition party expected to emerge from the event, said: "I had to fend off a lot of cyber-squatters so I'm very guarded about this."

The article explains that Facebook is no longer just for people who know one another to communicate and socialize with each other, but also for those who intend to gain recognition, status and power by creating a profile. The article also revealed that an individual who creates a Facebook profile could be in danger of receiving unwanted messages or comments from anonymous persons.

"The Facebook profile cites Shilowa's political views as "Other" while his favorite movies are thrillers, romances and dramas. The profile, with smiling pictures of him and his wife, Wendy Luhabe, was created on Thursday night. By 09:45 on Friday, he had 25 supporters." –News 24

The article illustrates the use of Facebook to its users, that individuals can list their favorite music and books. In the case of Shilowa's Facebook profile, it is said that his favorite music is cited as jazz, African music and gospel, while his interests are politics, development, economics, travel and governance. The article also illustrates that the users' online friends are listed on the individual's profile. The article also states that

politicians' profiles on Facebook do not have lists of friends like general users do; they have supporters instead. This goes for companies such as BMW (www.bmw.co.za) South Africa which has a Facebook page and a list of fans.

The article revealed that Lekota also supposedly has a fake profile on Facebook, He is named "Mosioua [sic] Terrosist [sic] Lekota" with a big black cross over a picture of him. The fake profile says of his relationship status: "It's complicated with everyone who feels we are being taken for a ride by these losers Lekota and George." It adds: "Be careful of this looser Mr Mosioua Terrorsist Lekota [sic]."

The article further reveals that it is possible to create fake profiles and to tarnish the reputation of the person's identity whose identity had been stolen and placed online. Other political leaders with Facebook accounts are ANC leader Jacob Zuma with some 1 200 supporters and Democratic Alliance leader Helen Zille with 1 800 supporters. The article reveals that social networking sites will soon become a political utility where supporters and politicians will connect to debate and discuss issues affecting the country; however as the author of the article states, this is not as successful as the emotion-driven youth response to the kissing law, since voters are rightfully suspicious of this medium of self-promotion.

Article 4:

Vernon Wessels's article ***South Africa's Cope Party Using Facebook to Lure ANC Members*** (www.bloomberg.com) also commented on how political groups are using Facebook as propaganda against other political groups.

"Dec. 9 (Bloomberg) -- South Africa's Congress of the People, formed by dissidents from the ruling African National Congress, is using Facebook, the world's largest social-networking site, to boost membership. The party, known as Cope, has attracted 9,200 members using Facebook since it was formed two months ago, Charlotte Lobe, the party's general secretary told reporters in Johannesburg today. Cope has 428,000 members, excluding Facebook Inc.'s Web site and other online applications, that have paid a 30 rand ($2.95) annual joining fee, she added.

Facebook allows individuals to create groups and invite others to join them. This article illustrates that Facebook is also a platform where individuals and groups can compete on the basis of, for example fashion or politics by creating profiles or groups that can compete for members of the public to join. All four articles are just a few of the news stories that have reported on social networking sites. All four have revealed that social networking sites are being utilized in South Africa by businesses, groups, children and adults for multiple reasons. Since the internet is so vast and accessible, there is an increasing use of social networking sites in South Africa. Therefore there should be some affect on personal identity formation through advertising and communication on social sites. It should be of interest to look at the way social networking sites are being used in small towns such as King William's Town, and how young people in particular use social media to communicate.

1.4   King William's Town

King William's Town is in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. A report prepared by Setplan (1997) for the KWT TLC estimated the population at some 150 000. The TLC includes an estimated 27 535 households, of which some 10 730 live in shack houses. The population is mostly poor and expected to grow fairly rapidly at approximately 3% per year. The economy of the area is small and only a modest rate (2%) of economic growth is expected within the next 10 years (Palmer Development Group 1998 cited in Morrison et al. 2000:3).

King William's Town was once divided into racial and cultural groups. Over the years since 1994, we have seen that this sort of segregation has remained more or less the same. The town forms part of a Transitional Local Council area incorporating Bhisho, Zwelitsha, Dimbaza, Phakamisa, Ilitha and Ndevana. Today the economy of the area is based mainly on cattle and sheep ranching, and King William's Town itself has a stable industrial base producing textiles, soap, candles, candy, cartons and clothing (Country Roads 2007).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the way bilingual Xhosa/English speaking female adolescents in King William's Town view social media. The study will specifically look at how social media, also known as 'social networking sites' such as

Facebook (www.facebook.com) and MXit (www.mxit.co.za) allow participants to present their identities in the virtual world. The study will give a description of the social nature of these virtual images and messages and explore how these impact on social identity formation among the youth of this particular geographical area. The research includes sociological aspects of youth culture which will be of interest to researchers in the field of psychology, sociology, anthropology and in the media field.

1.5   Motivation for the Study

Although there is a wide discrepancy in incomes and lifestyles, modernisation has slowly crept into the lives of many living in the rural areas. More internet cafés are springing up in the King William's Town area, revealing that there is a demand for the internet. Many of these cafés in the rural areas of King William's Town are run by young people.

Due to the fact that there is a lack of entertainment and recreational services, it will be of interest to learn of the way that teenagers in this area have connected with social media (social networking sites) since its historical development. It is also interesting that mobile phones have become a wide-spread phenomenon and the usage of the internet via this medium should also be explored.

1.6   Significance of the Study

The topic is significant because it will address the observations gathered from the target groups, and this in turn will have an interesting contribution to the field of media studies and communication. The intended study observes the communication process between participants, the sender and receiver and how MXit and Facebook enhance or demote this communication process. The topic is related to the media industry and may serve as a basis to explore aspects of electronic culture that have not yet been assessed before.

How social media are affiliated with the social identity formation among adolescents is a difficult and yet challenging topic to tackle, however, this study is essential to any other media debate as it involves female adolescents and their experience with MXit and Facebook and the psychological aspect of them choosing these social media.

This study is concerned with the relationship that social media have with black, female adolescents in the King William's Town area. Therefore the research will explore any inherent discrepancies and possibly bring to light new ideas of the ways that one's social identity may be influenced by other social constructs within the social media. Although people expect the mass media to inform them about different kinds of social roles and accompanying expectations in the sphere of work, family life, behavior and diverse social encounters (McQuail 1977:81), social media primarily facilitate one-on-one communication or group communication. However, social media are used significantly by traditional media for commercial gain, and can be used as a form of mass communication. Therefore, the effect of MXit and Facebook on the socialization of users by the influence of mass media should be investigated. Scholars have found that the media lack the relevant theory of social and psychological needs (Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch 1995:166) but it is necessary to further investigate the phenomenon that the social media exerts on the social identity formation of adolescents, integrating media effect theories of mass communication with theories from social and psychological backgrounds.

1.7   Problem Statement

Research on teenager affiliation with social media has been fairly narrow in the Western world, during the past years (cf. Stald 2008; Ellison Steinfield & Lampe 2007; Gross & Acquisti 2005). The research focuses on the use of social media among an adult population. However, apart from the metropolitan areas usually covered in literature, the population in small towns in South Africa, such as King William's Town, has not yet been investigated. When considering the fact that the new democratic South Africa is a plethora of diverse cultures and sub-cultures, the lack of such research therefore indicates

that the responses of millions of multi-cultural potential consumers to social media have not yet been researched. Researchers focus on densely populated areas, since they are easier to access. According to McGuigan (2005:51), the *Mobile UK-Mobile Phones and Everyday Life* by James Crabtree is concerned with research that gives disproportionate attention to certain groups of mobile users such as teenagers.

In South Africa, whether adolescents come from disadvantaged or advantaged backgrounds, young people have access to mobile phones which they use on a day to day basis. From the author's observation, young girls seem to own cell phones at a younger age than in previous years. Nowadays, even little girls are seen walking around with their cell phones, writing text messages and sending them to their friends while standing in shop queues or other public places.

Additionally, the impact of social media has remained largely unexplored although the use of social media is prevalent among teenage populations, and it is thus important to explore the way social media impacts on their identity formation.

1.8   Research Objectives

This study will aim:

a. To describe the use of social media among bilingual Xhosa/English speaking girls in King William's Town.

b. To gain an understanding of female adolescents' experiences with social media in King William's Town.

c. To interrogate the theories of modeling theory, stereotyping theory, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, the gratification theory, and the social exchange theory in terms of the use of social media among adolescent females.

1.9   Delimitations of the Study

The representative sample may not correlate with the appropriate distribution of the demographics of the country due to the size and population of King William's Town. Denscombe (2003:125) states that using this model is disadvantageous for the following reasons:

1. It lacks scientific rigour: the emphasis of phenomenological emphasis of subjectivity, description and interpretation contrast with the scientific emphasis on objectivity, analysis and measurement.
2. The representivity of the sample for the rural areas might be limited, as the adolescents coming from rural areas may not have access to the internet as the chosen school is a former Model C school and therefore better equipped than the average school.
3. In addition to this limitation, the study might not be 'generalizable' to the rest of the country. However this research is pertinent as a form of exploratory research to ascertain the influence of social media, and establish whether any influence exists on the social identity of teenagers.

1.10   Definition of Terms

1.10.1 Social networking sites

For the purpose of this study, social networking sites (SNS) also known as social media is defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (Boyd & Ellison 2007).

1.10.2 Adolescents

Adolescence is the period of life between roughly age 10 and 20 when a person is transformed from a child into an adult. This involves not just the physical changes of a

maturing body, but also many cognitive and social-emotional changes (Morris & Maisto 2002:418).

1.10.3 Social identity formation

When an individual tends to classify himself or herself and others into various social categories, this in turn enables the individual to define himself or herself in the social environment (Hatch & Schultz 2004:135).

1.10.4 Social capital

Social capital broadly refers to the resources accumulated through the relationships among people (Coleman 1988:94). It can be broken down into bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Putnam's (2000:13) view of bonding social capital is its ability to reflect strong ties with family and close friends, who might be in a position to provide emotional support or access to scarce resources. Bridging social capital is described by Putnam (2000:13) as the "weak ties" which are loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another, but typically do not offer emotional support.

1.10.5 Fantasy

Fantasy deals with a (re-)presentation of reality that does not exist in real life. In other words, fantasy is something that has been made up for entertainment purposes, or rather something that is not immediately present. In short, it describes imaginary content (du Plooy 2001:65).

1.10.6 Reality

The concept of reality can be defined as presentation of content as it exists in the real world with the aim of creating understanding (e.g. by means of comparison) and clarifying issues (e. g. by showing cause-and-effect- relationships) (du Plooy 2001:65). On the other hand, reality also refers to the representation of something. This representation creates the impression of reality and/or imitates reality as an aspect thereof (e.g. feature films). This imitation can be of a realistic or expressionistic nature (Fourie 2001:185).

1.10.7 Model C School

According to Thurlow, Bush & Coleman (2003, cited in Brown 2006:509-519), 'Model C school' is a term first introduced in 1992 (just two years prior to the end of legal apartheid) to cope with the economic realities of financial cutbacks in the then white education budget. Schools were required to cut expenditures by reducing either the number of teachers or services provided. Instead, in Model C schools, parents were granted greater autonomy in developing school policy but they paid increased school fees. They managed and controlled the appointment of teachers, the admission policies, additions to the curriculum, the utilization of buildings, and financial policies. Some schools even sold land and established huge endowments. Former Model C schools tend to have better facilities than other government or public schools. These schools are now attended by the middle class of South Africa.

1.11 Conclusion

The following chapter will introduce the currently available literature on the research topic.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   Introduction

This chapter consists of the literature review, and the concepts of MXit and Facebook will be described and defined by the related number of research efforts focused around social identity. The chapter also offers a South African account for the use of these social media together with a discussion of ideologies of the Western world and third world.   The chapter furthermore provides descriptions of the following theories: modeling theory, stereotyping theory, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, the gratification theory, and the social exchange theory which forms the theoretical framework for the analysis of the data gathered from target groups.

2.2   Overview of Social Media and social identity formation among young people

Facebook was created in 2004 and was reported to have more than 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion page views each day (Needham & Company 2007, cited in Ellison Steinfield & Lampe 2007:1144).   During 2005, online social network sites like MySpace and Facebook became common virtual destinations for young people in the United States. Throughout the country, young people were logging in, creating elaborate profiles, publicly articulating their relationships with other participants, and writing extensive comments back and forth (Boyd 2008:119). Ellison et al. (2007:1153) propose that with the media coverage of Facebook and by their pilot interviews, there is evidence that suggests that initially, keeping in touch with high school friends was a primary use of Facebook as users include their high school name in their profile. Since there is an overwhelming phenomenon of people keeping in touch through various means, popular social networking sites like Facebook and MXit are being studied as agents of social identity formation and the maintenance of social capital (Ellison et al. 2007).

Social network sites allow individuals to represent themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others (Ellison et al. 2007:1143). Although that is the presumption of social networking sites, (Parks & Floyd 1996 cited in Ellison et al. 2007:1144) reported that one-third of their respondents later met their online correspondents face-to-face.

According to Ellison et al. (2007), early research suggested that Facebook users engage in searching for people with whom they have an offline connection, more than they browse for complete strangers to meet them later. That perspective is fast becoming a cliché, and the recent findings imply that relationships that begin online, rarely stay there (Ellison et al. 2007:1144). It is due to this realization that much of the existing academic research on Facebook has focused on identity presentation and privacy concerns (cf. Gross & Acquisti 2005).

Williams (2006) argues that although researchers have examined potential losses of social capital in offline communities due to increased Internet use, they have not adequately explored online gains that might compensate for this. Williams (2006) also argues that few empirical studies have explicitly examined the effects of the Internet on bonding social capital which Putnam (2000:15) describes as the "weak ties" which are loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another, but typically do not offer emotional support. Some studies (cf. Wellman, Haase, Witte & Hampton 2001) have questioned whether the Internet supplements or, in fact, supplants strong ties.

2.3   Social media: integration with mass media

Although social media are known for facilitating primarily one-on–one communication as well as group communication, the Social TV project suggests the increasing integration of television and computer technology to support sociable, computer-mediated group viewing experiences (Oehlberg, Ducheneaut, Thornton, Moore & Nickell 2006:1). The Social TV experiment involved participants to collectively observe various television shows in a specially equipped room (laboratory) in Stanford University (Oehlberg et al. 2006:2). The three exploratory sessions allowed viewers to be

located in the same room and they could interact face-to-face. The smallest group size was 5 and the largest 8. Participants were between 20 and 50 years old, with more males than females (70% and 30% respectively) participating. Most were work colleagues but a few shared social activities outside of work. Participants watched a soccer game or one of two episodes of a documentary (the BBC's "1900 House"), each lasting approximately 2 hours overall. Two cameras were used to videotape both the participants' behavior and the content of the television show. The second phase of the study held six additional viewing sessions, this time separating the participants into two groups located in two different rooms. A social audio link was established between the rooms using two computers running Robust Audio Tool. By relaying all audio between the two rooms, each group could hear what the other was saying at all times. These later experiments were meant to simulate some of the conditions users might encounter while watching television in a distributed setting. According to Oehlberg et al. (2006:3), the most striking finding to emerge from their observations was the surprising similarity in the nature and structure of the participants' conversations across the two experimental conditions.

It is often thought that television viewing is an isolating, anti-social experience, but ethnographic studies (Lull 1990) have shown that "TV and other mass media, rarely mentioned as vital forces in the construction or maintenance of interpersonal relations, can now be seen to play central roles in the methods which families and other social units employ to interact normatively."

According to Fourie (2001:212), mass communication can be defined in a number of ways, especially against the background of the latest developments in information and communication technology (ICT). ICT has increased the number and kinds of media involved in transmitting messages of various kinds and in various formats to bigger, increasingly heterogeneous and global audiences. The term "mass communication" in ICT applies when people in their private and individual capacity communicate through intermediate media (such as television, radio or internet) to large, relatively heterogeneous and anonymous individuals and groups (Beer 1992:7). These mass media are common communication platforms. However, there is an increasing link between the

institutional mass media and the private networks of communication that are facilitated through social networking sites. Mass media are embracing social media in that mainstream TV programmes are mentioning social networking sites and mobile phone company advertisements are selling handsets by promoting their social networking functionality, example an article, *MXit campaign for World Aids Day* (www.bizcommunity.com) explained how MXit helped raise HIV/AIDS awareness on World Aids Day, Monday, 1 December 2008. The company teamed up with South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) to launch a campaign that should simultaneously raise HIV/AIDS awareness amongst a key target group - the youth of South Africa (Unknown 2008).

Webmasters or even users promote brands, or a company promotes itself on social networking sites. Consumers are being targeted through social media, where they can express their thoughts, opinions, recommendations and complaints. Such social media include blogs, wikis, forums, discussion and news groups. The major difference between social media and mass media is that the consumer/user has a large amount of control over the content disseminated and received when participating in social media. However, consumers/users are not in total control as the marketers can participate and facilitate in the conversations. Youtube (www.youtube.com) has distinctly impacted on the way that advertisers are reaching the public, by placing video advertisements online and allowing the user to engage with the products/services in order to create a brand identity. Social media is comprised of virtual communities. Virtual communities play a significant role in the online behavior of social media users. Online communities have the same advantage as offline communities to discuss issues and influence societal opinions, and by utilizing social media, it is also becoming much easier for advertisers to reach the public.

Celebrities are promoting their MySpace (www.myspace.com) pages in their mass media exposure so that viewers, listeners and readers may be able to view their sites so that the celebrities gain yet more publicity.

If mass media can include aspects of social media in their content (such as the Social TV project, which facilitates the observation of television viewing behavior of subjects and includes social interaction via internet (cf. Wellman, Haase, Witte & Hampton 2001) and if social media can include various aspects of mass media (such as

online computer games, which are a form of social media that inevitably includes the internet); then social media are showing similar trends as mass media: Both mass media and social media can reach small or large audiences, due to the fact that both of these media use the internet and have the potential of reaching a global audience, e.g. a blog post can either reach millions of people or none at all; similarly, a television show can potentially achieve a similar result. The distinction that content is determined by institutional or, respectively, individual decisions, is thus becoming increasingly blurred.

Very few systems have been developed to support social interactions of any kind among television viewers. There are two projects which are closest to the Social TV project of Oehlberg et al. (2006:2); firstly Chuah's (2002, cited in Coppens, Trappeniers & Gordon 2005:1-3) "reality instant messenger", which provides both "buddy surfing" (an awareness that friends are watching the same television program) and an IM-based communication channel between viewers. The second related project is Alcatel's Amigo TV (Coppens et al. 2005:1-3), which allows television viewers to share opinions and feelings with friends via an interactive broadband link. Amigo users are offered voice communication as the primary way of interaction with their friends. The users are also represented by their selected avatar (for example, a bird) in an overlay on their TV screen, and their friends should also be watching the same channel. Amigo TV is a mix of entertainment and social needs by combining public broadcast (football), the familiar surroundings (the home) and the need to communicate (Coppens et al. 2005:1-3).

Another approach has been to transform television into an inhabited virtual world. Benford et al. (1998, cited in Oehlberg et al. 2006:2) report that audience member's control avatars in a 3D space and can interact with the performers of the show they are watching. The focus here is on breaking down the barriers between audience members and performers, as opposed to facilitating group interaction while watching television. Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant & Kelly (2003:39) mention that it can be argued that 'digital television' is not a new medium but is best understood as a change in the form of delivering the content of the medium of TV, which has a history of some fifty years or more (Lister et al. 2003:39-40). This would suggest a further development within an 'old' medium 'in new times' as distinct from a 'new medium'. Lister et al. (2003:39-40) include the insightful assertion of Jay Bolster & Richard Grusin who argued the effective

tie between new media and old media as a structured condition to all media. They propose that the novelty in new media is the manner in which the digital technologies that they employ, 'refashion older media', and these older media in turn 'refashion themselves to answer to the challenges of the new media'.

According to Dijk (2006:9) new media are defined by three characteristics; they are media which are both integrated and interactive and also use digital code at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The structural new media characteristics are the integration of telecommunications, data communications and mass communications in a single medium. Dijk (2006:7) mentions that integration leads to a gradual merging of telecommunications, data communications and mass communications; and he predicts that the separate meanings of these terms will probably even disappear.

Since there is an integrated link between social media and mass media, the modeling theory and the stereotyping theory can be applied to evaluate how the mass media are infiltrating the social media, how this influences the way that female adolescents use these social networking sites and how this, in turn, forms their social identity online. Therefore the application of the modeling theory and the stereotype theory in social media is appropriate here.

Online computer games, for instance, are displacing television among young viewers, in part because they offer an interactive, social, and location-independent experience (Schwartz 2004). Electronic games are a relatively new form of media but they have already established themselves as an everyday phenomenon for the children around the world who play them extensively (Salonius-Pasternak 2005:5).

Salonius-Pasternak (2005:5) mentions that video games and computer games have a range of possible effects on players and have been studied in many fields of scientific literature, with areas of focus including whether games with violent content increase aggression or a tendency towards violence. Although most of the research on computer and video games focuses on possible negative influences on children and adolescents, the games also have the potential to contribute positive influences on development. Some research has proven that computer and video games improve aspects of visual attention and perceptual-motor skills (cf. Green & Bavelier 2003:534-537). Other researchers include the possible influences of computer and video games on cognitive skills and

development and the possible therapeutic or prosocial effects of computer and video games (van Reekum et al. 2004). Salonius-Pasternak (2005:6) mentions that computer and video games have been studied as a form of play and as educational tools. Most studies indicate that the majority of US American school-aged children are playing electronic games on home computers or console game systems such as Nintendo, PlayStation and X-Box (cf. Annenberg Public Policy Center 2000, Kaiser Family Foundation 2002, Walsh, Gentile, Van Overbeke & Chasco 2002). Salonius-Pasternak (2005:6) cites Beentjes, Koolstra, Marseille & van der Voort (2001), who observe that the prevalence and popularity of electronic play is equally true for European and Japanese children. A recent study of Finnish children, 8 to 10 years old, showed that their most common use of computers and mobile phones is playing games (cf. Suoranta & Lehtimäki 2004). Salonius-Pasternak (2005:7) explains that currently, the most popular types of electronic play are console and hand-held games. She further explains that graphics and realism are two elements of computer and video games that make them attractive to players. Sports games not only provide opportunities to "play" virtual soccer, basketball, or any other sport a player can imagine, they also provide realistic representations of well-known sports arenas, real-life commentators (e.g., American football commentator John Madden plays himself in *John Madden Football*), and all the signs and symbols that help define a player as being linked to a particular sport. The aspect of what Salonius-Pasternak calls realism describes how real the game feels to its players, suggesting to the virtual player how vivid the depicted world seems to be. Salonius-Pasternak (2005:8) explains that an aspect of the games' realism is enabled by haptics technology, through which players can experience some of the force and vibration that matches the depicted play. She continues to explain that, in addition to graphics and realism, another attractive feature of computer and video games is the use of levels or graded challenges, starting at basic level, where there is not a lot of strategy involved. To succeed at the highest level, players must use complex strategies and think abstractly in order to systematically evaluate different options and to carefully plan their approach to the game. Salonius-Pasternak (2005:8) remarks that the increasing potential for interactivity is another reason why players are drawn to computer and video games. Significantly, most console game systems provide ways for more than one person to play

at the same time, and the Internet is so easily accessible that it encourages much more interest for computer games as well. Although the first online game was created in 1969, it was not until the early 1990s and until there was widespread use of the Internet that online gaming became popular (Mulligan 1999, cited in Salonius-Pasternak 2005:8). Salonius-Pasternak (2005:8) puts forward the observation that currently, children on different continents who have never met can simultaneously play computer and console games together through several different technological facilities. Players often find that the game experience is richer when playing with or against people rather than the computer (PS3 Land.com 2004). Salonius-Pasternak (2005:8) implies that the Internet also created the virtually unlimited potential for players to trade tips and strategies, access demo versions of new games, and form friendships based on their shared interest.

Salonius-Pasternak (2005:9) believes that computer and video games offer unique opportunities for a child to play according to rules within a make-believe setting. An example that she gives is the video game *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4*, where the child, by identifying with the main character, is able to transcend the rules of physical reality by leaping higher and turning faster on a skateboard than she ever could in reality.

2.4.   South African's emulate Western practices and behavior

It is an interesting observation that young people in technologically underdeveloped areas such as King William's Town react to new media and this raises curiosity about whether there is a relationship between the adolescents' social identity formation and the virtual sites they come across.

 Boyd (2008:119) questions why there is a rising flock to these sites by American high school teenagers and also by other teenagers from other countries. What attracts teenagers to this type of service? How do these sites fit into their lives? What are they learning from their participation? Are these online activities like face-to-face friendships or are they different, or complementary? Boyd (2008:119) believes that in addressing these questions, researchers may provide long-lasting insights into identity formation,

status negotiation and peer-to-peer sociality. It is for this reason that these issues will be explored in a South African context, in terms of the social identity formation of female adolescents in King William's Town.

Pertierra (2005:23) conducted a survey of 364 respondents from June through August 2004 to investigate the ways in which cell phones impact the lives of users in the Philippine society. The results showed that most young respondents (aged 14-23) used the mobile phone to expand their circle of relationships. Respondents also claimed to be truthful to their virtual friends; this was particularly so among older informants. Young users discussed topics such as love and sex, and most were interested in meeting their virtual friends.

Ellison et al. (2007) conducted a study that illustrates how undergraduate students' relationships with Facebook varied, depending on the degree of the individuals' self-esteem. In addition to Ellison's assessment of bonding and bridging social capital, Facebook usage was found to interact with measures of psychological well-being, suggesting that it might provide greater benefits for users experiencing low self-esteem and low life-satisfaction. In their study, Ellison et al. (2007) also noted a few demographic factors; for instance, from the random sample of 800 Michigan State University (MSU) undergraduates, white students are somewhat more likely to have bridging social capital than non-white students. Against this background, it will be interesting to see how the black, South African female adolescents respond to their knowledge and experience with MXit and Facebook. It will also be to note whether or not their age (younger adolescents and older adolescents) accounts for their interaction with these social media. It will further be of interest to examine how the new connections result in an increase in social capital (Ellison et al. 2007) for the users.

Pertierra (2005:25) affirms that mobile phones are increasingly playing a major role in the current communication revolution and are often referred to as one of the "new media". According to Pertierra (2005:25), each of these new media is characterized as a computer-mediated-interactive-communication technology or CMICT). The mobile has become an important tool in young people's lives and they usually consider its communicative function as far more important than the social meaning which develops through this communication (Stald 2008:143). Young people in South Africa are very

attached to their cell phone as it is their link to friends and family. It is on their mobiles that they update, coordinate and document socially important information. The fact that the mobile is constantly available is evident to researchers who observe that MXit and Facebook have become a craze among the young people since the virtual sites are available on mobile phones. This is extremely useful to users as the mobile is still a telephone but offers additional services such as the Internet. Stald (2008:144-148) comments that even non-advanced users of technologies can access the internet on their phones, and this should account for the role mobile phones play in contemporary youth culture and identity. When using the mobile, one has to learn the codes, the unwritten rules for meaning, language and normative behavior which are essential in order to make the communication meaningful. Therefore, young users have constant reminders of the presence of others through the mechanical expressions of the mobile such as sounds, vibrations, and visual effects or through other meaningful content (Stald 2008:153). Some unexpected online gains are evident from the results of the survey from the Philippine society; among the text services most often used are the "Text God"- a service involving biblical quotes, news services and games which ultimately indicate that authentic and spiritual relationships are possible in cyber-reality (Pertierra 2005:29). This also suggests that religious institutions have successfully accessed this powerful medium and are providing a market-specific use of it for their own interests.

Stald's (2008:159) findings from a series of individual interviews, questionnaire surveys and observations of 15 to 24-year old Danes and their mobile phone use, conducted in 2004 and 2006, resulted in a discussion among academics on the modification of rules and norms for social behavior. Rules and norms are modified as the use and the meanings of the mobile change and technically develop over time. Pertierra (2005:37) suggests that apart from fortuitous exchanges resulting in sex text, various cell phone service providers offer text chat rooms where users can meet people interested in friendship and companionship. Pertierra (2005) believes that many people who use these chat rooms engage in sex text. It is particularly for this reason that the mobile phone should be studied for its impact on user sociality on the macro and micro level. Furthermore, the social demography; political economy; conversation, discourse and text

analysis; and ethnography should be the four methods for studying the mobile phone (McGuigan 2005:45).

Donath (2007) agrees with Stald (2008:159) that the meaningful changes and social ties offered by mobile phone applications provide many benefits, including companionship, access to information and emotional and material support (c.f. Granovetter 1973; Wellman, Garton, & Haythornthwaite & Gulia 1996 cited in Ellison et al. 2007) which is found in participating in social sites. Increasing the number of ties increases access to these benefits, therefore Ellison et al. (2007) illustrate that it should be possible to increase the scale of one's social world—to create a "supernet" with many more ties than is feasible without such socially assistive tools. The social capital created by these networks generates broader identities and generalized reciprocity. They also hypothesized that the relationship between the user's intensity of Facebook use and his/her bonding social capital will vary depending on the degree of the person's satisfaction with life. It may be safe to say that adolescents are 'pressured' into joining social networking sites, therefore applying the psychological theories such as Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, the gratification theory, the social exchange theory and the social identity theory.

Hargittai (2007) says that the challenge in studying social network site usage stems from the fact that large-scale questionnaires (e.g., the Current Population Survey and the General Social Survey in the U.S) have mainly focused on adult populations, with relatively few young people represented in their samples. According to McGuigan (2005:51), the *Mobile UK-Mobile Phones and Everyday Life* by James Crabtree criticizes research that gives disproportionate attention to certain groups of mobile users - "young urban professionals, mobile business people and teenagers". *Mobile UK* is concerned with more mundane and widespread use. McGuigan (2005:51) suggests that we should explore how the mobile phone is embedded in the most typical routines of everyday life; therefore, ethnographic research is an appropriate tool.

Hargittai suggests that researchers should concentrate on adolescents in particular if they are to gain a better understanding of how such sites are being incorporated into people's lives. Ellison et al. (2007) also motivate that future research could explore

Facebook use in other contexts, such as organizations and high schools. It is for this reason that this study looks at female adolescents in the King William's Town area.

2.5   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.5.1   Introduction

The study applies the following theories: the modeling theory, the stereotyping theory, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, gratification theory and social exchange theory and social identity theory for the use of social media by adolescents.

2.5.2   Modeling Theory

The modeling theory will be used to study the way that teenagers form their social identities. The theory is based on the social learning theory in psychology, where it is argued that some media users, in this case, the teenager, can adopt the medium's depictions of people's behavior (Defleur & Dennis 1994, cited in Fourie 2001:300-301). The researcher observes whether or not this theory applies to Facebook and MXit and looks at the mass media's infiltration of the two social media, observing how the adolescents report that they modeled the behavior depicted by the media presentation.

2.5.2.1 The assumptions of the Modeling Theory

According to Defleur & Dennis (1994, cited in Fourie 2001:300-301); the assumptions of the modeling theory are:

1. A media user encounters a form of action portrayed by a person (model) in a media presentation.
2. The individual media user identifies with the model and believes that he or she is like, or wants to be like the model.

3. The individual remembers and reproduces (imitates) the actions of the model in some later situation.
4. Performing the reproduced activity results in some reward for the individual
5. Thus, positive reinforcement increases the possibility that the media user will use the reproduced behavior again as a means of responding to something or someone in a similar situation.

2.5.3   Stereotyping Theory

The stereotyping theory claims that the media create and sustain stereotypes of certain people, organizations and groups (Defleur & Dennis 1994, cited in Fourie 2001:303). It is further alleged that through stereotyped portrayals, the media reinforce existing patterns of attitudes and behavior toward specific individuals, groups and institutions. The study will observe whether the female adolescents can identify any objects, situations, or messages on the social media that reflect this theory or disprove it.

2.5.3.1 Essential ideas of the Stereotype Theory

Defleur & Dennis (1994, cited in Fourie 2001:303-304) express the essential ideas of this theory in the following way:

1. In entertainment content and in other media messages, the media can repeatedly present negative portrayals of a specific group.
2. These portrayals tend to be consistently negative, showing such people as having undesirable attributes and fewer positive characteristics than members of the dominant group in which the media function.
3. Such portrayals are similar among the various media, providing corroboration.
4. These portrayals provide constructions of meaning for media users, particular for those who have limited contact with actual people of the stereotyped group.

5. Viewers, readers and listeners incorporate these meanings into their memories as relatively stereotyped interpretations which they use when thinking about or responding to any individual of a portrayed category.

2.5.4 Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

Piaget's theory states that children undergo qualitative changes in the way they organize and use information (c.f. Berk 2003, Papalia & Olds 1995). These results support Piaget's assertion that as children age, they become more able to engage in abstract reasoning such as that needed to discern between reality and fantasy (Cummins 2005:5).

2.5.5 Gratification Theory

The gratifications theory explores the needs of users and the probable gratifications that they derive from media use. The theory here is used to question what the users do with MXit and Facebook, for what they use these services and what they get from using these social media (O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery and Fiske 1994:326; McQuail 2000, cited in Fourie 2001:297).

2.5.6 Social Exchange Theory

According to Taylor et al. (2003:10), social exchange theory analyzes the interpersonal interaction between people in terms of the benefits and costs that the individuals exchange with each other. The process of interaction creates benefits (information, recognition, money, feelings of being loved, etc.) and costs (boredom, disapproval, and feelings of being misunderstood, etc.) for the people involved.

2.5.7 Social Identity Theory

Tajfel (1982 cited in Taylor, Peplau & Sears 2003:187) proposed that the social identity theory incorporates three basic assumptions: (1) People categorize the social world into in-groups and out-groups; (2) people derive a sense of self-esteem from their social identity as members of an in-group; and (3) people's self-concept depends partly on how they evaluate the in-group in comparison to the out-groups.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, existing studies and literature concerning virtual sites have been reviewed in this chapter. Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory, the Gratification Theory, and the Social Exchange Theory, the Social Identity Theory, the Modeling Theory and the Stereotyping Theory have been described in this chapter, which will aid in the examination of the target group's responses in the structured interviews.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This chapter describes the assessment techniques used and the objectives of the main study. The assessment techniques used were semi-structured group interviews which provided dense descriptions of the participants' thinking processes in their own terms. Drawing from the literature and the theories, hypotheses are formulated about their interaction with these media. The data collection technique is outlined as well as the method employed in data analysis. The reliability and the validity of the assessment will also be ascertained.

3.2   Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the representation of identity of female adolescents in their interaction with MXit and Facebook in the King William's Town area.

The secondary objectives of the study were as follows:

a) To investigate whether a relationship exists between the social identity formation among the female adolescents and social media in the King William's Town area,
b) To identify themes that relate to the female adolescents' social identity formation.

3.3   Research Design

In conducting a research project there are universal norms, guidelines and procedures to be followed. There are two types of research paradigms that a researcher can follow when conducting research: namely phenomenological, qualitative and positivistic, quantitative research. The positivistic or quantitative paradigm adopts the natural science experiment as the model for scientific research, with its key features of

quantitative measurements of the phenomenon and systematic control of the theoretical variables influencing those phenomena (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2006:117).

A phenomenological or qualitative research paradigm is associated with an interpretative perspective in social research in which the logic of the research is not so much to test out given theories about what guides human behavior, but instead to develop an appreciation of the underlying motivations that people have for doing what they do (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2006:149).
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This is a social research project and therefore the phenomenological and qualitative research paradigm will be adopted. According to Denscombe (2003:124), the advantage of such a research approach is:

1. It offers the prospect of authentic accounts of a complex phenomenon.
2. It offers a human style of research: this paradigm allows a researcher to be close to the selected target group.
3. It is suited for small-scale research.
4. The description of the experience of the researcher can tell an interesting story: this paradigm allows the researcher to access the feelings experienced by the target group members.

Denscombe (2003: 124) states the following as the disadvantage of such a paradigm:

1. It lacks scientific rigor: the emphasis of phenomenological emphasis of subjectivity, description and interpretation contrast with the scientific emphasis on objectivity, analysis and measurement.
2. In addition to this limitation, the study might not be 'generalisable' to the rest of the country. However, this research is pertinent as a form of exploratory research to ascertain the influence of the media, and to assess whether any influence exists on the social identity among teenagers.

3.4   Sampling

The sample consisted of ninety (90) female volunteer participants between the ages of twelve and seventeen, who speak both Xhosa and English in the King William's

Town area, Xhosa being their mother tongue. According to Louw, van Ede & Louw (1998:385), adolescence as a developmental stage begins at eleven, while the age at which it ends is between seventeen and twenty-one. The participants were classified as younger adolescents from the ages twelve (12) until fourteen (14) and older adolescents from the ages fifteen (15) until seventeen (17). In total, there were ten groups, five of whom consisted of the younger adolescents and the other five consisted of the older adolescents. Therefore, there were nine girls per group.

3.5   Interviews

This assessment was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide prepared prior to the interviewing process.

3.6   Measurement Instruments

Procedure

Ethical and safety issues were major priorities in the research project; therefore, the study required the following resources in order to conduct the structured group interviews:

- From the onset of project planning, consultation with the principal of the school was initiated. The researcher explained the ethical considerations of the study to the principal and produced copies of the questionnaire and ethical clearance forms. The principal signed a form in which he gave his consent to the researcher to proceed with the structured group interviews.

- A letter explaining the intended study and ethical clearance forms were distributed to the adolescents and their parents before the time of the structured group interviews, which they had to sign and return to the researcher. The forms were signed by the parents and/or the adolescents.

- Venue: Structured group interviews were conducted at the Kingsridge High School for Girls (KHS), where the researcher had matriculated in the past. The school has earned its position as one of the Top 100 schools in the country. Each session took forty-five minutes to an hour.

- Verbal instructions to participants were implemented at the beginning of the group interviews, where the researcher advised all present to respect each others' views and to only share that which they felt comfortable sharing in the group environment.
- Respondents were asked to respond in writing to questions that implied possibly confidential answers. The researcher provided sheets of paper and pens for the respondents, which however, were never used since respondents were candid and expressive.
- As stated in Chapter 1, page 7, the researcher and a female assistant noted down the information discussed during the sessions as well as any behaviors/attitudes observed that may have been displayed during the sessions.

3.7   Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were constructed from the literature review.

H_1:   It is hypothesized that female Xhosa/English speaking adolescents in the King William's Town area are acquainted with Facebook and MXit.

H_2:   It is further hypothesized that there will be a relationship between these social media and social categorization of the world; the tendency to divide the social world into the in-group and out-group (Baron& Bryne 2004:222).

3.8   Thematic Analysis

The analysis consisted in reading the recorded notes of what the participants said and looking for themes and common statements. Aronson (1994,cites Leininger 1985:60) who suggests that themes are identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often appear meaningless when viewed alone. The researcher ventured this proposition by listing patterns of experiences which came from direct quotes and paraphrasing common ideas. Thereafter, the researcher identified all data that related to the already classified patterns and combined related patterns into sub-themes.

The main themes identified in the group interviews include **Status, Culture, Symbols** and **Sexuality**.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented and thoroughly discussed.

4.1.1   Results of the Study

Ninety black female adolescents were interviewed, 45 of whom were younger adolescents from the ages twelve to fourteen; and the other 45 were older adolescents from the ages of fifteen to seventeen. The study identified a broad spectrum of themes which were expressed during the structured group interviews. Of the younger adolescents, 17/45 (37.7%) had internet access at their homes, while 16/45 (35.5%) of the older adolescents had internet access at home. Overall, therefore, only 36.6% of the adolescents had internet access present in their homes. The younger adolescents were more active Facebook users than the older adolescents with 7/45 (15.5%) of the total younger sample population, in comparison with 5/45 of the older group (11.1%). Combined, only 13.3% of the adolescents chose to use Facebook as a social medium, whereas all ninety randomly selected adolescents were MXit users. Therefore 100% of the ninety female adolescents used MXit as a social networking agent. The average number of years that these adolescents had been using the social sites is two to three years.

It was also found that the internet cafés and the internet at their parents' work were places where adolescents accessed the internet.

The main themes identified in the group interviews include **Status, Culture, Symbols** and **Sexuality**. As a starting point, the author will explain the social nature of the electronic images and media messages on the internet and outline how these play a role in social identity formation among the female adolescents.

4.2.   **STATUS**

4.2.1.   **Peer Pressure and Role Models**

The younger adolescents of the sample population revealed that they heard about Facebook from their older siblings, older friends and leading talk shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *The Tyra Banks Show*. The older and younger adolescents heard about MXit from their peers. A contract on MXit also informed the older adolescents about Facebook.

"You get to meet new people and to meet celebrities. It's popular, so people use it. People don't want to be left behind," said a thirteen-year old girl.

The younger adolescents were more excited about meeting celebrities on Facebook, whereas the older adolescents were more aware that these celebrities might not be the authentic person.

The main reason for using these media with each other was that all their friends were using them, especially MXit, to keep in touch. The adolescents, all of whom are black, also stated that their indian and coloured peers instigated them to start using MXit. Due to the fact that homework was discussed on MXit, others also developed an interest to join the social site. Therefore, being part of a social group and not being left out is a major concern among adolescents, with the added benefit of a peer-aid for homework.

North and Kotze' (2001:91) state that of all environmental socialization agents, parental influence is the most pervasive and important. Parental influence also reinforces the children's future behavior and social identity. Baumrind (1980:639-52) is of the opinion that parental socialization helps children develop habits and values that are congruent with the prevailing cultural environment. However, nowadays role models and peer groups increasingly influence children's behavior and social identity.

The adolescents also encountered MXit and Facebook through Oprah Winfrey and Tyra Banks. *The Oprah Show* as well as the *Tyra Banks Show* are televised internationally and it is through these two shows that the adolescents had heard about the two social sites.

A black feminist such as the most successful daytime television talk show host, Oprah Winfrey, is a cultural icon. She is the first black female ever to own a prosperous television show and a film production company. Her role as Sofia in the movie, *The Color Purple,* adapted from the novel by Alice Walker, depicts a fat woman who suffers greatly at the hands of whites and black men. Her achievements as a black woman have been highlighted in different mass media. Her fame, however, became greater when she lost weight and then also appealed to an upper class American market, such as the whites (Unknown 2008). Her fame and fortune were already at a peak, but her loss of weight made her appear richer and more suited to be part of the bourgeoisie. Tyra Banks, on the other hand, is a former supermodel who currently also hosts *America's Next Top Model.* Like Oprah Winfrey, She is also an African American who sensationalizes women's issues and equally attracts teenagers and young adults; often giving advice on relationships, health, fashion tips and related women's issues. With her background on fashion, beauty and business, she is seen as an epitome of a successful black woman. It is understandable that the adolescents would feel an attraction to her and consider her their role model.

Oprah Winfrey and Tyra Banks are both African American women, with whom the adolescents could identify in two ways: in view of race and gender. It is understandable that role models of the same race and gender as the adolescents play a significant role in shaping their thoughts, attitudes and behavioral patterns. In other words, the adolescent chooses vicarious role models that are similar to him or herself (cf. Basow and Howe 1980; Dates 1980; King and Multon 1996; Nicholas et al. 1971 cited in Martin & Bush 2000). These role models or 'influentials' do not tell teenagers what to think, but rather what to think about and how to react (Newbold 1995:119).

4.2.1.1   Advertising on Facebook and MXit

"MXit must have been created by an Indian person because they are always advertising Islamic/Muslim festivities…like, "It's the week of Ramadan, something like that" said an older adolescent.

"'Tradepost' on MXit is famous for advertising websites and available services such as news reviews, movie reviews, horoscopes and more," said an older adolescent.

"Facebook also advertises a lot of products, especially for women. They usually have links to celebrity stories," said a younger adolescent.

When the adolescents were asked to explain how **Tradepost** works, the following responses were made;

"You must first send a message like 'hi' to Tradepost, then you will find options of services…what you actually doing is trading. You pay Moola, on Tradepost. 1 Moola = 1 cent. You can buy Moola in R2, R3, R5, R7, 50, R10 and R15. 'Joe Banker' will then take care of your Moola. If you send Joe Banker a message e.g. 'hi', then he will give you your financial balance. You can trade your Moola for skinz for your phone, chat rooms, music, movie information, greeting cards and lots of other stuff," said an older adolescent.

"If you don't know anyone, you can try out Tradepost. Tradepost is good because you can get contacts of celebrities and it keeps you informed about what is happening," said a younger adolescent.

"Tradepost advertises a lot of competitions. You can win cell phones, money or cars! Oh yes, they also advertise movies and shows on MXit!" said yet another excited younger adolescent.

"Every time I log in, I see an advert, sometimes they are advertising something, other times, they just have funny things" said a younger adolescent.

When the adolescent was asked to elaborate, she made the following comments,

"The adverts are very colorful sometimes include sexy cartoon women or superwomen striking poses, stuff like that. You also see an advert every time you log onto MXit. It is nice, because you see something new all the time."

"I like taking part in competitions in order to win a chance to chat with celebrities online or win tickets to shows. There are a lot of things to do on MXit. You can also win some money." said a younger adolescent.

"The adverts show women wearing nice clothes or bikini's; they also advertise things that can make you look cool for the summer season, like sunglasses. When I want more information, I follow the instructions on MXit and it takes me to what I want to know about the products and services they are advertising." said a younger adolescent.

According to Unknown (2008) tradepost is a default contact on MXit. Users can visit Tradepost and trade Moola, which is MXit's virtual currency for chat rooms, skins, contacts, etc.

From the remarks made by the adolescents, it is clear that social media are becoming a marketing tool for celebrities, brand custodians and many others. Since teenagers are more responsive to trends than probably any other age group, they are now being targeted through social media such as MXit and Facebook. Teenagers are not only trendsetters for one another, but are also trendsetters for the population at large. Current trends in clothing and music, for example, are results of teens perceiving an idea or brand as "cool", signifying its quality, social acceptability and desirability. According to Zollo (1995, cited in Martin & Bush 2000) some of the top reasons that make a brand a "cool brand" among teens are: "quality", "it's for people my age", "advertising", "if cool

friends or peers use it", and "if a cool celebrity uses it". Thus, it appears that advertising, peers, and celebrities/role models have the potential to contribute to brand choice among teens.

Teenagers model the social identities of others around them, and take over the good and bad aspects from each 'influentialist', modifying them to create their own social identity.

The **modeling theory** is applicable in this instance. Through advertisements on Facebook, an adolescent begins to identify with the model and believes she is, or wants to be like the model (Defleur & Dennis 1994, cited in Fourie 2001:300-301). This need to be similar to celebrities and adolescents' role models gratifies the need for status, which in turn is pressurized and made popular by their peers.

The adverts below are just a few of what the adolescents come across on MXit's **Tradepost**.

http://www.alphabetsoup.co.za/intestestingcontent/Business%20PresentationJune%202008%20%5BCompatibility%20Mode%5D.pdf

This is an example of the "sexy female" cartoons that the adolescents come across on the social networking site, MXit.

Advertisements on social media are reaching young people in a significantly fast rate. The **stereotyping theory** is applicable in that the advertisements on social media have the potential to create and sustain certain stereotypes of certain people (as mentioned by Defleur & Dennis 1994:599 cited in Fourie 2001:303). The adolescents felt that they had to continue using the social media in order to learn, for example what women are wearing at the beach, what the latest trend is and what was expected of them in order to be considered socially acceptable among their online and offline friends.

The selective portrayal of women on Facebook and MXit, through advertisements, allows female and adolescents to construct ideas of how a woman is meant to look like and behave. The representation of women in advertising is consistently sending messages that women ought to be thin and beautiful. Negative implications are evident where women are portrayed as sex objects, and such ways of thinking about women guide the adolescents' behaviors both in real society and on social networking sites.

Teenagers who depend on the media to be kept informed about how to be more feminine or masculine, will seek advice from media such as television, internet or magazines and other sources. The most transparent and most publicized information will be utilized by teenagers who are self-conscious about their bodies, identities and sexuality, which in turn is the basis for the manner in which the media formulate the desirable social identity for teenagers.

4.2.1.2   Frequency of use

The younger adolescents log onto Facebook twice a week, while the older adolescents log onto Facebook only twice a month. MXit is widely preferred by the youth in this area as it provides cheap and immediate communication and is easily accessible on their cell phones. As many of their peers are frequent users of MXit, the adolescents in the sample population spend an average of 8 to 15 hours online every day.

"MXit is addictive! It's cheap and you can use it in church." This is a direct quote from an excited twelve-year old girl, who also mentioned that she feels as if she is in another dimension when she is online. Of all the girls interviewed in this study, 92% felt that being online was escapism from their real world, which was considered necessary due to boredom. The dependable access and use of MXit strongly supports the argument stated in Chapter 1 on page 9, that there is a lack of recreational activities in the King William's Town area and the youths consequently desire to be part of something that is exciting and considered "cool", i.e., socially desirable and contributing to their group identity.

One of the most frequent activities that both groups of adolescents consider "cool" are the **Marathons** that are customary during the weekends and holidays. The marathons start at six o'clock in the morning and end at six in the evening of the following day. The objective of the marathon is to see who will be able to stay awake for the whole duration of the competition. Most adolescents feel that this craze leaves them no option but to participate as all their peers are online and feel that they will be left out of the latest incidents if they are not online.

The social affiliation displayed in the hours spent online, is activated by the incentive of having an opportunity to please others and gain their approval, which in turn causes the individual to want to act in a certain way constituted by that situation, thus it represents an action-need (Oulasvirta 2005:62). *"If I am not online for at least two days, I would not know what is going on around me; who said what, who gave who something*

and if I missed a social gathering or interesting discussing online. And it is not nice to be left out," said a younger adolescent.

According to Kankainen (2003, cited in Oulasvirta 2005:62), there are two types of human needs: motivational needs and action needs. Motivational needs rationalize and motivate taking a certain action in a context. Motivational needs are experienced as emotional and behavioral potentials that are activated by particular situational incentives. The adolescent's choices to use these social sites are stimulated by their personal needs. Oulasvirta (2005:62) argues that it is helpful to elaborate on the distinction between the two types of motivational needs: basic needs and quasi-needs. Basic needs are related to bodily homeostasis (physiological needs such as pain avoidance, thirst, hunger and sex), some to providing psychological nutriments for growth and healthy development (organismic psychological needs such as self-determination, competence and relatedness), and some contribute to preferring some aspects of the environment over others (social needs such as achievement, affiliation, intimacy and power). The adolescents were motivated to use the social media so that they could be affiliated with status, power and other social needs, hence the **social identity theory**, **gratification theory** and **social exchange theory** could be applicable here.

Social psychologists emphasize ways in which specific situations and social relationships can create and arouse unmet needs for intimacy and a sense of "belonging" (Taylor, Peplau & Sears 2003:6), the social relationships formed and maintained on social media gratifies that adolescent's need to belong. The need to belong and be affiliated with status or power, results in adolescents categorizing themselves into in-groups and out-groups, where most adolescents desire to be associated with the in-group being the influential group.

According to Reeve (2001, cited in Oulasvirta 2005:62), quasi-needs, on the other hand, are more ephemeral, situationally induced wants that "create tense energy to engage in behavior capable of reducing the built-up tension". Reeve suggests that they are not "full-blown needs" in the same sense as basic needs, but they do affect how we think, feel and act. For example, the desire for the adolescents to have more friends on the social network sites, stimulated by the involvement of other peers and role models

with the sites, is a quasi-need. Adolescents also exposed that they gain more by 'being part' of the in-group as their affiliation with MXit and Facebook released their hidden desires to receive attention that they could not normally get in real-life, by making friends with unknown individuals and exchanging information and emotions. Therefore, the **social exchange theory** suggests that the adolescents' needs allow them to benefit, or at times not benefit, from their relationships with their online contacts.

4.2.1.3 Group identity

Peer pressure has influenced many of the girls to also participate in **MultiMx**, which is the latest feature on MXit, where an individual creates a group and invites a maximum of seven contacts to that group who then all chat together online. All seven contacts can see what the others display on the social site. With this feature, a group can be named, e.g. *"Kissing Buddies",* where the seven individuals may feel part of the group and may express themselves more openly or restrictively in the context of that particular group of friends. In other groups, named e.g. *"Maths Class"*, *"Science Freaks"*, the adolescents reported that they discuss challenging academic work together on MXit.

The adolescents report that they yearn to be part of something exciting; it is for this reason that they make use of applications that involve being part of a group. Such group applications assist adolescents to discuss issues with the relevant individuals with whom they choose to discuss matters. At present, there is a range of organizational forms on virtual sites such as groups, among them the knowledge-based organization alternatively known as the knowledge-intensive or virtual organization (Hurme 2005:101).

The adolescents' involvement in **MultiMx** substantiates Hurme's deliberation that knowledge-based organizations are characterized by the importance of information seeking and utilization, as well as knowledge creation, team and project work, collaboration and competition and the use of information and communication technologies. The adolescents organize themselves into groups for the simple reason that they achieve more when working together that they can do alone. An organization is often defined as a group of people who work together (Hurme 2005:105). It can be for

instance large or small, hierarchical or flat, centralized or distributed. The adolescents' groups/organizations, and consequently, the organizational communication forms are decentralized as there is no "real" hierarchy, nor evident boundaries. The adolescents use the informal channels to discuss schoolwork-related issues, e.g. homework and assignments (Hurme 2005:105). The **social exchange theory** and the **social identity theory are** applicable in this instance, as the adolescents felt that their continuous use of MXit is focused around the benefits they receive from being online. The adolescents benefited from discussing academic work with their friends on **MultiMx**, therefore the adolescents **socially exchange** with their online contacts and benefit or 'lose' from associating with them. Study sessions would develop from these discussions as one person would not have to repeat the information to several friends as they would all be part of the conversation (maximum of seven contacts on MultiMx).

The act of categorization can also quickly group people into "us" (an in-group) and "them" (an out-group). One result of this is the **in-group favoritism effect,** where people evaluate in-group members more positively than outsiders (Tajfel 1982, cited in Taylor, Peplau & Sears 2003:187). Individuals feel that they belong to a group and tend to favor fellow group members at the expense of members of other groups. The adolescents felt that belonging to a particular virtual group, positioned them better both online and offline. Those who belonged to groups such as the *"Kissing Buddies"* felt that they were more powerful than those who belonged to example, the *"Science Freaks"* group. Science people (scholars/researchers) are stereotypically perceived as being "boring and studious" whereas the group who call themselves *"Kissing Buddies"* are regarded as being more out-going and adventurous. Therefore, the *"Science Freaks"* would be the out-groups, whereas the *"Kissing Buddies"* group would be in-group. According to the **social identity theory**, individuals are likely to have high self-esteem if they belong to a superior in-group, and have lower self-esteem if the in-group is inferior (Tajfel 1982, cited in Taylor, Peplau & Sears 2003:187). Therefore social identity results from a mixture of cognitive and motivational behaviors. It is cognitive because the mere act of categorization in a group is sufficient to trigger these effects, and it is motivational because social identity fulfills self-esteem needs.

4.2.1.4 Virtual Self vs. Personal Self

"I stay at home on weekends, but MXit changes me"; this confession by one of the younger adolescents introduces the concept of one's virtual self being altered from the personal self.

An older adolescent stated the following experience;

"You forget what is going on around you. Makes you laugh when someone makes a joke…it's fun to be online…you get freedom. You can say what you want as the person is not in your face."

The girls sporadically took turns to express the following comments;

"I don't go out a lot to socialize. I pretend to be sleeping but I am online, that is the best thing about MXit," said another older adolescent who also contributed that her parents are overly suspicious about MXit and often exclaimed, *"Stop MXitting!! MXit is the Devil."*

It is significant that the older adolescents revealed that they had online *"best friends"* and *"boyfriends"*. The older adolescents mentioned that having online "boyfriends" and "best friends" is better than having reality relationships as these friends cannot hurt the girls since they are a distance apart. The older adolescents felt that it is through this realm of fantasy that some of their needs and desires are fulfilled. The older adolescents mentioned that their online boyfriends can make them feel special and provide monetary goods such as buying them phone credit, which is a necessity to continue their online behavior.

"I don't do funny things on MXit, I am not that type of person. Some people are too much. They reveal too much."

The examples given by the adolescents highlight that when individuals are online, there is a distinct need for self-presentation; which refers to our efforts to control the impression we convey (Taylor et al. 2003:126). When online, many individuals can and do alter their personalities to suit their needs and intentions. Taylor et al. (2003:126) state that self-presentation is important for understanding the self. They mention that there are several reasons that we manage the impressions we make on others. (1) Often we want people to view us positively - as an interesting, friendly, intelligent and caring person. (2) Sometimes we strive to convey other images, e.g. as tough or intimidating. Therefore self-presentation helps us to describe and understand the manifold and different presentations of ourselves that we may want to project to others. At most times, however, self-presentation is a form of **gratifying oneself.** The adolescents are gratifying their needs to be entertained, loved and to explore their identities by 'managing their identities' online. **The gratification theory** that explains the diversion element, prescribes that the teenager seeks to release emotions (c.f. O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery and Fiske 1994:326; McQuail 2000, cited in Fourie 2001:297). The adolescents are releasing these emotions online in order to gratify their needs and allow them to be diverted from reality. Having online boyfriends to buy them cell phone credit, underlines how materialistic the older adolescents are. This behavior reveals that the adolescents form their social identity based on what they can receive or lose in their relationships with their online contacts. Therefore, by accepting 'goods' from their online contacts, the adolescents behavior allow the **social exchange theory** to be applicable in this situation. Their behavior further conveys that the girls could easily be taken advantage of by these online boyfriends or *"sugar daddy's"* (older men in romantic relationships with younger women, including under-aged girls). Therefore teenagers prefer to be surrounded by an atmosphere of 'fantasy', where they feel no reason to be lonely, bored, hurt, and sad and can prevent any connection to bad experiences. This 'fantasy world' can be enjoyed by socializing or relaxing, where the teenagers feel that they can be who they are by browsing the net and getting tips on how to become a better person, or alternatively, experiment with being a bad person without the real social consequences. The other form of socializing is being on the social network sites, where the teen has opportunity to correspond with other individuals who seek the same

endeavors (c.f. O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery and Fiske 1994:326; McQuail 2000, cited in Fourie 2001:297).

"Some of my friends are freaks, they stay on MXit all day, and they do not even hear you when you talk to them. I don't like being around them. They don't listen to me," said a thirteen- year old adolescent. Another girl from the group agreed,

"Yes, my other friend goes mad when she does not have airtime for MXit that is when she starts sucking up to her guy friends to buy her airtime. I don't like how she goes about it as well."

"Some people abuse MXit because they have problems, not everyone has an addictive personality," said an older adolescent.

According to Morris & Maisto (2002:444), psychologists typically define personality as an individual's unique pattern of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that persist over time and across situations. The adolescents mentioned that they are affected differently by the social sites as some have more sensationalist personalities than others.

Sigmund Freud theorized that personality is formed around three structures: the id, the ego and the superego. The **id** consists of unconscious urges and desires that continually seek expression. It operates according to the **pleasure principle**; that is, it tries to obtain immediate pleasure and to avoid pain. As soon as an instinctive desire arises, the id seeks to gratify it. Since the id is not in contact with the real world, it has only two ways of obtaining gratification. One is by reflex actions, such as coughing, which relieve unpleasant sensations at once. Another is through fantasy, or what Freud referred to as 'wish fulfillment'; where a person forms a mental image of an object or situation that partially satisfies the instinct and relieves the uncomfortable feelings. These mental images provide fleeting relief (Morris & Maisto 2002:446-447);

"When I see my friends online, I get so happy, because I can chat to them. I don't have to sit at home and be bored. We just chat all day!" said another younger adolescent

"I enjoy receiving photos from my friends. MXit is so good because you can now send and receive photos. There is a lot that you can do on MXit, depending on your phone and which MXit version you are using. My phone can also save messages, so I like to read over old message," said another younger adolescent.

"If I have not been on MXit the whole day, I feel like I have not done something. I need to be kept informed about what is happening among my friends and in the world. MXit tells you the latest," said a younger adolescent.

The adolescents felt that their personal self and virtual self were at times in constant conflict. Adolescents would be drawn into the virtual world and at times forget that they are expected to socialize with the people around them in reality.

4.2.1.5   Presentation of Identities

The younger adolescents chose to chat to individuals whom they did not know, while older adolescents favored chatting to individuals whom they already knew. The older adolescents experienced that it was easier chatting to someone they knew and saw frequently in real life, than trying to make conversation with anonymous persons whom they did not know. This choice of 'friends' has an impact on the virtual identity as one has less reason to lie to offline friends than to online contacts.

The groups revealed that on Facebook, they do not place photos of themselves but of their favorite celebrities or of their friends. The girls motivated that placing a photo on Facebook allows others to have an idea of them and they found that they received more attention from both known and unknown contacts if their photo was not posted. Others included interesting real or imaginary "facts" on their profiles and placed quotes which would indicate who they are and reflect their desired personality.

Although the girls acknowledged manipulating their real identities online, the younger adolescents voiced the opinion that they experienced boys being untruthful to them about who they were. The girls believed that boys were also untruthful for the same reasons that girls mentioned. A boy from a township school reportedly told one of the girls online that he was from a Model C school and was from Cape Town, when in fact he was from a township area in King William's Town, perceived to have a lower status than the metropolitan middle-class school.

It was found that the younger adolescents were more untruthful online about who they were, compared to the older adolescents. It was revealed that 80% of the younger adolescents exaggerated their names, ages, and overall identity.

Of the older adolescents, 95% claimed to have started off their chats by lying to ensure that they were chatting with the right people. There are many identities online and there are individuals who also steal other people's identities, therefore it is no surprise that older adolescents are more guarded of others' pretentious mannerisms online, whereas younger adolescents told untruths to position themselves with a higher status.

Another element that concludes an individual's virtual identity is her "virtual name". Most of the girls preferred using names that people called them, but nicknames are widely used among these groups of adolescents.

"I don't like the names like 'Sexual Healer', so I delete the person on my MXit".

The above statement, made by a thirteen year-old girl, expressed her disbelief of some individuals' virtual identities on MXit. The younger girls revealed that some of their friends have celebrity names like *"Jika-Majika"*, *"Lil Romeo"* and *"Beyoncé"*, which they perceive as unoriginal and cheesy. The girls prefer names like "Intriguing", "Princess", "Beautiful" and shortened versions or the meaning of their own names. This showed that the girls wanted to be seen as unique with their own personalities. The younger girls disclosed that they changed their names from e.g. Xoliswa to *"Amanda"*. They also mentioned that they made themselves three years older so that they could attract good-looking, older boys. The girls also showed feelings of dissatisfaction about

being associated with King William's Town. It was repeatedly mentioned that they told their online friends that they lived in East London, a city in the Eastern Cape, forty-five minutes by car from King William's Town. It was also mentioned that being associated with King William's Town was like living in the "*Larlies*", a slang word often used by Xhosa-speaking people; used to refer to the townships or squatter areas and signifying backwardness, lack of worldly wisdom and modernity. The adolescents want to belong to a modern society. The younger adolescents change their Xhosa names to names from Western culture, which shows that the adolescents are concerned with status and how others see them. This also indicates that these adolescents want to be considered as westernized and this could be reflective of the fact that this group of girls is from a Model C school. Changing who they are online gratifies that need to appear richer and more westernized, therefore achieving the illusion that they are of high status in the virtual community.

The younger adolescents revealed that some of them took on celebrities' identities by calling themselves, "Beyoncé", another African American female artist. "Jika Majika", is another name that some female/male adolescents have adopted as their pseudonym. *Jika Majika* is a South African music and dance show, produced by Next Door Media, that showcases the outrageous dance styles of Mzansi (SABC 1 2008). The adolescents said that "Lil Romeo" is a name that the boys tend to use online. "Lil Romeo" is actually the nickname of Percy Romeo Miller, Jr., a male African American song entertainer and actor.

While the girls were realistic about their names, they felt strongly that male identities have more fantasy name associations (Mellins 2007:15). Therefore the **gratification theory** is applicable in these instances as the adolescents looked for alternative identities to fill the voids of companionship and sociability that they experienced in their lives. The adolescents want to compensate for their perceived insignificance. The fact that the younger adolescents *"get a rush"* when using MXit and would rather not watch *Generations*, (one of South Africa's much-loved television soapies) correlates with the **gratification theory** that constitutes the individual as being distracted from her real world. *Generations* is also a fictional representation however the study revealed that adolescents prefer to "create" their own ideologies, where they are not

mere spectators when watching *Generations*, but gratify their need to fuse their own lives and the fantasy world together, therefore having some sense of control over the media. In addition, the younger adolescents' cognitive development involves children undergoing qualitative changes in the way they organize and use information at the different age stages (cf. Berk 2003, Papalia & Olds 1995:279-289). According to Hodge & Tripp (1986:100), **Piaget's cognitive development theory** states that the adolescent from the age of eleven onwards is characterized as beginning to form adult-like thought patterns. At these stages adolescents, especially younger adolescents are less thoughtful and as they grow older they become better able to coordinate multiple dimensions of phenomena, known as decentration. The younger adolescents were more concerned about their status; their names, where they lived and how they portrayed themselves online. **Piaget's cognitive development theory** gives good reason for their behavior to be less thoughtful of others, but paying more attention to their own needs and how they are well-positioned and treated by others.

The gratification theory also suggests that the teenager seeks personal relations (O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery and Fiske 1994:326; McQuail 2000, cited in Fourie 2001:297). Both MXit and Facebook provide companionship and sociability. Some teenagers build relationships with other online personalities and fictional characters. It is through this 'fantasy world' that a teenager's personal identity begins to be explored, challenged, adjusted or confirmed in the virtual sphere. These social sites may be used by teenagers to compare themselves and their situations and values with others. Teenagers receive information about issues that can affect them directly or indirectly, which is called surveillance, where the media gratify the need for information about the immediate and distant world. This is how teenagers begin to know what is going on around them, and how they fit into this space between fantasy and reality, who they should be and who they really are according to society (cf. O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery and Fiske 1994:326; McQuail 2000, cited in Fourie 2001:297).

Online identity plays a key role in virtual communities. In communication, which is the primary activity, knowing the identity of those with whom you communicate is essential for understanding and evaluating an interaction. Many of the basic cues about

personality and social roles we are accustomed to in the physical world, are absent in these electronic forms of communication (Donath 1999:29).

Adolescents, such as those from King William's Town, use MXit and Facebook to escape from their daily school work and other routines and problems; and communicate readily with various online characters. Donath (1999:29) explains that in real life, the person is visually one human body, therefore perceived as having one identity. In the virtual world, it is different. What is seen is information, rather than matter. Donath further explains that a user can have, some claim, as many electronic personae as he/she has time and energy to create. Hence, the social media enable teenagers to experiment within a realm that largely excludes their parents and other adult figures of authority who determine their real lives. This may naturally lead the educators and parents to be suspicious and apprehensive about these facilities. The teenagers thus effectively escape adult supervision for their social perception in this medium.

4.3   CULTURE

4.3.1   Language and ethnicity

"I have a stigma against white people. I can't have them on my phone as contacts. I can be friendly to a white person but I do not want to chat with them. I can't stand white people. I like my own people. Black people." said a younger adolescent.

"I like to have white friends as contacts if they are rich," said a younger adolescent.

*"I appreciate communicating with someone who does not break 'George,' "*said an older adolescent. ("Breaking George" is a slang phrase used among the black youth of South Africa. It refers to a person who does not use the English language correctly).

The younger adolescents revealed that they predominantly invite their Xhosa-speaking friends on MXit or Facebook, and keep in contact with some rich, white, English-speaking people for status. It was passionately expressed that the girls enjoyed chatting

to "their own black people" and some articulated a deep annoyance against white peers, and some would not even have them on their phones as contacts.

Some expressed contradicting views that they would not associate with white people but had a few white friends as contacts. This revealed that they desired to be associated with white people who are wealthy and had social status. This further reflects the adolescents' needs to be considered as being special due to their affiliation with white people.

The adolescents also conveyed that they enjoyed chatting to people whose English and sentence construction is good. The younger adolescents revealed that the choice of language is important when communicating online.

"The lingo is a mixture of white and Xhosa". (The word "white" refers to English).
Another younger adolescent added;
"You don't want to speak English all the time, at the same time you can't speak strict Xhosa but must be able to mix the two…it sounds nice".

From these remarks, the younger adolescents described how they preferred to communicate online. They also described that they preferred to chat to individuals who could also speak and write in English. It became evident that the younger girls were more concerned about keeping to their Xhosa culture and were concerned about how their Xhosa people viewed them e.g. as "Xhosa girls" and not black girls who have abandoned their culture and traditions in the new South Africa.

As one girl mentioned, *"If you speak English only, even on MXit and Facebook, you are labeled a 'Coconut' "* and that is looked upon badly by the black people living in King William's Town. It was also reiterated that chatting only in English online; it would appear as though they were trying hard to be "white."

Another perception that emerged out of the structured group interviews with the older adolescents was on the subject of black foreigners. The girls felt that they could not chat with black foreigners as these black foreigners always wanted to meet them after chatting online and showed obsessive behavior (such as calling the girls and wanting to

know where they are and what they are doing; and telling them they love them). Some of the girls felt that current xenophobic stereotypes about black foreigners were justified. Negative portrayals of foreigners in other media could have contributed to forming the younger adolescents' thoughts about this group of people. Foreigners are generally viewed as power-hungry individuals who take the jobs of South African citizens. Foreign men are also seen as being drug-lords that take advantage of young, innocent girls and enslave them for sex. South Africa had recently experienced xenophobic attacks throughout parts of the country, not long before the group interviews were conducted. Therefore the study revealed that young adolescents from small towns experience feelings of uneasiness and prejudice, particularly towards foreign black men. Their cause for creating their own sense of status and exclusivity online is probably generated from their geographical and historical area.

Among many other aspects of identity, a person's identity is constituted by the culture and background from which that person originates and the language he or she speaks. The traditional inheritance influences the way an individual socializes with other people. The adolescents come from a Xhosa background and have also consistently been exposed to Western beliefs and the English language in their daily lives. Their preference of chatting to individuals who are able to competently combine the two languages, mirrors their standpoint as bilingual Xhosa/English speaking females. The adolescents wanted to ensure that they maintained their status by not doing away with either of the languages (by communicating in only English or only Xhosa), but using both languages to create a *"lingo"* that is often used as slang words. It could even be argued that this is how sub-culture languages develop. Groups comprised of individuals make up their own words, phrases and they later become used in the community. The adolescents revealed that language choice is a powerful tool when communicating online.

Segall, Lonner & Berry (1998) suggest that many of the traits we think of as defining us as individuals - especially language, morals and technology - are elements of culture. Even one's sense of self is dependent on culture and subculture. Kluckhohn (1949, cited in Segall et al. 1998) explains that a classic definition of culture is a people's "design for living". Morris & Maisto (2002:28) add that a culture provides modes of

thinking, acting, and communicating; ideas about how the world works and explanations for why people behave as they do. The adolescents' culture is very important to them as it defines them as human beings and positions them in society. Hence, the Xhosa language and culture influence the adolescents to communicate in a certain way online, that they cannot communicate using only the English language or as if they were "white". Phrases like, *"Girl!! Unjani?"* (Translated: Girl!! How are you?) Or *"Hayi man, what happened tshomi?"* (Translated: No, man, what happened, my friend?), are just some of the ways that the girls combine the two languages.

The adolescent's preference of mixed-language communication can be linked to peer-pressure and role models. The black youth of South Africa is becoming increasingly westernized and knowledgeable about different spheres of life, so that these girls are feeling the pressure to keep up with these technological changes and developments. Successful black role models such as television celebrities also mix languages when communicating on screen and off-screen. It is through the adolescent's choice of language that we see these trends manifesting in the youth.

According to Taylor et al. (2003:192), the racial and ethnic prejudice that adolescents feel towards whites and foreigners is called symbolic racism (Kinder & Sears 1981; Searset al. 1997; also described as "modern racism" by McConahay 1986, or "racial resentment" by Kinder & Sanders 1996, cited in Taylor et al. 2003:192). The symbolic racism in the context of King William's Town suggests negative evaluations of minority groups, due to stereotypical associations caused by society or media, as well as at times unspecific resentment of white people for their past influence during apartheid and the perceived continued existence of white superiority. Some of the adolescents' attitudes towards the white people and black foreigners could emanate from an element of jealousy and resentfulness. Although black foreigners are stereotypically considered to be of lower status, the general feelings towards black foreigners are that they are benefiting from the post-apartheid system by getting jobs.

The bilingual Xhosa/English-speaking female adolescents generally portrayed shared behavioral patterns of their Xhosa culture. It is important to recognize that some views and beliefs tend to be taught to the girls by one generation to the next through socialization.

It is also clear from these comments and reported scenarios that Xhosa-speaking parents are not accustomed to these social sites and discover that their children's relationship with MXit in particular is disturbing and culturally offensive as their culture conventionally favours interpersonal communication. The adolescents on the other hand do not see their "out of space" behavior as outrageous or offensive when using MXit.

Triandis (1995, cited in Taylor et al. 2003:11-12) suggests that it is important to identify cultural differences when conducting research on social behavior. Triandis explains that there are cultures that emphasize individualism and those that emphasize collectivism. The cultural values of U.S. and European societies emphasize the importance of personal independence and individualism. In an individualist's culture, a person's behavior is guided largely by individual goals rather than by the goals of collectives such as the family, the work group or the tribe. An individualistic or fictional identity on social networks contradicts conventional (present-day) and traditional phases of identity development in the Xhosa community, as the adolescents mentioned that they block out everything and anyone who is around them, and focus only on entertaining themselves online.

In contrast, collectivist cultures emphasize loyalty to the family, adherence to group norms, and the preservation of harmony in social relations with members of the individual's own group. According to Triandis (1995), the cultural values of many African, Asian and Latin American societies emphasize collectivism.

The younger adolescents seemed to portray more of their 'collectivistic culture' than the older adolescents, as they constantly mentioned, *"It is not my culture"* in the group discussions.

Many of the adolescents in KWT participating in this study lack familiarity with cultural differences, which could be a result of not having the opportunities to travel outside South Africa. One benefit of foreign travel is that it causes the traveler to take a fresh look at aspects of his/her own behavior that he/she takes for granted.

The **social identity theory** is applicable in this section of the study as the adolescents categorized themselves by associating themselves with members belonging to their in-group. e.g., other Xhosa and English speaking contacts. The adolescents who

preferred to be associated with the out-group (e.g.) "rich white people" revealed that they had white friends as contacts for social status. Therefore the **social identity theory** is legitimate in its claim that individuals are likely to have high self-esteem if they belong to a superior in-group and have lower self-esteem if the in-group is inferior (Tajfel 1982, cited in Taylor, Peplau & Sears 2003:187). The younger adolescents revealed that there was a cyclic shift from having high self-esteem as they were proud of their Xhosa heritage, to lower self-esteem when the adolescents envy their white peers and only communicate with them if it benefited their status quo. The theory is also applicable since the adolescents' preference of language use (both English and Xhosa) on social network sites, conveying their mixed feelings about holding onto their collectivist culture. By embracing the English language, this signifies the acceptance of western ideology and the individualistic culture.

4.3.1.1   Written Language and Acronyms

The older adolescents revealed that their grammar in conventional written language was deteriorating due to the extreme use of text messaging on MXit.

"MXit kills your spelling, while writing your essays; you realize that it affects your writing!"

"I use too many abbreviated words when I chat online, so I always get shocked when I see how something is actually spelt. It is so funny!"

The older adolescents also revealed that their listening skills are becoming worse, however, they have found that they can chat online without being genuinely 'present' in the conversation.

"When I am on MXit and someone says something to me, I just cannot remember what they have said, but I can write chat to someone without thinking!"

"I can chat to someone online and still listen to what someone is saying to me, but I am not fully hanging out to their every word."

According to Morris & Maisto (2002:268), language is a flexible system of communication that uses sounds, rules, gestures or symbols to convey information. The girls revealed that they were used to shortening words when chatting online, e.g., LOL (Laugh Out Loud) is the most commonly used chat expression to illustrate that the user is laughing during a text conversation or that she found something funny. Haig (2001:89-90) singles out *LOL* as one of the three most popular initialisms in Internet slang, alongside *BFN* ("bye for now") and *IMHO* ("in my humble opinion"). He describes these acronyms and the various initialisms of Internet slang in general, as convenient, but warns that "as ever more obscure acronyms emerge they can also be rather confusing". McGuigan (2005:50) explains that the abbreviated language of text messaging is a new kind of shorthand, which may eventually have an impact on language generally.

Heng (2003), in discussing these acronyms in the context of performative utterances, points out the difference between *telling* someone that one is laughing out loud and actually laughing out loud: "The latter response is a straightforward action. The former is a self-reflexive representation of an action: I not only do something but also show you that I am doing it. Or indeed, I may not actually laugh out loud but may use the locution 'LOL' to communicate my appreciation of your attempt at humor."

Crystal (2001) notes that the use of *LOL* is not necessarily genuine, just as the use of smiley faces or grins is not necessarily genuine, posing the rhetorical question: "How many people are actually 'laughing out loud' when they send LOL?". Franzini (2002) concurs, stating that there is as yet no research that has determined the percentage of people who are actually laughing out loud when they write "LOL".

The adolescents learnt how to use 'internet slang' from interacting with their online contacts. Therefore, the social exchange theory is useful in the study as the adolescents' use of written language is influenced by their contacts.

Social identity is formed when these adolescents begin to use words, phrases and other social concepts to communicate online. Adolescents who use these common "internet slang" words are somewhat 'pressurized' to use these terminologies, whether

they are aware of this pressure or not. To be part of the in-group, the adolescents model the behaviors of others on the social sites and learn to use and understand how to communicate online. The ability to use the words indicates to the rest of their peers that they are modern, as LOL, for example, is internet slang derived from the Western world.

Therefore, the adolescents feel that they are superior to those who do not know the term and fear being labeled as "backward". The expectation to learn the norms on social networks sites causes the users to be divided into the in-group and out-group. According to the adolescents, those who are not acquainted with the online jargon are the "backward" group, the out-group. The **social identity theory** is applicable here because the adolescents' social identity online is dependent on the way in-groups form their social identities online.

"It is weird if someone actually writes out 'See you later'. It is so weird. You must just write 'L8r'."

This sort of behavior allows the conclusion that the adolescents want to have a social identity that is on the same level as those from developed countries, those who are perceived by non-Westerners to have a better status. This behavior also illustrates that the adolescents desire to have an 'expanded culture', where they can be able to borrow from Western practices and incorporate these aspects into their own lifestyles. The adolescents also seem to be selective when choosing their online friends and only chat to those who have adequate knowledge of English and can be creative in using abbreviated language. This correlates with McGuigan's (2005:50) assumption that the use of shorthand in text messaging is a medium of sub-cultural identification and much older people cannot fathom and familiarize themselves with it.

Morris & Maisto (2002:295) affirm that many words in language, such as 'friend', 'family' and 'love', correspond to concepts that are among the building blocks of thought. By combining words into sentences, we can link concepts to other concepts, forming complex thoughts and ideas. Because our language determines not only the words we use but also the way in which we combine those words into sentences, we must

question whether language can determine what we think about. Morris & Maisto (2002) reiterate that language affects long-term memory.

"Once I started using abbreviated words, I started to write like that everywhere, even without thinking about it. It just happened," said an older adolescent.

Morris & Maisto (2002 explain that the memory of an experience is stimulated by the language that communicates that experience. Similarly, the language and content with which the adolescents come into contact with on MXit and Facebook, allow them to think of past experiences or ways to react towards these images. Therefore, the adolescent's use of languages (shorthand writing) has been impacted by observing how their peers write, and this had adversely affected them to the point where they are reminded of how to communicate with their peers by the memory of their experiences with this type of writing technique.

On the other hand, Stern (1985, cited in Morris & Maisto 2002:233) asserts that short-term memory holds the information we are thinking about or are aware of at any given moment. Short-term memory has two primary tasks: to store new information briefly and to work on that information. Morris & Maisto (2002:233) state that because of the limitations of short-term memory, a person who is intent on being on social network sites, will have to hold information in short-term memory for longer periods through what Greene (1987, cited in Morris & Maisto 2002:235) calls rote rehearsal, which consists of repeating information over and over.

"I had to practice using abbreviated words, now I use them more often now; it took a lot of practising because my friends were always wondering why I would take long to respond. Then when I would send them the messages, they realized that I was spelling the words out in full. Most of them did not like waiting for me to respond, and they would start chatting to other people. So I had to learn," said an older adolescent.

Long-term memory is defined as the portion of memory that is more or less permanent, corresponding to everything we "know" (Morris & Maisto 2002:235).

Everything that we learn is stored in long-term memory. The older adolescents revealed that they automatically respond to their contacts in abbreviated language or in acronyms due to the fact that they had been exposed to them for a long time. This observation is critical as it responds to Morris & Maisto's (2002) claim that long- term memory is more or less permanent. The older adolescents complained about the effect that their use of abbreviated words had on their academic writing. The older adolescents have used 'internet slang' for much longer than the younger adolescents and they claimed that it has had negative effects on their grammar. It can be confirmed by this example, furthermore, that language does indeed affect long-term memory. The language that the older adolescents were exposed to has now affected their long-term memory, adolescents use shorthand writing in their everyday communication.

If language affects our ability to store and retrieve information, it should also affect our ability to reflect upon things. According to Whorf's (1956) linguistic relativity hypotheses (cited in Morris & Maisto 2002:295), the language a person speaks determines the pattern of that person's thinking and his or her view of the world. Matsumoto (1996, cited in Morris & Maisto 2002:296) believes that language, thought and culture are intertwined and that people create words to capture important aspects of their experiences and to some extent words shape how people think and what they think about. It is further concluded that people also think about things for which they have no words and experience shapes in language, and language in turn, affects subsequent experience (Morris & Maisto, 2002:296). According to Matsumoto (1995:52 cited in Morris & Maisto 2002:297), cultural differences can therefore affect perception, cognition and behavior).

4. 4   SYMBOLS
4.41   Symbols of gender in the virtual environment of Facebook and MXit

The adolescents acknowledge that in the cyberspace, a user should also be able to represent herself by utilizing the features that express those social representations. The older adolescents felt that the use of **Emoticons** on MXit helps to convey how one is feeling at a particular time. These emoticons express emotions of happiness, sadness,

guilt, jealousy, boredom, etc. Adolescents make use of this application, as it is usually reflective of the way they feel at a given time. This may also show a lack of vocabulary that teenagers experience, either due to insufficient language training in both mother-tongue and second language. It could also be due to a desire to instantaneously express emotions and do so expressively. Adolescents do not have to say how they feel, for example sad; their online friends would just have to look onto the mobile screen and see that their friend is undergoing some emotional grief. The meanings of these emoticons are not described to the user online; therefore, the user may misinterpret the meanings behind the icons, thus misrepresenting herself online.

On Facebook, the adolescents are able to update their profile status and state what they want others to know. *"People can also give you drinks on Facebook, I love drinks like bloodmerry"*, exclaimed an excited older adolescent.

An application that is widely enjoyed by the adolescents is the **Booze mail**, where individuals can send and receive online drinks. These applications tend to help the adolescents connect socially with their peers and feel part of a virtual world that is supposedly understood by all who participate in it, or at least, users are expected to understand the meaning behind the symbols and words. **Booze mail** represents different alcoholic drinks that the adolescents can "consume" and thus ideologically feel part of a social environment. Therefore, having the **Booze mail** application on Facebook can be utilized by those who do drink and those who would like to, but would prefer to be 'online drinkers'. To be an online drinker allows others to perceive a person as someone who enjoys going out and having many friends by accepting "drinks". Therefore, a user is considered popular and socially acceptable, even if they are only popular and socially acceptable online. The **social identity theory** is applicable here, since the adolescents desire to be part of the in-group even though it is only through fantasy. In the King William's Town society (which is relatively conservative) social drinking among female adolescents is regarded as inappropriate and vulgar. Therefore, it conflicts with the conventional culture and value systems. The younger girls mentioned that they do not

consume alcohol but enjoy the consumption online. It was also added that their lack of freedom prevented them from further exploring actual drinking.

The receiving and sending of drinks on Facebook depicts the "party" scenario. The girls felt that although they do not go out often, they could imagine being in a social gathering and having fun drinking, even though it is something they do not do. This further reinstates that the adolescents desire to gratify their need to explore drinking and to be part of the in-group. One of the girls' favorite applications is the **Gift** application which conveys messages of social interaction, status and sharing. Items include flowers, birthday cakes, teddy bears, jewelry, lipstick, and lips (signifying kissing). These items are also associated with certain groups of people, e.g. flowers are normally associated with female recipients. The **Gift** application allows users that are listed as friends on Facebook to send a small icon of a novelty item. The gifts are designed by Susan Kare, who created the Apple icons on the 1983 Macintosh. Users are given one free Gift to give to a friend and after that they have to pay one dollar (R8) for any additional Gifts they want to send to a friend (Hall et al. 2007:11). Once again, the commercial benefit to the service providers of the application is evident.

"I like taking the Quizzes on Facebook, they tell you what type of person you are or what model you qualify to be." said a younger adolescent.

"I like them because they are sometimes true. I took a quiz that told me when I would be expected to get married, and it revealed the exact age that I desire to be married!," said another younger adolescent.

"Some quizzes are just there to make us think what it wants us to think, I don't believe in it," said an older adolescent.

"I sometimes hate seeing beautiful people all over Facebook, it's one of the reasons why I stopped getting online so much. Everyone wants to be a model! People go

out of their way to include the results of their Quizzes on their profiles," said an annoyed older adolescent.

Most of the adolescents revealed that they enjoyed taking the **Quizzes** on Facebook, which upon completion would describe what type of person they are, e.g. which model they qualify to be, what type of mother they will be and/or the kind of child that they would have and the age when they will get married. These quizzes illustrate how Facebook's applications portray social activities and social roles; the way that women are meant to behave and how they should look, e.g. like a model, and suggest that a woman should marry and have children. Some quizzes also imply that a woman should fulfill all of these ideals; that she should be attractive and should fulfill all the stereotypical social roles and that brings about feelings of apprehension. The **Quiz** applications can be seen as one of the ways that adolescents model the behaviors and attitudes of others, thus making the **modeling theory** applicable.

The central point of this discussion is that the media differ from socializing agents such as family, school, community and the legal systems, in that adolescents have greater control over their media choices than they do over their socialization from the conventional live sources.

MXit and Facebook offer a lot of words, abbreviations, objects and signs that communicate messages between the adolescents and provide sustainable meanings and impressions.

Conventionally, gender is understood as a semiotic system in which particular values or ideas are associated with designations of 'female' and 'male' (Lloyd & Duveen 1990:27). Correspondingly, there are symbols that signify female or male characteristics on the social sites, e.g., red lips or lipsticks are commonly associated to the female and femininity, while a picture of a soccer ball signifies sport activities and masculinity.

"On Facebook, I know that I must send a guy a football or a trophy as a gift, you can't send him flowers" said a younger adolescent.

These examples are signifiers of gender and provide the resources which individuals employ to express a social gender identity. Such sign systems function as a means of communication for social groups. Therefore, sign systems may also be seen as an expression of social representations (Lloyd & Duveen 1990:27).

"When I am having a bad day, I always just place a sad face on my MXit profile and I get the attention I need. Girl's normally use the emoticons as we are more emotional than boys, so we use it" said an older adolescent.

Helfenstein (2005:77) mentions that the way that individuals exchange emotion devices, is called *transfer*. The study of transfer is explicitly concerned with the emotion dimension of transfer as contents of consumers' and users' mental representations. The **social exchange theory** is applicable here as the adolescents exchange feelings of happiness, sadness, joy or information on the social sites.

These features have both advantages and disadvantages as adolescents enjoy visual images and these network sites provide means of creating meaning and deliberate expressions that are compatible with the users' ideal self as well as their personal self-presentation. The adolescents utilise the opportunity for creating a personal self-presentation on the social networks in order to acquire social interaction. Therefore, signs, stereotypes and language on social sites assist in the formation of social identity among adolescents; and form part of the way that the transfer of information is sent and/or retrieved from person to person.

Hobson & Patrick (1995, cited in Helfenstein 2005:77) state that affective transfer is involved in psychological process where previously experienced feelings and attitudes toward a situation, object or task are re-evoked in current engagement with related "symbols". This includes the transfer of affective connotations to situations or the socio-emotional values attached to an object, as well as the trans-situational transfer of emotional and social skills, attitudes and values in general (Damasio 1995, cited in Helfenstein 2005:77). When looking at symbols, adolescents can form different ideas as the connotations behind the objects are not clearly defined, and this in turn may bring

about feelings that are associated to past circumstances and consequently affect the way that adolescents socialize with each other.

Although the symbols on the "products" MXit and Facebook may generate different meanings, feelings and thoughts; the products activate meanings, feelings and thoughts that are derived from an individual's own specific needs and desires. According to Helfenstein (2005:78), the meaning of a product to a person can be seen as closely related to the individual's values in terms of his or her trans-situational goals or needs and the degree to which the product possession and use can elicit and satisfy the various functions incorporated in these needs. The affective and social dimensions of people's relation to products have naturally been the subject of numerous studies in the past. The approaches valued here build on such notions of meaning (cf. Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; human values and attitudes (cf. Braithwaite 1982; Fishbein 1967; Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1994), involvement, preference and choice (cf. Cohen 1983; Kim 1991: Mittal 1988; Mittal & Lee 1989; Zaichkowsky 1985) and the self-concept (cf. Claiborne & Sirgy 1990; Sirgy et al. 1997; Zinkham & Hong 1991, cited in Helfenstein 2005:78).

The items which stimulated socio-emotional meaning seemed to be strongest among the younger adolescents in the study, who are easily influenced by the fantasy world and who spend the most time online.

4.5.   SEXUALITY

Sexuality among the adolescents was an overwhelming theme evident from the responses in the interviews. As girls are socialized differently to boys in the King William's Town society, there is always a social expectation from the girls online to behave flirtatiously and sexually inappropriately.

Some younger teenagers were highly offended by the sexual content that was communicated to them online. The interviews revealed that both the younger adolescents and older adolescents were aware of their sexuality and often spoke on the behavioral differences of males and females when using MXit and Facebook. The adolescents

recognized themselves as being an emotionally and sexually desirable person. The adolescents also revealed their own emotional needs for teenage partnership.

The author will firstly look at the way these two social media play a role in the formation of the social identity among teenagers, and will do this by looking at the way the female adolescents project their sexual identities online and how they are treated in return.

4.5.1.   Male vs. Female online identities- Stereotypical behaviors

During the study, it was found that female adolescents compared themselves to their role models; *"I like to take the quizzes on Facebook to see which supermodel I look like and if we have the same personality"*, as one of the younger adolescents mentioned.

The obvious association that a supermodel elicits in audiences' minds is her fame, picture-perfect body and her ability to elicit a sexual gaze from the male world. It comes as no surprise that the representation of women across all media tends to highlight beauty, size, sexuality, emotions, and relationships. It is also not surprising that social networking sites such as MXit and Facebook are replicating these images as a marketing tool. It also became apparent that adolescents could pick up that males and females behaved differently online.

"Girls chat online more than boys. Boys stay online for a shorter time than girls. We have a lot more to talk about. Boys are usually out while we are at home, "said a younger adolescent.

"When chatting online, I find that my female friends are more open and give me more information than boys. We like details, "said another younger adolescent.

"When I chat to someone I don't know, especially a boy, I always send my photo or else they won't chat to me again," said a younger adolescent.

When guys chat to us, they usually want to flirt and when they get tired, then they get offline," said an older adolescent.

"Boys just use MXit and Facebook to get girls. We use it to genuinely socialize and keep in touch and that's the truth," said an older adolescent.

"Girls like talking; boys are busier doing other things such as drinking and rugby. Girls are more social beings; boys have more friends everywhere they go. Girls are more judgmental so it's harder to make friends." This statement by one of the older adolescents echoes Bradley's (2006:3) insight that children's social knowledge, for example, is obtained "through their participation in social groups, such as the family, school, or with their peers". It is indeed a fact that stereotypical behaviors among the adolescents are also learnt from socializing with their peers.

"I sometimes just pretend to be an exciting girl when I chat to a boy, because I don't want them to think I am boring. So I just tell him what he wants to hear." said a younger adolescent.

"I don't like it when I am chatting to a boy I don't know, then he asks me if I am beautiful in real life, it ticks me off!" said a younger adolescent.

"I don't believe everything a boy tells me online, I am too old to be lied to now," said an older adolescent.

Due to the adolescents' prior knowledge of themselves as being "gendered subjects", sexuality on MXit and Facebook was an explicit theme during the interview process. How a person portrays herself in the media is important and it is from online media like Facebook and MXit that adolescents continue to learn stereotypical roles and attributes beyond their childhood gendering acquired in normal social contexts such as the family, where gender stereotypes are general beliefs about characteristics that are presumed to be typical of each gender (Morris & Maisto 2002:25). Gender relations

between boys and girl online tended to be an undercurrent theme during the interview process. The female adolescents often compared themselves to males and explained their position for their online behavior.

4.5.2.   The Threat of Pornography

The older female adolescents report that they compete on the basis of who has more connections with mature boys that have money and a tertiary education. It is with this motivation that girls continue participating in online activities, in hoping to be acquainted with such persons. It is stereotypical for a man to be openly sexual, whether it is online or in private, towards a woman he may or may not know. The study revealed that male friends requested the girls to send them *"sexy pictures"* on MXit, and that some male friends sent the girls photo's of their genital areas and requested that the girls return the favour. The adolescents felt that once a boy offers to buy them airtime, he requests nude photos from them. This is something that 62% of the girls experienced.

The younger adolescents were more appalled by this behavior than the older adolescents who seem to have become more accustomed to shrewd, sexual behaviors from the opposite sex. The younger adolescents felt that it is not in their culture to exchange such explicit images and asserted that they respected themselves;

"We have values, how can they expect that from us," was an outcry from one of the younger adolescents.

"The boys send pornography on MXit, girls as well," an older adolescent said with a hint of amusement.

It was also revealed that nude photos are frequently transmitted on MXit, most pictures are of female celebrities with very offensive descriptions of their genital areas. What is more disturbing is that the younger adolescents were being sent nude photos of what they called *"grandmothers"* (old-aged women) on MXit by their male and female

friends. Woman of all ages are thus being promoted as subjects of scrutiny and sexual pleasure on this popular South African social network site.

A Marxist analysis of pornography is provided by Bryson (1999:177) that the commercialization and degradation of human relationships under capitalism, whereby people are alienated from their own bodies and sexuality, becomes a commodity rather than an expression of human connectedness and creativity. As such, pornography is a product of capitalist sexuality rather than a key component in structuring it, and therefore a symptom rather than a cause of the oppression of women. Pornography is seen by feminists as an act of oppression and discrimination against women in the same way as a sign saying, 'whites only', is an act of oppression and discrimination against black people (Bryson 1999:179). Uncensored pornographic images of naked women of all ages, shapes and classes are sent to the adolescents by their known and unknown contacts. The continuous exploitation of nude photos of celebrities and "grandmothers" on MXit sends a negative message to female adolescents, suggesting that their value lies in their physical appearance and their acceptance of male sexual advances and that they will cease to be respected once they have aged.

Jackson & Scott (1996:297) say that in defining pornography, one can make the connection with prostitution which is essential to the etymology of the term, as it transforms women into whores, into objects to be used by men. They argue that "pornography objectifies women for men's pleasures that it contributes to eroticization of power and violence and hence the construction of forms of masculine sexuality…"
It became very obvious that the social identity of the female adolescents was primarily affected by their male contacts.

"Boys just want our naked photos so that they can show their friends that we slept with them. Even if you just send a photo of your breasts," said an older adolescent.

"They want to use [it] for their own pleasure," said a younger adolescent.

Lesbianism is another sexual topic that was introduced by the respondents in the conversations during the structured group interviews. The younger adolescents once again were open about the different personalities that they encountered on the social site. Some girls were taken aback to have been socializing with girls who had "male tendencies" and were therefore categorized as "Lesbians". Some of the girls were not used to this social behavior and found the online relationship awkward and socially unacceptable. An individual's shift from the stereotypical female identity to lesbianism which is still a somewhat controversial topic in SA despite the recent legislation allowing single-gender marriages, may change a person's identity, values and how she relates to the outside world. The adolescents thus experienced clashes between their personal self and their online identities as some of their values were compromised online while chatting to individuals of complex sexual identities.

"Some people you chat to on MXit are confused…you think that a person is normal, until they ask you for a nude photo….even girls ask, its normal these days." said an older adolescent.

"Boys are always just thinking about naked women that is why they ask girls to send them photos. Older men offer girls airtime, then after you have received the airtime, they want you to send them a picture," said a younger adolescent.

"Boys think it is funny to ask us for nude photos but I think it is degrading. We are not porn stars! " said a younger adolescent.

The **social exchange theory** and **gratification theory** are applicable in this section of the study as the males and females both exchange 'information' that gratifies their needs. According to Murphy (2004:25), the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC), states in his book *Economics* that men are stronger, women weaker, men courageous, women cautious, men are the outdoor type and women domestic. Men are said to educate children, whereas women nurture them. This ancient Greek philosophy continues to exert an influence today, many centuries later. Understanding the sexual differences establishes not only the sex of bodies, but also the kinds of desire they can

have. Society generally teaches men that they should dominate; it teaches women that they should be submissive and consequently, men have the opportunity to dominate women. It is quite evident that sexuality is interpreted as a theory about human beings which divides them into two biologically-based categories; male and female (cf. Francis, Waring, Stravropoules and Kirkby 2003:6). The media play a considerable role in present-day society, aiding and tampering with the supposed "oracle" of a woman; normalizing her secrets, passions, desires and goals, through the collective means of communication.

"I will never send a boy a nude photo of myself. It could end up on the internet with my name on the site. I am too good for that. Plus people can make copies and it is hard to get it off the internet," said a proud yet fearful older adolescent.

4.5.3   Safety and Harassments

A discussion arose, relating that parents feel that cell phones are becoming a nuisance as their child's personality is becoming distorted during and after their interaction with the social network sites. It was also discussed that the teenagers felt addicted and often did not disclose to their parents that they had MXit on their phones. Some claimed to pretend to be playing games on their phones but were in fact utilizing the social networking site. Others consistently pretend to send text messages to avoid their parents from knowing that they are online utilizing the social site.

"Parents don't want us using MXit because of the things they read about in the newspapers," said a younger adolescent.

"Facebook is much safer than MXit. To become friends with someone, you would have to at least know their name, surname and where they live in order to be friends. When it comes to MXit, you can just make up a cell phone number and invite the person as a friend. It's really not safe" said an older adolescent.

"d8 for DATE is a chatroom where you can get contacts if you want to date someone, you just have to be careful because you can get into contact with some real psycho's" said an older adolescent.

Just as bodies mature during adolescence, so do patterns of thought (Morris & Maisto 2002:420). Piaget (1969, cited in Morris & Maisto 2002:420) saw the **cognitive** advances of adolescence **(outlined in the developmental theory)** as an increased ability to reason abstractly, called formal-operational thought. Not all adolescents reach the stage of formal operations, and many of those who do, fail to apply formal operational thinking to the everyday problems they face (Gardner 1982, cited in Morris & Maisto 2002:420). Younger adolescents especially are unlikely to be objective about matters concerning their safety and have not yet achieved a deep understanding of the difficulties involved in moral judgments.

Facebook has been criticized from many different angles, as of late. One issue the website and its creator, Mark Zuckerberg, are facing is the concern that Facebook is not doing enough to protect young children from sexual predators (Hall, Hickle, Irwin & Jorkos 2007:11-12). It seems that South Africa is following in the footsteps of the western world with the increase of social predators on social networking sites. The Attorney General of New York, Andrew Cuomo, began investigating these claims when he received concerns from the public that, although Facebook and other social networking sites are popular among young people, they are also a hotbed for those who wish to take advantage of children (Gilbertson 2007a).

The concerns began with an investigation involving the attorney general's office setting up a fake Facebook profile for a 14-year old girl, which was contacted within a week by a 24-year old man wanting naked pictures of the girl (Gilbertson 2007b). Cuomo wrote a letter to Zuckerberg stating that, although Facebook has the right to run its website however it wants, the site does not have the right to tell the public it is safe when user safety can obviously not be guaranteed (Hall et al. 2007:12).   The younger adolescents were also aware that sexual predators were using MXit to reach underage girls; it was mentioned that a girl from the community disappeared after meeting a male online friend. The girl had apparently chatted to him for two months before she decided

to meet him. He had also falsified his identity, claiming he was seventeen years old and residing in Cape Town, when in fact, he was a thirty seven year old man. The meeting place was a local restaurant. She was reported missing after that day; it was said that the girl never came back. The girls also mentioned that the girl was black and thought that she was meeting someone rich. (The adolescents suspected that the man was white). The girls concluded that there is a general trend that black girls wanted to meet rich, white men online. It is difficult to secure the safety of adolescents online when poor decisions, as in this scenario, are being made by adolescents. Adolescents are overly concerned with their status and identities and consequently, easily overlook their safety. It is their need/desire to be part of the in-group that lures the adolescents into situations that they cannot control. The younger adolescents also revealed that the most outrageous thing that they did on MXit, is meeting their online contacts.

"I met this guy once…we were friends on MXit for three months, so we decided to meet. I will never do it again. He turned out to be ugly and desperate," said a younger adolescent.

"If a person decides to meet someone who they don't know, they must not go alone. That is stupid. At least meet the person in a public area, like the mall," said an older adolescent.

"If a guy refuses to allow you to bring a friend along, then he is dodgy, rather stay away from him and change your number. Never tell him where you stay!" said an older adolescent.

Some of the girls admitted to being stalked telephonically, where unknown individuals continuously called them even after they were deleted from their phones; the man would rename himself and persists on harassing the girl on MXit. Some weeks after the structured interviews were conducted with the female adolescents; *Special Assignment* broadcasted a special report on SABC 3, on the 9 September 2008 and 23 December 2008. *Special Assignment* is a weekly investigative documentary show that aims to uncover the truth about news events and the people involved in them (Unknown 2008). The report was by Sasha Wales Smith on the dangers of social networking sites among

teenagers in South Africa. The story revealed that Bluetooth makes it easy for individuals to send nude photos and this has contributed to an increase in child pornography in South Africa. Online behavior experts also revealed that paedophiles use the famous MXit chat room, d8 (www.d8.co.za) to lure young girls for child pornography. The report revealed that girls in particular meet people they do not know, are drugged and raped, this act is filmed and placed on the internet. The report on *Special Assignment* revealed that schools recently had been targeted with a "SLUT LIST: 2008" where "50 sluts" (names of female children who were listed on the MXit chat rooms by their peers) in Durban. The report revealed the names of children, their school, their grades and phone numbers. A "BASTARD LIST: 2008" with names of boys was also distributed onto chat sites later in the year as well. The report concluded that it is illegal to make porn movies and those who are found guilty face ten years imprisonment. The report cautioned parents, educators and adolescents of the dangers that social network sites constitute among teenagers and invited persons to report child pornography to their help line; **Tel: 0800 148 148.**

4.5.3.1 Antagonistic Behavior and Bullying

It was found that not only males were acting inappropriately online, but females did so too. Bullying is quickly becoming a problem on social sites, as Sasha Wales Smith reported on *Special Assignment.* The adolescents revealed that girls are using social network sites such as MXit to seek revenge on their rivals. Examples given were:

1. Jealous girlfriends would harass the other girls and send confrontational messages to encourage them to stop meddling with their relationships with their boyfriends.

2. Male contacts would bully girls who refuse to satisfy their sexual needs; therefore they would call them names like "slut", "whore", "bitch".

3. Girls and boys would threaten each other for various other reasons, especially when confronting matters that derived from gossip.

Such antagonistic behaviors among adolescents are becoming a tendency on social network sites; many of the girls have resorted to changing their cell phone numbers

and at times renaming themselves to protect their identities online and offline. If adolescents are confronted with these messages on a daily basis, it should be questioned how these girls feel about their identities and whether this type of abuse impacts on their real life relationships with people. Some of the younger adolescents admitted that although they did not know most of the people who were harassing them, the offensive messages that they received left them angry, uncomfortable and emotionally impaired. Others retaliated by adopting the same behaviors as their opponents, they also began to harass other people online as an outlet for their frustrations. The girls now moved from being victims to acting as perpetrators. This sort of power-shift is made possible by social sites, as individuals have more courage to be offensive online towards those they dislike, than offline. The world of fantasy is definitely a place where adolescents feel powerful and in control and therefore enact unacceptable behavior.

The diversion of youths from reality to fantasy is becoming a concerning topic among both parents and scholars. Sigmund Freud's term for the part of the personality that mediates between environmental demands (reality), conscience (superego) and instinctual needs (id) is the ego. It is now often used as a synonym for 'self' (Morris & Maisto 2002:447). Instead of acting on the pleasure principle, the ego operates by the **reality principle**: by means of intelligent reasoning. The ego tries to delay satisfying the id's desires until it can do so safely and successfully. It is for this reason that adults are psychologically more developed and can be governed not only by reality but also morality, called **superego**, which is defined as the social and parental standards the individual has internalized (Morris & Maisto 2002:447).

Since the superego is not present at birth, young children are immoral and do whatever is pleasurable. It is only as they mature that they adopt the judgments of their parents about what is "good" and "bad." In time, the external restraint applied by their parents gives way and the superego takes over the task of observing and guiding the ego, just as the parents once observed and guided the child. It became evident in the interview responses that the adolescents were beginning to move into a place where they were both applying and rejecting parental standards regarding social sites.

The superego is more evidently active in the older adolescents as they had a more mature approach to the use of MXit than the younger adolescents. The older adolescents were more concerned about the potential threats and dangers of using the social network sites, whereas the younger adolescents were aware of them but seemed to not take the current situations too seriously. The older adolescents felt that Facebook is much safer than MXit, as the user will need a person's name, surname and address to add someone as a friend. On MXit, users can make up random phone numbers and add them as friends to get contacts. The cognitive development of adolescents thus influenced the adolescents' social behaviors when using the social network sites to communicate.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the fact that the adolescents lived in King William's Town, the girls felt that they would be considered 'lost' or 'backward' if they did not know about MXit and Facebook as the latest online trends worldwide. From this study, it is quite clear that MXit and Facebook are utilized extensively by the teenagers, especially MXit for its user-friendly facilities. It is good for addressing perceived emergencies with their friends since it is cost-effective, using only R0.01 each time a user logs into the social site. It is also faster and cheaper than the internet at the Cafés, and cheaper than the normal cellular phone text messaging charges. Therefore, the study reflects the adolescents' motivational needs for using the social sites (Oulasvirta 2005:62), which included academic purposes as well as the relief from boredom. The adolescents revealed that they were acquainted with Facebook and MXit. In fact, the adolescents were acquainted with the following social network sites: Bing, MySpace, Bluepulse, mig33 and Noknok, therefore fulfilling the hypothesis:

H$_1$:   It is hypothesized that female Xhosa/English speaking adolescents in the King William's Town area are acquainted with Facebook and MXit.

The six theories; social identity theory, the modeling theory, the stereotyping theory, the gratification theory, the social exchange theory and the cognitive development theory have been useful in the study for the following reasons:

The study revealed that since the adolescents spend 8 to 15 hours a day online especially on MXit; they desire to be part of the thrill that came along with using the social media. This further revealed that the adolescents desired to be part of the in-group as they did not want to be considered 'backward' and 'technologically impaired.' The adolescents discovered that being part of the two social networking sites, especially MXit, was beneficial to them and it helped increase their social capital as the younger adolescents met new people and most believed that they were also corresponding with celebrities.

Therefore their quest for being part of the in-group and being part of something stimulating was fulfilled as hypothesized:

H2: There will be a relationship between the social media and social categorization of the world; the tendency to divide the social world into the in-group and out-group (Morris & Maisto 2002:222).

Therefore, the social identity theory which categorizes the social world into two groups, the in-group and out-group, was useful in the study (Tajfel 1982, cited in Taylor, Peplau & Sears 2003:187).

The adolescents made use of features such as **MultiMx** on MXit to socialize with seven contacts all at the same time. To identify themselves on the virtual community, the seven contacts gave their group a name which would separate themselves from the rest of their other contacts, and to identify themselves within the group. The social identity theory was a significant tool to address the way that adolescents form the identity online. It was patent that their friends and role models influenced their social behavior online by adopting their favorite celebrity's name in order to assume a position of status and power within the virtual world. The positive reinforcement of the identity of the adolescents using MXit is strongly dependant on their online friends. If their friends decide to use Facebook more, then the adolescents will use that social medium more often. Otherwise, the adolescents can only benefit if they are in tune with the social media that their peers are currently using; and in turn, their peers must also be in tune with the current social trends. Therefore, Livingstone (1996:300) is correct to say that there is a 'continuous cycle of influence'. This reflects the key difference between mass and social media. Social media make it possible for individuals to communicate more readily than traditional mass media, as there is an immediate response from the receiver to the sender.

The modeling theory, which stipulates that the user can adopt the behavior portrayed by the model (Defleur& Dennis 1994, cited in Fourie 2001:300-301), proved to be applicable to social media. The adolescents acknowledged the advertisements on MXit

and Facebook from the different brand custodians, celebrities and/or agents. On MXit, adolescents viewed content that initiated seemingly desirable attributes. This resulted in the adolescents wanting to be closer to their role models and to desire that with which they identified with on the social sites.

The purpose of the study is to create awareness and investigate the different kinds of ways in which the social network sites like MXit and Facebook play a role in the social identity formation among the female adolescents. By looking at the two social networking sites, it has been discovered that these two social media are also used primarily by the mass media as advertising tools.

The stereotyping theory exposed the way that the adolescents viewed what was advertised on the social sites. The social media only re-advertise that which is stereotypical of certain people, organizations and groups (Defleur & Dennis 1994, cited in Fourie 2001:303) and the adolescents would model the behavior.

The adolescents noticed and absorbed stereotypical portrayals of women through the social media as well as other forms of propaganda. Therefore, the author concurs with McQuail (2004, cited in Fourie 2001:293) that the [social] media can cause intended as well as unintended minor change and can also facilitate, reinforce and prevent change in social identity.

Being able to communicate with friends and having to know what is happening around them through the use of MXit and Facebook, made the gratification theory useful in its application to the study; it addresses the needs of users and the probable gratifications that they derive from media use (O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery and Fiske 1994:326; McQuail 2000, cited in Fourie 2001:297). The interview results revealed somewhat surprising results that corroborate the theory: since the adolescents were highly concerned about how they presented themselves on the social sites, the adolescents gratified their needs by meeting their online contacts, naming themselves after celebrities to emulate status and in the end exploring their sexuality by exchanging emotional and sexual content with male adolescents in the virtual context.

The social exchange theory was applicable in observing how the adolescents used the social sites which resulted in them gaining benefits from their interaction with their online friends. MXit and Facebook alleviated boredom, and were additionally used by the

girls to conduct study sessions on the virtual sites. The adolescents reported that discussing their homework online was convenient and cost=effective. The adolescents' responses also revealed that sexual content was often sent to the adolescents. This confirms the social exchange theory that analyzes the interaction between people and costs and benefits that the individuals exchange with each (Taylor et al. 2003:10). The theory not only assisted in expressing how the adolescents utilized the social sites, but also facilitated recognition of what type of "products" they were exchanging on the social sites, and for which reasons.

The application of the cognitive developmental theory revealed that the younger adolescents were still caught between fantasy and reality, whereas the older adolescents were more realistic in the way they presented themselves online and in the extent to which they would trust anonymous contacts. Cummins (2005:5) observes Piaget's assertion that "as children age, they become more able to engage in abstract reasoning such as that needed to discern between reality and fantasy." This is clearly confirmed by this study.

With the aid of the six theories, the results of the study prove that the social media's effect on the social identity formation among adolescents has subject to both positive and negative effects. The extent of these effects appears to be significantly moderated by teenagers' demographics, personality and family relations, all of which play a major role in determining media effects (Craft, Leigh and Godfrey 2001:353).

Cultural influences outlined in this study have shown that the social identity formation of adolescents is dependent on their social backgrounds and beliefs. Subcultures are emerging on social sites within the youth cultures in King William's Town. Adolescents are beginning to construct their own online languages, groups and traditions within the social networks.

Therefore this research opens up the debate on the cultural value and social purpose of social network sites. Future studies should

(1)   Include research on adolescents from small-sized populations and different geographical areas.

(2)   Explore how the different cultural, socio-economic and ethnic groups among adolescents utilize social media as a socializing tool in order to gain an

understanding of how people of diverse backgrounds form the social identity online.

(3)   Consider how advertising content and messages shape the social identities of adolescents, since advertising on social media is slowly becoming popular. Greater knowledge of the three studies could assist brand custodian, marketers, designers, and publishers to make effective decisions regarding the presence and use of advertising on social media.

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