Malay Women's Identity Construction and Engagement with The Sims Social in Facebook.

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Abstract

This thesis encapsulates how Malay women engage with globalisation and modernity through Western, more specifically American media. Through examining online gaming and platforms, this study demonstrates that these women negotiate the clash of sociocultural values with a variety of strategies. *The Sims Social*, a type of online game played via Facebook is taken as a case study to explore the complexity of identity performance and management that emerges as these two different, but overlapping contexts collide.

The research finds that instead of rejecting the many clashing social-cultural values portrayed in *The Sims Social*, Malay women attain pleasure as they negotiate their way through different aspects of the game. Despite the stark differences between the sociocultural and religious values presented by this game and their own values, Malay women explain how their sociocultural values particularly Islam; grant them the licence to play the game.

Nevertheless, there are circumstances where the values portrayed in the game crossed a line causing players to take a firm stand, mostly on the grounds of their religious beliefs, and play was set aside in favour of Islamic values. These circumstances were brought to the surface and discussed in this research.

Utilising three types of methodology; online participant observation, focus groups, and face-to-face interviews, this study explores the performance and management of identity across the thin boundaries of three different but overlapping contexts within *The Sims Social,* Facebook and offline contexts. Other features examined were the boundaries play breaches along the intersection of gender, sociocultural norms, religion and the values inscribed in the game.

Pargman and Jakobsson's (2008) 'frame metaphor' is used to complement Giddens's and Goffman's theories to explore and explain the experience these Malay women players encounter during play in *The Sims Social* as they weave their identity performance through three overlapping contexts.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Shifa Faizal

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Acronyms used

ANT	Actor–network theory
API	Application program interfaces
EA	Electronic Arts
GTA	*Grant Theft Auto*
MMOG	Massively multiplayer online game
MMORPG	Massively multiplayer online role playing game
MUD	Multi-User Dungeons
NEP	New Economic Policy
NPC	Non-player character
OMG	Oh my God
PBUH	Peace be upon Him
RPG	Role playing game
PVR	Personal video recorder
SNG	Social network game
SNS	Social network site
TSS	*The Sims Social*
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation
US	The United States of America
XP	Experience points

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis investigates the engagements of Malay women with the social networking game *The Sims Social,* in order to explore how they negotiate aspects of culture such as gender roles and religion when participating in a globalised media context. *The Sims Social* offers an opportunity to research the construction of identity in an online, global, and gaming context. 'The context in which modern Malay Muslim women operate is a complex one' (Jamil Osman 2013, p.2). Malay women in Malaysia are in a constant balancing act negotiating being Malay, Muslim and women in modern Malaysia; fulfilling specific gender expectations in line with Islam and the Malay *adat* (customary law) and participating in the economy and modernity as encouraged by the government (Jamil Osman 2013).

Identity by itself is complex, and it is further complicated when one needs to juggle multiple identities on Facebook, which is visible in an unprecedentedly public way. For Malay women who were participants in this study, some form of identity management or self-presentation management is required in order to manage their 'authentic identity' performed on Facebook and 'identity play' performed in *The Sims Social.* This is because most of them feel the need to be consistent with their identity in both online and offline spaces, especially on Facebook where the public is made of people they know offline. Although the need to manage their self-presentation exists and was practised, most of them were managing it indirectly.

I began this thesis after reading research on human experiences with digital media such as digital games and social network sites. I was intrigued by the differences in women's behaviour towards media consumption, which triggered a simple question: How do Malay women engage with *The Sims Social* and Facebook? How is their engagement with this type of media different from their engagement with 'mass media'? This simple question led me to further explore how users interact on Facebook and the ways identities are represented and managed by its users, particularly Malay women.

Facebook seems liberating by providing several platforms for Malay women to express and perform their identities, for example through games or meme sharing. However, it also limits the freedom to perform multiple identities at the same time. The structure of Facebook and its policy which requires its users to present their 'authentic' identity can be problematic. The meaning and perception of the word 'authentic' is subjective. Facebook's privacy policy has raised issues related to its attempts to 'authenticate' the identity of holders of accounts on Facebook. For some Facebook users, the issue of visibility and authenticity has further complicated the management of multiple identities.

This project looks at *The Sims Social* as a site or outlet where individuals were in constant play; managing, experimenting with and negotiating their identity as a way of experiencing globalisation and modernity. The discussion on identity play performed on *The Sims Social* can only be fully understood if Facebook is included into the discussion. This is because *The Sims Social* was exclusively played on Facebook, and Facebook provided affordances to its users to play and to connect gameplay activities to their social network site. This also meant that the identity performed in the game context leaked into Facebook and became visible to unintended audiences. This had consequences for the players' self-presentation of their 'authentic' identity on Facebook.

Malay ethnicity is in itself complex, not only does it determine identity, it is also defined by two important factors stipulated in the Constitution of Malaysia. Being Malay in Malaysia is defined by first, those who profess to Islam as their religion, and second, adhere to Malay customs which includes habitually speaking the Malay language. Their identity is defined by their Malay *adat* (customs) and Islamic values. For Malay women, these values are observed through their way of life and the way they present themselves in daily life. In Islam, men and women are equal, though there are specific roles and responsibilities to be performed by respective genders. For example, 'while men are the main breadwinners and rulers of a family, women are responsible for taking care of the house and children' (Jamil Osman 2013, p. 16). Islam has never confined women merely to domestic work. In fact, 'women are free to learn and work as men do; this is gender equality in Islam (Mohd Salleh, 2003 as cited in Jamil Osman 2013, p. 16). Although Islam outlines and guarantees women's status as equal to men, the Malay *adat* however, has a strong inclination towards the patriarchal system, positioning Malay women in a complicated situation as they need to 'manage and negotiate their position within their identity as Malay Muslim women and the patriarchal system ingrained in their culture' (Jamil Osman 2013, p. 16)

In modern, democratic and multi-ethnic Malaysia, both Islam and the Malay *adat* are important elements in the construction of Malaysia's modernity project. Malaysia's moderate approach to Islam (Aziz & Shamsul 2004; Baharuddin, 2005) sees Malay women in Malaysia as unconventional and having more freedom compared to their counterparts in the Middle East or in South Asian Muslim countries (Hefner 2006).

Modern Malaysia encourages transnational media and entertainment industries to flourish which brings cross-border, cross-cultural consumption of global entertainment media by local media users (Mirrlees 2013). However, the Malays' encounter with Western cultures and values did not come as something new or different, because their encounters predate the mass media era. The Malay Peninsula was colonised by three European powers: the Portuguese, who captured Malacca in 1511; the Dutch, who

took over in 1641; and finally the British, who occupied the northern Malayan island of Penang in 1786 before the Second World War when the Japanese were in power from 1942 to 1945. Malaya was a British colony until Malaysia became independent in 1957. Due to the long years of colonisation, the Malays were reasonably exposed to Western values.

After independence, these values continued to be part of Malaysians' experience through pop culture consumed on television, movies, radio and magazines. Western cultural values were pouring into Malaysia particularly when a private TV station, TV3 started its operation in 1984, which saw Malaysians switch from the state run Radio TV Malaysia (RTM) for more appealing, entertainment oriented content, the majority of which came from Hollywood (Dunnett 2011). This raised concerns about the influence Western values had on the sociocultural and religious values of the Malays. The complaints caused TV3 to increase its local content gradually and by 2010, 72% of TV3 content was local.

However, the increase of local content on TV3 does not eliminate the fear about the influence of Western values. This is because in 1996, ASTRO - Malaysia's first and only direct broadcast satellite pay television service was launched with 22 TV stations that introduced American cable TV stations such as HBO and MTV channels for the first time to Malaysians. As Malaysia embraced globalisation and modernity, Malays were exposed to more American and Western values which led to studies such as Frith and Frith (1990) Idrus, Hashim and Mohd Mydin (2014) Ishak (2011) which focus on the influence of these cultures on Malay women. Being a patriarchal society, it is no surprise that the focus is directed to Malay women because of the gendered roles and responsibility expected of women - as mothers, homemakers and child rearers. The majority of these studies have found that the fear of Malay women adopting Western culture was groundless, as Malay women have continued to embrace modernity without deserting their religious and cultural identities.

There has been a rapid rise of the internet over the last 20 years. Unlike the mass media, including television, radio and newspapers, which is regulated by the Malaysian government, the internet lives up to the term 'a world without borders'. Its self-regulated nature means that there is minimal law enforcement in place to govern its consumption. The global mass-adoption of social media, starting with Friendster and Myspace in the early 2000s and later Facebook, has altered the way Malay women experience modernity, from being a mere third-person watching and consuming media content to actively engaging with the content.

Initially, the internet was praised for creating a safe and anonymous space in which to experiment with identity (see e.g. Turkle 1995). However, more recent research suggests that anonymity on the internet has lost its initial meaning as social media becomes a site where being '"*nonymous"* or not anonymous

is performed as users are compel[led] to perform identity in new ways' (Cirucci 2014, p. 1). The advent of social media has provided a platform for Malay women to engage with globalisation and modernity, and utilise these sites 'as places to create, maintain, broadcast, and interpret their identities' (Cirucci 2014, p. 1).

The identity performed on Facebook is a digital embodiment or re-creation of a person's offline self because Facebook firmly encourages its users to be as 'authentic' as possible, 'often through features such as uploaded photos and GPS check-ins' (Cirucci 2014, p. 2). However, identity in social media spaces like Facebook is complicated because different identities (performed in different contexts for different audiences) were amalgamated and made visible to its networked public; and this is due to its 'composite result of structure, design, and organization' (Papacharissi 2009, p. 205).

Facebook, and many other social network sites, is equipped with affordances that link to other websites (for example social network games (SNGs) such as *The Sims Social*) from which users can share information regarding their gameplay on their Facebook newsfeed and timeline. This adds another layer of identity on top of the identity performed on Facebook, causing multiple identities (which could be contradictory) to be visible and broadcast to 'unprecedented potential audiences' (Cirucci 2014, p.1). The complexity of managing identity and information 'given' and 'given off' requires proper self-presentation management or impression management (Goffman 1959).

The research objectives, questions and aims

The purpose of this research is to document the experiences and perceptions of Malay women encountering globalisation and modernity through *The Sims Social*, a type of social network game (SNG) played on Facebook. These are the objectives of the research:

1. To explore Malay women's media consumption habits, particularly digital networked media alongside other more conventional media.

2. To explore Malay women's experiences of globalisation and modernity through their engagement with *The Sims Social on Facebook* in their daily lives. In particular, this research explores the area where sociocultural and religious values collide, as these Malay women players experiment, negotiate and manage their performance of selves in a realm such as *The Sims Social* which is predominantly filled with Western/American values and within the parameters of their networked publics on Facebook.

3. To explore the ways Malay women manage their performance of self in a complicated context that allows multiple identities to exists as they play *The Sims Social* afforded by Malaysia popular social network site, Facebook.

Focusing on *The Sims Social* as the site for the research, below are the research questions:

1. What are the media consumption habits of Malay women, particularly with regard to social network games and social network sites, alongside other media? How does the consumption of media affect the way Malay women experience globalisation and modernity in general and in particular with regards to American/Western culture as presented in *The Sims Social* played on Facebook? What are the experiences and perceptions Malay women have as a result of consuming globalised media content in their daily lives?

2. What are Malay women's experiences through their engagement with SNGs (generally) and *The Sims Social* in their daily lives? How do their identities as Malay women intersect with their play experiences in *The Sims Social*? How do they negotiate the culture, values and ideology presented within the game realm?

3. What are Malay women's experiences with Facebook, the platform for *The Sims Social*? As the identity performed within the game realm adds a layer and thus complicates the identity performed on Facebook, how do they manage multiple, fluid and possibly clashing identities?

The Sims Social and Facebook were selected as case studies because Facebook is the world's most popular social network site with 1.86 billion monthly active users as of December 31, 2016 (Company Info | Facebook Newsroom 2017) and *The Sims Social* was the fastest growing Facebook games at that time and was in the top five of applications on Facebook from its debut in 2011 (Ward 2011). It was launched in 2011 but it was shut down in June 2013. While in Malaysia, Facebook has been the most popular social network site with estimated numbers of Facebook users in 2017 to be 11.8million **(**Malaysia: number of Facebook users 2021 | Statistic 2017).

In addition to its popularity, Facebook was chosen as a case study in this research because of its features 'that allow users to construct and perform identity in different ways, such as status updates, photographs, and GPS check-ins that work to "validate" certain identity performances' (Cirucci 2014, p. 3). This research looks at how one such feature in Facebook, the social network game *The Sims Social*, affected the way identity was performed and managed in both the game realm and in Facebook.

2000 to 2010 saw the rise of casual games (Juul, 2012). Often seen as an 'underdog' segment of the gaming industry, it was, however, a rapidly growing segment of the video game market, with its revenue in 2014 estimated to be $8.64 billion (Social Network Games: Casual Games Sector Report 2012). Facebook became the most popular platform for casual games (thus the term 'social network games') with game titles such as *Farmville, Cityville* and *The Sims Social* becoming the most played social games on Facebook at that time (*Gardens of Time* beats *Cityville* in Facebook games list - BBC News 2012). Some common characteristics of social network games are that they are simple to play, inexpensive and easy to adopt. This multibillion industry is often played by the 'mass consumer, who would not normally regard themselves as a gamer' (*Casual Games Market Report* 2007, 2009). For a few years, social media games dominated the media landscape. This thesis explores a period when they reached their peak popularity.

This study considers the intersection of the 'work' of constructing and performing identity in Facebook and the 'play' of identity in *The Sims Social*. In today's globalised media, other cultures and values are inevitably encountered. Malay women face this phenomenon on a daily basis when consuming media and balancing identities, particularly with regard to their exposure to the American and Western cultures, ideologies and values that are embedded in the game. This challenges the 'consistency' of these women's identity performance, which is already complex to begin with. Informed by their intertwined social, cultural and religious identity, Malay women go through the process of reflexivity to further negotiate the values presented in the media they consume in their daily encounters with modernity.

Many cultural and social theories of identity suggest that identities are multiple, fluid, dynamic, malleable and, perhaps, volatile rather than consistent (Buckingham 2007; van Zoonen 2013). The internet is no longer a utopian, consequence-free playground where people can experiment with identity (Shakeshaft 2011). Social network sites such as Facebook advocate for the management of a single, authentic identity.

Although research on identity and self-presentation proposes that the performance of identity is contextual (Goffman 1959), Goffman also suggests that identity has to be consistent to be successful. Thus, consistency is the key in performing or managing one's identity. But this is difficult in networked publics such as in social networking sites; where previously separated audiences, for whom we performed our identity differently, converge into the same space (boyd 2008).

As more and more applications surface within a social network site (SNS) environment, for example the SNGs, a further layer of complexity is added to the identity management process by introducing an element of play in which people may be experimenting with and constructing their identity differently.

Although both SNSs and SNGs coexist to facilitate social interaction (Wohn 2012), the boundaries between the game and the broader platform may be somewhat permeable, which generates a risk of performance inconsistency.

Utilising three methods – online participant observation, focus groups and face-to-face interviews – this research explores the experience of a group of Malay women who played *The Sims Social.* It shows them experimenting, negotiating and managing identity across different contexts, online and offline, and dealing with the intersection of gender, sociocultural values and ideologies that are inscribed in the game. This research is focused on themes relevant to the lives of these Malay women: being Malay women as they engaged with and negotiated a game text laden with culture and ideologies that were familiar but often unacceptable in their context. The permeability of their 'Malayness' could still be seen, though in very limited context, particularly in the areas involving Islam. This indicated the significance of religion in their lives. The findings that emerged from the focus group and personal interviews are supplemented with data retrieved from online participant observation. In total, the online participant observation involved 46 Malay women players in the researcher's *The Sims Social* game. However, only 22 Malay women were interviewed- 13 were divided into two separate focus groups and nine Malay women were interviewed personally.

The game emerged as a heterotopic space of experimentation, rationalised by the players' use of a strong conception of a 'magic circle'. The 'magic circle' is a term coined by Johan Huizinga to describe a game-playing space established by the players through a set of rules to separate play from the 'real world' (Huizinga 1955). Huizinga's magic circle was established to describe play before the existence of digital games, thus the use of magic circle as a theory to describe play within the digital game studies is problematic. It has drawn many critics such as from scholars like Taylor (2007), Copier (2005) and Pargman and Jakobsson (2008) claiming that the magic circle is inadequate to describe the nature of play for digital games.

However, Juul gave an interesting understanding on the operational value of this theory. Instead of disapproving the magic circle completely, he claimed that the magic circle 'is a description of the salient differences between a game and its surrounding context' (Juul 2008, p.60). It is these differences that sparked negotiation between players and the game they engaged with; demonstrating the flexibility of the magic circle. In Juul's words,

> The magic circle is the boundary that players negotiate. To deny the magic circle is to deny that players negotiate this boundary. Game scholarship should be about analysing the conventions of this boundary, and how and when this boundary is created and negotiated. (Juul 2008, p. 62)

In this research, the Malay women's social-cultural, religious values are the surrounding contexts that interact with the game contexts. The interactions of different contexts caused a lot of negotiations between the players (Malay women) and the game (*The Sims Social*). Attitudes towards the hijab by the Malay women and their encounter with *The Sims Social* was one example of a broader and more complex negotiation at play; one in which the constraints of gender and religion were renegotiated within a 'play' space of aspirational capitalism.

This project addresses several gaps in the literature. Although there have been a number of established studies of digital games from a gendered perspective, many of these studies focused on the AAA-game titles played on consoles. More recent studies have focused on online games such as massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) or massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs). However, not many studies have focused on online casual games, particularly casual games played through social networking sites such as Facebook. To date, there have been very few studies seeking to understand the integration of this so-called 'masculine pursuit' in women's daily lives (Bryce & Rutter 2002, p. 253), especially in the context of a predominantly Muslim, South-East Asian country such as Malaysia.

Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised in nine chapters. This preliminary chapter discusses the aims of the research and its significance. Chapter 2 sets the context of the research, the social network game *The Sims Social* which is played on Facebook. It also explores the structures of the game. Chapter 3 brings in the key theoretical underpinnings of this research and introduces the main subject of this research: Malay women. Giddens's notion of reflexivity is the underpinning theory used to understand Malaysia's globalisation and distinctive modernity. This theory provides a window to understand the process that takes place as Malay women encounter globalisation, particularly via media. Chapter 4 discusses the context of identity performance with reference to social network games and social network sites through the lens of Giddens' notion of self-identity and Goffman's notion of self-presentation management. Chapter 5 presents the methodology of this research, in which three qualitative methods were applied: participant observation, focus groups and in-depth interviews. The subsequent chapters, 6, 7 and 8 report and discuss the findings of this research, with each chapter focusing on a different context. Chapter 6 focuses on Malay women's engagement with globalised media, cultural negotiation and gendered issues surrounding their everyday media consumption. This is important in order to situate the consumption of *The Sims Social* and Facebook in relation to other media, and to provide a holistic understanding of their media experience. Chapter 7 highlights the engagement of Malay women with

The Sims Social. Chapter 8 focuses on Malay women's experiences with Facebook in ways which enable play. Conclusions and recommendations follow in Chapter 9.

Chapter 2: The structure of *The Sims Social*

Introduction

The structures of social network sites play 'a large role in how users employ the site, view others, and view themselves' (Cirucci 2014, p. 61, citing Papacharissi 2009; Postigo 2014). Understanding the affordances in SNGs is equally important. *The Sims Social* was launched in 2011 but lived a short life as it was shut down in June 2013. This chapter attempts to set the context for this research, focusing on the game and its host, Facebook.

Exploring Malay women's engagement with *The Sims Social* is an attempt to understand women's leisure time and play; particularly when it involves digital games, an area that is known as a 'masculine pursuit' (Kerr 2003; Lewis & Griffiths 2011). Digital games are gendered, more often than not due to 'cultural processes or practices that use simplifying stereotypes to attempt to understand the tastes or interests of individuals, in this case women' (Chess 2009, p. 1).

Women's engagement with *The Sims Social* is typical of women's engagement with digital games. It can be categorised as a type of digital game that accentuates gendered play as it fits into Chess's argument where 'women's play tends to be productive in a decidedly unplayful way' (Chess 2009, p. 62).

> The gendered divisions of play help construct specific kinds of player and reinforce gendered hierarchies, both in the video game industry (where femininity is often devalued) and in the cultural constructions of what is considered acceptable play for women. (Chess 2009, p. xv)

Chess argued that the recent popular uptake of casual games by women is a result of accentuating the traditional stereotypes of femininity. She later elaborated on the concept of productive play, which underlies most of the casual games women play.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the literature about the challenges women face surrounding the concept of play, leisure and fitting it within their time. It goes on to discuss how casual games (social network games falls under this category) have gained popularity, especially among women.

Next, this chapter presents a discussion on the concept of games, before moving deeper into the definition of social network games (also known as SNGs). Subsequently, this chapter will discuss the characteristics of SNGs: the concept of asynchronous multiplay, and time and its significance for the social and sociability function in its play experience. The chapter then moves on to provide an overview of *The Sims Social's* game characteristics as well as its gameplay structure. This integrates the

researcher's own gameplay experience, with focus on ways the game interacted with Facebook. This chapter will provide an outline of the interactions between *The Sims Social* and Facebook. This leads into the discussion of the main subject of this research- Malay women and their encounter with globalisation and modernity particularly via media in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will continue the discussion with focus on performance and management of identity in the context of both SNGs and SNSs.

Women's play, leisure and fragmented time

Several studies have been done looking at women and casual games through studying gender and its relationships with leisure, pleasure, play and time (Chess 2011; Royce et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2009; Winn & Heeter 2009). Since the 1980s, studies have been done circling the issue of problematic relationships between women and leisure activities (Aitchison 2003). The number and nature of responsibilities and leisure time activities differs for men and women. In general, more responsibility falls on women for taking care of the family and household duties, regardless of other work-related obligations (Apt & Grieco 1998; Chess 2011; Mattingly & Bianchi 2003). There is an expectation that these gender roles are performed by women based on shared cultural expectations that are placed on individuals on the basis of their socially defined gender (Fallon & Donaghue 2003; Eagly & Karau 1991; Kidder 2002). This may be slightly different from one culture to another. Due to this, leisure for women, particularly leisure at home, is difficult to quantify and specify because women often have more responsibilities in home spaces than men (Chess 2011).

Fulfilling domestic responsibilities was always a priority, and less importance was given to leisure time, thus women were left with limited time for digital games (Schott & Horrell 2000; Winn & Heeter 2009). Studies conducted in developing countries found that girls had less time than boys for leisure activities and carried a larger workload at school and home (Lloyd et al. 2008). A handful of studies also confirm that women have less available leisure time than men (Aguiar & Hurst 2006; Larson & Verma 1999; Lloyd et al. 2008; Mattingly & Bianchi 2003; Mauldin & Meeks 1990; Winn & Heeter 2009).

Although there are positive changes in gender equality in other domains, men and women still experience free time differently. Gender roles and life cycle factors such as marriage and child rearing intensify the gap. Furthermore, working women in particular are forced to cope with responsibilities both at home and work through multitasking, which leaves them with fragmented amounts of available time (Apt & Grieco 1998). Working women tend to have less free time and less 'uncontaminated free time' than men, thus the fragmentation in pure leisure time (Mattingly & Bianchi 2003). The inequality in quantity and quality of free time is the most obvious during the early stage of marriage and possibly

when preschoolers are present; however, free-time experiences between men and women are similar at other points or life stages (Mattingly & Bianchi 2003).

Busy women, having been left with small chunks of leisure time did not make digital gaming a preferred type of leisure time activity. This is because digital games on consoles and computers demand undivided attention (Prensky 2001) and long playing hours and therefore are not conducive to multitasking. This deters these women from playing digital games in the first place. However, with casual games, women are able to play during their 'smaller chunks of leisure time' as they require little attention and can be played concurrently with other activities such as work in the office or home or while doing other computer work such as instant messaging, emailing, surfing the web or listening to music (Winn & Heeter 2009).

Productive play

Casual games seem to resolve the problematic issue of women's 'smaller chunks of leisure time' by accentuating flexibility in time and cost. Considering that gratification and quality are central in any discussion of women's leisure time activities, the next question is: How do casual games address women's need to spend their leisure time productively?

Chess (2009) illustrated how traditionally, women's leisure time is filled with work-related leisure activities that are in some way, 'productive' and can be managed easily in their daily lives. Chess used a study by Rosemary Deem (1987) to illustrate the quality and type of leisure practices that women engage in.

> No wonder then that much of women's household leisure consists of needlework, knitting, cooking, reading, TV watching, writing letters, day dreaming and snatching quick naps. All of these activities can be fitted into a fragmented time schedule, do not require large blocks of time, are cheap or free, require little space or equipment, can quickly be disposed of or stopped when work obligations intervene. (Deem 1987, p. 81)

These activities may also produce something 'productive' from the time spent on the activity (Chess 2009).

A more recent study such as by Mattingly & Bianchi (2003) supports Deem's argument. The types of activities women engage in during their free time are more of an obligation. Women's free time may be filled with activities related to family wellbeing or cohesion (Mattingly & Bianchi 2003). Therefore, it is not surprising that women may not identify these activities as relaxing. Women's leisure time is filled with work-related leisure activities that are in some way, 'productive' (Chess 2009; Deem 1987; Mattingly & Bianchi 2003).

Because the issue of women's leisure time and activities circles around the notion of productivity, one might argue that playing digital games is against this trend because playing digital games has no productive value. Surprisingly, casual games have changed the way people view women and digital games. One of the reasons is because casual games that are marketed to and played by women emphasise femininity play and have productive undertones. They seem a perfect fit with a notion that women's leisure activities seek productivity.

The popularity of casual games among women is also attributed to the design and characteristics of casual games, as discussed by Juul in his (2010) book, *A Casual Revolution*. The design and characteristics of casual games enable women to maximise their limited (and fragmented) leisure time and satisfy their need to spend it wisely and productively (Chess 2010). Casual games' usability and interruptibility allow women to multitask during play, giving a sense being productive and hence, reducing feelings of guilt. (Further discussion on the design of casual games follows in the next section).

'Productive play' is also perceived to be the answer to the issue of women feeling that engaging with digital games is a 'guilty pleasure'. Issues of 'guilty pleasures' have been discussed in the literature focusing on various media from TV viewing to reading romance novels, as well as engaging in digital games. Studies addressing digital games found that the feeling of guilt is a product of self-consciousness about engaging in 'non-productive' activities and relates to women's subjective perceptions of time pressure. Women have difficulty in 'letting-go' of obligations to allow quality free time for themselves. This is described by one researcher as women having difficulty 'turning off the concerns of one sphere when they enter another' (Mattingly & Bianch 2003, p. 1024), which affects their leisure experiences (Mattingly & Bianchi 2003). This may be a result of the way women are socialised to behave. It is possible that 'women are viewed, or view themselves, as less deserving of free time and experience more guilt when they take time for themselves' (Mattingly & Bianchi 2003, p. 1025).

Literature such Chess (2011) and Mattingly & Bianchi (2003) Bianchi and Milkie (2010) argue that household labour as undervalued, underappreciated and less demanding compared to market work, and hence view women as less needing or deserving of time for themselves. As a result, women may engage in free-time activities but not feel relaxed, feeling pressured by themselves and by others to finish the activity so that other responsibilities can be fulfilled (Mattingly & Bianchi 2003).

Several studies have reported that many women feel guilty and like they need to justify themselves whenever they play digital games (Bertozzi & Lee 2007; Chess 2010; Shaw 2011). The feeling of doing something 'productive' is mimicked by a lot of casual game titles, which may be one of the reasons that casual games are popular among women. The integration of the concept of productivity in digital games, particularly the casual games is researched by Chess (2009). According to Chess, ideologically driven practices of productive play might reinforce traditional stereotypes of femininity and potentially have effects on women's leisure and play practices. Three kinds of productive play are prominent in many women's video games. These are pragmatic play, simulated productive play, and socially productive play.

> *Pragmatic play* is play that attempts to be productive for the player in the real world. For example, games such as *Brain Age* and *Wii Fit* use themes of self-help and self-care to attract feminine audiences.
>
> *Simulated productive play* is play that emulates real-world productivity – often in very mundane and domestic ways – and has the player re-enact these practices in the game world.
>
> *Socially productive play* refers to games that use stereotypes of family and caregiving to specifically attract women audiences. Video game systems such as the Nintendo Wii, in particular, use socially productive play to evoke guilt and expectations that women's play should centre on taking care of the family. (Chess 2009, pp. xv-xvi)

Thus productive play seems to provide the answer to the complicated relationship women have with leisure, play and time. From the discussion in this literature, gender roles are a big factor in determining women's play and leisure activities and time. The concepts around women's play, leisure and time, and 'work-related leisure activities' seem to fit with the characteristics of casual games: both casual games and women's leisure time 'accentuate small bursts of play or leisure time, are inexpensive or free' and have the sense of 'productivity' (Chess 2009; Deem 1987; Mattingly & Bianchi 2003).

> Productive play, embedded in casual games in general, can function as a kind of permission slip, constructing excuses for why and when women are permitted to engage in specific forms of play. While none of the categories of play are mutually exclusive, they all help to draw a clearer picture of how women's video game play has become essentializing and often encourages non-playful gender stereotypes. (Chess 2009, p. xvi)

It is important to realise that the term 'productive play' does not exclusively describe play from a gendered perspective. The term 'productive play' is generally understood in game studies as describing 'the metamorphosis from play to creative output or work-like activities' (Pearce 2009, p. 141). Productive play is a form of emergent gameplay that is strongly aligned with the concept of interactivity made available by digital media. This allows content creation, where play transforms into creative

activity through activities such as skinning or creating storyboards. Productive play is not a new phenomenon. There are expressions of it in cultural practices and rituals, historical re-enactments, cosplay and hobby cultures such as model railroading. One thing all these activities have in common is that 'the players continue to perceive what they are doing as part of a play practice, even if it transitions into professional activity' (Pearce 2009). Although the interpretation of the term 'productive play' from these two perspectives seems different, both perspectives bear the concept of productivity. In short, play in traditional or modern terms can be something productive when it creates products (be they tangible or intangible) or produces the feeling of 'being productive' in the player involved.

Motivation

Since casual games are attracting female players (Casual Games Association 2007; Nielsen 2009), it is worthwhile examining women's perceptions and experiences of casual games. Past studies uncovering women's reasons and motivations for playing massively multiplayer online games have provided a foundation for understanding the phenomenon of 'women playing digital games'. I was interested in exploring the reasons behind the success of casual games, in particular, as the most played digital games among adult women (Begy & Consalvo 2011).

A handful of studies tried to understand playing styles and their relationship with motivations for playing digital games and pleasures gained from digital gaming (Bartle 1996; Begy & Consalvo 2011; LeBlanc 2011; Royce et al. 2007; Taylor 2003, 2006; Williams et al. 2009, Yee 2006).

The many identified reasons for women to engage in digital games included: control and flexibility to explore elements of the game such as characters and the game environment or world; escapism or a form of distraction from everyday lives; a way to think through problems (Royce et al. 2007); achieving success or winning, mastery and power (Begy & Consalvo 2011; Royce et al. 2007; Taylor 2003); fun and relaxation; personal identity; and the maintenance of social relationships (LeBlanc 2009).

All these motivations for and pleasures in digital gaming can be categorised as player styles, gamer types, gamer personalities or play styles. One of the earliest taxonomies of players styles was discussed by Bartle (1996), who studied online text-based MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) players. He classified players into four categories: achievers, explorers, socialisers and killers. However, Bartle's gamer types elicited criticisms and further expansion on his work, particularly as his work failed to recognise escapism as one of the salient motivations for women to play games (Tekofsky 2010). Bartle's model was further developed by Yee (2006) to include for more complex interests that gamers might bring to their play styles and the evolving nature of virtual worlds. He detailed three main

components of playing: achievement (advancement, mechanics, competition); social (socialising, relationship, teamwork); and immersion (discovery, role-playing, customisation, escapism) with various players differing on the weights they attach to each of those components (Yee 2006).

It is fair to say that stereotyping women's digital gaming motivations as mainly 'social' has no real value in understanding women's digital engagement. More recent studies on women's motivation and pleasures in playing digital games have challenged stereotypes by suggesting that players, both men and women, might have multiple motivations for play that do not mutually exclude one another. This is especially true for games that have broad appeal, which can be fairly gender-neutral and thus able to cater to different kinds of play styles (Begy & Consalvo 2011; Taylor 2003, 2006; Yee 2006).

However, the relative weight placed on those reasons differs between genders. Although both men and women play digital games for reasons related to a sense of achievement, power and social relationships, it has been found that 'male players socialise just as much as female players, but are looking for very different things in those relationships. Within this context, women were 'more likely to play as part of maintaining a relationship' (Yee 2007 as cited in Williams et al. 2009, p. 704). Further, 'variation in the achievement subcomponent is in fact better explained by age than gender' (Yee 2006 p. 774). Aligned with Yee's ideas, Williams and colleagues (2009) suggested that 'even if women do start playing MMOGs for social reasons, they may also develop interests in competitive or cooperative activities" (Williams et al. 2009, p. 721). Women players 'were the most intense and dedicated 'hardcore' players, playing more often and with more dedication than the males (as indicated by lower likelihood of quitting)' (Williams et al. 2009, p. 716).

Although these theorisations were made based on MMOG studies, this suggests that players do have multiple motivations and seek multiple pleasures when engaging in digital gaming, and there 'is mixed evidence regarding how male and female players align in regard to those patterns' (Begy & Consalvo 2011). These studies, especially by Yee (2006) and Williams and colleagues (2009), highlighted women's motivations and dedication. However, the concept of productivity might still be there; observed through their motivation for playing. As the 'opportunity cost of allocating free time to playing a game is much higher for those with very little free time', it is just logical to understand that 'the game play would need to be a gratifying experience for women, to be worth the allocation of scarce free time' (Winn & Heeter 2009, p. 3).

Casual game design and meta-game: the 'sticky' factor

Women's play, leisure, time and motivations structure engagement and commitment in a way that fit the structures or 'text' of what casual games have to offer. For non-typical game players, casual game design offers more acceptable game content (less violence, fewer dark themes), greater accessibility (easier to play), simplicity (stripped down number of rules or actions) and flexibility (greater error forgiveness, allowing for player to start and stop playing easily) (Kultima 2009). This is also stressed by Juul (2010), who stated that casual games are highly flexible to a range of players – they have high usability, high interuptibility and lenient difficulty or punishment, as well as 'juiciness' or positive feedback (Juul 2010). This is summarised in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: description of design components of casual games

Design component	Description/difference from a 'hardcore' games
Fiction	Casual games are generally set in pleasant environments, emotionally positive fictions.
Usability	Casual games presuppose little knowledge of video game conventions. Casual game design is very usable.
Interruptibility	Casual game design allows the player to play the game in brief bursts. Casual game design is very interruptible.
Difficulty and punishment	Casual games do not force the player to replay large parts of the game. Single player casual game design has lenient punishments for failing. Punishment in multiplayer casual game design depends on who plays.
'Juiciness'	Commonly features excessive positive feedback for every successful action the player performs. Casual game design is very juicy.

(Adapted from Juul 2010, p. 50)

Juul explained that the flexibility in casual game design attracted non-traditional gamers, because casual games do not demand that players have resources, game knowledge or invest time, making them flexible games played by many players, in many different ways. 'Even if the fiction of casual game design tends to be unapologetically positive, casual game design still opens the games to players with little or a lot of game knowledge, and for playing with little or a large time investment' (Juul 2010, p. 54). The design of casual games gives them flexibility, thus making them inviting for both casual and hardcore gamers. This also demonstrates that the flexibility of casual game design, in contrast to typical 'hardcore' games, is one of the many reasons that women are loured to start (casual) gaming in ways not possible in other types of digital games.

Cook (2008) explained the importance of 'stickiness' effect in casual games in his article 'The casual games manifesto':

> To make a service sticky, you need a persistent multiplayer meta-game. Existing casual games provide the core activity of the community, but the meta-game gives user's reasons to socialize, reasons to replay old games and reasons to play new games. (Cook 2008).

In this way, casual games encourage gamers to come back and play the games, as the game has supporting elements surrounding the core activity of the game itself.

The 'stickiness' of casual games, or what Juul (2010) termed their 'pull' factor, is the main ingredient for a successful game particularly in attracting intended gamers. The 'pull' factor of casual games has captured the mass market as well as previously untapped demographics because the games are 'easy to play, [fit] well with a large number of players and [work] in many different situations' (Juul 2010, p. 5). These criteria fit perfectly with women's notion of play, leisure, fragmented time and motivations.

Defining 'games'

Before diving straight into the site of this research, *The Sims Social*, I would like to note the importance of being specific in defining the term 'games'. Games should be understood as both 'object and process; they can't be read as texts or listened to as music, they must be played' (Aarseth 2001). This suggests the importance of considering games as both an 'object' and 'process' in any attempt to define or analyse them. Hence, a productive way of providing a definition of games lies in describing commonalities, differences and the interactions between the affordances of the design and the appropriation of the design by the players (Meurs 2011).

The significance of Meurs's suggestion is to enable games to be analysed in their own right; giving particular attention to 'design with the specific game mechanics, the affordances and the implied player experience, but also at the way in which these are set in motion and experienced by the players' (Meurs 2011, p. 25). Therefore, this chapter will describe what SNGs are and their connection to SNSs before moving on to a brief description of *The Sims Social.* Later chapters describe the uptake of those affordances by players.

Social network games

All types of games played digitally are digital games, but the differences in their characteristics fragment them into separate categories. The characteristics of SNGs are comparable with those of casual games. Both types of games are characterised by flexibility in terms of speed and ease of access. They are also flexible in terms of the time commitment required to play. These games are easy to learn and require no previous special video game skills or expertise; making them more inviting for any laypersons who were previously intimidated to try their hands on AAA games. In addition, casual

games are described as being 'highly interruptible' with little consequence to the player's enjoyment (Juul 2010).

Another factor contributing to the success of casual games is the genre; as many casual games are based around familiar game concepts that older consumers played in arcades or on the family Atari in the 1970s and 80s. The success of casual games in attracting non-traditional gamers is attributed by Juul to the ability of casual games to reconnect 'with an audience that had been lost' (Juul 2010, p. 2). Casual games are also attracting those players 'who would not normally regard themselves as a gamer' (Casual Games Market Report 2007).

The popularity of casual games has contributed to an increase in consumption in the digital games category as a whole. The games are played online or offline (downloadable), synchronously or asynchronously, through various platforms: web browsers, mobile devices, PCs or consoles such as Wii, Playstation Move and Xbox Kinect. The games are free or available for a relatively small fee (anything from 0.99 to 20.00 Dollar) after a free trial period (Wohn 2010). Despite having only being around for several years, digital casual games have gained popularity through the exponential growth in membership of SNSs such as Facebook and Myspace (Barker 2009).

Social network games can be loosely understood as any digital game that is played between networked publics via an SNS (Wohn 2012) utilising the facilities provided by the SNS. Although the terms 'social network games' and 'social games' are sometimes used interchangeably, the term SNGs is more appropriate to this research because the type of game being discussed utilises an SNS's existing networks and facilities.

The term 'social' and 'network' in the context of SNGs is an important description of the game itself as it 'is designed to use your social network' (Meurs 2011, p. 26). The social is embedded as part of the game, but it is not compulsory for players and co-players to socialise in order to play SNGs. They can still be played individually; however, some features might be inaccessible or players may be required to make an investment of time or money if they play solo. The term 'social games' suggests a more generalised meaning, which includes all multiplayer games played online or offline, as well as board or card games, because of the social experiences these types of games offer (Meurs 2011).

Some of the most popular SNGs, contributing to the multibillion dollar video game industry, have been played on Facebook (Phan & Chaparo 2013; PopCap Games 2010). Facebook is one among many SNSs. It is a 'web-based communication platform that support[s] socially relevant interactions among contacts (i.e., "Friends") on the site' (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2011 as cited in Ellison, Vitak, Gray &

Lampe 2014, p. 855). In their seminal work, boyd and Ellison provided a definition of social network sites:

> We define social network sites 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, p. 210)

However, since the time this definition was written social network sites have evolved with each platform, offering different features and affordances such as Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. The initial social network functionality as described by boyd and Ellison (2007) has become the basis or the foundation to these sites that serve different purposes (Thilk, 2015). Thus, it is important to note that the terms used in this thesis now represent a particular media historical period.

Facebook provides each of its users with a personal account or profile, which enables them to communicate with approved 'friends'. The activities of the Facebook account holder are displayed on his or her page, and can be viewed by other Facebook account holders approved as 'friends'. By default, most information on Facebook is readily and equally available to everyone (or the networked public). However, Facebook users are able to control information by customising the privacy settings for each and every friend or post made on Facebook. As long as the Facebook user understands the disclaimer and the settings on Facebook, the privacy settings are very useful as they give users freedom of expression and control of information on their profiles.

Games are one of the most popular applications on Facebook with over 550 million people playing Facebook-connected games every month on desktop, mobile and console (Weber 2016). The growing popularity of SNGs among women (Galarneau 2014) and non-mainstream players is seen as a viable business opportunity, thus game developers, mobile game developers, casual game developers and web programers are forging ahead with social games (Kleinman 2009). The estimated overall value of the worldwide social gaming market is forecast to reach US$17.4bn by 2019 (Transparency Market Research 2015).

The varying genres and styles make it difficult to define SNGs by their content. Rather, SNGs can be defined and differentiated from other networked games based on the relationship they have with social network sites, as suggested by Wohn (2012):

> Social network games (SNGs) differ from traditional networked games because one must be 'Friends' with other players within the SNS before being able to play games with them ... This is slightly different from other multiplayer games such as MMOs [massively multiplayer online games], in which the technical 'Friending' of other players is not a prerequisite of game play (Wohn 2012, p. 3).

The functioning of an SNG relies on the SNS it inhabits (Wohn, 2012). There are three features of SNSs that SNGs capitalise on. First is access to the player's profile, which is the 'equivalent of a player character or avatar' (Meurs 2011. p. 27).

Second is the utilisation of an SNS's existing network to set up a list of connections between a player's profile and the profiles of other players. This enables the viewing and traversing of profiles (boyd & Ellison 2007). This function also provides SNGs with access to players' network list and displays those within the list of players who are currently playing the same game. Initially, this list helps the player to add co-players (sometimes referred to as neighbours in games such as in *The Sims Social*) to their game. As the game progresses, the players may need to recruit new co-players into the game and this can be done by adding new 'friends' into the SNS's networked publics (Meurs 2011). This SNS feature allows co-players to connect, have access to and interact with each other's' avatars within their personal game environments. In addition, it allows co-players' scores and achievements to be displayed in other players' personal game environments.

The third feature of SNSs that supports the 'social' functions of SNGs is the facility for interaction among co-players' profiles (Meurs 2011). Co-players are able to perform a small number of tasks within each other's game environment to serve different purposes, such as helping neighbours to complete a mission or sending and requesting gifts. The mechanics of SNGs are designed to facilitate these actions within the game as well as extending or sharing these actions and achievements on the players' and co-players' walls through status updates (Silva 2013). As with any status updates, posts from the game are visible to everyone who has access to a player's posts, depending on the player's privacy settings. In Facebook, for example, these game updates function like any other updates; the networked public can interact with game updates by 'liking' or commenting on the status. For co-players, responding to these posts may generate rewards via a 'click-through' system. The incorporation of SNS affordances into the design of SNGs has created the distinctive characteristics that make SNGs distinct from other types of digital games or social games.

Social network games can be categorised by their core mechanic. There are mastery SNGs and management SNGs. As the name suggests, mastery SNGs demand skills or knowledge and their main focus is on the score. Success is not dependent on co-players. On the other hand, management SNGs

are about the continuous management of the progressing game state over time. The difference between these two types of SNG lies in the method of score accumulation. Scores in mastery SNGs are based on expertise; in management SNGs scores are determined by players' dedication (Meurs 2011).

The Sims Social is a management SNG that encourages social interaction and cooperative play, unlike mastery SNGs that focus on competition. There might be a sense of competition between co-players in management SNGs, particularly when they compare scores, but the core mechanic of management SNGs emphasises time and dedication without the pressure of additional playing skills.

Thus far, this chapter has laid out the definition of the term 'games' as it is applied to this research and has introduced social network games. Next, I will discuss the concept of asynchronicity, which is a key element that governs the play experience in SNGs.

Asynchronicity as a main organising element in SNGs

Asynchronous multiplay, as characteristic of SNGs, refers to games played by multiple players who are not necessarily playing at the same time. SNGs, such as *The Sims Social,* require their players to manage and progress in their own game state with the option of interactions with co-players (neighbours) with the flexibility of time.

Games theorist Ian Bogost (2004) provides four characteristics of asynchronous multiplay from a design (object) perspective, which is one-sided because games should be understood as both 'objects' and 'processes' (Meurs 2011). When developing a concept of asynchronicity, Meurs appropriated Bogost's notion of asynchronous multiplay to explain both the object (the design) and the process ('what player(s) can do with a game') to define the concept of asynchronous multiplay. Table 2.2 below put Bogost's characteristics of asynchronous play beside Meurs's critique that builds on it.

Table 2.2: Bogost's and Meurs's definitions of the characteristics of asynchronous multiplay

Characteristic	Bogost	Meurs
Asynchronous play supports multiple players playing in sequence, not in tandem		
	'Players never play the game at the same time. Instead, players play in sequence, one after the other' (Bogost 2004, p. 2).	Argues that the word 'never' used by Bogost is restrictive of asynchronous games. Rather, asynchronous game design affords players flexibility to play in tandem or in sequence (Meurs 2011).
Asynchronous play requires some kind of persistent state in which all players are affected, and which in turn affects all players		
	Asynchronous multiplayer games may rely on online connectivity and network storage, local storage methods (such as disc drives and memory	Persistence is the most important characteristic as it sustains and affords asynchronous multiplay in SNGs. Meurs also highlighted boyd's argument

	cards), or distributed storage methods (such as email and SMS) to retain data about the game.	that persistence in SNGs is part of the affordances provided through SNSs (boyd 2007).
Breaks between gameplay as the organising principle		
	Sequential, disrupted play is a distinguishing trait of asynchronous multiplayer games. It is described as a 'meaningful' disruption of game experiences. These fissures are centre pieces, rather than detours in the game.	'Breaks' refer to both breaks in game spaces and breaks between players, which are the organising principles in both mastery and management games. Breaks between players in management type games differ in terms of the amount of time (Meurs 2011).

Both Meurs and Bogost share the same idea on defining asynchronous multiplay as a persistent world, which allows the operability of the other two characteristics. It is embedded through the relationship and interaction between object (the game) and process taken place in the games (players' play experience with the game). Generally, persistence supports temporal aspects like time limits, loops, cycled actions and tempo, which are crucial in a game to support player retention. This is applicable for most digital games (Wolf 2001).

For SNGs, asynchronicity is important in supporting the design, economics and experience of play (Tyni, Sotamaa & Toivonen 2011). It is a significant concept in generating flexibility in SNGs. It also gives SNGs their distinctive characteristics compared to other types of digital games, enabling their players to fit games into their everyday lives and to opt for casual or more intense play (Tyni, Sotamaa & Toivonen 2011).

Asynchronicity and the experience of play in SNGs: The social and sociability

Understanding the social and sociability in SNGs demands a broader understanding of the application of the concept 'social' and the constructs of 'sociability'. In the context of this research, understanding identity paves the way to understanding social construction, which mainly focuses on human interactions (Goffman 1959). However, the changing media landscape has altered what constitutes social construction, complicating Goffman's concept of the social. Thus, for the purpose of this research, the term social will be reviewed and broadened to embrace the assemblage of digital technologies and virtual spaces to ensure both human and non-human actors are included in the notion of 'social' because the social world in these spaces is a composition of both kinds of actors (Latour 2005; Silva 2013, 2014).

Social experiences in SNGs are tied to the concept of asynchronicity. However, the asynchronous element of SNGs has led to suggestions that the games are not social, because players simply play their own game and 'no interaction between participants is required or necessary' (Fullerton, Swain, Hoffman 2008, p. 53). Although some games are designed to be played solo, this claim is disputable

because the intensity of social involvement in games is subjective and particular to the type of game and the player. Management type SNGs such as *The Sims Social* require more social involvement from their players than mastery SNGs.

This asynchronous way of playing is not unique to SNGs. It may also happen in any multiplayer game in which the game can 'be played alone to a certain extent' (Meurs 2011, p. 37). 'Several multi-player games, mainly MMOGs, have been found to harbour a lot of "solo" players that only group up when they feel like it' (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore 2006; Olivetti 2010 as cited in Meurs 2011, p. 37). In gaming spaces, players have options to interact with human or non-human actors; hence, the saying, 'playing alone together' (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore 2006, p. 1).

Defining the social and sociability based solely on the characteristics of the game, such as asynchronicity or multiplayer format, will only limit the way the social is viewed within the gaming environment. Rather, within the perspective of Latour's actor–network theory, social construction in digital spaces should include the process of interactions among both human and non-human actors (Latour 2005). From Latour's perspective, the social and sociability in SNGs are not limited by the act of playing with other players, but also constructed by our interactions within the game, our interactions with other players and their interactions with our game, and interactions that occur outside the game space.

The Sims Social

The Sims Social was launched on Facebook in August 2011 and ceased operation in 2013. It was a free-to-play adaptation of *The Sims* published by Electronic Arts in 2000. *The Sims* franchise has been acknowledged as one the most successful computer games ever, selling well and consistently over time, spawning a host of expansion packs, winning prestigious prizes such as the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences Game of the Year 2000 and receiving positive reviews (Nutt & Railton 2003, p. 578).

The Sims was the first game in *The Sims* game series. This game was developed by Maxis and later by *The Sims* Studio, and published by Electronic Arts (EA). It was released as a PC game in February 2000. *The Sims* generated a large and committed online community of fans with a range of official and unofficial websites and discussion groups (Nutt & Railton 2003).

Most of *The Sims* series utilised the PC as its gaming platform. However, by 2003, *The Sims had* also been released on other platforms: PlayStation 2, Xbox, Nintendo GameCube, Game Boy Advance, N-

Gage, Wii and Nintendo DS. In December 2002 an online version of the game named *The Sims Online* was released, but it failed to recreate the success of the previous Sims series.

With the booming of SNGs played via SNSs, Playfish and EA capitalised on the popularity of Facebook by releasing *The Sims Social* in 2011 as a new addition to *The Sims* series. *The Sims Social* accumulated over 65 million players, with over 16 million added in its first week alone (Ward 2011). As advertised on the Electronic Arts website, *The Sims Social* allowed players to 'play with life in a whole new way – with your real friends, for free!' *The Sims Social* was a life simulation game in which players created and customised their avatar (Sim), which was then used to represent them when interacting with Facebook friends in the fictional town called Littlehaven. Despite initial success, EA retired *The Sims Social* on June 14, 2013 due to a falling number of players and amount of activity (Service Updates, n.d.).

As the name of the game suggested, the social is made central within the game and the inclusion of Facebook assisted in the sociability of gameplay. Like other SNGs, *The Sims Social* allowed playing only between Facebook friends. The co-players were known in the game as 'neighbours'. Having more neighbours in Littlehaven indicated better performance in the game. Getting neighbours required players to invite friends from their Facebook friends list. Anybody could join the neighbourhood, as long as they registered beforehand.

In the start-up stage, before co-players were added as neighbours, Sims met Bella Goth. She was a non-player character (NPC) in the game and the first neighbour ready to befriend a player's Sim. Bella guided new players in establishing their new life in Littlehaven. Eventually, players would realise that Bella was the benchmark for an ideal Sim. This could be observed through the decorations, furnishings and products in her house, which were always updated according to the latest 'season' or 'theme'. All the goals that a Sim might take on had already been achieved by Bella.

The social is an important and an integral part of most SNGs, particularly *The Sims Social*. Socialising was central to the accumulation of points and rewards, which were translated into 'Simoleons', 'SimCash', 'social points' and 'lifetime points' apart from other material wealth. Points and rewards were accumulated through the completion of quests and tasks. Completing a chain of quests may have entitled the player to exclusive interactive items for their Sim's home, or material vital for future quests.

Socialising with friends in *The Sims Social* was essential for three reasons: 1) ensuring the basic needs of the Sim were satisfied. 2) increasing points and rewards in the game. 3) completing quests (for rewards). In this game, like any other in *The Sims* series, players were expected to complete quests

and tasks which involved adding other players to their *The Sims Social* neighbourhood from their networked friends on Facebook and interacting with these neighbours by visiting them, helping them with their requests and completing the game's quests and tasks. These interactions were important to players' achievement in the game.

Social experience in The Sims Social

As discussed, the element of time is a crucial and common element in the design and sociability of almost all SNGs. Asynchronicity defines SNGs and regulates social experience within the game.

The execution of asynchronicity and the constructs of social experience in *The Sims Social* were applied through simple, repetitive 'point-and-click' actions at a variety of levels via mouse clicks. These were termed 'clickability' by Järvinen (2010); a potent element that creates rhythm in the play and pleasure for the players (Järvinen 2010)

An example of this 'point-and-click' action in *The Sims Social* was the interactions of Sims with objects such as a sofa. When a player pointed at and clicked on the sofa, a list of options appeared, allowing the player to interact with the sofa. The player could select any one of the options, such as to sit on the sofa. The same method applied when a player clicked on another Sim in the game; for instance, when a player clicked on a Sim who was sitting on the sofa, a list of possible interactions would appear. The player could then point to the desired action and click on it.

The same method applied to interactions with NPCs and other Sims (asynchronous interaction with other player) such as in starting conversation, providing help or receiving gifts. This 'rhythm design' was incorporated into the asynchronous multiplay mechanics that regulated all interactions in the game, whether with NPCs or between co-players, enabling a distinctive form of sociability found only in SNGs.

Asynchronous social interactions were organised within each and every player's personal game state, facilitated through Facebook or the game itself. They did not occur in real-time. Every interaction, particularly those involving other players, would involve a 'time lag' or delay before it could be completed. In participating in this form of interaction, the element of persistence is regarded as the most important characteristic for SNGs (Meurs 2011). The element of persistence is the reason SNGs are available for access at any time, providing the flexibility to accommodate its players.

This element is particular to SNGs as it allows indirect, peer-to-peer interaction and cooperation 'through the channels offered by social networking websites, providing mutual aid without being actually present in a shared game space' (Silva 2013, p. 25). It opens up sociability functions and interactions

with other players and non-player characters, and potentially increases the duration of play and the dynamic of a single play session (Tyni, Sotamaa & Toivonen 2011). This contributes to player retention.

Games that incorporate 'sociability' as their main dynamic demand that their players have a large pool of co-players as a resource to help them advance and 'level-up' in the game. In *The Sims Social*, neighbours are normally recruited through players' existing friends list on Facebook. This process can be annoying for both players and non-players. There are alternative ways of recruiting co-players. They can join fan pages or fan forums on Facebook or recruit through the game developer's official website via forums established for this purpose. Fan pages or forums are ideal places for neighbour recruitment because these players have the same objectives in mind: achieving the goals of their game which may include recruiting co-players/neighbours; collecting and sharing game bonuses, rewards and achievements; and discussing problems or difficulties encountered in the game.

The significance of Facebook's role in the recruitment of co-players through the existing friend list and the use of Facebook fan pages is clear. These interactions are all made possible because of the affordances provided by Facebook as well as the asynchronous multiplay mechanics governing SNGs.

The social experiences of *The Sims Social* and how they permeated into Facebook will be further discussed in the following pages. First, it is necessary to touch on the concept of 'achievement', as it is part of the social and sociability constructs in *The Sims Social*, which, I will argue, promoted consumption, capitalism and materialistic values like earlier Sims series titles.

Achievement in The Sims Social: consumption, capitalism and materialistic values

Players' achievements in *The Sims Social* were measured through six different indicators: energy, in-game currency, social points, experience points, lifetime points and house levels. These achievement points could be divided into two categories, the currency or units. *The Sims Social* currency (Image 2.1) was comparable to physical world currency. The Simoleons were seen as equivalent to cents and SimCash to dollars. Social points were not as valuable but could be used to purchase some materials in the game.

		
Simoleons	SimCash	Social points

Image 2.1: The Sims Social currency

SimCash was the most valuable currency in Littlehaven. It could be bought with real-world money and SimCash could be change into Simoleons or social points. Each TSS currency or unit increased or decreased with each action. The easiest way to accumulate TSS currency and energy was by logging in to the game every day: the first login of the day was rewarded with energy, Simoleons and social points and on the fifth consecutive day, the player would receive up to 10 SimCash as a reward. Other easy ways to accumulate these rewards were through clearing the Sim's backyard or attending to the Sim's plants. Buying furnishings for the house required Sims to spend any one of the TSS currencies (SimCash, Simoleons, social points) and in return this would increase the house value and level.

The Sims Social units (Image 2.2) worked in similar ways to the currency. For example, socialising and visiting neighbours in Littlehaven helped Sims to gain social points, energy and experience points. Most activities required items collected from missions and tasks, such as Career Points and tokens. These were job-related points used as a requirement for promotions and to complete special job-related tasks.

				
Energy	Experience Points	Career Points and Tokens	House Value	Lifetime Achievement Points

Image 2.2: The Sims Social units

However, lifetime points were slightly different from the rest of the units. Levelling up skills such as writing, cooking or music would increase the lifetime points of the Sim. Managing Sim's skills such as art, cooking, music, writing, athletics and driving could be part of quests. The Sim was able to develop skills for financial gain and other personal satisfactions such as increasing experience points. This enabled the Sim to unlock higher level items. All these skills could be developed through repeated play (described as 'repetitive tasks') through mouse-clicking actions (Silva 2013).

Another way of gaining lifetime points was through completing quests. Quests and accumulation of seasonal goods had significant impact on advancement in the game, which rewarded players with lifetime points that could be used to buy traits for the Sim. This was a gradual process, which required the player to buy and fill up one trait slot at a time using lifetime points. Lifetime points differed from other measures of achievement in *The Sims Social* because they could not be transferred to or from SimCash.

The points, achievement and rewards system was particularly appealing to players who played for the ultimate goal in *The Sims Social,* which was to have the highest house value and level in the game.

Quests and seasonal goods were vital in maintaining player retention and engagement as well as avoiding boredom (Tyni et al. 2011). This element was controlled through the game's time-based mechanics which posed two challenges for majority of its players: 1) it demanded an increase in the frequency of playing time per day. 2) it demanded that the players collect different items with the help of plenty of co-players (Silva 2013).

Success in playing the game depended a lot on time investment and having large number of active co-players. Without time and a large number of active neighbours, players were pressured to accomplish all the challenges on time due to the large amount of challenges offered in the game (Silva 2013). This pressure to complete quests on time and achieve a high house value or possess expensive 'vanity' items in *The Sims Social* sometimes led players to resort to bypassing (parts of or entire) quests by purchasing virtual currency with real money.

In free-to-play games such as *The Sims Social*, being able to pay to bypass game challenges has created issues that need to be addressed by game developers and designers. They have to tread a delicate balance between acquiring revenue and retaining players; while ensuring an equal play experience for each and every player. This is important in order not to stir existing criticisms of 'the idea that people can just buy their way to victory' (Fields & Cotton 2012, p. 157), in which free-to-play games have been ironically labelled 'pay-to-win' games (Onyett 2012).

It is important to ensure that players who play without paying will not lose interest in the game due to feeling it is unfair or that they are being mistreated. This is because the majority of SNG players play games 'by the book' and these players are of equal importance to the players who 'pay' because they build the user base who spawn the whole gameplay experience for SNGs. The power of these players should not be underestimated because they can generate indirect value by increasing their lifetime total network value by extending invitations to their networked friends, for example through 'help' requests (Fields & Cotton 2012). This should be seen as an opportunity to acquire new players and there will always be the possibility that these new players will spend money in the game or view the advertisements. Thus, game developers and designers build game mechanics that reward players who recruit new players into the game (Fields & Cotton 2012).

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that capitalism seems prevalent and is still the underlying principle organising the economy of SNGs. Not only the economies organising the whole SNGs monetisation

system, but the underlying values of the game content are based on commodification and consumer culture and this is merged with and conveyed through the structures of the game. *The Sims Social* merged its economies and the social elements in the gameplay. The whole gameplay in *The Sims Social* centred on accumulating points and currency, trading off real money for virtual currency for the purpose of bypassing grind 'time' and purchasing virtual goods, and the practice of 'gift giving' among neighbours, which normally involved branded products. Prevalent practices in *The Sims Social* included bypassing quests using SimCash in the driving quest featuring Toyota Hybrid car; spending money on in-game abilities (such as owning a tree that grows more SimCash to accumulate more currency for the purpose of more spending); virtual shopping for the Sim to feature branded clothing labels such Adidas or Diesel; and giving neighbours branded in-game gifts such as Starbucks lattes or Dunkin' Donuts (Wohn 2011).

All points, units and currency accumulated could be spent again to acquire material possessions which increased the house value. As the house value increased, the Sim would be rewarded with more points, units, currency and awarded even bigger rewards in Littlehaven, including opportunities to buy property, unlocking more virtual goods and customising the Sim with features and traits not available in the lower levels. In life simulation games such as *The Sims Social*, there is no real goal or end, thus the cycle repeats all over again. The reward system and blatant consumerism has raised concerns by academicians and game designers (for example in studies by Frasca 2001; Lehdonvirta, Wilska, & Johnson 2009) because the reward system could be seen as cultivating capitalist values in the players – both those who play for narcissistic and vanity purposes and those who play for competitive reasons in their pursuit to acquire the highest house value/level in the game.

Competition based on the accumulation of material wealth has been labelled a form of 'classification, distinguishing dedicated (and more advanced) players from casual ones' (Rebs 2011 as cited in Silva 2013, p. 48). The classification of players based on material wealth created 'distinctions between high status and low status, between membership and non-membership, and between one group and another' (Lehdonvirta, Wilska & Johnson 2009, p. 1073). Critics saw this as an encouragement to unnecessary spending in the game and accused *The Sims Social*, like the rest of *The Sims* series, of advocating materialistic culture and consumption ideology.

The issue of capitalism in *The Sims* franchise is not new and it can be conceived as a type of simulated consumption play (Lehdonvirta, Wilska & Johnson 2009). In fact, consumerist ideology is one of the most controversial features in *The Sims* series (Frasca 2001) with self-expression, aesthetic considerations and even artistic aspirations revealed through users' virtual consumption choices (Paulk

2006). The sociability aspect of the business model of SNGs has also been accused of 'commodifying friendship bounds and of exploiting social principles' (Björk 2010; Liszkiewicz 2010; Meurs 2011 as cited in Silva 2013). It has been assessed as not being social (Deterding 2010) and, at the most extreme, of not qualifying as a game at all (Bogost 2010).

The construction of SNGs relies heavily on social elements which are controlled by time. Thus, players have to bear in mind that all interactions happen asynchronously and require players to be patient in completing quests and tasks. However, players may opt for 'shortcuts' to expedite their gameplay using real, physical world money to achieve their goals. The monetisation system for most SNGs utilises credit cards or debit cards to purchase in-game currency to assist players in the gameplay, such as allowing them to bypass certain interactions or purchase items to create potions for completing a task.

Discussion of the experience of play in SNGs would be incomplete without looking into the monetisation system that is incorporated into the games. The following section discusses the monetisation of SNGs in general, with explanations and examples derived from *The Sims Social*.

Economies in SNGs and The Sims Social

Monetisation systems in the gaming industry have evolved from games being freely available – for example simple programs like *Spacewar!* – to diverse systems that can be divided into four major types: retail purchases, in-game microtransactions, digital downloads and subscription models (Fields & Cotton 2012).

Initially, the selling of games was conducted in a more 'traditional' way that relied on the retail system. This started to change as more and more people could access the internet. The internet enables games to be played online through servers such as those used by massively multiplayer online games, which normally utilise a subscription system. Commonly described as a pay-for-play business model, the first modern wave of MMOGs, including games such as *Meridian 59* and *Ultima Online*, included a stable, regular income stream through a monthly fee system, on top of one-off payments from the initial retail sale. This system was adopted by many MMOG developers with success.

Problems such as piracy, which are present in a lot of Asian countries, were proof of impractical retail models (Fields & Cotton 2012). This forced game developers to think of other mechanisms for monetisation. Subscription fees seemed to solve this problem and Western MMOGs such as *Lineage* gained popularity in South Korea and Taiwan (Fields & Cotton, 2012). The popularity of MMOGs was soon identified by East Asia gaming companies, which 'found ways to distribute the client software for

free, selling the users peripheral equipment and gear instead' (Fields & Cotton 2012, p. 23). They focused on getting players to spend small amounts of money on regular basis on virtual items for avatars.

This marks the beginning of the modern microtransaction model (Fields & Cotton 2012) where most SNGs utilise a free-to-play business model that stimulates micro-payments or microtransactions, which build on a virtual currency and/or virtual goods, viralisation and retention (Deterding 2010; Silva 2013). Monetisation system options are different for different types of games because each type of game has different types of players and play profiles; which Facebook has successfully addressed in the mechanics of its games (Fields & Cotton 2012).

Microtransactions in SNGs are 'a combination of game design with monetisation strategies, in which the design fosters microtransactions' (Deterding 2010 as cited in Silva 2013, p. 25). They operate

> in an abstract form within the metaworld of the game, initially as opportunities offered to players to purchase a type of in-game currency that could be used to speed up the completion of tedious in-game tasks or let users keep playing when their daily or hourly allotment of turns had been expended. (Fields & Cotton 2012, p. 23)

For example, the players of *The Sims Social* did not usually pay money directly to the game; instead, they purchased SimCash (which could be converted into Simoleons), which was the virtual currency used for various purposes in the game.

This monetisation method is the most common in SNGs, where 'time' is being sold to players who are willing to pay real money for easier and faster ways of climbing the achievement ladder in the game. It is also a way to increase player retention (Silva 2013). Table 2.3 provides examples of mechanics outlined by Fields and Cotton (2012) through which 'time' can be purchased in SNGs. It includes comparable examples from *The Sims Social* developed through the researcher's own experience and observation.

Table 2.3: Examples of monetisation mechanics outlined by Fields and Cotton where 'time' can be purchased in SNGs with comparable examples taken from The Sims Social

No.	Example by Fields and Cotton (2012)	Example in *The Sims Social*
1.	A user may only get 12 energy units per hour. Energy is used when performing in-game tasks. A user can buy more energy and avoid the one hour wait by paying $1.	Energy was replenished at a rate of 1 unit every 5 minutes (12 energy units per hour). It could be earned by visiting friends, collecting bonuses and rewards from wall posts. It could be received as a gift. Energy could also be bought with SimCash, e.g. 9 SimCash for 10 energy or 12 SimCash for 15 energy. SimCash was difficult to obtain unless it was given by the game developer (EA) or purchased with real money. Different payment methods gave players different amounts of SimCash for the money paid.
2.	A certain required resource may spawn or 'drop' only once per day, and this effectively gates a user's progress. Users have the option to purchase more of that resource in a microtransaction, allowing them to continue the gameplay without experiencing the drop delay.	This mechanism was to encourage players to login to the game daily. Logging in on a daily basis for five consecutive days would enable the player to collect rewards on a daily basis. These were made up of energy, Simoleons, social points and up to 10 SimCash. Players could purchase all these through microtransactions.
3.	Some repetitive 'levelling up' tasks (e.g., build 100 houses in this area, kill 20 of these monsters) that typically require the use of scarce resources or the quick expenditure of in-game energy can be automated or simply waved away with a small cash payment .	Crafting potions or items for instant benefit. Example, the fun potion for instant 'fun booster'. To craft it, required items such as 'relaxation', 'entertainment' and 'buzz'. Most of these ingredients could be gained from routine tasks such as clearing the garden or picking up rubbish around the house, utilising point-and-click rhythm design. Different tasks would give a different item, sometimes at random. These items could be stored in the backpack which has limited capacity. Players had the option to purchase these items with SimCash (which could be topped up with real money) whenever necessary.
4.	Certain rewards a user might earn after a certain length of play time can be unlocked by paying with real-world currency. For example, a player normally has to be at level 20 to get a certain type of sword. An in-game monetisation strategy might offer that sword after level 5 for a $2 payment.	Some items in the shop mode could not be purchased until a certain skill level or house value was reached. For example, to purchase a typewriter a player needed at least 10 writing skill points. To increase their skill level, players needed to complete required tasks. Instead of letting players buy these items straightaway, players were allowed to use real money to expedite the lengthy skill-levelling-up process. As it required a lot of energy, the in-game monetisation system allowed energy or related items to be purchased by the player.
5.	Many games allow users to speed up 'grind'-type mechanics (in which players increase their character's power or skill by completing a lengthy series of repetitive tasks) by selling enhancements that increase the amount of reward given for the 'grind.' For example, *Pocket Legends* allows users to buy potions that increase the XP (experience points) earned from each monster slain. Thus one player may pay no money, but need three hours to have their character reach a certain level. Another player might choose to spend a small amount to reach a higher level in less time. This type of item is called an 'accelerator'.	Project items were objects that had to be built through a step-by-step process, by levelling up skill levels. They could be identified through symbols like a blue hammer or a gold pyramid. Often as the players increased their skill level, more ways of interacting with these objects were unlocked. The 'Kitties are forever' quest had three sub-quests in it. One of the sub-quests, 'Can't hug every cat!', had three small tasks that need to be completed in a certain time frame, but players could bypass these sub-quests by making payments with SimCash (which can be purchased with real money).

(Fields and Cotton, 2012; pg.157, researcher's own experience and observation)

Another common form of monetisation in SNGs is the selling of virtual goods. Virtual goods in-game can be items used to increase in-game abilities, instant consumable items for more turns or extra in-game features, or they can be cosmetic items for the character or as accessories in the game. Items sold as virtual goods can be a central component in the gameplay, or special items available during a particular season (Fields & Cotton 2012).

In *The Sims Social*, apart from buying time to bypass the grinding time, players could buy items that gave a long-term advantage, such as a SimCash tree, a one-time item that produced three SimCash every three days. They could also buy branded clothing or products for the Sim, such as Adidas and Diesel brand clothes. Examples are shown in Image 2.3.

	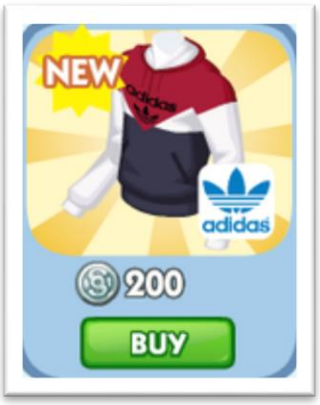
The SimCash tree produces three SimCash every three days.	Adidas Originals Colorado Hoody is a top for male Sims

Image 2.3: Examples of items that players can buy

The integration of branded products is a common advertising practice found in most SNGs with a free-to-play business model. Image 2.4 shows brands like Samsung, Roxy, Adidas, Diesel and Toyota that appeared in *The Sims Social*. Sponsorship and product placement (also known as in-game advertising) are common in SNGs. Products and brands can be seen prominently displayed and integrated into the gameplay (Chen 2009; Fields & Cotton 2012; Silva 2013, p. 24). Advertising in SNGs is used in combination with other monetisation methods.

As free-to-play games such as SNGs depend on these types of monetisation methods, there is a lot to consider. Utilising time, virtual goods and advertising for the purpose of boosting revenue requires game developers and designers to consider their players and tailor creative and flexible monetisation methods to accommodate the diversity of players (Fields & Cotton 2012). At the same time, game

developers and designers need to apply monetisation methods with caution in order to ensure a fair play experience and avoid unwanted criticism.

Roxy Denim Jeans | Samsung Galaxy S3

Toyota Prius Hybrid | Cornetto Ice-Cream

Image 2.4: Some of the brands integrated in The Sims Social

As discussed in the previous section, *The Sims* series has been criticised for advocating consumption and capitalist values through its game play and mechanics. The same values could be seen in *The Sims Social,* as the social and sociability constructs in the game gravitated towards capitalist values. This was apparent in the game's monetisation system, specifically the practice of in-game advertising in which products and brands such as Adidas, Toyota and Samsung made their way into the gameplay

experience. These made *The Sims Social* prone to criticism as a game that valorised capitalist ideology.

The social experience of SNGs permeates into SNS

Sociability is not only significantly performed in SNGs, but it permeates into the everyday lives of the players, which affects the overall play experience (Silva 2013). The play experience goes beyond the SNGs' realm to include its host, the SNS. In this context, it means that players' engagement with *The Sims Social* through their 'play identity' was not confined within the parameters of the game but permeated into Facebook, where a more consistent (or a more authentic) representation of the players' identity was performed. If not properly managed, the more 'authentic' identity performed on Facebook could become layered with the play identity arising from *The Sims Social*. This is an example of how the affordance provided by SNS is used by SNGs. This affordance not only benefited *The Sims Social*, it also fed Facebook because social interactions such as the ones engaged with in SNGs are part and parcel of the very existence of any SNS.

The Sims Social application had access to players' walls and friends' databases, which enabled it to create a semi-automatic feature where the game prompts users to post their game achievements to their Newsfeed and Timeline. By default, all posts will appear on Newsfeed and the player's Timeline and these postings will appear to everyone in the players' network public or friends list, unless changes were made in advance by the player in the privacy settings (Wohn 2012). Other mechanisms that work the same way in *The Sims Social* include gift or help requests and sharing achievement status rewards from the game. An example of such a feature in *The Sims Social* can be seen in Image 2.5.

Image 2.5: Sharing an achievement on Facebook via the player's newsfeed and timeline

All social experiences on *The Sims Social* were constructed through interactions of both humans and non-humans. Although most of the human interactions in *The Sims Social* (and all SNGs for this reason) were asynchronous, Facebook offered a platform where players could cultivate the feeling of co-presence (Stenros, Paavilainen & Mäyrä 2009). An example is the Malaysian Sims fan page where players with the same characteristics and goals became members or subscribed to this group.

This Malaysian Sims fan page on Facebook had both *The Sims Social* and physical world conditions operating simultaneously. With the complexity of managing their play identity from *The Sims Social* colliding with their more authentic identity performed on Facebook, these fan pages provided a permission for *The Sims Social* players to continue performing their play identity while still embodying their Facebook identity. This offered a different social experience that added excitement to the overall gameplay as more social and cultural context from the physical world could be seen and performed in this space. On the Malaysian Sims fan page, players made *The Sims Social* their own.

While non-human interactions provided a unique social context, human interactions happened within or outside the game, initiated by the game. These 'third places' (Stenros, Paavilainen & Mäyrä 2009) as provided by SNS, extend the social experience beyond the gaming environment to include physical world influences where other social factors such as culture and religion come into play. Players are constantly analysing, evaluating (and re-evaluating) during play and they take actions based on their

own understandings. Playing a digital game does not happen in a vacuum, but rather 'is informed by and situated within the contexts of other players and their analyses and playing' (Newman 2008, p. 12).

Discussion of the social experience in SNGs in general, and in *The Sims Social* in particular, has to reconsider the notion of the social and its constructions. Technology paved the way to the changing media landscape, as represented by digital games where the notion of social construction has to include both human and non-human interactions (Latour 2005, Meurs 2011; Silva 2013). *The Sims Social* was supported by Facebook, which further complicated the social experience as it provided a platform where identities performed in different contexts were able to overlap, resulting in a coalescing of identities, which were also visible to the networked public, unless managed by the players in advance.

This intersection of identities between a playful context and a more serious one, as portrayed on Facebook, has implications that have not been thoroughly discussed in academic literature. Although a lot of study and research has been done concerning the performance of identity in games and in SNS contexts, most of these studies have looked at identities in the context of the game without considering the permeability of identities between contexts.

Chapters 7 and 8 thoroughly discuss the findings, from both observation and interviews, regarding Malay women's performance and management of identity on *The Sims Social*, fan pages and Facebook.

Identifying the points where the social and identity are performed in *The Sims Social*

The previous topics have discussed the crucial element in any SNG, which is the concept of asynchronicity embedded through time structures. The concept of the social in SNGs was further probed to establish the understanding that the social aspects in SNGs should include both human and non-human actors. This is due to the fact that the players of digital games interact with both types of actors during play. The argument about the social aspects of SNGs (with particular reference given *The Sims Social*) went on to discuss in brief how technology has made it possible for identities performed in different contexts to permeate into one another, and how this complicates the social experiences of the players. The basic impact of permeability of environments can be seen through the adoption of offline world values in the play environment. This permeability was evident in the players in different social situations in *The Sims Social*. As this chapter's aim is to introduce the topic of SNGs and *The Sims Social*, issues related to identity will be presented in detail in Chapter 4.

Here, the researcher wishes to highlight the points in *The Sims Social* where the 'social' took place and identity was performed. These points become a system for the researcher to organise the data collected through the online participant observation.

To recap, *The Sims Social* was ideal for this research project because it was a life simulation game 'in which players [could] customise their avatars (Sim) and Sim's homes using the numerous in-game items available' (Silva 2013, p. 28). This game allowed socially dynamic engagements not just in the game realm, but also through interactions and emergent gameplay among its players within the broader environment of the Facebook platform. This unique interaction between an SNG (*The Sims Social*) and its platform (Facebook) provided an opportunity to observe how different identities are performed and managed in a context where both identities may overlap. The uniqueness of *The Sims Social* enabled the researcher to understand how identity comes into play. As Silva (2013) argued:

> a real-life – rather than a farm, city or medieval world – simulation, *The Sims Social* brings closer fantasy and reality, or play and everyday routine. Instead of immersing in environments created mainly out of imagination alone, players can base their modes of play in their real lives, either to reproduce or to transform it completely in the game realm. The very slogan of *The Sims Social* – 'play with life' – indicates the intentional closeness with players' real-world experiences. (Silva 2013, p. 28)

As *The Sims Social* resembled the real world, it enabled players to bring in their own real-life experiences into the game world, thus opening up space for experimentation, challenge and discovery (Griebel 2006; Nutt & Railton 2003).

However, this research will argue that the 'real-life' experience depicted in *The Sims Social* was in fact a depiction of a Western/US cultural context, which for players coming from cultures other than the West/US, required interpretation of the meanings presented within the game. The affordances and limitations in a game affect the way players perform their identity. This condition made *The Sims Social* a fertile ground for understanding the negotiation and performance of identity as these Malay women experienced globalisation and modernity within the game context as well as its SNS platform.

The performance of identity or self can be understood as contextual and dynamic, shaped and reshaped by social interactions and everyday life (Goffman 1959). In the context of SNGs and Facebook, the performance of self is shaped by social interactions that are not limited to those among humans but extend to include non-human interactions (Silva 2013). Social network games and Facebook are also legitimate cultural artefacts, embedded with sociocultural values, perspectives and ideologies, particularly those from the West or the US. Thus, the manifestation of identity within the game realm is unique to the interpretation and meaning developed by each and every player, framed

by their social and cultural backgrounds. Quoting Hall from his lecture entitled, 'Representation and the media':

> . . . there is no escape from the fact that meaning is, in the end, interpretation. It always shifts from one historical setting to another. It is always contextual (Hall 1997).

Arguments whether media are legitimate sociocultural tools is not a new one, as argued by Stuart Hall in his seminal work, 'Encoding-decoding' (1980). For Malay women, playing *The Sims Social* on Facebook meant interacting and negotiating cultural meaning. It also meant experiencing globalisation and modernity in a different context, alongside other media such as the television, film and books. Within *The Sims Social*, Malay women were engaging (through play) with cultural values and ideologies encapsulated by the developers from a US/ Western perspective.

For the purpose of identifying the points where the social was experienced and identity was performed, a model developed by Silva (2013) was adopted in this research to identify the 'points of engagement' between human and non-human actors, namely the players (Malay women), the game (*The Sims Social*) and the platform (Facebook). Silva combined actor–network theory (ANT) with game studies to create a theoretical model to locate and explain the interactions between human and non-human/technology in SNGs, and to analyse identity performance. Silva successfully demonstrated how players' identity 'becomes the product of both social practices and technological affordances' (Silva 2013, p. 55).

Although Silva acknowledged that non-human interactions in *The Sims Social* carried cultural meanings, she did not provide further explanation because it was not the main focus of her work. She also did not look at how the identity and self-performance in SNGs may affect the performance of self on Facebook.

Thus, this research will extend Silva's work, from simply looking at technology as a legitimate social actor to looking at SNGs as cultural artefacts. This research will look at reflexivity in negotiating meanings presented in the game and how it affects the performance of self and identity not just within but also beyond games, including their platform, the SNS.

Applying Silva's ANT model to identify 'points of interaction'

Silva's (2013) ANT model for analysing videogame play (Image 2.6) combines the work of media theorist Alexander Galloway (2006) and Salen and Zimmerman's (2004) work on the modes of interactivity. Silva repurposed their work in her research to identify and explain the interactions experienced in digital games, particularly SNGs.

This four-quadrant model defines how technology (the game) and humans (players) as legitimate actors work together. The repurposed model has four quadrants with each quadrant representing the 'relationship' between agents (operator/machine) with type of action within the game (termed 'diegetic') or outside the game (termed 'non-diegetic').

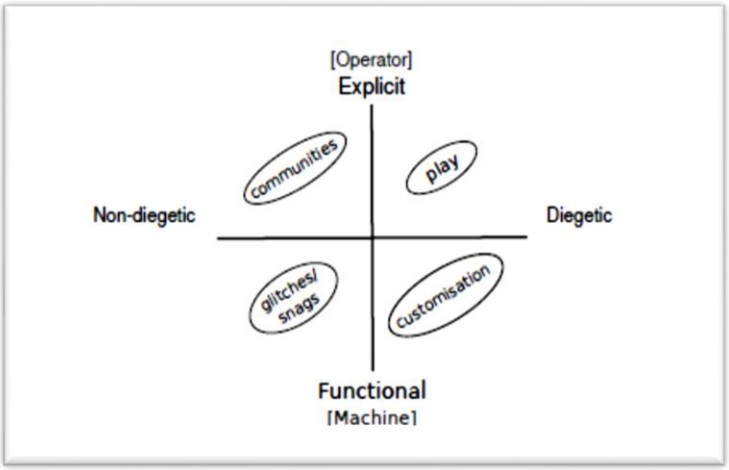

Image 2.6: Silva's (2013) ANT model for analysing videogame play

The ANT approach is used to analyse the blend of identity, play, and technology in SNGs (Silva 2013). This model suits the objective of this research because it was developed with SNGs in mind. A simplified explanation on the model is presented in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Explanation of the ANT model by Silva (2013) with comparable observations taken from The Sims Social

Quadrant	Explanation of the ANT model (based on Silva 2013)	Observed in *The Sims Social*
Diegetic/Explicit	This is where 'play' happens. Technology is the mediator between players' desires and game opportunities. Players have the most choices and power.	A Sim is provided with several choices in every interaction with human or non-human characters.
Diegetic/Functional	The machine controls players' actions directly and explicitly. Technology directly affects the way players see themselves in relation to the game.	A Sim's perspective is as a third-person in the game. A Sim is only able to interact with one other Sim at a time by either visiting their house or calling them over.
Non-diegetic/Explicit	Provide ways of enriching game experience. Players enhance their involvement with both co-players and the game itself through the sharing of game knowledge and the provision of mutual help. Machine becomes the background to, and the subject matter of, players' actions.	*The Sims Social* players' discussions happened on fan pages on Facebook to share knowledge, help each other and participate in self-initiated emergent play. For example, 'Fashionista' and House Mania' contests on the Malaysian Sims fan page on Facebook.
Non-diegetic/functional	Requires actions in which technology affects gameplay from outside, and players have little control over it.	Game failures – freezing, glitches, snags – usually happened when the internet connection was slow.

(Adapted from ANT model for analysing videogame play in Silva 2013, pp. 21–22 and researcher's own observation.)

In Silva's research, this model was used to construct categories to represent social experiences that take place between actors (human and non-human included) and how identity is performed. She identified three categories in her research: 'the avatar', 'the environment' and 'the social' (Silva 2013).

The categories were developed from the model were adopted in this research as a way to organise and present the findings in Chapters 7 and 8. These categories are the 'contact points' where identity is performed, either in human-to-human interactions (when a Sim is interacting with another Sim) or in human-to-non-human interactions, such as when a Sim is interacting with objects or executing quests or tasks.

The following sections discuss each of Silva's categories: 'the avatar/Sim', 'the environment' and 'the Social', along with detailed remarks made during play and participant observations in *The Sims Social*.

The diegetic/functional quadrant: The avatar/Sim

The routine in Littlehaven provided a space for players to perform identity. *The Sims Social* brought real-world experiences into play, allowing its players to either reproduce or transform their 'real' lives in the game environment (Silva 2013).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, *The Sims Social* had similar core mechanics to the other SNGs in the simulation genre, especially those in the -ville series (Tyni et al. 2011). As soon as they joined the game, the player created and personalised their Sim. This process included the naming the Sim, and choosing physical characteristics (gender, skin colour, hair type), personality traits and clothing.

Image 2.7 shows two screen shots of the screen for customising Sims. This is where players first encountered an opportunity to think about identity, translating 'the game system into a meaningful representation or idealisation of themselves' (Silva 2013, p. 29). However, the word 'meaningful' is unclear here, because for a majority of Malay women and people of different cultures, all of the options given were drawn from a Western or US perspective and culture, which to a certain degree, required the players to engage in some form of negotiation. In *The Sims Social*, although the options for Sim customisation were wide, they were not exhaustive. As this was a platform where individuals were more likely to embody themselves visually in virtual bodies that leaned towards a fantasy or ideal self (Belk 2016). However, it was complicated, or even impossible, for some Malay women to present themselves in ways similar to their offline or preferred self, due to the narrow range of options provided for Sim customisation.

Image 2.7: Customising male and female Sims in The Sims Social.

The Sims Social players were able to make changes to their Sim's features and personality at any time after the initial set-up. Any changes to the Sim in terms of its gender, personality and everything under the 'shop' category including hairstyles, special facial features, clothing and shoes, would incur some form of payment using virtual currency (SimCash, Simoleons or social points). Virtual currency could be purchased with real money to buy these virtual goods. Shop items were regularly updated and some were made available during seasonal quests such as those related to Valentine's Day, Halloween or Christmas.

This customisation function brought more than creating a figure for play and interactions within the game parameters. Its meanings ran deeper than simply cosmetic. In fact, this is the first point where players' identity was negotiated, embodied and performed. It acted as the 'backstage', as Goffman puts it, where actors prepared for their performance.

The customisation and re-customisation of the Sim were not limited to clothing, as virtual currency allowed changes to facial features and personality traits as well, although choices were still limited. The available options gave players an opportunity to express themselves 'beyond the limitations and restrictions of the physical world' (de Zwart & Lindsay 2012, p. 95). Unlike social virtual worlds like *Second Life*, where there is no need for its players 'to engage in predetermined role-play' (de Zwart 2012, p. 95), *The Sims Social* players were still bound to goals and tasks as part of the gameplay. This makes it important to understand how the choices about Sim customisation (and re-customisation) affected Malay women's embodiment of self in the game realm.

Through the discussions held with these Malay women, some of them stated that the customisation and re-customisation of their Sims mattered less to them, as their focus was solely on the achievement in the game. The absence of choices available could also mean that these Malay women had no personal identification with their Sims; they were somehow detached and saw them merely as a tool to manoeuvre in the game.

Past studies suggest that the representation of self in online spaces lies in a continuum. At one end is a direct representation of people's offline selves; at the other end a total opposite or a fantasy self is embodied. Thus, the customisation of the Sim reveals that a negotiation of identity performance took place among Malay women. *The Sims* in Littlehaven could be used as tools, as means of personal expression or escapism, or all of these at once in different situations during play. Identity negotiation and performance is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The overall Sims franchise has been studied and criticised (examples in Crawford & Rutter 2006; Drayson 2012; Frasca 2001; Lehdonvirta, Wilska & Johnson 2009) for advocating consumerist or capitalist values through the integration of shopping culture and consumerist values with play, suggesting to players that performance and life are about managing and improvising through consumption of products and services. The monetisation system embedded in the structures of the games has also raised questions about integrity and ethical concerns regarding the game developers and designers.

The other issue that could be raised about *The Sims Social* (and the rest of *The Sims* franchise) is the issue of representation, which is not new in media and game studies. Although this was not raised or discussed as much in published research, it has to be taken into consideration, particularly in this research. As Malay women customised their Sim, they engaged with shopping and consuming products or services which were most likely depicting Western/US culture and lifestyle. This was not limited to

the Sim's physical and personality customisation, but stretched to include the whole game experience, in which cultural settings included Valentine's Day and Halloween's quests. These quests were complemented with matching clothing and decorative ornaments for houses; these were tied to quests and rewards in the game. This is a clear way in which *The Sims Social* governed its players' performance, which required identity negotiation in the game environment.

Diegetic/explicit quadrant: The environment

After the Sim customisation stage, players were guided to their home. Upon arriving in a basic two-room house, the Sim unpacked their boxes. As with other games in the same category, the initial steps functioned as a 'tutorial' that guided new players through the basics of the game.

Up until the end of *The Sims Social*, a total of six houses in different environments were available for players to own, namely, Beach House, Home, Penthouse, Midnight Grove, Winter Chalet, and Kingdom of Simelot. Each of these houses was offered to players as they progressed through the levels. But all players owned at least the basic home in Littlehaven.

Image: 2.8: A 105 thousand (in Sim value) house named 'Rugged Ranch'. This image is viewed through The Sims Social's shopping function

Image 2.8 shows a typical home in Littlehaven valued at 105 thousand expressed in Sim value as viewed from the shopping function. In this space, identity was negotiated and performed through interactions with furnishings, items and accumulated rewards (like pets). Most displayed items (in and around the house) offered some form of interaction, although there were some items for decorative purposes that offered no interactions at all. Interaction between any two Sims can only happen in either

one of the Sim's home and the only time a Sim is able to invite another Sim over to his or her house is when they develop a 'romantic' relationship.

Interactions also happened at several other limited time locations during seasonal quests, such as the Italian holiday week, during which most of the quests happened in the Italian Villa. However, interactions in these spaces were limited to non-player characters and items for quest purposes only.

The asynchronous nature of *The Sims Social* meant that players could only view their own Sim's behaviours and its interactions with other Sims and the items around a Sim's house. These interactions were visible only to the player and not everyone in the game, making the social experience personal to each and every player. Visiting co-players' Sims at their houses, looking at the way a Sim dressed, interacting and developing relationships was a window that offered a glimpse into other players' performance of self in the game. Understanding this situation through Goffman's perspective- is where information was mostly 'given off'.

The shopping mode is one of the spaces where most of the gameplay took place. Once again, shopping and consumption were prevalent in *The Sims Social*, and consumption practices were incorporated into gameplay. The shopping mode is where the majority of the social interaction and consumption happened as they are merged into the structures of the game to encourage the expenditure of real money through play (Silva 2013).

Image 2.9: The loft quest that requires a lot of 'cleaning-up'

The house needs to be managed, and Sims were required to complete tasks such as tidying up the bed, cleaning the bathroom and gardening. Owning more houses (Image 2.9) required a lot of

unpacking and tidying up. In all of the houses, a lot of domestic work took place such as cooking and tidying up. This has raised questions of 'gender performance'. In analysing the significance of 'productive play', Chess (2009) argued that this is a reason SNGs are appealing to women.

Life in Littlehaven was more than simply managing the basic needs of the Sim. There were quests offered from time to time, which are largely optional for players to pursue. Like most of *The Sims* series, there were no definite goals in *The Sims Social*, but there were a series of small goals broken down into smaller tasks to be completed in a span of time in order for the Sim to get a specific reward, such as quest related to owning a car. A decision to pursue a particular quest was motivated through the reward offered by the quest, such as earning points, currency or units in the game or a special prize attainable only through completing the quest. Ultimately this led to increasing house value or level.

Playing quests also 'gives off' a lot of information about the Sim or the player. Participation in quests gave an indication that the player could be playing for 'house value', which was an indication that the player is competitive, but it also indicated that the player could be playing for vanity or materialistic purposes. The accumulation of rewards, displayed inside and sometimes outside the house, and the house value were all indications of identity performance by the players. It is a performance of the player behind the Sim, a manifestation of identity resulting from negotiation and experimentation within the game environment.

As tasks were accomplished, new quests and new activities were unlocked which required more involvement and interactions with other players (Silva 2013). As indicated in the title of the game, *The Sims Social* players had to go beyond fulfilling the basic needs of their Sims and be geared towards socialising with the rest of the co-players (their neighbours), who were connected as 'friends' through Facebook. Socialising in *The Sims Social* required players to interact with Littlehaven neighbours to get their missions accomplished.

Players in *The Sims Social* began their relationships as neighbours, marked as mere acquaintances in the game. Players were then able to pursue three different relationships: friends, inspired soul mates (lovers) or enemies. The progression of a relationship depended on the effort put into the relationship. Positive (which ultimately turned romantic) or negative relationships required social interactions and tasks to unlock relationship levels. Like any relationship in real-life, good relationships could turn sour if a player engaged with negative interactions, thus it was possible to break up a romantic relationship and become an enemy. The possibilities for social interactions and where they could occur depended on a Sim's relationship status. For example, Sims in love could engage in massaging, kissing,

showering or having a bath together, or 'woohoo' (sex). While enemies could engage in various acts to annoy each other such as insulting, playing pranks, messing with household appliances, and other negative interactions.

The advancement through each relationship level required approval from both Sims before it was established and reflected in the game. Like any other interactions and game statuses, relationship statuses and interactions could be publicised on players' Facebook wall and become visible to everyone in the players' Facebook network if the privacy setting was set to 'public', the default. The option to build a relationship with another Sim is up to the players; however, the progression of a romantic relationship can be pursued with one Sim only. This suggests a form of control by the game and an underlying valuing of monogamy.

Recruiting more friends (especially active playing friends) into the Littlehaven neighbourhood was always a good thing in this game as this gave a Sim an advantage in completing quests and tasks in the fastest time possible, without having to spend money. A Sim was considered active if they engaged in frequent and consistent interactions with their Littlehaven neighbours by responding to their requests for completing quests and tasks, giving gifts, visiting and socialising with each other.

Players engaged with the game through four different spaces or screens engaged one at a time. Each time players log into their game, they are presented with the first screen compiling all the requests, gifts and bonuses from other players which need to be approved, disapproved and their favour returned. After all requests are sorted, players are brought into the second space which is their home, where the more complex play takes place. In this screen, players are able to interact with the game environment, with another Sim and participating in game quests which determine the relationship outcome with other Sims as well as overall performance in the game. During play in this space, players are able to pause their gameplay and switch to two other spaces- the customisation mode or the shopping mode. The customisation mode enables the players to change the physical appearance, traits and personality of their Sims. Players must switch back to the main space where gameplay takes place before they can have access to the shopping mode.

As a cultural artefact, *The Sims Social* projected Western/US culture and lifestyles and these values governed the experience of play in the game. This could be observed in the game, for example, in the way shopping and consumerist values were integrated, the way relationships and sexuality were projected, and in relation to issues of gender performance, as discussed earlier. These interactions in

The Sims Social gave a lot of options and freedom to players; however, these were 'to some extent limited by the possibilities offered by the system' (Silva 2013, p. 30).

In fact, defining freedom and limitation in the game context is very subjective because it depends upon individual interpretation. Whether a game offers freedom or limitation, and how players make use of it in their performance of play identity, is a personal decision and almost always a negotiation to strike a balance (that seems right at the time) between the players' sociocultural, religious background and the information gained from globalised media and the world (which normalises a lot of the values projected in *The Sims Social*). The affordances (and limitations) in *The Sims Social* allowed players to channel their creativity and self-expression (Silva 2013), as the Malay women did within the game parameters, and therefore, can be observed and understood with certain considerations.

Non-diegetic/explicit quadrant: Socialising on a Fan page

The first and second categories of analysis, as discussed above, take place within the parameters of the game. This third category happened outside *The Sims Social*, but was very much tied to the game. In this third category, play was brought outside the parameters of *The Sims Social* and continued in *The Sims Social* Facebook group account. Such Facebook group accounts were normally a joint initiative by several players to group players from a particular game in one place. The main purpose of these groups was to be a hub where members could increase their number of neighbours by adding players to help with quests and complete tasks. Players could also share information from the official *The Sims Social* website or other sources. Some of these groups are made private and interested players who wanted to join needed to request permission from the group administrators. As group membership grew, so did the activities within the group.

The existence of these groups was driven by the limitedness of asynchronous games. The nature of asynchronous game limits the players' visibility to their own game state, making it impossible to play together, and experience real-time interactions in their own game spaces or in co-players' game spaces. As explained by Meurs (2011), instead of playing together, asynchronous games allow players to play alongside each other, because each and every interaction between co-players in the game is delayed before it can be completed. Due to this, no players are able to interact or play together in real-time, unlike most persistent virtual world MMORPGs such as *EverQuest* or *World of Warcraft*, where all players worldwide are connected to a persistent virtual world that runs continuously and enables them to communicate and play in real-time.

There were several Malaysian-based *The Sims Social* fan groups on Facebook. However, the Malaysian Sims fan group (Image 2.10) was selected for this study because it was a Malaysian-based group, and there was cooperation from one of the administrators. Play in this group was a spinoff from the game itself. It was apparent in this group that socialising was not just an essential part of the game, but also an important element in the group's Facebook account. Facebook played an important role in facilitating the 'social' elements as well as the 'emergent play' for *The Sims Social.*

The administrators of the group would initiate several activities and sometimes ideas were derived from members of the group or a deviation from the official EA website or other games or fan sites. The most common and well-received activity among group members was the search for the most stylish Sim. This was named a 'Fashionista' contest in the Malaysian Sims fan group. This contest was open to both male and female Sims, and functioned like a best dressed competition with a prom night twist. The other well-received contest was the best house in Littlehaven, known as 'House Mania' in the Malaysian Sims Group. This activity searched for the best decorated house based on a theme. Members were encouraged to participate by posting pictures of their Sims or homes. Winners for both contests were announced on a monthly basis by the group administrators based on votes cast by the members of the group.

Image 2.10: The Malaysian Sims Facebook group cover photo

Other activities centred on sharing and documenting screen shots of relationship interactions and statuses – screen shots of activities at another Sims' house, which were not visible to co-players in the game itself. All these activities accentuated the relationship among co-players because these activities, particularly the sharing of screen shots from personal game states, stimulated conversation among members, and thus established the feeling of playing together. In this space, emergent play in relation to identity play from *The Sims Social* happened. This is where both a player's identity play and their Facebook identity became visible in one space. Other activities involved documenting information,

instruction and tips on themes and quests, and solving technical issues to help one another in the game.

The presentation of findings and discussions on this category will anchor the first and the second categories. It was an important part of the social experience for the players and it demonstrates that play did not simply begin and end within the parameters of *The Sims Social* but seeped outside the game realm and into Facebook itself where a more 'authentic' identity is expected. This category is useful to observe and analyse play as it documents play that happened in the game environment, but would otherwise be 'invisible' due to the nature of asynchronous play. It is also a place where the performance of self can be observed as play identity from *The Sims Social* and the more 'authentic' identity on Facebook collide and both are visible to everyone within the fan group.

Play was experienced differently here as play identity and 'real' identity (featured on a player's Facebook account) collapse into one. Although discussion and interactions still centred on *The Sims Social,* the players' 'true' identity became apparent in this context. As members in this group (which normally play together) made their relationships in the game transparent to the rest of the group members, it provided insights on their identity performance in the game, such as the way players related to their Sims, the manifestation of identity and justification of their performance in-game, as it revealed players' thoughts, ideas and feelings resulting from their engagement with *The Sims Social*. This context also included the management of the players' identities as portrayed on Facebook.

Conclusion

This chapter has established three important contexts where identity is performed differently. It strengthens the argument that identity is multiple and possibly clashing due to the contexts in which it is performed. On Facebook, identity is often performed to best reflect the offline self. In *The Sims Social*, identity was performed based on play, and this was influenced by the affordances and limitations of the game.

These two identities then collapsed in a third context: the 'fan group', facilitated by Facebook and geared by *The Sims Social,* in which play was taken outside the game context. It is probable for clashing identities to create complexity, particularly in managing identity in this space. However, because the members of this fan group played the same game and were focused on game objectives in the context of the fan group, the group indirectly established shared conventions. Thus, the players became more tolerant towards play identities – although there could be clashes with the real identity portrayed on Facebook. The phrase 'more tolerant' does not here mean that the players were a

hundred per cent accepting. Their behaviour during play in *The Sims Social* and while on Facebook was the same as any individuals': they engaged in meaning making and based on their interactions or through symbols, which gave off leads to meaning making and interpretation, and all these were influenced by sociocultural and religious backgrounds and knowledge.

However, it worked differently on Facebook. As play identity permeated Facebook identity, creating a layer on top of the players' existing identity, it brought complexity to players' management of multiple identities. It is a challenge to manage multiple identities on Facebook because Facebook publics consist of people who the players know from different contexts throughout their lifetime; with each person on their network having different expectations about the consistency of the player's online and offline selves. Clashing identities have the potential to disrupt the consistency needed to establish authenticity in the performance of self (Goffman 1959) demanded in today's world. Chapter 8 of this thesis focuses on Malay women's presentation and management of their multiple selves on Facebook as they juggle their identity play and the more 'authentic' identity presented on Facebook.

The topic of identities and the collapsed of identities performed in different contexts online (and offline) is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. This discussion of the performance of identity in both SNGs and SNSs will provide an understanding of identity management and how everyday social factors are still relevant in guiding social interactions in online contexts, including in-game and on Facebook, for women, Malays and Muslims in Malaysia.

Chapter 3: Malay women and globalisation, media and reflexivity

Introduction

This chapter seeks to establish the context in which the Malay women in this study played digital games like *The Sims Social*. It begins by briefly setting the background of Malaysia's encounter with globalisation and modernity and how this revolutionised the Malays' sociocultural and religious identities. Using Giddens' notion of reflexivity, this chapter then discusses the identity of the Malays, and Malay women in particular, and how they negotiated, incorporated, and manifested their identity as globalisation and modernity were internalised into their lives, particularly through playing *The Sims Social* and managing their presentation of self on Facebook.

Globalisation and modernity

Views and approaches to studying globalisation and culture differ, sometimes to extreme degrees, but most scholars generally agree that 'globalization is not a single, unified process but a set of interactions that may be best approached from different observation points' (Mittelman 2001, p. 7). Globalisation is experienced everywhere in the world today and it is amplified through media, communication and technology bridging the distance between the global and the local (Giddens 1991). Playing *The Sims Social* on Facebook was a phenomenon of globalisation as it has been experienced by Malay women engaging with SNGs.

When one is discussing the impact of globalisation on different countries, particularly on aspects of culture and identity, there are three schools of thought: homogenisation (Hassi & Storti 2012) heterogenisation or differentiation (Bhawuk 2008; Embong 2011; Hassi & Storti 2012; Mittelman 2000) and hybridisation (Hassi & Storti 2012).

Some believe that the increased interconnection between countries and cultures that has been brought by globalisation has resulted in a more homogenous world, as proposed by the Western Euro-American model of social organisation and lifestyle (Liebes 2003). An aspect of the homogenisation critique is the belief that globalisation is cultural imperialism all over again (Embong 2011), in which local cultures are shaped by dominant cultures or global culture (Ritzer 2010). This form of homogenisation, also known as convergence, is reflected 'in several concepts and models such as the Global Culture, Americanisation and more importantly the McDonaldization theory' (Hassi & Storti 2012).

Although certain scholars (i.e. Appadurai 1996; Featherstone 1995) admit that globalisation for the most part originates from Western cultures, they reject the notion that globalisation constitutes a

homogenisation of world cultures, a linear interaction of one culture imposing on the other. They argue that a model of cultural homogenisation is 'too simplistic as several local cultures have demonstrated their ability to domesticate or resist foreign cultural influences' (Appadurai 1996; Pieterse 2004 as cited in Hassi & Storti 2012, p. 12). Instead, this second school of thought argues that globalisation generates a state of heterogeneity, in which the mixing of diverse cultures results in better understanding between them because each individual responds differently to different cultures, as this very much depends upon their own understanding of globalisation (Embong 2011). This view suggests that through globalisation, local cultures will continue to experience continuous transformation and reinvention, but the root of the culture will remain untouched and authentic with minor changes occurring at a surface level (Ritzer 2010). The only changes are probably 'the criteria used by different cultural groups to define their identity and differentiation vis-a-vis other cultures' (Hassi & Storki 2012, p. 8).

The third school of thought argues that globalisation is a mixing of cultures resulting in something new: hybridisation. This is regarded as the 'cultural logic' of globalisation, with proponents arguing that 'traces of other cultures exist in every culture, thus offering foreign media and marketers transcultural wedges for forging affective links between their commodities and local communities' (Kraidy 2005, p. 148). This notion of the impact of globalisation is a risky one, in that the challenge for scholars is 'not to come up with all-purpose, final definition of hybridity, but to find a way to integrate different types of hybridity in a framework that makes the connections between these types both intelligible and usable' (Kraidy 2005, p. iv).

It is very tempting to select one school of thought and draw conclusions by it. However, the scale of today's global connections, particularly in Malaysia, is far too complex for a single theory to explain it all. I agree with Embong's (2011) call to move beyond the either-or debate, in which one must choose homogenisation, heterogenisation or hybridisation. Instead, Embong asserts that these theories can exist simultaneously given the different circumstances unique to each different locale. He argues that

> all three schools of thought are useful in helping us to understand and analyse culture, and globalisation. Empirical realities show that all the three theories can exist simultaneously; homogenisation, heterogenisation and hybridisation may each prevail in different historical and cultural conditions. The pertinent point for the analysis of the impact of globalisation on local culture and identity is the importance of circumstance. For instance, in one particular society, we may see homogenisation taking place in some areas, hybridisation in others, and at the same time, tendencies of differentiation may also be found (Embong 2011, p. 18)

Instead of trying to fit findings into any one of these categories, it will be useful to consider all three schools of thought on the outcomes of the interactions between globalisation and culture (Embong

2011). This also means that the argument that 'globalisation equals cultural imperialism' is unacceptable, particularly if we look at the notion of globalisation from a modern society (as per Giddens definition of modernity) such as Malaysia.

Embong's understanding of globalisation and culture is parallel to Tomlinson's (2003) call for a 'more complex understanding of the globalization process: one, at least, which allows for a degree of unpredictability in its consequences' (Tomlinson 2003, p. 270). Both Giddens and Tomlinson argue that social modernity gives importance to globalisation (Giddens 1990; Tomlinson 1994). Modernity and globalisation have a clockwork relationship. Modernity allows technology to speed up the globalisation process, and globalisation in turn speeds-up the process of modernity. Tomlinson specifically argues that 'globalization is really the globalization of modernity, and modernity is the harbinger of identity' (Tomlinson 2003, p. 271). The outcome of globalisation and modernity at work lies within 'identity'.

Modernity can be understood as 'a cultural ethos or period that breaks with tradition, producing a sense of "new" and "old"' (Syed & Runnel 2013, p. 2). A handful of scholars agree that modernity, in its broadest sense, is an era characterised by 'an influx of new ideas and alternative modes of thought, as well as transformation of physical conditions and changes in lifestyle and economy' (Barker 2000; Chong 2005; Giddens 1991; Leonard 1996 in Syed & Runnel 2013, p. 2).

The influx of new ideas and alternative modes of thought were addressed by Giddens through his fourfold classification of the institutions of modernity namely: a world capitalist economy, the nation–state system, a world military order and the international division of labour. These four dimensions operate as a complex, multidimensional concept, 'operating simultaneously and interrelatedly in the economic, technological-communicational, political and cultural spheres of human life' (Tomlinson 2003, p. 272). The globalisation of industrialism saw a worldwide dispersion of machine technologies beyond the spheres of production to include other aspects of day-to-day life (Giddens 1991). The most significant outcome of industrialism in human interaction is the transformation of communication technologies (Giddens 1991).

Cultural transfer through the globalising impact of media was noted by numerous authors during the period of the early growth of mass circulation newspapers, which was made possible with the introduction of mechanical printing in Europe. This marked the global extension of the institutions of modernity through the pooling of knowledge, upon which cultural globalisation thrives (Giddens 1991).

Cultural globalisation is the less obvious, but fundamental, element operating behind the four dimensions of modernity. Furthermore, with the advancements of media and communication systems,

the intensification of transmission and exchange of information, ideas, and images is happening at a rapid rate. It therefore seems impossible for us today to not be in contact with others who think and live in ways that are culturally different from ourselves (Giddens 2002), creating 'populations whose identities are both multiple and complex' (Tomlinson 2003, p. 276). In *Runaway World,* Giddens states, 'Globalisation is political, technological and cultural, as well as economic. It has been influenced above all by developments in systems of communication, dating back only to the late 1960s' (Giddens 2002, p. 10). The influence of media in Giddens' notion of globalisation and modernity developed as an 'intrusion' of the distant into the local:

> In conditions of late modernity we live 'in the world' in a different sense from previous eras of history. Everyone still continues to live a local life, and the constraints of the body ensure that all individuals, at every moment, are contextually situated in time and space. Yet the transformations of place, and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the centrality of mediated experience, radically change what 'the world' actually is . . . Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global (Giddens 1991, p. 187)

Giddens' last sentence above, where he claims that 'there is an experience of the global in everyday, 'situated' lives of people in local circumstances' (Tomlinson 1994, p. 150), raises the question of the way globalisation is experienced in each and every 'situated' locale that comes into contact with globalisation. The discussion of globalisation becomes superficial if it is done in abstraction as there is lack of 'empirically grounded, detailed understanding of the phenomenon reaching into the heart of the intimate and personal sphere' (Kim 2005, p. 446). Progress in discussions relevant to globalisation can be actualised through understanding the context of particular cultures with consideration of complexities of the global encountering in the specific social, historical, and everyday experience (Robins 2000). 'The concern of mainstream globalization discourse tends to be with "out there" macro-processes, rather than what is happening "in here", in the intimate and personal aspects of our lives' (Kim 2005, p. 446).

Globalisation is about understanding and embracing diversity and avoiding 'the risk of being so over-schematic as to hide all the differences that matter' (Morley 1992, p. 272). Thus, 'in here', micro level experience is essential to our understanding of the 'diverse and differential impact of globalization across distinct categories of people and localities' (Kim 2005, p. 446).

Many scholars have studied the relationships between globalisation and media and 'most theorists agree that there is practically no globalisation without media and communications' (Rantanen 2005, p. 4). Media is central in globalisation for three main reasons: 1) the increasing number of media corporations globalising their operations; 2) the global communication infrastructure facilitates global

information flows; 3) global media play a key role in how we view events across the world in developing shared systems of meaning (Terry Flew 2007 as cited in Movius 2010). The significance of media (particularly electronic media) in globalisation and modernity was also emphasised by Giddens in his concept of time and space separation and bridging the distance into the local (Giddens 2002).

My objective in this research is to empirically engage with 'globalization as a mediated cultural force and its relationship to experience' (Silverstone 1999, p. 108). The experience of globalisation through media will be approached as a 'situated, mundane, practical activity' (Thompson 1995, p. 38–9) within everyday lives. The aim of this research is to go beyond simply understanding media consumption, to hopefully understand the sense-making process within the encounter with cultural globalisation as it is integrated into the lives of modern Malay women in Malaysia. The approach to this process is through Giddens' notion of 'reflexivity', as this is significant in the cultural experience of globalisation, particularly in any modern society.

Reflexivity, self-identity and the 'fixities of tradition'

Giddens' work was based on his critical analysis of the works (and works stemming from the works) of Marx, Durkheim and Weber which all attempt to explain a 'single overriding dynamic of transformation in interpreting the nature of modernity' (Giddens 1990, p. 11). Giddens argued that looking at each of the classic social theories in sociology separately bears no benefit, as each of these concepts should be analysed in relation to the characteristics of modern institutions, which are dynamic and 'world embracing'.

The outcome of Giddens' critical thinking is three interrelated elements of modernity, which drive the dynamism of modernity itself:

> one, the separation of time and space and their recombination in forms which permit the precise time-space 'zoning' of social life; two, the disembedding of social systems (a phenomenon which connects closely with the factors involved in time-space separation); and three, the reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations in light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups. (Giddens 1990, pp. 16–17)

Although these elements of modernity are interrelated, the dynamism of modernity depends very much on the third element – the process of reflexivity. Although Giddens did not specifically mention this, it can be inferred from a passage in his book, *The Consequences of Modernity*, in which he summarises the elements of modernity:

> The reflexive appropriation of knowledge, which is intrinsically energising but also necessarily unstable, extends to incorporate massive spans of time-space. The disembedding mechanisms provide the means of this extension by lifting social relations out of their 'situatedness' in specific locales. (Giddens 1990, p. 53)

According to Giddens (1990), globalisation is defined through the first two elements of modernity: first, the 'transmission of information, ideas and image across the globe' and second, with the assistance of the 'disembedding mechanisms' (such as mediated experience particularly the media). While these two elements provide the conditions for globalising modernity to happen, reflexivity is key to fostering globalisation. It is the foundation of systematic knowledge reproduction as it generates the actual intellectual process through which thought and action are constantly refracted back on one another (Giddens 1990).

Modernity is an era in which we break free from 'the fixities of tradition' (Giddens 1990, p. 53). Counter to a lot of critics who saw Giddens as describing the thriving of modernity and globalisation at the expense of tradition, I believe Giddens does not discard the influence of tradition in the context of modernity and globalisation. Although he believes that tradition will be less important in modernity, this does not mean it will be totally abandoned, especially in relation to self-identity. Giddens describes self-identity as 'a reflexive organised endeavour' (Giddens 1991. p. 5) 'that we continuously work and reflect on' (Gauntlett 2008, p. 107). Giddens stated:

> The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choices as filtered through abstract system. (Giddens 1991, p. 5)

Reflexivity bears the sense of continuity, described by Giddens as 'narrative', which enables a person to 'create, maintain and revise a set of biographical narratives – the story of who we are, and how we came to be where we are now' (Gauntlett 2008, p. 107). In short, the notion of reflexivity includes the dynamics of one's past and present as well as the anticipated future. If we consider the insight that 'What a 'person' is understood to be certainly varies across cultures, although there are elements of such a notion that are common to all cultures' (Giddens 1991, p. 53), it adds to our understanding of the reflexivity of self-identity. It includes a person's culture and background (which draws on a person's past) and potentially affects a person's decisions at present and in the future. In the context of this research project, reflexivity for Malay women lies in the dynamics of their self-identity where their past, present and anticipated future can be seen in the process of interpreting, negotiating and making sense of the experience of globalisation, encountered through *The Sims Social*.

There is no doubt that globalisation and modernity restructure our lives, transforming the roles of tradition and religion (as illustrated by Giddens) especially in matters related to family values, aspects of gender and sexuality, and marriage. But considering Giddens' notion of reflexivity and self-identity, we can infer that 'tradition' is not simply abandoned through modernity, but rather practised or used differently because the process of reflexivity is a subjective matter.

While Giddens explained in detail the conditions for reflexivity to thrive, the process of reflexivity is unknown. It happens in a 'black box' of the human mind; which simply means that the process of reflexivity- interpreting, negotiating and meaning making particularly involving mediated experience are predisposed to ones' cultural background and life experiences, which is the context one's in (Hall 1980). We can infer that reflexivity is subjective and unique to each and every individual, even if they were exposed to the same content. Hence, using Giddens' notion of reflexivity in modern society, globalisation should be viewed on a case-by-case basis and should not be generalised.

The issue of subjectivity leads us to the second concern in Giddens' notion of reflexivity. In applying the notion of reflexivity to understanding the engagement of Malay women with social network games, we should carefully consider the roles of culture, tradition and religion in their lives. These factors are not only embedded as part of their self-identity, but also act as a 'lens' through which they view and reflect on the world they see and experience. Thus, to understand Malay women is to consider the factors that 'narrate' their lives.

Giddens saw changes in Western society in which tradition and religion were becoming less significant in the lives of the people living in the high modernity era. However, in some other parts of the world, such as in Malaysia, tradition and religion were taking the front seat and are considered important in the face of modernity (Merriam & Mohamad 2000). Applying the notion of reflexivity to understand Malay women's engagement with social network games is potentially problematic if we overlook the importance of tradition, culture and religion to Malay society – or any Asian society for that matter. Giddens' idea of modernity is based on Western culture, which he saw thrive at the expense of traditions, favouring rationality or what he termed 'cosmopolitan values'. Cosmopolitan values can be understood as a shared, common values found in all cultures which exist in any globalising, modern society (Giddens 1991).

The subjectivity of reflexivity allows one to be flexible and able to accommodate different contexts. It is a process of negotiation that enables different values to interact and accommodate any values, even those that are sometimes contradictory due to the convergence of cultures brought by globalisation.

This is particularly salient for a semi-secular country like Malaysia. Thus, the applicability of reflexivity as a concept to understand the way Malay women negotiate the cultures and values they encounter through media on a daily basis should include the cosmopolitan values alongside the core values that describe the identity of the Malays namely their tradition and religion which are indispensable in the 'narrative' of being a Malay in Malaysia.

Giddens' notion of reflexivity in a globalised world may be accurate in explaining modernity from a Western perspective. However, it is not rigorous in providing an explanation of reflexivity in Malay women, who are obviously socioculturally different from Western society. Thus, as suggested by scholars such as Appadurai and Breckenridge (1995), modernity should be viewed as contingent to history, geography, cultural traditions and the impact of local events. Therefore, Giddens' notion of reflexivity will be extended to include religion and tradition in order to describe Malay women's identity as they engaged with globalisation and modernity via *The Sims Social* on Facebook.

The next section will discuss the role of Islam and Malay *adat* in moulding Malaysia's modernity. It will also discuss the ramifications of the Malays' sociocultural values as globalisation has brought Western and cosmopolitan values.

Malaysia's distinctive modernity

Giddens himself, despite advocating for a globalised world with no 'others', acknowledged the fact that modernity and globalisation is imbalanced throughout the world, describing how it 'fragments as it coordinates' (Giddens 1990, p. 175). This has resulted in the increasing world interdependence and planetary consciousness in which some issues and matters are approached and managed through strategies derived from non-Western settings (Giddens 1990).

The notion of modernity is dependent 'on how it is understood, interrogated and conceived in different national or specific cultural sites' (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1995, p. 2 as cited in Syed 2011, p. 45). This argument was supported by scholars who share the view that modernity should not be benchmarked or compared to Western's standards (Gaonkar 2001, p.15; Kaviraj 2000, pp. 137–138; Pathak 1998, p. 10). Moores highlighted this point by stating that 'the globalising modernity does not have the same universal significance for all the planet's inhabitants, not even for those who live in the relatively affluent "first world"' (Moores 2000, p. 6). This suggests a pluralistic view of the notion of modernities, known as 'alternative modernities' (Taylor 2001, p. 182). 'The conceptualization of multiple modernities or alternative modernities emerged to capture the variable ways in which modernity unfolds across time and space' (Furlow 2009, p. 221).

Even within the Western tradition, the term modern has been differently conceptualised over time (Goankar 2001 as cited in Furlow 2009, p. 221). As argued by Goankar (2001), non-Western nations strive for 'local' versions of modernity and avoid hegemonic models (Gaonkar 2001, p. 15). 'Malaysia is one such location, where the state has made the call for an alternative model of modernity that is different from hegemonic Western forms and mindful of its traditional socio-cultural order' (Syed 2011, p. 46). The former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad envisioned Malaysia as a developed modern nation by the year 2020: 'in our very own mould and based on our very own value system' (Mahathir Mohammad in *New Straits Times* 2002).

Most scholars agree that Malaysia's era of modernity began with the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1970–1990), which saw Malaysia undergo remarkable progress in modernisation (Crouch 1993). Three important goals of NEP, as part of the roadmap of modernisation, were: economic progress for Malaysia as a nation; bringing socio-economic equity in a multiracial Malaysian society; and creating a Malay middle class and involving more middle class Malays in the industrialised economy (Syed 2011). During Tun Mahathir's time in office, he also implemented an open economic policy which emphasised growth and industrialisation (Jomo 2004). He promoted modernity as depicted by the economically robust and industrialised East Asian nations of Korea, Taiwan and Japan by launching the Look East Policy (Syed 2011).

Modernising Malaysia, changing from an agricultural to industrial nation, required both economic and cultural shifts. Malaysia is adopting capitalist development to support economic and social transformations, but was quite conservative in terms of the cultural impact of modernity on its social structure, particularly where it involves the Malays, the majority ethnic group (Crouch 1996).

The appropriation of Malay adat and Islam in the construction of Malaysia's modernity

The Malays have a profound impact on the moulding of Malaysia's modernity. It dates back to the history of Malaysia itself. As stated in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 160, Malay in Malaysia is defined as a Malaysian citizen born to a Malaysian citizen who professes to be a Muslim, habitually speaks the Malay language, adheres to Malay customs, and is domiciled in Malaysia or Singapore. This definition is loose enough to include people of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, who can be defined as 'Malaysian Muslims', and it therefore differs from the anthropological understanding of what constitutes the ethnic Malays. Their ancestors can be traced back over 3500 years from Indo-China or Yunnan (Abdullah 1997).

As documented in the annals of Malaysian history, the Malay Peninsula became the colony of three European powers: the Portuguese, who captured Malacca in 1511, were followed by the Dutch, who took over in 1641, and finally the British, who first occupied the northern Malayan island of Penang in 1786. Except for the Second World War years of 1942 to 1945, when the Japanese were in power, the Malay states of Malaya were a British colony until the independence of Malaya in 1957 (Gullick 1981). Malaysia is dominated by three ethnic groups- the Malays and the Indigenous groups of Sabah and Sarawak (68.6%), Chinese (23.4%), Indians (7%) and others (1%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal 2016).

The Malay and indigenous groups are also regarded as early settlers prior to the influx of the Chinese and the Indians, who were brought into Malaya during the British colonisation (Hamidon 2009) under the free labour migration policy of the British to provide cheap labour in the tin mines and rubber plantations (Case 2000; Gomez 1998; Hamidon 2009; Nagata 1974). The differences between the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians do not stop at their geographical origins, but run deep as reflected in their languages, codes of dress, customs, and behavioural norms and patterns (Gomez 1998; Sendut 1991 as cited in Mohd Rhouse 2013, p. 9).

Prior to independence from the British in 1957, the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) was founded in 1946 to advocate for Malay rights in the spheres of economic and social activities. UMNO took the driver's seat, launching series of demonstrations to oppose Britain's concept of a 'Malayan Union' in which all Malay states, including Singapore, would be incorporated and unified under a single administrative unit in Malaya (Andaya & Andaya 1982, p. 254). UMNO and the Malays saw a Malayan Union as an attempt to undermine 'Malay rights, mainly the power of the Malay Sultanate in political decision-making, citizenship, religion, language, education and so forth' (Syed 2011, p. 48).

UMNO championed the move to halt the Malayan Union and later worked towards gaining independence from Britain. With strong support from the Malays, Malaya gained independence in 1957 and UMNO became the most influential political party in Malaysia. In 1974, UMNO collaborated with Chinese and Indian-based political parties and officially formed the Barisan Nasional (National Front). It has been in power ever since.

Led by UMNO, Barisan Nasional introduced various policies to restructure Malaysian society and economy, like the NEP after the racial riots in 1969. One of the significant objectives of the NEP, apart from restructuring the Malaysian economy, was to create a new middle class of Malays. This agenda was important so as to avoid the recurrence of the racial riot in 1969, which happened because the

Malays felt at the time that they did not have 'their rightful share in the country's wealth' (Syed 2011, p. 47). Strong political representation by the ethnic-based political party Barisan National, and policies to lobby for a greater role for the Malays in all developmental aspects in Malaysia, saw the rise of the new middle class Malay dominating 'every sphere of polity in Malaysia and [they] began to exert influence in defining all aspects of the project of modernity for the nation at large' (Syed 2011, p. 47).

Beside restructuring Malaysian economy and creating the new middle class Malay, UMNO had a vision of leading Malaysia to modernity without compromising the traditions and values of the Malays. Thus, UMNO reinvented 'the elements of Malay tradition to further define its vision of modernity and retain the power of ethnic Malays' (Syed 2011, p. 48). This was done through its adaptation and re-appropriation of Malay *adat* and Islam.

Islam and Malay *adat* are two important factors that were appropriated in the construction of Malaysian modernity. Both are heavily linked to the Malays and Malaysia's history. Thus, the following section will focus on the historical side of Malay *adat* and on the significance of Islam in the lives of the Malays before returning to the re-appropriation of Islam and *adat* in UMNO's efforts to retain the loyalty and political power of the Malays (Syed 2011).

The relationship between Islam and *Malay adat* underwent continuous evolution from the moment Islam was introduced to Malaysia in around the ninth century, to being formally accepted by the Sultanate of Malacca in the 15th Century, and in the modern Malaysia of today. The pre-Islamic Malays were first introduced to Islam around six hundred years ago. To a civilisation that was already practicing a blend of animistic and Hindu-Buddhist elements, Islam brought new concepts, beliefs, practices and institutions to the Malay society without displacing their initial system of beliefs. One of the concepts introduced was *adat*, which means 'customs' (Syed Hassan 2000).

The vast differences between the teachings of Islam and the blend of animistic and Hindu-Buddhist beliefs of the pre-Islamic Malays suggest that Islam might have upset local beliefs and ruler-centred society. However, it did not because the Malay rulers appropriated the Islamic values without displacing the values the Malays were practicing at that time. Islam became the overarching framework for beliefs in Malay society and the Malays were able to grasp conceptually and differentiate between Islam and *adat*. At this point, very little effort was taken to impede the mix of Islamic and local un-Islamic *adat* practises, particularly with regard to the use of traditional ceremonial activities and un-Islamic activities by the Malay rulers as a way to gain hegemonic power. During these pre-modern times, *adat* was very much a living tradition complementing Islam in Malay society (Syed Hassan 2000).

In the nineteenth century, this outlook began to change. Having performed the Hajj in Mekah (pilgrimage to Mecca) and been exposed to religious sciences in Mecca and Medina, more religious scholars of local origin replaced the foreign merchants and traders as interpreters of Islam and they became religious teachers. These teachers opened the eyes of the Malays to the differences between Islamic teachings and *adat* practices (Syed Hassan 2000). By the late nineteenth century, Islamic scholars with advanced training in Islamic sciences from Middle Eastern universities set up modern religious schools. These brought greater attention to Islam and rejected cultural practices that were inconsistent with Islam.

During this period of time, a new Islamic framework was introduced, which saw 'Islam as a way of life, and regard[ed] piety and salvation as the outcome of lawful and ritually correct behaviour and not blind obedience to customs (*adat*)' (Syed Hassan 2000, p. 30). It was during this time that Islam and *adat* were truly understood and categorised to ensure that the Malays are able to consciously address both Islam and local customs (*adat*) in their daily lives.

As the Malays came to terms with what was Islamic and what was *adat*, the British came to occupy Malaysia and secularism was introduced. The British managed to separate Islam from the Malay rulers through laws and the abolishment of traditions which at that time served as 'key institutions and symbols of Malay *adat* and [the] feudal system' (Syed Hassan 2000, p. 29). The separation of Islam from governance became the basis of the concept of Malaysian government that exists today. Although from then onwards *adat* took a secondary place (after Islam) in the lives of the Malays, it is still considered 'a crucial underpinning of Malay life. It is at once all-encompassing of the Malay way of life, yet can have very specific connotations in the ceremonial and religious spheres' (Nagata 1974, p. 91).

In the 1970s, Islamic revivalism emerged globally. During this period, Islam in Malaysia was also experiencing a revival. Religious scholars known as the ulama' questioned the compatibility of certain beliefs and practices of *adat Melayu* with Islamic teachings. They 'reworked the existing religious framework into a more recognisably Islamic one by making Islamic Law a focal point' (Syed Hassan 2000, p. 23). The consequence of this was that *adat Melayu* was relegated 'to the realm of things local and mundane while Islam was presented as a philosophical system and an ideology that could bind the Malays into a wider community at both the national and international level' (Syed Hassan 2000, p. 23). Since then, Islam has had a firmer stand in the lives of the Malays and this marks the beginning of the re-appropriation of Islam and Malay *adat* in defining Malaysia modernity. For the purpose of this thesis, it will suffice to say that *adat* for the Malays is part and parcel of their way of life. It is practised

alongside Islam and they may penetrate one another. However, in the case of any discrepancy arising between them, Islam has the final say in providing the solution in that matter.

The tenets of Islamic revivalism were brought into the modernisation program through the new middle class Malays under UMNO as they led various development projects of the NEP across the nation (Syed 2011). 'In fact, many key figures of the Islamic revivalist movement held important positions in the public sphere as cabinet ministers, scholars, professionals and industrialists' (Shamsul 1997, p. 253). This is the reason why Malaysia's modernity is influenced by the ideology of Islamic revivalism (Ong 2006, p. 47–48). The reinvention of Islam and *adat* by UMNO is a strategy to retain the loyalty of Malay Muslims (Syed 2011). Islamisation projects include the establishment of Islamic banking and finance institutions, the International Islamic University and social bodies. Local authorities established Sharia Law and banned Muslims from entering local casinos. They have also restricted socialising between men and women in public (Crouch 1996).

Despite criticisms by a more Islamic political party (PAS), 'UMNO was able to maintain its influence among the Malays' (Sundaram & Cheek 1998, p. 86). After the era of Mahathir Mohamed, Abdullah Badawi launched the concept of Islam Hadhari to re-establish a vision of alternative modernity for Malaysia as a progressive and modern Islamic state (Hoffstaedter 2009). 'Islam Hadhari is translated as "civilizational" or "progressive" Islam, which paradoxically aims to bring Islam back to basics, back to its original form, as well as project it into the future' (Hoffstaedter 2009, p. 121).

Despite adopting a capitalist approach in its economic and social transformations, 'Malay and UMNO dominance in national politics ensures that Islam remains the spiritual and moral discourse invoked to guide the path of progress for Malaysia' (Syed 2011, p.53). The role of Islam is so significant in the lives of the Malays that 'the definition of being Malay is determined not so much by claims to indigeneity but by Islam as a religion' (Lie & Lund 1994, p. 31 as cited in Syed 2011, p. 53). Thus, the integration of Islam and *adat* adds to what government rhetoric positions as a unique vision of alternative modernity for Malaysia (Syed 2011, p. 54).

It is also worth noting that apart from these two key ideologies, an 'Asian values' discourse also guided Malaysia's path to alternative modernity. This discourse arose in the 1980s at a time when many East and Southeast Asian countries were at their initial peak of economic success (Kessler 1999; Manan 1999). Then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamed introduced the 'Look East Policy' to encourage Malaysia to adopt the technological as well as cultural advancements of countries like Japan, Korea and Taiwan rather than those of the West.

Malaysia underwent a process of negotiation with 'foreign' forms of modernity to establish 'custom made' modernity for Malaysia (Kahn 2001). 'Malaysian modernity is not modelled entirely on Western modernity, but one that seeks to articulate alternative forms that will be more appropriate to the national and cultural specificities of Malaysia' (Kahn 2001, p. 120). 'Many scholars have chosen to label such a path taken by Malaysia as a version of alternative modernity' (Syed 2011, p. 47).

The notion of 'alternative modernities', as it is applied in the Malaysian context, could complement our understanding of the process of reflexivity, particularly in considering a society that regards tradition and religion as important aspects of life. Instead of viewing traditions and religion as insignificant or declining in significance, reflexivity should be viewed as a catalyst for critical thinking, significant in making religion and tradition relevant in modern society. It could provide people with the capacity to 'interact' with traditions and religion in a dynamic, rational way. This could result in a positive interpretation and outcome, as we know the process of reflexivity is specific to each and every individual and the type of knowledge they have access to.

Mellor (1993) studied Giddens' reflexivity theory and its implications for the study of contemporary religion and suggested that traditions and religion should not simply be dismissed and be labelled 'sham' traditions, but reflexively, as 'reflexive traditions can provide new, dynamic forms for the expression and development of religion within the context of high modernity' (Mellor 1993, p. 111).

The revivalism of religion, particularly in the context of Malay society in Malaysia, can be viewed as a positive, dynamic expression in which Islam acts as a 'filter' in the dynamism of the reflexivity process in daily life. In fact, tradition is seen as being reconstructed and valorised in new forms in the quest to define an alternative modernity (Syed 2011).

Modernity and Malay women

Malay women's encounter with modernity is a delicate balance 'of pursuing the desirable aspects of modernisation such as participating as productive citizens in the economy, while adhering to conventional social mores as Muslim women and nurturers of families' (Syed 2011, p. 58). In Malaysia, the surveillance of women, particularly among Malay women by the Malays, has become a popular topic. It is an ideological battlefield through which the government champions and orchestrates their vision of alternative modernity with Islamic values, Malay roots and Asian orientation. Women's issues are so significant that they are representative of the debate over the whole project of Malaysia's alternative modernity. Malay women are often positioned as metaphors for the conflicting aspects of modernity (Stivens 1998b, p. 93).

The involvement of Malay women in Malaysia's modernity was written in history. They supported the men during the pre-independence period, fighting for independence not only from the British but also from the Japanese and communists (Syed 2011). When UMNO was established, it not only gained support from Malay men, but saw active involvement of Malay women through the establishment of 'Kaum Ibu' (womenfolk) in 1947 as the women's wing of UMNO (Mohamad 2002).

The participation of Malay women in UMNO was a way to support the 'male-led independence movement without changing their traditional role' (Syed 2011, p.59). Malay women held secondary roles in UMNO. Despite their active involvement in such a public sphere of activity, their secondary role in the independence movement 'Illustrates the entrenchment of social attitudes regarding the role of women and attests that participation in the public sphere without reassessment of those attitudes does not effect a changed role' (Manderson 1977, p. 228).

The participation of Malay women in such a movement in the public sphere was among the earliest significant engagements with modernity, although it was slow at first. Apart from the Malay women's involvement in political movements, the pre-independence period also saw Malay women's movements that sought to reform their status in other social contexts, challenging 'the old social mores of female subservience' (Syed 2011, p. 60). These movements suggest that Malay women during that time had thoughts on civil rights and gender equality as present in any modern society (Syed 2011). It was regarded as the turning point towards women's liberty, in parallel with Malaysia's modernity process.

As Malay women proceeded with these movements, tradition remained important. They invoked Islamic values and traditions 'to legitimate their grievances and actions' (Harper 1999 as cited in Syed 2011). The most obvious issue pertained to Malay women leaving their homes unescorted. Some Malay women leaders encouraged Malay women to go out unescorted when faced with instances such as needing to take a child to hospital. The original Malay proverb, 'Let the child die but not the custom', was inverted to 'let the custom die, but not the child' (Harper 2001, p. 71) to argue the point that it is acceptable to violate societal norms particularly when it is concerning a child's health (Harper 2001).

Along the same lines, there was an occasion where a Malay woman leader inversely invoked Islam to endorse women participating in a public parade for a royal wedding by saying, 'We are also Muslims . . . and therefore we too know how far we are religiously privileged to act on any occasion' (Mamat 1948 cited in Harper 2001). These movements in the pre-independence period, in which Malay women confronted issues of gender equality by invoking of Islam and tradition had challenged and reformed the status of Malay women in society (Harper 2001).

The 1970s and 80s saw Malay women's engagement with modernity influenced by the Islamic revivalism movement. During this period, the Malay *adat* was re-evaluated. This gave the government opportunity to intervene in Malay women's engagement with modernity through efforts like family planning and encouraging women to focus on family and home. However, the family planning proposition was not well accepted because Muslim leaders criticised that effort as refusing what 'Allah giveth' (Ong 1990). However, the New Economic Policy introduced in the 1970s turned the effort around, encouraging an increased birth rate in an effort to provide a future workforce for Malaysia's modernisation project.

This period also saw the introduction of 'tudung' also known as the headscarf or 'mini-telekung' by UMNO as an 'appropriate clothing for the modern but culturally grounded Malay women' (Syed 2011, p. 61). This small head scarf to cover the hair, neck and chest area is widely worn by Southeast Asian Islamic women to complete their Islamic dress code. It is different from a burqa, worn in the Middle East, which covers the whole body (Anwar 1987). Before Islamic revivalism, it was not a cultural practice for Malaysian Muslims to wear tudung. Instead, the Malay women used a 'selendang', a long soft shawl that covered the head and draped loosely over the shoulders (Ismail 2004).

There are plenty of interpretations of the dress code applied to Muslim women. The differences are largely due to the different interpretations and understandings of Muslim women's coverings which differ from country to country (Boulanouar 2006) and due to culture. Hijab, a term which is used to refer to the act of wearing a cloth that covers the head, neck and chest by Muslim women, in fact has a more general meaning. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World* states:

> The term hijab or veil is not used in the Qur'an to refer to an article of clothing for women or men, rather it refers to a spatial curtain that divides or provides privacy. The Qur'an instructs the male believers (Muslims) that when they ask of anything from the wives of the prophet Muhammad to do so from behind a hijab, a curtain that creates a visual barrier between the two sexes.

Although the word 'veil' is an acceptable word in English used interchangeably to the word 'hijab', the term hijab is not proposed in the Qur'an to specifically described the act of Muslim women covering their hair or parts of their body from 'specified list of close relatives with whom marriage is disallowed (in Arab language is 'mahram'), eunuchs, and children not yet conscious of women's nakedness' (*The Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World* 2004, p.266). Rather the term used in the Qur'an was '*khumur',* which is plural for the word *khimar***,** 'the veil covering the head' (The Qur'an and Hijab n.d.). The word hijab however, has evolved and is commonly use 'to mean the headgear and outer garment of Muslim women' (*The Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World* 2004, p.721).

The Holy Qur'an includes several verses relating to women's dress code, including head covering. Quoting from the Qur'an:

> And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms. And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or guileless male servants, or the children who know not women's nakedness. And let them not strike their feet so that the adornment that they hide may be known. And turn to Allah all, O believers, so that you may be successful. (An-Nuur 24:31)

The act of veiling (wearing the tudung), popularly accepted in Malaysia and globally as the 'hijab', is a widely debated issue. It has often been viewed as an indication of Muslim women's oppression, seclusion and silencing (Afshar 1996; Keddie 1991 as cited in Mohd Rhouse 2013). However, this understanding has shifted significantly over time as more complex and different interpretations have emerged apart from its central 'act of modesty, worship and submission to Allah (God); in this way veiling stands as a public symbol of Muslim piety and expression of religious adherence' (Brenner 1996; Mahmood 2001 as cited in Mohd Rhouse 2013, p. 14).

Although the tudung in Malaysia was made popular by UMNO, the popularity of wearing tudung in Malaysia is more of a grassroots movement. It has moved from being 'a customary item of clothing enforced by socio-religious compulsions to a fashionable object' (Syed 2011, p. 62) and is regarded as part of a 'distinctively Malay modernity' (Stivens 1998b; p.117). Some also interpret the tudung as a symbol of Malay women's 'increasing political agency in their support of revivalist and politicised Islam' (Stivens 2000, pp. 29–30).

Today, wearing (or not wearing) a tudung or other veiling is a personal choice, backed by the universal principle of human rights (Anwar 2001; Yamani & Allen 1996). Veiling has different connotations today and sometimes it is a way to confront consumerist behaviours and materialistic cultures (Bullock 2000). Interestingly, the complexity of veiling correlates with each and every woman's agency and should be understood alongside broad Islamic ethical and moral guidelines (Hirschman 1998).

In1998 Malaysia was confronted with financial and political crises that opened up new prospects for Malay women to engage in the public domain (Syed 2011). The sacking of Anwar Ibrahim, who was at the time, was the Deputy Prime Minister, by then Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad, saw Anwar Ibrahim's wife, Wan Azizah, appointed as president of the National Justice Party (*KeAdilan*). She led the party to elections. UMNO, known as a conservative party, felt challenged and 'nominated many

women candidates to stand against Wan Azizah' (Syed 2011, p. 64). This phenomenon saw women, particularly Malay women, acknowledged in politics. However, many critics said it was a mere superficial change to counter the momentum of the *'Reformasi'* movement (a protest movement initiated by Anwar Ibrahim after he was sacked as the Deputy Prime Minister), seeking to bring it 'within the fold of the UMNO with the promise of liberalisation' (Weiss 2000, pp. 420–421).

The following years saw Abdullah Badawi, Mahathir's successor, introduce the concept of '*Islam Hadhari*' to continue strengthening the project of alternative modernity after the political crisis of 1998 (Syed 2011). He also promised to promote women's rights and empowering women in UMNO (Ting 2007). However, this also did not make any significant changes in women's political role and 'the underlying socio-political dynamics confronted by Malay women in the UMNO have not changed in an appreciable way since the party was formed in 1946' (Ting 2007, p. 75).

Up until early 2000, Malay women's engagement with modernity in Malaysia was associated with issues of morality (Syed 2011) and debates about Islam and tradition (particularly *adat Melayu*). A case study (Ong 1990; Ong 2010) on Malay women's engagement with modernity cited by many scholars in this area of research was made during the industrialisation process era in the 1970s when the government launched the National Economic Policy. With rapid technology transfer and foreign direct investment from countries like Japan, Korea and Taiwan, Malaysia had massive growth in the construction of factories. A majority of 'young rural Malay women were inducted as wage labour in the factories set up under these partnerships' (Shamsul 1997, p. 258). The phenomenon involving young Malay women, known as '*minah kilang*', literally translated as factory girls, is regarded as a significant 'microcosm of modernity' (Syed 2011, p. 66) at work. It transformed not only the sociocultural values of Malay women and the Malays as a whole, but also Malaysia's overall sociocultural and economic landscape.

This phenomenon became the focus of studies examining Malay women and modernity because this was the first time Malay women confronted modernity directly. Their parents were overwhelmed with anxiety as they experienced the dilemma of deciding between letting their daughters go to cities and work in factories to earn extra income for the family, or maintaining the honour of their daughters as good Muslim women (Ong 1990b, p. 268). The greatest threat to the Malays was the idea of interracial relationships with non-Malay men (Ong 1990b).

At this time, Malay women experienced increased freedom of movement and economic independence. They gained access to new activities to indulge in, 'such as going to the cinemas, shopping, displaying

interest in fashion, wearing Western clothes and make-up. [These activities] were criticised as an improper use of their time and money. Malay female factory workers were stereotyped as wasteful and morally flippant' (Ong 1987, p. 181–182). These anxieties for Malay women again, centred on issues of moral impropriety.

This is the dilemma of Malay women engaging with modernity. On one hand, they were required to actively participate in the modernisation process, and, on the other hand, they were blamed for the breakdown of the family structure and were 'seen as posing a threat to male authority and the traditional economic dominance of men' (Ong 2006, p. 35). Modernity in Malaysia is 'full of contradictions: on the one hand, it attempts to delineate the boundary separating the public from the private realms (home and the world) but, on the other hand, modernity also breaches this boundary on its own terms' (Cheng 2006, p. 136 as cited in Syed 2011, p. 68).

Today, one of NEP's main agendas, which was to produce a large middle class Malay population with sedentary lives and disposable incomes, has been achieved. This paved the way for Malay women to become an important part of Malaysia's workforce and saw their engagement with modernity shifted so that they became consumers of popular culture via media. This emerged 'as one of the most important sites for Malay women to engage with modernity' (Syed 2011, p. 70).

Throughout Malaysia's history, Islam, *adat Melayu* played an important role in Malay women's encounter with modernity. These values are also the same factors they were monitored and penalised for. Malay women have performed a tricky act of balancing their roles in both public and private spheres, considering Islam and tradition in their engagement with modernity in their daily lives. At the same time, Malay women invoked Islam and tradition as means to negotiate and respond to issues surrounding their encounter with modernity. As present in other modern societies, this demonstrated Giddens's process of reflexivity at work in Malaysia.

Globalisation and other Malay realities

Reflexivity in modern society does not bring only one way of thinking, but many. The intersection of sociocultural and religious values with globalisation saw the diminishing of Malay identity (Embong 2011). Cosmopolitanism has been accepted by some Malays as they have questioned the notion of Malayness and felt 'that there is a need to deviate from the demands of politics and society' (Idrus, Hashim & Mohd Mydin 2014, p. 1801). These 'new Malays' demanded freedom and individualism. They wished to determine their own understandings and practices of Malayness, including the trajectory of class, identity, and gender issues, in relation to *adat Melayu* and Islam (Martin 2014).

However, the term ‘new Malays’ is ambiguous and could be misleading if it were only to be applied to describe the ‘liberated or modernized’ Malays. The only rational way to understand the Malay identity today is to accept the multiplicities involved in defining ‘Malay’. This definition should not be confined to the Malaysian Constitution per se or stipulated solely by politics and society at large. The complexities in defining Malay identity enable us to ‘bridge our past to the present understanding of the Malay world’ (Idrus, Hashim & Mohd Mydin 2014, p. 1802). It highlights the effect of globalisation and the process of reflexivity resulting in the Malay’s multiple identities.

One of the more significant ways Malay women have engaged with globalisation and modernity is via popular culture and media. The next sub-section, I discuss in detail the fears government and Malay society have had about Malay women as they engage with popular culture, especially globalised media content.

Media globalisation

Globalisation brings with it media globalisation, via transnational media programs and content such as television programs, magazines, movies and global marketing and advertising campaigns. Globalising media and entertainment industries have encouraged cross-border, cross-cultural consumption of global entertainment media by local media users (Mirrlees 2013).

In the era of globalisation, media, culture and identity are intricately intertwined and have many complex impacts on each other (Embong 2011, p.11). The media is regarded as an important agent in the construction of social identity (Syed 2011), shaping the way people understand their social identities, their cultural communities, and the wider world in which they live, think and act (Mirrlees 2013). Transnational media are laden with cultural content from around the world. In this context, media content, particularly from the major US led media organisations, is causing concern about its influence.

Global entertainment media is a substantial part of a complex political economy of global capitalist consumerism (Mirrlees 2013, p. 12). It is accused of advocating not only cultural values from the West or Hollywood (in particular), but also more controversial values, particularly the overt consumerist culture portrayed in media and in digital games (including in *The Sims* series and *The Sims Social*). There is concern among media academics and society in general about the impact of the values, cultures and ideologies presented in media texts.

Media globalisation and its impact on culture and identity has divided acceptance in Malaysian society. In Malaysia there has been tension between demands for openness and the assertion of state control

and media monopoly (Embong 2011). Research in Malaysia has taken an interest in this notion. More recent works focus on the competence of audiences as they encounter content, such as television programs, with Western values (such as in the works of Abdul Karim 2010; Syed 2011; Syed & Runnel 2013; Wilson 2001). These studies pave the way to understanding Malaysians, and particularly Malay women, with regard to their television consumption and negotiation of the values presented to them.

The media landscape is changing, with significant growth in the popularity of the social network sites and social network games. The way Malay women consume media and experience globalisation is changing too. In recent years, the popularity of social network sites and social network games has exploded especially among women. These changes in media consumption call for the development of understanding of Malay women's engagement with social network games in relation to various other media (Jenkins 2006). To date, little research has been done to understand this consumption and the way Malay women negotiate with social network games and social network sites, as most research has focused on television and other less interactive media.

In modern Malaysia, Malay women are described as adept, active consumers who are able to employ an array of tactics to negotiate the cultural content of transnational modernity presented on soaps on television (Syed 2011). I wish to expand Syed's argument to include identity performance in social network games and social network sites alongside other media consumption. Understanding Malay women's engagement with social network games without understanding it in relation to other media is artificial and inadequate. As Allor (1988) highlights, previous 'audience' models continue 'to rely on distinct notions of the "audience," whether as a physical entity or an abstract position, and texts' (Allor 1988 as cited in Shaw 2010, p. 59). Therefore, he suggests that social subjects should be studied with consideration of the heterogeneity of practices 'that frame individuated engagements with texts, discourses, and ideologies' (Allor 1988, p. 229).

This consideration is significant because an understanding of Malay women's engagement of *The Sims Social* should be situated within the globalised media they experience and sociocultural context of their everyday lives. This is necessary in order to give a well-rounded picture of the meanings they attach to the game texts they engage with. Radway (1984) stated the importance of understanding meaning as it is constructed by the media user/audience:

> We are forced . . . by the nature of meaning itself as the construct of a reader always already situated within an interpretive context, to conduct empirical research into the identities of real readers, into the nature of the assumptions they bring to the texts, and into the character of the interpretations they produce. (Radway 1984, p. 13)

Globalisation and sociocultural values, ideologies and meanings in digital games

As discussed in the previous section, individual construction and performance of identity involves a dyadic relationship between media and sociocultural factors. In this section, we shall look at digital games specifically, as cultural artefacts that potentially have power in communicating and shaping identity.

The internet is hailed as the most powerful media today. It is claimed to be the media that empowers the 'audience' (or users) as distinct from the practices of the more traditional media. Studies in critical political economy have raised concerns about the monopoly of media conglomerates (due to media globalisation) and the decreasing number of voices in the media. This concern extends to the digital games industry. It has been argued that the global domination of media conglomerates is the main hindrance for 'smaller firms to gain access to finance and distribution' (Johns 2006, p. 177).

Digital games are not simply to be understood as a type of technology or a text that enables interactivity and play, but more importantly as a cultural artefact (Crawford & Rutter 2006). Digital games as a form of cultural artefact are further complicated by the complexity of the uneven, multimillion dollar production networks of the video game industry, which are controlled by two main groups of 'actors', namely the hardware production actors and the software production actors. The hardware and software production actors are very much interrelated in determining the availability of game titles in the market. However, software production is more relevant in the context of this research because of the greater 'creativity' input software production has in the process (Johns 2006). The US, Japan and the UK are the main centres of digital games software production with a substantial number of people employed both directly and indirectly in the digital games industry, particularly in the creative process (Kerr 2006). As digital games have significant presence in global media consumption, this raises concerns because the content or the texts of these games do not represent its consumers, particularly those who are culturally different from the US, Japan and the UK.

Like any other media, digital 'games carry values and beliefs within their representation systems and mechanics. Through the design process, values and beliefs become embedded in games whether designers intend them to or not' (Flanagan, Nissenbaum, Belman & Diamond 2007, p. 752). Thus, 'who is behind the game creation' is important because game titles in the market embody the political economy of global capitalist consumerism as well as cultural, liberal ideals of individual choice and agency (Kerr 2006). This is marketed to and consumed by game players, the majority whom are from outside the US, Japan and Europe. The amount of 'power' game designers have over games has been

discussed in studies by authors such as Salen and Zimmerman (2004, 2006), Flanagan, Nissenbaum, Belman and Diamond (2007), Flanagan, Howe, and Nissenbaum (2005b), Squire (2006).

A player's 'pleasure' from playing digital games can be a result of a game designer's construction and manipulation of the rules of the game. This indicates the amount of influence a designer has on the experience of players playing the game (Salen & Zimmerman 2006). 'Pleasure', as explained by Salen and Zimmerman (2004), refers to 'game mechanics'. These 'dictate how players may and may not function in a game world, and narrative content, which sets the rule system within a coherent framework, and may reflect designers' conscious and unconscious considerations of values and their beliefs about "how the world works," even when that world is fictional' (Flanagan, Nissenbaum, Belman & Diamond 2007, p. 757). In other words, the game mechanics create the affordances and limitations of the game in ways that convey values to the players. The authors thus suggest that not only should players be aware of this fact, but that these issues should be discussed and brought up regularly among the developers themselves (Flanagan, Nissenbaum, Belman & Diamond 2007).

> For example, *The Sims* has been said to inculcate materialist values: players are encouraged to earn money, and spend it on acquiring goods. The Grand Theft Auto series was not created with the intention of propagating a particular worldview, but nonetheless, it portrays the world as a violent place, rewards criminal behaviour, and reinforces racial and gender stereotypes. In Okami, the player takes on the role of the animal/goddess Amiterasu, and her job is to make plants and animals happy in the environment; the game fosters the values of empathy, nurturing, sharing, and caregiving. (Flanagan et. al. 2007, p. 752)

Terms such as 'interactivity' and 'user-control' tend to hide or elide the constraints on players' freedom that come from

> not only the limitations of technology but also the aims of the designers and manufactures, and the ideologies behind these. Gamers will only have certain limited options and possibilities within any particular game and the game's possible responses to their actions will likewise be restricted. Games will also involve other limits on their scope and possible interactivity. (Gosling & Crawford 2011, p.139)

These restrictions can be clearly seen in the embedded game rules. Järvinen (2003) summed up clearly the functions of rules in the context of digital games:

> Rules of digital games are accepted and prescribed, and they govern action. This governance adopts the form of procedures that lead to so-called game mechanics, which give birth to the more or less 'guided' player behaviour and 'habits'. The definition focuses our attention to the 'conduct' within a game, i.e. how gameplay is circumscribed, and with what elements is this achieved. Rules are based on principles, i.e. assumptions of what the player can, should, and cannot do: 'this is the purpose of the game', 'the player is allowed to do this', 'the player has to do this', 'the player cannot do this'. These are tied to specific states of the game, which take the form of specific game elements: components, procedures, environments, and interfaces, and the specific challenges they each present. (Järvinen 2003, p. 70)

All these arguments suggest that digital games, like other media texts, are not ideologically neutral. It needs to be understood that these 'technical artefacts are constructed by individuals whose decisions and skills as developers are informed by their own ideological dispositions and by their own experiences in the world' (Flanagan, Howe & Nissenbaum 2005a, 2005b as cited in Flanagan, Nissenbaum, Belman & Diamond 2007, p. 757). The context of the games' production plays an important role in understanding 'the layers of meaning in a text' (Squire 2006, p. 21).

Media globalisation and 'fears' for Malay women

The ability of media to transmit cultures, values and ideologies, especially in today's globalised world, has caused an ongoing concern in Malaysia. The influx of 'media-scapes', ideo-scapes' and 'techno-scapes' (Appadurai 1990) has been significant, particularly after the introduction of Malaysia's first satellite television broadcaster, Astro in 1996 (Zaharom & Wang 2004). Satellite television was perceived as disseminating new sources of identity, introducing 'more fluid and multiple identities into the lives of Malaysians' (Abdul Karim 2010, p. 10).

The popularity of global media content through Astro caused public anxiety. The Malays particularly, have been wary that messages from global media content could compromise 'Malay cultural life by imparting values that are contrary to Islamic and traditional Malay teachings' (Syed 2011, p. 10) with sexualised images and images of rampant consumerism and liberalism in sexuality and extra marital relationships. This fear has also extended to characterising the media as 'a frivolous waste of time for leading Malay women to ignore their duties in the private and public sphere' (Syed 2011, p. 10).

The main reason on the influx of imported TV content in Malaysia TV, particularly in private free-to-air TV stations is to attract large audience and increase their ratings to attract advertisers; raising concerns on possible Western influences on the locals (Lay Kim 2010). Hence, to regulate the amount of imported TV programs aired on Malaysia TV, the government has set a quota of 80 percent local content to all TV stations- both governments owned and commercially-owned (Lay Kim 2010). However, content analysis conducted on major TV stations in Malaysia showed that although the gap is

narrowing, the quota has yet to be reached (Lay Kim 2010) with 73% of the programs aired on government TV stations and 64% programs on private free-to-air TV stations were locally produced (Abu Hassan et al. 2012).

These concerns on the basis of culture, religious and moral dimensions were also discussed by the authorities, who feared the detrimental effects of global media on Malaysia's vision of modernity 'and the role of female citizens within that plan' (Syed 2011, p. 10). As a result, many studies were done to examine the impact of this issue on identity; prioritising young people and Malay women in negotiating the cultures, values and ideologies they encounter in transnational or global media content. This is seen in works by Rahim and Pawanteh (1999), Abdul Karim (2010) and Syed (2011).

Most of these studies were conducted to understand the competencies of Malaysian television audiences in negotiating the cultural values and ideologies brought in through global television. Electronic media is a very influential media (Appadurai 1996), and television has been the focus of many studies because it has been regarded as the most important electronic media. However, more recent worldwide research indicates that the young are rejecting television in favour of the internet (Global Media Consumption Report 2012). This was reflected in the findings of this research: the Malay women in this study were switching off their television sets and opting for digital games as online engagement. This makes the internet, particularly social media, the more important form of electronic media today.

The consequence of this is the need to expand existing knowledge that is focused on television to include digital games. This will further our understanding of the experience and meaning of globalisation, culture, values and ideologies as experienced through electronic media 'which are quite different from television, music, and other forms of popular entertainment' (Consalvo 2003, p. 3).

Media globalisation, digital games and American (or Western) cultural values

The digital games global revenues in 2017 are estimated at around $108.9 billion with 47% of the market come from the Asia-Pacific region (McDonald 2017). While the production of digital games is dominated by a powerful, select few countries, namely the US, Japan and the UK, the games produced are marketed worldwide with most sales in the Asia-Pacific region (McDonald 2017). The production flow begins with 'two transnational multimedia corporations, Sony and Microsoft, and one digital game focused corporation, Japan-based Nintendo, economically dominate and drive the industry due to their development of both game playing hardware and software' (Johnson 2010, p. 33). These multinationals

work together with multinational publishers such as Electronic Arts and Square Enix which is based primarily in the United States, France, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Britain.

Crafted by the game developers and designers from the US, *The Sims Social* is dominated with American cultures, values and ideologies played on Facebook by players from all around the world. This shows an unbalanced input in game content – the culture, values and ideologies that are encrypted into game texts; especially when it is seen through the perspective of Malay women playing *The Sims Social* in Malaysia or any other game titles for that matter. It raises the issue of representation (and interpretation/negotiation) of cultures, values and ideologies in digital games from the perspective of Malay women.

In Malaysia, the concern towards the American cultural values and ideologies (sometimes generalised as Western values) commenced at the influx of Hollywood media content particularly on electronic media such as television and movies as well as music videos. The concern surrounds the depiction of American or Westernised 'lifestyle, values, morals and belief system that are truly foreign and may not resonate with the Malays and Malaysian in general (Hussain 2006).

Historically and as a broad generalisation, mainstream U.S. culture was driven by white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, males who subscribed to Calvinist ideology. America today upholds the extension of Calvinism in their everyday lives and this can be observed through the values of earned status, individualism, self-reliance and independence (Weaver 1999). Americans also prefer less interference from the government in their lives and this is most obvious in their economic system of laissez faire capitalism (Weaver 1999). Individualism, independence and less interference from the government means Americans have more freedom in most aspects of their lives. They are open to interpret and express themselves with more freedom for example in the terms of fashion or being open about one's sexuality. However, 'the American way of life' depicted in their media content in a lot of ways contradicts Asian values that are more collectivist in nature and for the Malays, a lot (but not all) of American values contradict their *adat* Melayu and the teachings of their religion, Islam.

The Sims series has always been associated with the 'American dream' and *The Sims Social* is no exception. For Malay women (or any other players from cultures outside America), engaging with this game is encountering globalisation that requires them to negotiate American culture and values depicted in the game. For these Malay women participants, the negotiation that happens within the game context evokes cultural and religious issues around representation, sexuality and capitalist ideology.

The most controversial issue with *The Sims* series is its capitalist ideology (Frasca 2001), particularly concerning free games distributed through social network sites such as the Facebook, where capitalist ideology is noted as the rational principle organising its economy. Advertising and product placement (termed in-game advertising) are prominent in social network games (Fields & Cotton 2014); for example, *The Sims Social* incorporated Dunkin' Donuts products into gameplay. Converting real cash into Simoleons, *The Sims'* currency, to buy virtual items in games is another example of the game's commercial underpinnings. In *The Sims* games series, shopping was given a central role. This was conceived of as 'consumption play' (Lehdonvirta, Wilska & Johnson 2009, p. 1061).

Self-expression, aesthetic considerations and artistic aspirations are revealed in users' virtual consumption choices (Paulk 2006). Virtual commodities are also used as social markers 'to signal distinctions between high status and low status, between membership and non-membership, and between one group and another' (Lehdonvirta, Wilska & Johnson 2009, p. 1073). *The Sims Social* is no different to the rest of *The Sims* series, as it incorporates consumerist values in its game through in-game gift giving cultures as part and parcel of relationship maintenance and enhancement in the game (Wohn 2011). It can be argued that incorporating branded products into the game mechanics encourages consumerist values in the game's players.

The issue of capitalist ideology is frequently discussed when it comes to free-to-play games and *The Sims* game series in particular. However, there are other issues that are seldom brought up in the academic discussion: issues of the negotiation of sexuality, cultural and religious values, and ideological factors that influence identity. The current discussion on sexuality and religion in digital games normally lingers around issues related to representation, observations of the functions of sexuality in games, and methodological tips for looking at sexuality in games. These issues are covered by Consalvo (2003, 2006), Shaw (2011) and Boelstorff (2008).

An account of the amount of power game producers and designers have on game text may give the impression that players lack freedom or control in their gaming experience. This would be a one-sided argument; we need to consider the agency players have when engaging with game text. Digital games, like any cultural products, may be 'encoded' with dominant values, ideas and beliefs. However, audiences engage in a process of 'decoding' these texts. This is not mere translation, but a process through which individuals provide their own readings and interpretations of cultural products (Hall 1980). It is impossible to predetermine the relationship between encoding and decoding as different audiences generate different meaning from the same text (Morley 1992).

Taking Hall's notion on encoding and decoding further, researchers should also consider the particularities of digital games as a medium in their own right to be analysed as a cultural texts (Shaw 2010). The major difference between digital games and other more passive media lies within the game texts which are regarded as 'not as stable as other media text[s]' (Shaw 2010, p. 21). The instability of game texts requires involvement in the form of play: players have to be actively involved with the text, unlike any other media (Shaw 2010).

The process of 'decoding' game texts through play has empowered Malay women with freedom to interact with game text, more than any other media text. However, play is not the sole domain of digital games; it also exists in other media but in different ways, such as when an audience actively interprets meaning encoded in a TV program (Shaw 2010).

Play or gaming experience depends on several possibilities. Narratological and ludological contexts affect audience readings of game texts as much as the players' own context brought into the game (Shaw 2010). Thus, when looking at digital games as cultural texts, the interaction between the game context and the players' context should be considered, as it determines a gaming experience unique to each individual player. However,

> Relying too heavily on existing theories will make us forget what makes games: Such as rules, goals, player activity, the projection of the player's action in to the game world, the way the game defines the possible actions of the player. (Juul 2001, p. 10)

The complexity of everyday life permits room for individuality and creativity, allowing individual interpretation and pleasure (de Certeau as cited in Crawford & Rutter 2006, p. 160). An 'active' and creative audience, as describe by de Certeau, brings cultural objects alive in their imaginations and assigns objects specific and individual meanings by locating them in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

Digital games, like any other media texts, are cultural artefacts; some of which we agree with and some we do not. They are definitely not a place where freedom is unlimited. Play in *The Sims Social* on Facebook changed the way Malay women interacted with and experienced globalisation and modernity, alongside television, film and books. Within *The Sims Social*, Malay women engaged through play with cultural values and ideologies encapsulated by the developers, drawing on their US/ Western perspectives. At the same time, as they played, these women proactively engaged with emergent play and sought out people from different countries and backgrounds to become friends on Facebook. This is where the process of negotiation or 'reflexivity' (Giddens 1990) took place as players tried to make

sense of the text they were engaging with. When something was new, different or out of the norm, this later became a resource for conversation, social constructions, and a component in identity construction.

'Digital games as transmedial cultural forms play an important role in reshaping communication patterns, social structures and cultural practice across space and time' (Kerr 2006, p. 1). Theories of globalisation provide the meta-level framework for this project, in which the interactions of ethnicity, culture, religion and gender are viewed through digital games, which are dominated by Western (predominantly US) values but read from a non-Western standpoint. This collision of culture and values is an occurrence of everyday 'situated' experience of globalisation. Giddens (1991) described today's high modernity era as connecting the distanced with local contexts, making the world less of a 'stranger' to all of us through mediated experience. Any society in the high modernity era will become more reflexive with the intervention and interaction of global happenings and much more accepting of cosmopolitan values. Social practices will be affected or be produced differently at the local context (Giddens 2002).

Culture, ethnicity, religion and gender are part and parcel of identity, and 'might be made significant by external social circumstances' (Gauntlett 2010, p. 15). This was apparent in the engagement of Malay women with *The Sims Social.* They brought their identity into play in *The Sims Social* and 'interacted' with the game text, which carried dominant, but not unfamiliar US/western cultures and values. Reflexivity in this context occurred as Malay women's identities collided with the Western, predominantly US cultures, values and ideologies presented in *The Sims Social*. Both Facebook and *The Sims Social* are sites in which individuals are in constant play; managing, experimenting and negotiating identity.

Chapter 4: Identity in *The Sims Social* and Facebook

Introduction

This chapter presents literature on the performance of identity as related to social network games and social network sites. This chapter will argue for an understanding of identity that follows Giddens' concept of self-identity: that identity has continuity, or, in Goffman's word, consistency. The fluidity and dynamic nature of identity appear fragmented because the performance of identity is context dependent. Although it may seem fragmented or multiple due to the different contexts it operates in, identity is a continuous product of a 'person's reflexive beliefs about their own biography' (Giddens 1991, p. 53 as cited in Gauntlett 2009, p. 107).

The word continuous suggests multiplicity in identity (Waggoner 2009): that the core self is not stagnant. Giddens (1991) stated that a 'self-identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions' (Giddens 1991, p. 186). It is not in the intention of this research to debate the distinctions between modern and postmodern notions of identity – whether identity is unitary or multiple. However, this research wishes to demonstrate that identity is context contingent and dynamic, geared by reflexivity that takes place in persons in any nation experiencing globalisation and modernisation.

New media technologies initially created a space where anonymity was king, and individuals were permitted freedom to perform multiple selves in different contexts. However, as more and more of these technologies have become connected online, the boundaries between different social roles performed in different contexts have been pulled down, resulting in the disclosure of multiple identities. Turkle's discussion of the 'tethered self' (2006) highlighted this issue using the mobile phone as an example of relational artefacts that have the ability to pull down boundaries 'between social roles, allowing individuals present in the physical space of their use to witness mishmashing or disclosure of multiple identities' (Turkle 2006 as cited in Abbas & Dervin 2009, p. 5). With today's technology, the relational artefact or the tethered device could be just about anything, as long as it is connected via the internet. For some, this might not be an issue. But it can bring complications to one's identity and the management of self-presentation.

In today's world, which demands authenticity and consistency of identity, the management of identity has become more significant. Goffman's theory of 'the presentation of self in everyday lives' will be also used together with Giddens' work to provide a framework for understanding identity management in

SNGs and SNSs as well as in everyday life with direct reference to being female, Malay and Muslim in Malaysia. This theory has enabled the researcher to explore and understand the ways the participants of this research managed their self-presentation on Facebook (findings on Malay women on Facebook are presented in Chapter 8).

Due to the nature of *The Sims Social,* which is played within the platform of Facebook, Pargman and Jakobsson's (2008) 'frame metaphor' is used to complement Giddens's and Goffman's theories. It explains the cognitive state of these Malay women players during play as they juggled their identity performance within the game context and the Facebook context without abandoning the 'real-life' or offline context.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the many understandings of the concepts of 'self', 'identity' and 'self-concept' before moving on more specifically to the discussion of issues related to identity management in an online environment. This includes topics related to anonymity and authenticity. Subsequently, the chapter addresses identity performance and identity play in *The Sims Social* context, and Facebook as a context where a more consistent, reflective of offline, identity is performed.

The self, identity and self-concept

In a globalised world described as unpredictable and uncertain (Tomlinson 2003), web technologies have become dominant mediators in our lives, as 'objects-to-think-with for thinking about postmodern selves' (Turkle 1995, p. 185). The variety of web technologies or 'tethering devices' (Turkle 2006) as a mode of communication and self-representation often creates shifting pictures of who we are (Abbas & Dervin 2009). The performance of identity in contexts such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or online games involves changes to suit each of these different contexts, creating a sense of multiple selves. Web technologies, particularly social media, have provided a platform where multiple selves or identities exist simultaneously through the embodiment of the offline and online selves (Cirucci 2015). Thus, although we perform ourselves differently in different contexts, and reflexivity triggers the continuous change, this does not mean these identities live as separate wholes (Bergson 1907).

Before the discussion can go forward, the terms 'self' and 'identity' need to be clarified because these two terms are used frequently in this thesis. Academics often use these terms interchangeably without specifying that they are also very much related to self-concept. Self, identities and self-concept are a 'series of nested constructs, with self as the most encompassing term, self-concept being embedded within the self and identities are embedded within self-concept' (Leary & Tangney 2012, p. 94). These nested concepts influence 'judgment and behaviour both in the moment and over time'. This is later

stored in memory as one's 'autobiographical knowledge' (Leary & Tangney 2012, p. 95). These concepts include the element of time and space, and are similar to Goffman's and Giddens take on self and identity. Both perspectives see self and identity as contextual and consistent.

The self, self-concept and identity are integrated as a means to understand mental processes, highlighting both reflexive and reflective processing. Reflexive processing is described as rapid, effortless and always operating in the background, producing quick responses that feel effortless. Reflective processing is slower and requires more effort because it takes systematic consideration of content and application of rules particularly 'when people have the time, motivation, and mental capacity to engage it' (Leary & Tangney 2012, p. 95). From the psychology perspective, reflexive and reflective processing are mental processes that eventually link to some aspect of one's autobiographical knowledge. Both processes resonate with Giddens concept of reflexivity and the narrative self.

This research adopts Giddens's notion of identity, which is inseparable from his notion of reflexivity. Unfortunately, Giddens did not explicitly define this concept nor have there been any attempts to deconstruct Giddens's concept of reflexivity from the social sciences point of view. Thus, it will suffice for the purpose of this thesis to understand and highlight the similarities of psychological and social science perspectives. The concepts of self, self-concept and identity are understood by both perspectives as contributing to one's narrative self (Giddens 1991) or, in psychological terms, 'autobiographical knowledge' (Leary & Tangney 2012, p. 95) through mental processes which Giddens describes as reflexivity.

The complexity of managing identity in online environments

The web technologies provide spaces that enable the self or (selves) to exist online and offline simultaneously. In online spaces, the physical body that serves as an essential site of identity performance is not present. This makes interactions with others complicated as the 'skills people need to interpret situations and manage impressions are different' (boyd 2008). In online spaces, people rely on text, images, audio and video, which replace 'physical interactions' as means for both the actor and audience to express and receive impressions of the online/virtual self. In offline environments, our bodies are immediately visible and we can react to social cues and responses and alter our performance accordingly. People surrounding an interaction are able to interpret non-verbal cues, such as movement, clothes, speech and facial expressions, which minimises misinterpretation. However,

these cues may be unavailable in online spaces; 'digital bodies are fundamentally coarser, making it far easier to misinterpret what someone is expressing' (boyd 2008).

Online interactions are made even more complicated as interactions can be recorded and preserved to become an 'ever-present, presence that can never be disavowed' (Oram 2009). Information provided in these spaces, whether intentionally or not, acts as a representation of one's identity or image that later can be used as a source of information (and interpreted) by networked publics (boyd 2008). Online interactions are managed through self-regulation and controlled through privacy settings, which is subjected to the policies stipulated by each social media platform.

The privacy policies and features of SNSs such as Facebook allow users to control the degree of exposure of their information and activities to the networked audience or public. Being in control in this context means 'people have more control online as they are able to carefully choose what information to put forward, thus eliminating visceral reactions that might have seeped out in everyday communication' (boyd 2008, p. 129).

However, the amount of control that can be exercised within online environments is very imprecise due to the lack of physical geographical and temporal structures and boundaries (boyd 2008; Oram 2009). Information online can leak and spread. No amount of control is able to take away the risk of misinterpretation because our physical body is not readily available to react and alter our interactions according to social situations. Online interactions require different skills to manage self-presentation and interpret situations (boyd 2008). These problematic issues, if not managed properly, can harm the presentation of self in both online and offline environments.

Context, anonymity and the push towards authenticity

The first wave of digital studies concentrated on MOOs (MUD object-oriented), MUDs, emails, and bulletin boards and led to the conclusion that the representations of self in online spaces were limitless and anonymous, enabling the user to engage whatever persona they wished (e.g., Castronova 2007; Haraway 1991; Turkle 1997). Analysis and empirical studies conducted during that time focused on online identities, and particularly on the identity play that was enabled through the choice of characters and personas (Turkle 1995) or online gender swapping (Reid 1999). At this time, the internet was described as a space where individuals were freely 'experimenting with the constructions and re-constructions of self that characterised postmodern life' (Turkle 1995, p. 179).

Although earlier studies on anonymity saw it as a gateway to experiment with identities, others have regarded anonymity as a space where the 'true self' is manifested (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons 2002; Taylor 2002; Tosun 2012). These writers argued that anonymity in online interactions seemed to encourage 'people to be more honest and open about themselves than in offline settings' (Lövheim, 2013, p. 43, citing McKenna & Bargh 2000; Henderson & Gilding 2004). Both perspectives highlighted the power of being anonymous in online spaces.

As internet technology has evolved from textual interactions to the visual era, anonymity has become very relative (Abbas & Dervin 2009). The anonymity that was synonymous with the internet in an earlier time has been lost. Although it still persists in online spaces, this has become dependent on the context it operates in.

Anonymity is now also regarded as one of the 'risk factors' of internet use (van Zoonen 2011), and is not welcomed in some online spaces. The construction of online personas that do not reflect offline identities carries with it negative connotations such as online imposters, bullying and identity theft. Because of this, more and more commercial, government and cultural forces are pushing individuals to use and retain controlled, single identities online (van Zoonen 2013). As most of the online public sphere is dominated by large corporations, rules regarding the way users are identified vary (York 2015). The trend away from anonymity can be seen on social network sites such as Facebook and Google+, which have established policies that require users 'to register with their real names and data, and prevent them from having more than one account' (van Zoonen 2013, p. 45), although users might find ways to bypass this policies (as later demonstrated by Malay women in the findings chapters).

Facebook, and others, argue that an anti-anonymity stance is integral to online spaces (Cirucci 2014, p. 63). Facebook does this by requiring users to include real first and last names along with a working email address. The site's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities 2013 reads, 'Facebook users provide their real names and information, and we need your help to keep it that way' (Facebook Terms of Service 2017). The site also created an agreement with all its users to avoid 'false information, to not create more than one personal account, to keep contact information up to date, and to use a username that is the user's actual name' (Cirucci 2014, p. 63). Facebook claims that this policy makes users more civil, reduces harassment, makes people accountable and helps Facebook eradicate malicious accounts (Edwards & McAuley 2013; York 2014, 2015).

Maintaining a consistent identity today is complicated, especially in networked publics such as on SNS. This is because each and every audience for whom we perform our identity differently offline or online

is converging into the same space (boyd 2008). Online platforms, such as social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, provide contexts that support other online activities such as virtual worlds, online games, blogs, webpages, photo and video sharing sites, and internet dating sites. Engaging in all these activities constantly disembodies and re-embodies users as avatars, photos, videos and offline self (Belk 2013).

Application program interfaces have been developed to allow users of a SNS to access third-party websites or applications via one login. For example, Facebook Connect is an authentication mechanism that allows its users to access third-party websites via Facebook. Despite providing ease of access, personalisation and synchronisation (Conley n.d), it also further complicates identity management as it collapses multiple identities into one context. This was the situation painted by Turkle, (2006) where 'tethering devices' allow the 'mishmashing or disclosure of multiple identities' (Turkle 2006). This has led the merging of multiple selves performed online and further blurring of online and offline selves (Hongladarom 2011).

However, this by no means has to change or 'split' a person's personality. Users are compelled to create, maintain and revise a set of biographical narratives resulting from a continuous reflexive project across different contexts (Giddens 1991). Through these interactions with the social (media) world, the self is constantly negotiated and renegotiated.

> '…in creating online selves, users do not seek to transcend the most fundamental aspects of their offline selves. Rather, users bring into being bodies, personas, and personalities framed according to the same categories that exist in the offline world' (Robinson 2007 p. 94).

Maintaining a consistent self or identity in digital and social media settings is increasingly associated with 'authenticity'. By dictionary definition, the word authentic means 'undisputed origin and not a copy, or genuine. It could also translate as accurate or reliable' (Oxford Dictionaries Online 2017). It 'may mean unique or original; creating a faithful representation; giving authorisation or a stamp of approval; or remaining true to some internal essence' (van Leeuwen 2001 as cited in Cirucci 2014, p. 24).

In the context of the self, authenticity is performed by 'being yourself' (Marwick 2013). Being a 'real' self or 'authentic' self in both online or offline contexts is described as engaging in open and honest self-disclosure (Ellison et al. 2006). Engaging in both self-disclosure and self-enhancement strategies at the same time is an important part of impression management (Ellison et al. 2006; Rowatt, Cunningham & Druen 1998; Schlenker & Pontari 2000). Undoubtedly, the 'tension between authenticity and impression management is inherent in many aspects of self-disclosure' (Ellison et al. 2006, p. 417–418). These

tensions arise due to the 'multiple aspects of the self which are expressed or made salient in different contexts' (Ellison et al. 2006, pp. 418).

This battle happens in both online and offline settings. However, many digital spaces such as social media platforms allow users to be more strategic and have better control over the management of self-presentation (Ellison et al. 2006). In this sense, information is managed by users through information 'given' rather than 'given off' (Goffman 1959). But that does not mean that all the information 'given' is interpreted in the way the user intends. This can lead to misinterpretation of information. Facebook is such an environment: a mediated environment that allows its users some level of control over presentation management but not its interpretation.

Digital media makes self-presentation management complicated as users can integrate multiple online sites (such as gaming or shopping websites) under one account. On each of these applications or websites, users may manage their self-presentation differently because the nature of the applications or the public is different. Users can now login to all the integrated websites and applications via their main social media account and from there they are redirected to the other applications or websites. They may share posts from the applications or websites on their main social media account. By doing so, they add layers to the identities or self-presentations on their main social media account.

For example, Facebook users who played *The Sims Social* could share posts from the game on Facebook. Considering that identities performed in both contexts could be quite different or contradictory, these posts added a different layer of identity on display to their Facebook networked publics. This consequently created friction between the authentic self (as viewed by the Facebook networked public) and the 'self' portrayed on *The Sims Social*. As a Facebook user engages with games, or other applications that require a performance of a different identity, this can add more layers to the 'authentic self' on Facebook. Thus, the multiple selves or identities performed by any particular user on Facebook can further complicate his or her self-presentation management.

The debates on the notion of 'core self' or 'authentic self' are still ongoing in relation to identity management. No matter the view, one thing is certain: the performance of identity is context dependent. Each context potentially generates a different identity or, it could be safe to say, it produces a different viewpoint on one's actual self (which could be an ideal self like an avatar or a Sim in a game), thus creating a sense of multiple selves.

The demand for a consistent representation of identity online is real, as social media is becoming more and more dominant in use. There are, however, digital environments where multiple identities can still

be performed in total anonymity, such as in the persistent world online games (MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*)

The following section will concentrate on the two contexts of concern for this research: Facebook and *The Sims Social*. I will discuss identity performance on Facebook before proceeding with a discussion of identity performance on *The Sims Social*. Playing *The Sims Social* on Facebook offers a clear case of the collision of two separate contexts in which identity was performed differently. *The Sims Social* produced complex social and cultural outcomes within both gaming and Facebook contexts. This complexity took a toll on the performance of identity on Facebook where a more authentic self is performed and expected by its audience.

Identity performance on Facebook

Researchers have explored the performance of self/identity in relation to various contexts, including studies on identity performed in digital game spaces or on SNSs. Most studies that have looked at the performance of self in online spaces have tended to focus on similarities and differences between the performances of online and offline identity. This includes studies by Aarsand (2008), Nguyen, Bin and Campbell (2012); Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013); Ellison, Heino and Gibbs (2006) and Kendall (1998).

As SNSs gained acceptance among internet users, studies started to focus on the performance of identity in SNSs, especially Facebook. Facebook was selected by many researchers as the most popular SNS in the world (Hongladarom 2011; Marriot & Buchanan 2014; Seidman 2013; Zarghooni 2007). Interestingly, based on the studies of the performance of self in Facebook (which sometimes also include other, less popular, SNSs), identities performed in this context tend to reflect a fairly accurate representation of the actual offline self and are thus viewed as an authentic reflection of the offline self (Gosling, Gaddis & Vazire 2007; Back et al. 2010; Marriot & Buchanan 2014). Similar findings were also found by studies conducted by Waggoner, Smith and Collins (2009) and Weisbuch, Ivcevic and Ambady (2009), although these studies mentioned that minor self-enhancement might occur.

These studies show that Facebook is viewed as a context in which the identity that is performed is similar to the offline self. It is considered 'authentic' because friendships on Facebook are formed offline before making it onto Facebook, and not the other way around (Lampe, Ellison, Steinfield, 2006; Ross et al. 2009). 'As a consequence of this offline-to-online sequence, statements about interests and values are likely to be authentic' (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield 2007; Lampe, Ellison, Steinfield, 2006;

Pempek et al. 2009; Ross et al. 2009 as cited in Wilson, Gosling & Graham 2016, p. 21). Furthermore, 'observers' impressions of Facebook users are also affected by the user's number of friends and the characteristics of friends, especially those who write on the wall of the user' (Walther et al. 2009 as cited in Wilson, Gosling & Graham 2016, p. 210).

In other words, friendships on Facebook have a spill-over effect on the posts that appear on the timeline. Although these posts are directly controlled by the profile owner, the contributions of networked friends, such as the act of liking pictures or comments, feedback on statuses and tagging photos, lends authenticity to the owner's profile. Information given off by family and friends on a user's timeline adds some form of credibility and build authenticity as it is not intentionally created by the profile owner. The posts on a timeline make the Facebook user appear honest, transparent, and revealing: characteristics which define what authentic is in today's digital media (Marwick 2013).

The Facebook timeline can be interpreted as a showcase of information given and given off (Goffman 1959). It fits into the above-mentioned notion of authenticity as a compressed version of 'a complete self narrative with an idealised view of how we would like to remember ourselves' (van Dijck 2008 as cited in Belk 2013, p. 484).

The notion of authenticity and the consistent portrayal of identity on Facebook are not without critics. Cirucci (2014) argued that, despite advocating for users to be authentic, the structure of Facebook potentially limits authenticity. The commodification of user's information is linked to the way Facebook's affordances were made to support celebrity and self-branding culture (Cirucci 2014). Facebook's inability to provide exhaustive affordances to its users could be seen as inhibiting them from being 'authentic'. This has created problems for many individuals with fluid or non-normative identities such as transgender women and drag queens (Haimson & Hoffmann 2016). What is 'authentic' in the context of Facebook and similar sites is reduced by only allowing representation of identities and cultures that the SNSs approve of.

On the other hand, it can be argued that Facebook is self-contradictory because the affordances it makes available to its users, such as being able to share third-party news, feature stories, games, memes or quizzes, allows users to perform multiple identities. Unless managed through its privacy settings, these multiple identities are conflated and showcased on the timeline.

By now, it is not difficult to realise the complexity of maintaining an 'authentic' identity as well as managing self-presentation on Facebook when Facebook at the same time allows multiple identities from other contexts to be fed into its platform and showcased to unintended audiences via its newsfeed

and timeline. Facebook's push for a one-dimensional self, while at the same time allowing multiple identities to persist, has resulted in identities that are 'inescapably flattened into shallow versions of diverse selves' (Cirucci 2014, p. 28). This can lead to chaos for one's self-presentation, unless the Facebook user actively engages in self-presentation management.

Identity performance in social network games

Understanding the performance of self in a digital games environment requires that researchers consider issues unique to digital games. Play is one of the characteristics of digital games that makes them distinct from other media (Shaw 2010). Play in digital games begins as soon as players commence their gaming session, through the interaction or reception as well as where players engage in the meaning-making process (Shaw 2010, p. 5). These characteristics differentiate digital games from film, literature or hypertext, thus scholars suggest that digital games should be studied in their own right (Aarseth 2001; Buckingham 2006; Eskelinen 2001).

In digital or virtual game environments, play governs the structure, providing a safe context for players to perform and experiment with identity (Silva 2013). Like the studies of SNS, research about the performance of identity in digital game spaces has concentrated on the game spaces themselves, looking at how identity play relates to the offline self and how anonymity affords identity play. Studies have been interested in identity play in online games, particularly MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft* and *EverQuest* as well as virtual worlds such as *Second Life*, *The Sims Online* and *Habbo Hotel*. Scholars with significant contributions on identity performance in online games or virtual worlds include Mia Consalvo (such as works in 2003, 2009, 2011), T.L Taylor (such as works in 2002, 2003, 2006), Tom Boellstorff (2008), Nick Yee (such as works in 2007, 2008, 2009) and Jeremy Bailenson (such as works in 2007, 2008, 2011, 2012). The studies they conducted utilised a variety of methods from qualitative to quantitative, ethnography and interviews to experiments.

Like other games, *The Sims Social* affords play. However, because *The Sims Social* is built to utilise an SNS as a platform, players have no choice but to play *The Sims Social* through their Facebook profile. This raises concerns about whether users are able to engage with identity play to its fullest potential because of the lack of anonymity.

Identity play in The Sims Social

Identity play happens in any type of digital game through the 'the player's point of control within the game-world' (Bayliss 2007, p. 1): the character or the avatar. Bayliss (2010) argued that the relationship between the player and their character or avatar can provide some understanding of the players'

attitudes towards the activity of gameplay (Bayliss 2007). The relationship between the self and avatars has been widely studied, and a range of relationships exist. The extreme is when players identify with their avatar in first person terms (Denegri-Knott Molesworth 2010), as if the players were the avatar. Theories of immersion describe players in a state of 'a loss of self by the player, who then "becomes" their character' (MacCallum-Stewart & Parsler 2008, p. 228). Bartle argues, a

> persona is a player, in a virtual world. That's in it. Any separate distinction of character is gone – the player is the character. You're not role-playing a being, you are that being; you're not assuming an identity, you are that identity; you're not projecting a self, you are that self. (Bartle 2004, p. 155)

However, the identification between a player and their avatar can range from first person identification and recognising the character or avatar as 'me' (Kimppa and Muukkonen 2007) to seeing the avatar as a parallel subjectivity, an identity that aligns both to and by their selfhood but is still 'distanced by a detachment we might consider equivalent to an ontological *cordon sanitaire'* (Conrad, Charles & Neale 2011, p. 273):

> others still (self-consciously or otherwise) saw in this presence possibilities for the expression or even the realisation of their fantasies of themselves; others overtly resisted the promises of liberation advanced by the virtual environment and instead observed its limitations and absurdities. (Conrad, Charles & Neale 2011, p. 273)

'Avatar' in Indian mythology means a god's representation on earth. Thus the term avatar in a game context can be interpreted as 'a representation of the player in the game' (Tronstad 2008, p. 258). Character, on the other hand, is a term used to describe 'our representation in the game when it takes on an identity separate from our own, in the sense that we can clearly identify the character as separate from ourselves' (Tronstad 2008, p. 259).

Each player is able to perform their identity play as avatar or as a character through three different positions: playing through, playing as, and playing with (Bayliss 2007). These three positions are not mutually exclusive and a player may shift from playing as character to avatar or vice versa, or take both positions at the same time with an inclination to either one or the other. This gives players flexibility to switch between being an avatar, a character or both at any given point of time in the game, depending on their attitudes, intentions, and motivations at the time (Bayliss 2007). For games described as sandbox videogames, such as *The Sims Social*, 'where there are no prescribed winning conditions, or at least no requirement to attend to them' (Bayliss 2007) players may opt to not take any one of these positions.

A strong real-world element in game structure correlates with a strong player-avatar identification. It is argued that this directly leads to a better game experience (Silva 2013; Calleja 2007, 2007; Murphy 2004). For example, an avatar's resemblance to the players' own gender, age and race creates stronger identification with the avatar (Meadows 2008). This affects the re-embodiment process, which is described as a progressive process (Biocca 1997) that involves stages of designing the avatar, starting from 'giving it a name, learning to operate it, and becoming comfortable with it, we gradually not only become re-embodied but increasingly identify as our avatar' (Binark & Sütcü 2009; Robinson 2007; Taylor 2002 as cited in Belk 2013, p. 481).

The relationship between a player and their locus of manipulation can depend on the game itself, particularly in games such as *The Sims Social* as it is situated in a type of social context. Even games in the same category can be significantly different. For example, online games such as *World of Warcraft,* which offer standard servers and 'role-playing' servers, provide options for ludic activities or role-playing activities on respective servers (Bayliss 2007). This is because 'a role-play space may have different nuances and outcomes than what happens in a player-versus-player scenario or in a non-game virtual world' (Tronstad 2007 as cited in Taylor 2011, p. 374).

Thus, differing forms of freedom to select, modify and accessorise this representation of self, depend on the affordances the game provides (Bryant & Akerman 2009; Kamel 2009). The relative freedom to configure the locus of manipulation suggests that the locus of manipulation can be used to represent an ideal self (Kozinets & Kedzior 2009; Robinson 2007; Taylor 2002), possible self (Young & Whitty 2012), aspirational self (Martin 2008; Wood & Solomon 2010), or/and to explore various alternative selves (Biocca 1997; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010). The interchangeability between relating to the locus of manipulation as character or avatar depends on the game affordances and how it is approached by the player.

According to Linderoth (2005), characters or avatars are used either as roles or as tool to extend players' agency. Players may utilise their character or avatar as both role and tool (given the different situations in the same game, with the same character or avatar) and even as a prop for self-presentation (Linderoth 2005). Table 4.1 presents players' styles of play and gameplay activities in relation to their locus of manipulation in terms of embodiment and embodying. This information is adapted from Bayliss (2007) and Linderoth (2005) and includes the researcher's observations of *The Sims Social.*

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Table 4.1: Players' positions in relation to their locus of manipulation in terms of embodiment and embodying

Positions of playing		**Definition on positions of playing**	**Players' engagement with the game**	**Relationship with the locus of manipulation**	**Examples in *The Sims Social***
Bayliss (2007)	Linderoth (2005)				
Through	Tool	Focus is on the player's own embodiment outside of the game world. Indicates a fairly pragmatic attitude towards the locus of manipulation, and by extension, the game world more generally.	Ludic activities: problem-solving, exploration and competition.	More as an avatar than a character.	'Sim Snap', a series of 'mini-games', were memory-based puzzles played within *The Sims Social.* It was played for exclusive in-game items and sometimes points, energy, etc. Players competed against their neighbours to win. The Sim was merely a tool here; in the same way it was for the women who played *The Sims Social* for competitive purposes: a means of achieving the highest level and house value.
As	Role	The relationship between the player and their locus of manipulation becomes more complex. It depends on factors such as the perspective the game is presented in, the genre of the game being played, and the social context in which it is played.	Narrative and fictional possibilities presented by the character.	Functions as either avatar or character; both aspects will be involved to some degree.	The Sim could be used as a realisation of someone the player fancies, e.g. taking the role of popular footballer Iker Casilas. The player may switch between using the Sim 'as' Iker Casilas, as a 'tool', and also as a 'self-presentation' when playing in the Malaysian fan group.
With		The player engages with the game more fully by using the locus of manipulation as an explicit point of access to play with the world and rules of the videogame in a more freeform manner. A different style of playing	Free-play (paidia). This can take many forms and may occur even within games that were not designed with this type of activity in mind. Opens the scope of what and how a particular videogame	Can either be an avatar or a character as freeform play takes place.	*The Sims Social* players may have engaged with this use of the locus of manipulation, for example during a visit to a neighbour's home.

		with the locus of manipulation arises in 'sandbox videogames', in which there are no prescribed winning conditions, or at least no requirement to attend to them.	can be used for, resulting in a more sophisticated understanding of the affordances of that videogame beyond its ludic potentials.		
	Self-presentation	Social context is an important determinant of the choice between an 'avatarial' or character-based relationship.	Positions depend on the nature of presentation, for example presentations of skill or for fictional personas.	For the purpose of self-presentation, players can be associated with both tool and role.	Players could use their Sim as a self-presentation tool when they communicated outside of the game context, e.g. on the Malaysian Sim page.

(Taken from Bayliss (2007) and Linderoth (2005) with researcher's own observations from *The Sims Social*)

From these literatures, it can be concluded that all types of relationship with a locus of manipulation are possible in life simulation games like *The Sims Social.* Players are given some freedom to express themselves through the customisation of their avatar or character. They can explore the game like any sandbox type game. At the same time, the players may also engage in ludic play such as quests, completions or mini-games such as 'Sim Snap', in which players were challenged to solve memory-based puzzles. In Sim Snap, players moved from easier levels to more complicated ones with scores from each level accumulated to win prizes for their Sim's home. These scores were compared with other players and displayed on Facebook.

These examples show the different ways *The Sims Social* players switched between treating their Sim as avatar and character, or as an extension of themselves, playing with or using their Sim as a tool to accumulate as many points as possible or creating a Sim that resembles a character they love to play pretend. Within *The Sims Social*, in which the social was made central both within and outside the game, the Sim was also a means of self-presentation for players, both in Littlehaven and outside the game realm

The Sims Social players' management of self-presentation on Facebook

The previous section addressed players' positioning of their avatar or character to play 'through', 'with' or 'as' it to suit the context of play (Bayliss 2007; Linderoth 2005). The act of switching between avatar or character positions also made visible the permeability of online and offline selves as players' attitudes, intentions and motivations as well as their sociocultural values and real-life experiences were brought into the game during play. These values are used by players to negotiate the values presented in *The Sims Social*, particularly those that are different to their own. The analysis of Bayliss (2007) and Linderoth (2005) of players positions during play focused on the players' engagement with the game without much consideration of how players bring their offline selves, including their sociocultural values, into play especially when they need to negotiate the values presented in the game.

However, for all SNGs players, identity does not begin and end inside the game but transcends it, including particularly their identity in the SNS context. *The Sims Social* players needed to manage both their 'actual' self on Facebook, which reflected their authentic, offline self, and their identity play on *The Sims Social.* All *The Sims Social* players were therefore required to manage multiple identities on the Facebook platform.

The manifestation of multiple identities in different contexts is not new. It can be explained through Goffman's (1959) seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In this theory, Goffman

describes the everyday social context from a theatrical perspective, comparing individuals to actors during a performance in which actors assume different roles before the performance (backstage) and during the performance (frontstage). Individuals in this sense are understood as performers, performing for a wide variety of social audiences and changing roles (selves or identities) to suit different occasions and times (Goffman 1959). Because each different context is occupied by a different audience, Goffman highlights the importance of audience segregation to avoid the collision of identities meant for different contexts and audiences.

Managing one's Facebook profile is an example of managing front and backstage roles. Everything that can be seen by everyone in the friends' network or the general public can be seen as the frontstage. Preparations done before information is published on the Facebook's timeline can be seen as the backstage. The editing of a profile picture, approving photos and posts tagged by Facebook friends, or even the act of checking the spelling and grammar before publishing on Facebook are not done offline, but are still examples of backstage performance.

The front and backstage analogy can be applied to identity play in most digital games environments. The frontstage is where the players enter into the game realm through their locus of manipulation (avatar/character); the backstage is where the players prepare for the game, for example playing in offline mode, practicing alone or researching information, walkthroughs, cheats or other players' recorded gameplay sessions on YouTube. Managing self-presentation is clear cut when front and backstage contexts do not collide. Anonymity and play permits this manifestation of selves online and offline, though permeability can still occur between the online and offline selves as players engage with values presented in the game. There is little (if any) chance of collision of identity play performed in different contexts.

Goffman's (1959) front and backstage metaphor have been used to explain the performance of public and the private identity respectively. Goffman's front and backstage metaphor suggests that the front and backstage will always remain separated. But this is not always the case; there could be times where the front and backstage could merge. This gap in Goffman's theory was addressed by Meyrowitz (1985), who introduced the 'middle-stage' to explain the identity created 'when people have to combine certain social situations, such as being around both friends and family at the same time' (Cirucci 2012, p. 2).

Meyrowitz's work is helpful in providing some explanation where two (or more) contexts combine. The middle-stage highlights situations that require self-presentation management as identities from two or

more contexts collide. This is a stage where audiences are able to observe and question the performance of multiple selves and build a cohesive narrative of a particular person. Facebook is an example of such a stage.

Social network games are third-party applications that can become a source of information given or given off on Facebook. Identity play performed in SNGs persists outside the game realm, for example through emergent play initiated by the players in fan groups. This is one of the ways identity play may seep into Facebook. For *The Sims Social* players who were also members in fan pages, identity play collided with Facebook identity in the fan pages, in which both identities were made visible to the rest of the members of the group. Players' were compelled to manage both their identity play and their Facebook identity; however, shared conventions between players in the fan group reduced the pressure to maintain a consistent identity in these sorts of groups. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

Another way identity play seeps into Facebook is via players' newsfeeds and timelines. Here, the audience is a mix of players and non-players. The non-players are the general 'public' who are not aware of the players' identity play on SNGs. Without conscious management of Facebook settings, the sharing of game updates such as achievements, news or bonuses will expose the identity play to unintended audiences who are expecting a more authentic identity performance from the players. For example, sharing Facebook post on a love-making session with your *The Sims Social* partner as a relationship achievement in *The Sims Social* could create a negative perception in the general public who are not *The Sims Social* players.Situations where multiple online identities collapse, exposing identities to unintended audiences, could lead to what Goffman described as inconsistency of performance, resulting in the performance becoming unbelievable (Goffman 1959).

The whole process described above is an example of the ongoing self-reflexive process that takes place in the performance of self on a daily basis. But, this is never a one-sided process. Rather, it is an ongoing two-way self-reflexive social process in which each performance will be evaluated against others (Buckingham 2008 as cited in Cirucci 2012, p. 2). The inferences received from others can be used to improvise the performance of identity, and this is applicable in any social context be it offline or any online, including digital games and SNSs. The processes of reflexivity create a sense of consistency and authenticity of identity. Even when impression management is not the main objective, very rarely do humans intentionally behave in ways that would be expected to cause disadvantageous impressions (Leary 1995 as cited in Chester & Bretherton 2007, p. 224). This suggests that human behaviour is often influenced by concerns about managing the impressions of others (Chester & Breterthon 2007, p. 224).

The permeability of offline and online selves

The nature of *The Sims Social,* which is played on Facebook, led to permeability of the identities performed in the game and the social network. Bayliss (2007), Linderoth (2005) and Pargman and Jakobsson's (2008) works have been used to developing an understanding of the impact of permeability of multiple, or clashing identities on self-presentation, particularly on Facebook where a more consistent, offline representation of identity is often performed.

A holistic point of view is needed when considering the complexity of having and managing multiple identities on *The Sims Social* and Facebook. Pargman and Jakobsson's (2008) theory of frames-within-frames addresses the ways players manage their identities in different situations while engaging with the game. Pargman and Jakobsson's frame metaphor situates players' multiple identities within three different realms: the real world 'person frame', the game world 'character frame', and the backstage 'player frame' in which preparation for the game takes place. As players switch identities according to the different actions required during play, these frames are switched automatically.

During play, players are constantly switching frames because only one frame is active at any given time during play. 'It is something we all do all the time and [it] can be done literally at the blink of an eye' (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, p.238). This is a weak-boundary hypothesis, in which the word weak refers to the permeability of the boundaries between being a person, player, or character. Transitions between these roles happen effortlessly. The fact that Pargman and Jakobsson have included the 'person' frame in explaining the game experience signifies the permeability of offline self in game playing experience, through switching back and forth 'between being a person in the ordinary-life frame and a player in the game frame as the need arises' (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, p. 238).

Pargman and Jakobsson's (2008) work could provide a way to explain Malay woman's embodiment of their offline selves in their online selves through the use of each frame while playing *The Sims Social.* The frame metaphor can be used to explain the manifestation of a player's extended or idealised self in her Sim (character frame), or her use of the Sim as a tool to win a quest or complete a 'Sim Snap' mini-game competition. They player may switch into the 'player frame' to find out tips and cheats for the game. During play she can switch to 'person frame' as her phone rings and she pauses the game to talk to her mother on the phone.

However, the frame metaphor does not address the role of social networking sites. The frame metaphor was initially developed to explain the experience of hardcore game players. Thus, to explain the frame switching experience of players of *The Sims Social*, which was played on Facebook and required some

form of self-presentation management, the frame metaphor needs to be extended. It is important to ensure that the frame metaphor can describe the frame of mind of a player as she is considering self-presentation during play. This usually happened when the person intended to post and share their scores in a fan group or share an achievement or call for help on Facebook account. For this, we need to consider a fourth frame encompassing Facebook identity.

The idea of self-presentation to describe the position taken by a player in a game context has been explained by Linderoth (2005). However, Linderoth did not specifically explain the use of self-presentation for SNGs such as *The Sims Social,* which exist within a SNS context like Facebook. For the purpose of this research, Linderoth's notion of self-presentation will be applied to *The Sims Social* and its host, Facebook. This is important because *The Sims Social* is an affordance of Facebook. It is designed to appear on the player's Facebook account by default. This means that identity play on *The Sims Social* can permeate into Facebook and vice versa, which may raise self-presentation concerns that should be taken into consideration.

Combining Linderoth's notion of self-presentation and Pargman and Jakobsson's notion of a frame metaphor may shed some light on the experience of play by the Malay women in this research. By combining their works, self-presentation can be understood as both a position taken during play and a context which frames the players' thinking each time they play the game.

Taking the frame metaphor lens, for example sharing a post on Facebook about an achievement in *The Sims Social* the 'character frame' switches to 'person frame' when the player needs to decide whether to share a post on Facebook because it concerns their self-presentation on Facebook. Thinking about self-presentation happens within the 'person frame'.

In this case it is useful to extend Pargman and Jakobsson metaphor of person, player and character frames to include a 'self-presentation frame' representing the Facebook context. This extended version of Pargman and Jakobsson's frame metaphor may help explain some of complex situations that happen during play particularly in SNGs. For example, Player A, while being a character in Littlehaven, visits a neighbour to complete a quest and notices new clothes that could be interpreted as unacceptable in sociocultural and religious terms. However, player A thinks it is okay to wear clothes like that as long as it is within the game realm. Player A also thinks about the reaction she might receive if she wore something provocative and posted a picture of it on Facebook. She wants to post her games achievement on Facebook but she is worried that flooding the newsfeed or her timeline with *The Sims Social* achievements might annoy friends who are not playing. Switching back and forth

between person-self-presentation-player-character frames while playing *The Sims Social* on Facebook demonstrates more than simply the act of switching of frames, but also the permeability between online and offline selves in order to ensure a consistent identity throughout.

Conclusion

Engaging with identity play in *The Sims Social* required an ongoing self-reflexive process as the players negotiated with the values presented in the game environment while simultaneously managing their self-presentation on Facebook. Reflexivity can happen in any type of digital games (or any media for that matter) as part of the negotiation players go through as they are presented with values during play. However, in SNGs such as *The Sims Social,* players need to negotiate values presented in the game as well as consider the possible consequences of their identity play on Facebook. This indicates the process of self-reflexivity as they manage their multiple identities and self-presentation on Facebook where a more authentic, consistent identity is expected by the networked public. With some minor adjustment, Pargman and Jakobsson's (2008) frame metaphor provides the perspective to understand the complexity of negotiating and managing multiple identities in *The Sims Social* while maintaining their desired self-presentation on Facebook.

Chapter 5: Research methodology

> Methods matter because the choices made, along with the very characteristics of the researcher, play into and ultimately shape the conclusions of any research. (Bird 2003, p. 9)

This chapter outlines the methodology and methods used to conduct this research into understanding the complexity of identity of Malay, Muslim women in Malaysia experiencing globalisation and modernity through two different but overlapping contexts, *The Sims Social* and Facebook, in their everyday lives.

The chapter begins by specifying the research questions which define the matter being investigated. This is followed by a rationale for the methodology used. This includes a justification for the research design and sets out the theoretical foundation of the interpretive qualitative methodology and its significance to this research. Next, the role of the researcher in the research process is touched on briefly, before focusing on the research design. The methods used were online participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted in two ways: through focus groups and personal interviews. Finally, data analysis is discussed.

The research questions

Focusing on *The Sims Social* as the site of the research, below are the research questions formulated specifically to address the research objectives:

1. What are the media consumption habits of Malay women, particularly with regard to social network games and social network sites? How does the consumption of media affect the way Malay women experience globalisation and modernity in general and in particular with regards to American/Western culture as presented in *The Sims Social* played on Facebook? What are the experiences and perceptions Malay women have as a result of consuming globalised media content in their daily lives?
2. What are Malay women's experiences through their engagement with SNGs (generally) and *The Sims Social* in their daily lives? How do their identities as Malay women intersect with their play experiences in *The Sims Social*? How do they negotiate the culture, values and ideology presented within the game realm?
3. What are Malay women's experiences with Facebook, the platform for *The Sims Social*? As the identity performed within the game realm adds a layer and thus complicates the identity performed on Facebook, how do they manage multiple, fluid and possibly clashing identities?

The next section highlights the methodology used to address these research questions.

Methodology

Methodology in its broadest sense can be understood as 'a way of thinking about and studying social phenomena' (Corbin & Strauss 2008, p. 1). It concerns how research is conducted and the strategies or action plans used in that research (Creswell 2003; Taylor & Bogdan 1998 as cited in Mohd Rhouse 2013, p. 68). The essence of a sound research strategy is careful planning (Rubin, Rubin & Piele 2000) to acquire knowledge about the world we live in (Denzin & Lincoln 2003).

The basis for determining the methodology for any research investigation are the researcher's assumptions, interests and aims in seeking answers to the research question(s) (Boeije 2010; Taylor & Bogdan 1998). For research where exploration and investigation are essential, qualitative research is suggested as an appropriate methodology (Sarantakos 1998). As the objective of this study was to understand the performance of self by Malay women as they experienced globalisation and modernity through two different but overlapping contexts, *The Sims Social* and Facebook, in their everyday lives, a qualitative methodology was considered appropriate.

The qualitative foundations of the methodology

Qualitative research is understood as research addressing 'the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 8). It is a type of methodology that focuses on the non-quantification of data collection and analysis (Prasad & Prasad 2002 as cited in Mohd Rhouse 2013, p. 68). Qualitative research requires researchers to 'study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 4–5).

This research investigates Malay women's everyday experiences engaging with *The Sims Social* on Facebook by attempting to make sense of their experiences of identity performance in these two contexts. Qualitative approaches enabled the researcher to understand the depth instead of the breadth of the Malay women's experiences.

This research started off looking at *The Sims Social* as a media text, with its unique affordances and constraints. Like any other media content, *The Sims Social* embodies ideology and meanings that require negotiation by their players, although these Malay women are most probably familiar with American and Western values.

A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study as it enabled an account of Malay women playing *The Sims Social* on Facebook. Although some scholars would argue that digital games are not 'texts' per se, and thus cannot be studied through textual analysis methods (Juul 2000), methods to study digital games have evolved over the years and qualitative methods have became an important way of critically understanding digital games as 'texts' as well as their players (Consalvo 2006). A lot of the empirical work that concentrates on the audience or players or on critique of the games themselves has utilised qualitative methods such as ethnography and interviews. Seminal works, such as those by T.L Taylor (2006), Tom Boellstorff (2008), Celia Pearce (2009) and Sal Humphreys (2005), have used qualitative approaches, particularly ethnographic and online participant observation methods and interviews, in order to generate thick descriptions of the contexts being studied (Denzin & Lincoln 2003).

This study is underpinned by a constructivist epistemology, which assumes that individuals construct meanings through their sociocultural and value systems, leading to numerous and varying interpretations of reality (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). This paved the way to understanding the lived-world as it was experienced by Malay women through their interpretation, which was socially, historically, culturally, and politically constructed.

The fundamental assumption that guided this research was that 'meaning and experience are produced and reproduced through social interaction rather than constructed within individuals' (Berger & Luckmann 1971; Burr 1995; Gubrium & Holstein 1997; Schwandt 2000 as cited in Mohd Rhouse 2013, p. 70). Thus, social phenomena are viewed as ongoing processes of sense making and interpretation that individuals use to interpret their social environment (Chell 2000). This rejects a positivist perspective in which there is an 'objective' fact of identity and media meaning (Burr 1995; Willis 2007).

The social constructivist perspective provided advantages for understanding the phenomenon under inquiry. The most helpful social constructionist idea was that 'social reality is always an expression of relationship . . . people too are relational beings, constantly becoming and emerging in relation to their families, societies, and cultures' (Fletcher 2006, p. 167). Social constructivists view social interactions (where identity is performed) as contextual, which allowed this research to understand how Malay women experience globalisation in a context where media created contexts that required identity to be negotiated, performed and managed in ways that were different to those used in their everyday offline context. This view, coupled with the fact that a social constructivist perspective rejects the positivist notion of understanding knowledge, enabled this research to challenge dominant understandings, such

as claims that globalisation and modernity wipe away the importance of culture, tradition and religion in everyday lives (Giddens 1991).

Interpretative approach

Interpretive qualitative research is a tradition interested in the 'construction of contextual or local knowledge rather than universal laws or rules' (Willis 2007, p. 99). It aims to produce not the 'truth' in the positivist sense, but a situated or contextual (hermeneutic) understanding (Willis 2007, p. 188). Thus, 'there is no single interpretive truth' (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 37).

Therefore, the analysis conducted in this research using both online participant observation and interviews is a reflection of the researcher's attempt to make sense of Malay women playing *The Sims Social*. This approach allowed the researcher to 'tap into a participant's subjective experience and perspective rather than frame the participant's perspective within the conceptual lenses of dominant literatures' (Mohd Rhouse 2013, p. 71). This led to insights about the Malay women's performance of identity in *The Sims Social* and their simultaneous management of their Facebook selves.

The significance of discourse analysis

Using an interpretive approach, the researcher took into account Stuart Hall's work on 'encoding/decoding' and the work of other media scholars such as Radway (1984) in understanding *The Sims Social* as a media text, and as a site where Malay women players made sense of the values encountered during their engagement with the game. The general idea was that the process of 'meaning making' from encounters with any media texts are not in any way unitary and stable. A media text is not self-sufficient or neutral. The encoding process assigns 'identities' to media texts drawn from codes and conventions they are constructed in relation to (Hall 1980). Sometimes, media texts are encoded in such a way that they exert pressure on the process of decoding, channelling understanding one way rather than another and setting the stage for "legitimate" interpretation' (Deacon et al. 1999, p. 141). These processes give a media text its 'identity' but it is not absolute or fixed.

In relation to *The Sims Social*, the researcher needed to be aware that the text was encoded with Western and predominantly US sociocultural values because it was produced and designed by game designers who came from US a background. The globalisation of media, particularly the internet, allows the world to encounter culture and values through games like *The Sims Social*. Malay women are familiar with Western/US culture and values through their long-established engagement with other media such as TV, magazines, movies and other entertainment content. They have experience the process of meaning making or negotiation because of the differences between their sociocultural and

religious beliefs and those of media producers. Media users or participants will always decode a media text based on their established social and cultural codes and conventions (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock 1999).

> How the text looks and what it means always depend, to some extent at least, upon where you stand in relation to it. You cannot know or understand a text exactly as the producer knows or understands it. There is rarely the degree of coherence between the two processes of meaning-production. The media text is certainly a point of connection between the encoder and decoder, but it does not bring them into a position of symmetry. Media texts therefore bring people together at the same time as they keep them apart. Moreover, such texts do not have fixed and absolute identity, for what a text means to you is not necessarily the same as what it means to someone from another social group. So at best we must acknowledge an encoder text and decoder text- or rather decoder texts, for there are a large number of people involved in decoding media texts. (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock 1999, p. 140)

The interpretive approach to research aims to understand subject matter in context. This is clearly demonstrated by a framework developed by Norman Fairclough (1992), detailed in his book *Discourse and social change*. This framework guides the researcher in understanding how audiences make sense of the media texts they engage with. Fairclough stressed the importance of

> three analytical traditions, which are the tradition of close textual and linguistic analysis within linguistics, the macrosociological tradition of analysing social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist or microsociological tradition of seeing social practice as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared common sense procedures. (Fairclough 1992, p. 72)

In other words, Fairclough believed that language and social phenomena mutually shape and influence one another and this phenomenon can be analysed within a discursive practice. Within any discursive practice lies the 'macro' and 'micro' dimensions that impact on the way members of social communities read, produce and reproduce their 'orderly' or 'accountable' worlds. Social structures, relations of power, and the nature of social practice are elements that media consumers are often unaware of, but they shape their practices and affect more than just simply producing meanings (Fairclough 1992).

To understand why people do what they do, it becomes necessary to discover the constructions they place on their behaviour and the interpretations they make of their actions. It is the goal of this research to understand Malay women's performance and negotiations within *The Sims Social* and Facebook in the context of their everyday lives.

This is where the framework for this research stands: social phenomena should be studied in context. From this perspective, the meaning of the performance of self or identity in *The Sims Social* on Facebook is affected by the online context and the offline context brought into the game through the

sociocultural, religious identities embedded in the Malay women. Radway (1984), in her seminal work *Reading the Romance*, highlighted the importance of understanding media users within the complex social event of an activity where sense making or meaning making and attribution to lexical signs occurs in the context of everyday life (Radway 1984).

Because of the importance of being critical on both sides of the discourse (the media as well as data gathered from the participants), this research applied two methods: an ethnographic dimension to explore the game environment, and interviews to include the voices of participants. This strengthened the findings of the research and puts it in context as ethnographic approaches to critical discourse analysis have long been recommended as a way 'to connect production and textual analysis to the way that people live their everyday lives' (Machin & Mayr 2013, p. 217). This approach allowed the researcher to 'speak more confidently about the nature of the way ideology works and the way that dominant discourses are used by people (Machin & Mayr 2013, p. 217). This also allowed the researcher to think about the way people make, use and reuse semiotic materials – languages and images – in social contexts. Understanding semiotic resources from a critical discourse analysis perspective helps to understand the values and ideologies present in media texts well as in everyday lives (Machin & Mayr 2013).

Researcher as research instrument

The incorporation of an ethnographic element in the methodology positioned the researcher as a 'research instrument of this thesis' (Willis 2007, p. 202 as cited in Zagado 2013, p. 51). The position taken by a researcher in relation to the research should be acknowledged because the researcher's values, beliefs, and assumptions may influence the research process, particularly in data collection and analysis (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000; Corbin & Strauss 2008, Finlay 2002; Guba & Lincoln 1981, 2005 as cited in Mohd Rhouse, 2013, p. 73). However, being a research instrument can be understood as an advantage, as stressed by Devereux (1967): 'examining the researcher's influence on the research process may bring valuable insight to the research outcome' (Devereux 1967, as cited in Mruck and Breuer 2003).

I am Malay and a woman. This research sprang from my personal interest in digital games, which have always been a part of my life. Although, not a 'hardcore gamer', I have done my fair share of playing games, from the earlier days of MS-DOS with games like *The Alley Cat* to all sorts of classic console games such as *Super Mario Bros, Street Fighter, Tetris* and first person shooter games. Later, I played games with handheld consoles (and yes, I am even guilty of having one of those digital Tamagotchi pets) and the infamous Windows *Spider Solitaire* and *Pin Ball*. I have played it all. My engagement with

digital games has not been limited to my domestic environment. I have enjoyed playing the arcade version of *Time Crisis* and racing games such as *Daytona*. I have also engaged with console games like the *Need for Speed* racing games and RPGs (Role Playing Games) like *Silent Hill* because of my brother's interest in games, which he normally played on his Sony PlayStation console. As time passed, age and life cycle took their toll and I was happy to engage with sports and board games on Xbox Kinect and *Super Mario Brothers* on Wii. Only now, I played with my son and husband. I have also played casual games on Facebook such as *Cityville* and *The Sims Social*, and smartphone games such as *Song Pop, Sky Burger* and *Rocket Chick*. Some of the games I have played on smart phones are classic games such as the *Pac-Man,* which made a comeback via downloadable mobile applications.

The exposure I had as a Malay woman playing digital games made me wonder about Malay women's engagement with digital games because this is an area that is under-researched despite the proliferation of digital games today. Being a Malay woman myself, and sharing a similar background to the research participants, gave me an insider's perspective when conducting this research. This allowed me to understand, interact and overcome differences more easily. It also helped in the process of interpreting the data.

As one of the means to understanding the participants better, I decided to place myself in *The Sims Social* experience, engaging and playing with the participants as part of the ethnographic approach to the project. This stage of the project provided me with first-hand experience and background in understanding the media text – *The Sims Social* – the practices within the game, and outside the game within the affordances of Facebook, and how this experience fits into daily life.

Interactions between the participants and me were recorded through 'thick description' and screen shots were captured during play. Field notes on my online observation and experience on asynchronous gameplay sessions as well as the interactions between other Malay women players in *The Sims Social* were a personal interpretation of the gameplay experience. At this point I was merely writing without confirming the performances of other players in *The Sims Social*.

The online participant observation method, which involved descriptions, interpretations and screen shots of gameplay sessions in *The Sims Social,* was used to strengthen the interpretations gained from the focus group and personal interview sessions with the participants. The interviews were important in refining the data gathered from the online participant observation and to include the participants' voices and understandings of their engagement with *The Sims Social* in their daily lives. This ensured that this

research could describe and document their experiences and perceptions of *The Sims Social* in their daily lives as accurately as possible.

Although much care was taken to ensure the research yielded rich meaningful data reflecting the participants of the research, there is a need to acknowledge the sense of individuality; where each and every player is unique.

Methods of data collection and participant sample

The data collection for this research was divided into two stages. Game scholars and researchers advocate for the importance of playing the game as part of conducting game research (Aarseth 2003; Pearce 2009). Aarseth stated that

> in gathering information about the game, we should use as many sources as possible. Playing is essential, but should be combined with other sources if at all possible. The analysis should also contain reflection on the sources used; where they come from, what could have been included, why did we select the ones we did, etc. (Aarseth 2003, p. 7)

This points to the significance of being involved in the game as a player or, in ethnographic terms, 'being in the field'. However, this method is complemented with game text analysis as well as focus group and personal interviews to understand as accurately as possible the interactions between the players and the game context. The importance of combining different methods in game research was highlighted by Consalvo and Dutton (2006):

> So is simply playing a game, similar to watching a film, the proper method? Clearly not, as Aarseth and Konzack are careful to point out – at minimum the game must be played by the researcher, but we argue that this playing must be augmented by careful analysis of the various components of the game itself. There are many elements to contemporary digital games that contribute to the experience of playing; some of which are immediately vital to the player, and some of which are not. (Consalvo & Dutton 2006)

Consalvo and Duttons's argument implies that in game research, 'playing' the game needs to be complimented with other methods in order to understand the game's forms, features and affordances and the relationship between the players and the context of the game which affects play. Thus, this research employed three methods which were applied in two stages: the first stage involved playing (online participant observation) and game analysis and the second stage involved interviews (both focus groups and personal interviews).

Stage 1: Online participant observation in 'The Sims Social' and game analysis

Pearce (2009) and other game researchers have proposed that studies of games should include playing along with other players. Research conducted without being inside the game, relying only on series of interviews, will 'lack [the] fabric and shell of the immersive experience of trying to live "inside," along with the patient, self-critical discipline of imposing objectivity on this experience by reflexive observational practices and their expression in intimate, constant recording of fieldnotes' (Marcus 2012, p. xiv). 'Participant observation plays a crucial role in forging a methodological practice in which we can learn about both explicit and implicit understandings of culture' (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor 2012, p. 88). It is especially relevant to understanding social dynamics and the construction of culture in gaming contexts (Pearce 2009, p. 195).

Conventionally, ethnographic research on games has focused on the persistent MMOGs such as *EverQuest* (Taylor 2006; Humphreys 2005) or online virtual worlds such as *Second Life* (Boellstorff 2008). However, the application of ethnographic methods to this research was complicated because of the characteristics of SNGs' asynchronous gameplay which generate an experience different from MMOGs or virtual worlds.

Boellstorff and colleagues (2012), in their book *Ethnography and virtual worlds*, frame the utilisation of ethnography in virtual worlds by identifying four characteristics of a virtual world: 1) places have a sense of worldness; 2) they are multi-user in nature; sharing synchronous environments; 3) the worlds are persistent; and 4) participants can embody themselves, usually as avatars (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 7).

The Sims Social fulfils three-and-a-half of Boellstorff and colleague's four criteria. While *The Sims Social* is a multi-user environment, as in the second characteristic, it is not synchronous. Thus, *The Sims Social* could be categorised as a type of asynchronous virtual world due to the nature of SNGs which are played asynchronously through a SNS platform. van Meurs (2011) defines asynchronous multiplayer games as a type of game that 'affords multi-play by offering persistent game elements that can be interacted with by different players at different times' (van Meurs 2011, p. 35). Situating *The Sims Social* as a type of asynchronous virtual world suggested that this research could benefit from the application of participant observation methods.

As SNGs are considered 'asynchronously persistent', identifying the 'site' has to be understood in a non-conventional way. Asynchronous games are characterised by suspended persistent world interaction (van Meurs 2011) in multiple sites, which makes the play experience private and unique to

each and every player. Although every player owns a house in the same neighbourhood called Littlehaven, they can only engage in one-on-one play in one of the following 'sites'; one at a time: their own 'home' environment; the home of Bella, who is a NPC in the game; in a co-players/neighbour's home; or in seasonal quest environments. In each of these environments, interactions are limited to one Sim at a time, and although the actions will persist, they are suspended until the other player logs in and approves the actions. It is also worth mentioning that the game may continue outside the game context, as *The Sims Social* players engage in emergent play initiated by members in fan pages on Facebook.

The online participant observation method required the researcher to participate in *The Sims Social* to and observe other players in formal and informal, structured and unstructured playing situations in the game. This method provided the opportunity to observe and record the players' performances during game-playing. Through play, emerging spaces of identity negotiation and performance were identified and this assisted in developing a meaningful discussion guide for the interviews. However, it is important to note that this research used online participant observation, and did not involve gathering data from offline visits to observe players at play.

Documentation of the participant observation involved keeping a journal that described personal gameplay experiences and interactions on the Malaysian Sims fan group on Facebook. Engaging with the fan group enabled the researcher to gain insights on performances in a space outside the game where emergent play took place. The fan group was an important part of the performance of identity and managing of identity because it was a unique online space where identity play collided with Facebook identity.

As part of the ethnographic dimension of this research, screen shots of the gameplay were captured. Screenshots used as part of data collection 'can be incredibly rich data points as a source of in-depth analysis when used in context of other materials' (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 114–115). It has been very useful to have screenshots to help illustrate an observation and also as a visual explanation (Boellstorff et al. 2012). It has strengthened the argument put forward in this research.

Screenshots in this research have been used as supporting material to clarify explanations of the structure of *The Sims Social,* for example those used in Chapter 2. In Chapter 7, screenshots are used to illustrate the many ways Malay women describe, regard, position and switch their Sim as well as to demonstrate the many situations in which negotiation processes occur during play. In Chapter 8, several screenshots are used to illustrate how *The Sims Social* seeped into Facebook, through fan

pages, newsfeeds and timelines. Some of the screenshots also demonstrate the emergent play that happened in the Malaysian Sim fan page.

The online participant observation commenced in April 2012 and lasted for 14 months until EA decided to officially retire the game from Facebook on 14 June 2013. There were a total of 46 women players added as neighbours in the researcher's game. Although 46 players played the game, only 22 Malay women were interviewed. Thirteen of these were grouped into two focus groups and the remaining nine women were interviewed individually. Details about the participants in this research are discussed in the following section.

Other data gathering methods: messages and discussions in Malaysian Sims fan groups

As part of the online participant observation, informal chats between the Malay women who play *The Sims Social* and the researcher took place through Facebook messenger and in the Malaysian Sims fan page contributed to the findings of this research. These informal discussions and observation on the content on the fan page occurred particularly when the researcher sought help on matters related to the game. Sometimes this revolved around the researcher's own curiosity about the performance of the players in *The Sims Social* during gameplay sessions.

Screen shots of the discussions were taken and messages were documented. Documenting data from other online contexts such as in the Malaysian Sims fan group on Facebook served to

> enhance the holistic perspective of ethnographic research, which captures a variety of facets of lived experience, is key to our consideration of these data sources. They should be taken as part of a larger corpus that factors in a variety of other materials. (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p.120)

Stage 2: Focus groups and personal interviews

The initial plan was to conduct three focus group interviews of the players. Unfortunately, there were last minute cancellations from the participants. However, they agreed to make it up with personal interviews instead. Thus, personal interviews were conducted with nine women in addition to the two focus group sessions involving a total of 13 Malay women participants.

The focus groups were a follow up from the first stage of this project. The group sessions were conducted on the 19 January 2013 and 9 February 2013 respectively in Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. Participants in both the focus groups and personal interviews were selected from the online participant observation study. (The recruitment of participants is detailed in the following section.)

The aim of these focus groups was to explore the women's perceptions of and motivations for playing casual games and SNGs, and to probe the influence of sociocultural values in their perceptions and experiences in *The Sims Social*. Supplementing the online participant observation findings with interviews provided a good opportunity to elicit first-hand information about the women's gameplay experiences and it provided them with an opportunity to share and clarify the findings gained through online participant observation. The focus group sessions and personal interviews helped in gaining different insights and complemented each other due to the limitations of each type of interview. In both focus group sessions, new information was generated as the group participants readily opened up to one another due to shared characteristics in terms of demographics and interests. Focus groups were chosen because:

- little research, and no qualitative research, had been done to obtain knowledge from the game players, in their own words
- they provided opportunity for the researcher to identify key words or terms used by the respondents. Clear and accurate definitions of these terms were agreed upon, deepening the researcher's understanding and informing the subsequent in-depth interviews and research findings
- the focus group discussion generated ideas, which were a useful guide for the researcher to ensure that research questions were fully addressed in the following in-depth interview sessions.

(Adapted from Sekaran 2003, p. 220).

The focus group setting was very informative because participants

> collectively constructed the narratives of their culture and experience. This [was] crucial because the underlying basis of the social construction is precisely that it is social, thus a social method of data collection can provide additional dimensions of understanding. (Pearce 2009, p. 201)

However, a group setting raises privacy concerns. Participants may be shy or hesitant to share their personal experiences for various reasons. Fortunately, the limitations of focus group sessions were offset in this research through nine personal interviews. These allowed the researcher to build rapport and gain the trust of the interviewees, who shared their experiences and thoughts in more detail. The interview format increased the chances of participants disclosing more personal, deep and private feelings. This research benefited from the personal interviews significantly, especially as used in

combination with the focus group findings to support the findings gathered during stage one of the research.

There were also other factors in the decision to use focus groups as a means of gathering primary data. They are inexpensive and can provide reliable data within a short time frame, questions can be adapted as necessary, doubts can be clarified, and it can be ensured that the researcher properly understands participants' responses through repeating and rephrasing the questions. Both focus groups and personal interviews allowed the researcher to pick up nonverbal cues from the respondents (Sekaran 2003), which is difficult in online setting.

Semi-structured interview form

Both the focus groups and the personal interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview form (see Appendix 5 for a copy of the semi-structured guide). Using a semi-structured interview form encouraged free-flowing conversations within the focus groups, which consisted of five and eight Malay women respectively. As in the personal interviews conducted with nine Malay women, the semi-structured interview guide enabled the researcher to tailor the questions according to the participants' answers, and made the conversation very flexible by allowing questions flowing from interviewees' answers.

The interviews began with more general questions on daily life, which covered issues of leisure time and domestic work before moving to questions on media consumption and participants' history of playing digital games, their playing habits, and issues related to managing everyday life and fitting games into their lifestyle.

As the discussion developed, the researcher began directing the discussion to participants' perception and play experience on *The Sims Social,* probing sociocultural and religious issues based on the answers provided by the participants. Other areas that were covered related to life-cycle factors such as education, being single or married, and being with or without children, and how these factors affected their experience and perception. As this project was trying to make sense of the integration of *The Sims Social* and Facebook as a whole with Malay women's everyday lives, attention was given to participants' life cycle stages as this yielded rich and meaningful data for better understanding of the impact of gender roles, identity and culture.

The only criteria used in the selection of participants for the research were being a Malay woman, with minimum age of 21 years and being a player of *The Sims Social*. This was to ensure that the selected

game players had sufficient familiarity with the game and were able to generate meaningful information in the research. This criterion was sufficient because players of 'casual games' are made up of individuals who do not fit into the typically defined hardcore gamers' identity, as these types of games are simple and flexible to play (Juul 2010). However, it was essential for this research to recruit interviewees from the online participant observation because this would produce findings and insights reflective of the gameplay being observed in *The Sims Social*.

Participant: sample and recruitment

The participants in this project were Malay women who played *The Sims Social*. ESA (2010) stated that the average age of women who are engaged with casual games is 34 years old. However, age was not determined in this research to serve two purposes. First, it tries to avoid restricting the potential of gaining insights for this research and second, is for the ease of recruiting participants for this research. However, for legal purposes, the minimum age to participate in this research was set to 21 years old. As this research was interested in exploring the performance of identity in *The Sims Social*, it made sense to recruit participants via announcements through related Facebook pages (Appendix 1).

Recruitment

The recruitment process began with creating a Facebook account solely for the purpose of this research. This account contained legitimate information about the researcher, including general identity, preferences and photos to ensure that this account was a genuine representation of an ordinary Malay woman who plays *The Sims Social*. It was important to separate my research and personal accounts so as to avoid any ethical implications, address concerns about safety and confidentiality, and to avoid influencing subjects of the research.

The recruitment process commenced through convenience sampling of friends who were already playing *The Sims Social* to spread the announcement and advertisement. For this purpose, administrators for several Malaysian-based *The Sims Social* fan pages on Facebook were contacted, and requests to become a member in the fan pages were sent and approved. Approval from the page administrators was required before the announcement could be posted on these pages. One of the administrators in one of the fan pages extended an invitation to join a different fan group, which consisted of only Malaysian *The Sims Social* players and the researcher. Since this fan group is private, it is not searchable on Facebook. It has a large and active Malaysian fan base, compared to the two fan pages joined by the researcher earlier. Some of the members from the other fan pages were also members of this fan group named, 'Malaysian Sim' fan page.

Some fan page administrators were quite strict in order to protect the safety of their members. The Malaysian Sim fan page conducted a background check on the researcher before approval. Once my membership was approved, the intention to recruit players for the purpose of this research was explained to the administrators of these fan pages. After gaining consent, the researcher proceeded with posting announcements on the fan pages to recruit participants. These announcements were posted from September 2012 until January 2013. (Please refer to Appendix 1 for the Recruitment announcement).

The announcement included brief information about the research; contact information for the researcher and details of the compensation to be paid for the participants' travelling expenses to get to the interview location. Interested players contacted the researcher via email or Facebook messenger. The researcher then responded to their enquiries and interested players were provided with detailed information about the research through the recruitment letter, and brief explanations of their rights in this research. The participants who agreed to join the research were provided with the necessary ethics documentation, involving consent and complaint forms, via email. (Please refer to Appendix 1 for the Recruitment announcement; Appendix 2 for the Information sheet for the recruitment of participants; Appendix 3 for the consent form; and Appendix 4 for the Complaint form.) The players were then added as 'friends' and added into *The Sims Social* neighbourhood to start playing.

As participation in the research grew, one of the administrators of the Malaysian Sims fan page suggested the launch of a specific group to organise the participants. Following that suggestion, a group was created under the name 'Malaysian women TSS research group society'. All information related to this research was provided and accessible to everyone in this group, at any time. Events for the focus group were organised and topics related to this research were also discussed in this group.

Data analysis

The process of data analysis was ongoing. It began at the first stage of data collection (Courtenay, Merriam & Reeves 1998, p. 68) during the online participant observation stage. At this point of data collection, initial ideas and thoughts were recorded in a process described as 'reflective or abductive', which allows intuitive interpretations of empirical data be made (Charmaz 2008, pp. 157–161). The analysis of data gathered through online participant observation was done through mental sketching or 'reflective journaling' (Willis 2007, p. 221) and recorded as part of the thick description. At this stage, the researcher was fully aware that the findings were only 'her own account'; thus, any further analyses

were suspended until the research was brought to the second stage, when it could be combined with the data obtained from focus groups and personal interviews.

In analysing the data from the focus groups and personal interviews, the researcher applied an interpretive approach, specifically thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allows flexibility in dealing with empirical data, and its use is not limited to any particular epistemological approach, making it compatible with both realist and constructivist paradigms (Braun & Clarke 2006). Highly grounded in the empirical data, thematic analysis fit the objective of this research which sought to discover the underlying meanings, assumptions and beliefs behind the social phenomenon being studied. Six phases of thematic analysis, as outlined out by Braun and Clarke (2006) are: '1) familiarizing yourself with your data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) producing the report' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 87). Described below are the phases of thematic analysis as they were applied during the analysis of data gathered from the focus groups and personal interviews:

Becoming familiar with the data

All the interviews and transcribing were done manually by the researcher. As the interviews were conducted in Malay language and were at times bilingual when English was also used, the interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure no important data was lost. Although this process took a lot of time, it gave the researcher the opportunity to become familiar with the data.

Rich and thick description of qualitative data has been described as 'an attractive nuisance' (Miles 1983, p. 117). Thus the researcher took the initiative to reduce the large amount of irrelevant data from the beginning; specifically during the transcribing session. Lindlof (1995) suggested that where there are large amounts of data this should be reduced at the physical and conceptual level. This was done through deciding to omit conversations that were unrelated to the research, such as when participants started talking about food and restaurants after they had a short break during the sessions.

The transcripts were then re-read and thoughts were noted. The transcripts were also labelled with the names of the participants and date for ease of access. At this point, the transcribed interviews were all set in Microsoft Word.

It might be worth noting that some of the participants preferred to speak English, although the majority spoke in Malay language with some English. The usage of English language shows the level of education of the participants and sometimes it also indicates social status. As much possible, the

translation of the interviews and focus groups was done in context of them being women, Malay and Muslim, living in urban parts of Peninsular Malaysia. This is done to ensure that the findings represented the actual meanings intended by the participants.

All names in the thesis were assigned with codes to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. These codes were assigned according to the type of interview each participant was involved in. In the findings sections, participants who were involved in the focus group interviews were randomly assigned with numbers (MW1 to MW13) and participants who did personal interviews were randomly assigned with alphabets (MWA to MWI).

Generating initial codes

Next, all the transcripts were transferred to NVivo software in preparation for coding. The identification of codes was mostly grounded in the empirical data; however, initial ideas had been formed during the first stage of the research, the online participant observation. As the questions in the semi-structured interview forms were already organised to address issues of online and offline identity and how it is performed and negotiated in different contexts (*The Sims Social*, Facebook and offline), the coding flowed from there. NVivo was used to code the statements. Codes were generated as they emerged from the data. This process moved back and forth as the statements were coded and decoded before a list of stable patterns of code emerged.

Searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining sub-themes

There was also movement back and forth within the three final phases. The codes were sorted into potential themes responding to each context (offline, *The Sims Social* and Facebook). For example, all coded statements relating to religious practices in relation to performance of self in *The Sims Social* were organised into one theme. Recurring codes were all sorted into themes and NVivo provided a count of coded statements from participants, indicating the strongest themes. In each main theme, there were sub-themes, indicating specific areas that were related to the main theme. An example of the themes and sub-themes is as shown in the screen shot from the NVivo file, Image 5.1.

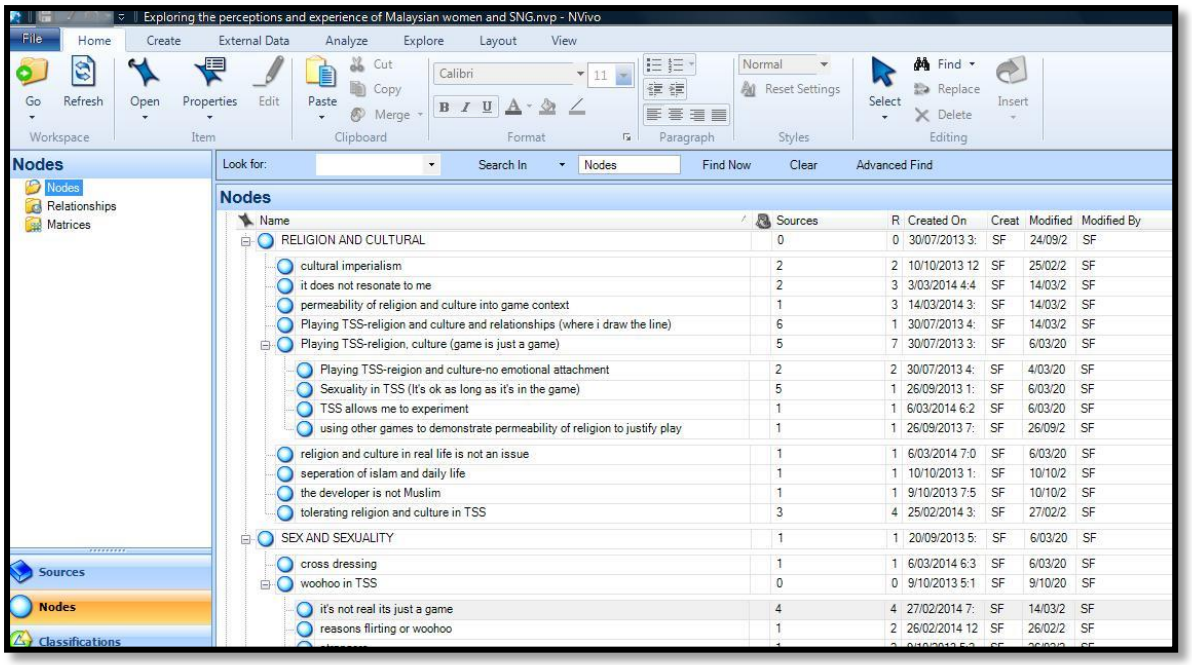


Image 5.1: Screen shot from NVivo showing initial themes and sub-themes

Defining and naming themes

Themes were defined in relation to identity performance and negotiation within each context. Themes and sub-themes were organised in relation to each context to address the research questions clearly.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the objective of this interpretive research was to understand the subject matter in context. The combination of the methods – the online participant observation and interviews – allowed the findings to be interpreted by the researcher, the participants and the supervisors of this research. This collaborative undertaking was useful as it ensured credible, plausible, and bias-free results (Fetterman 1989, p. 21 as cited in Zagado 2013, p. 65).

The importance of Islam in this research

The religion Islam is regarded as '*Ad-Din*', which means 'a way a life', by Muslims. This means that an understanding of Islam should consider not only the scriptures of the Holy Qur'an and normative commentaries (the Hadith), but also the civilisation and the 'lived' practices of its believers as shaped by cultural influences in each country. The West has often associated Islam with Arab culture, and has viewed the way Islam is practised in Asia in comparison with this (Hefner 2006). It is reasonable that most people equate Islam with the Arabs because of Islam's historical background, but this does not reflect current demographics. In fact, the latest figure shows that in 'the Middle East-North Africa region,

where the religion originated in the seventh century… is home to only about 20% of the world's Muslims' (Lipka 2017).

Conflation of Islam in general with Islam as it is practiced in the Middle East is common and this is where this research is significant in providing a Malaysian perspective in media globalisation and modernity. Muslims in Southeast Asia (including Malaysia) are significantly different to their counterparts in the Middle East or even South Asia. This can be observed in sociocultural and political spheres. In terms social and cultural spheres, there are striking differences between the Malaysia and most of the Middle East and South Asia countries in terms of gender matters and patriarchal traditions that confined women, as well as clanship, tribalism and honour and vengeance politics. Malay women enjoy a significantly higher social status compared to their Arab and South Asian sisters. This can be seen in education, where equal access to education is observed and women are not subjected to home confinement. Although there are still gendered patterns in terms of professions and wages (this is a global issue), Malay women may work outside home and this is not controversial in Malaysia, unlike some parts of the Muslim world where this is unacceptable (Hefner 2006).

Arabs in the Middle East and Muslims in South Asian countries practice complex political alliances where clan, tribal and sectarian divisions are significant. Southeast Asian Muslims have 'almost no tribal or clan associations and are described by anthropologists as somewhat "cognatic" – the more individualistic kinship found among modern Americans and Western Europeans' (Hefner 2006). This is one of the factors that made Southeast Asian Muslims more accepting of modern notions of citizenship and human rights (Hefner 2006).

In terms of politics, Malaysia's history and background has made the country pluralist and democratic. It has been known as practicing a moderate form of Islam, particularly during the reign of the then Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the current Prime Minister, Najib Razak. Malaysia is labelled as among the most liberal countries in the Muslim world (Hefner 2006).

Nevertheless, the strongest impacts of globalisation and modernity in Malaysia have been on religion and modes of social relations (Yusuf 2012). Thus, in modern times where tradition and religion are thought to be seeping away (Giddens 1991), this research has uncovered interesting perceptions and underlying feelings about being women, Malay and Muslim in semi-secular Malaysia when it comes to negotiating with Western and US values in *The Sims Social*.

Taking an ethnographic approach to this research generated particular understandings of the data gathered. As a Malay woman myself, I had the advantage of insider understandings of the participants,

which would not have been present if I had researched a different ethnicity. As an insider, the data produced rich and meaningful findings which are not vague; and parallel to the purpose of embarking on qualitative research in the first place.

Presentation of results

The findings chapters proceed according to the way the data was analysed. The findings are presented in relation to the performance of identity/self within each context, focusing on the emerging themes. There are three chapters dedicated to findings.

Quotations from the participants were extracted from the NVivo's file to support each theme discussed in the findings chapters. The quotations were translated to English at this point by the researcher. To ensure that the English translations still carry the same meaning and context, a second reader was elected to re-read the material. The second reader was selected because she shared the same background and context with the researcher- a Malay woman from Malaysia. She is also able to comprehend whether the usage of English in the translation conveys the actual meaning as intended by the participants as she obtained her Degree and Masters in Australia and has been living in Australia for 10 years.

The first chapter sets the background for understanding the consumption, comprehension and negotiation of Malay women with regard to globalised media, where they encounter globalisation and modernity and where *The Sims Social* fits in their daily lives. This will provide a basis for arguing the importance of this research because this issue, especially SNGs and other digital games, is under-researched among Malay women in Malaysia despite the significance of this digital media locally and globally.

The second chapter will focus on the performance of identity/self in *The Sims Social,* and the third chapter presents the performance of identity/self on Facebook and how the affordances of Facebook affect their overall experience. The third chapter gives attention to the management of identity as a result of clashing identities from both online contexts. All three findings chapters include representative observations, quotes and images captured from the online participant observation in *The Sims Social* to strengthen the arguments.

This research is just one account of Malay women's performance of identity/self as they encounter and experience globalisation in media, particularly through play in *The Sims Social* on Facebook. It hopes to

contribute to the existing knowledge of games and women's studies, and thus, has no intention to generalise its findings.

Chapter 6: Malay women, media consumption contexts and social network games

Introduction: Malay women's engagement with modernity via globalised media

In a globalised world, people are engaging with culture and values as an everyday 'situated' experience, connecting distant and local contexts and making the world less of a 'stranger' to all of us through mediated experience (Giddens 1991). Part and parcel of globalisation is the internationalisation of the media, especially in developing countries like Malaysia (Abdul Hamid 2004).

In Malaysia, media, and specifically television, has been an important medium for the government to promote alternative modernity, especially to Malaysian women. Although most Malaysians embrace their respective sociocultural values, foreign cultures, values and ideologies – particularly from the West – that are transmitted via media are generally accepted and considered part of the media globalisation process (Zawawi & Ibrahim 2010). However, media content from the West (as well as some non-Western media content) conflicts with Malaysian and general Asian values, and there has been much criticism of it. Western media content has been criticised by Malaysian elites and conservative parties as a threat 'to [Asian] values' and as steering viewers 'towards moral and cultural corruption' (Reality TV 2005, p. 1 as cited in Zawawi & Ibrahim 2010, p. 34). Because of this, women in Malaysia, particularly Malay women, are subject to constant scrutiny with regard to their television consumption. Many academics took an interest in this for media research for example in the works of Idrus, Hashim and Mohd Mydin (2014) Ruslan and Abdul Latif (2016) Syed and Runnel (2014). These researchers concluded that Malay women, given their background and particularly its sociocultural and religious elements, are discerning viewers who negotiate the messages on TV in their daily lives encountering globalisation and modernisation.

In recent years, however, the trend in media consumption has been changing globally and locally. The growth of internet access in Malaysia has made the web the fastest growing media in Malaysia. Following the global trend, women in Malaysia, including Malay women, are increasingly engaging with digital games. Like television, this is a space laden with cultures, values and ideologies. Unlike national television content, which is predominantly locally produced, most digital games are not. This means that the values depicted in digital games do not resonate with local Malay customs and Islamic values.

The clash of values in digital games, seen here in *The Sims Social* on Facebook, does not serve as a hindrance to Malay women communicating, understanding and embracing other cultures and values. In fact, the Malay women in this research mentioned actively communicating and building their network

with people from different countries with diverse cultures, values and backgrounds through friendships established on Facebook to play *The Sims Social* or other SNGs. The changes in the Malaysian media landscape, in this case with regards to Malay women's media consumption, provide an important indication of the migration from viewing TV to engaging with digital media content including digital gaming on social network sites. However, these changes in the media landscape are understudied and have received less attention from the government. With regards to Malay women, *The Sims Social* became one of the significant contexts where Malay women were exposed to globalisation and modernity. Thus, on a meta level, the changes in media consumption among Malay women can be seen as globalisation and modernity at work.

This chapter begins with the presentation of findings on the participants' daily media consumption, which demonstrates the significance of digital media usage (in particular, engagement with SNGs) when compared to other types of media. This provides an understanding on the significance of the SNGs that the women incorporate with other social media-related activities in their leisure time and daily lives.

The overview of the participants' daily media consumption also provides a holistic understanding that different forms of media work cumulatively. The cumulative effect of media differs from one individual to another (or from one society to another) because the construction of meaning from media is highly dependent on individual interpretation. Understanding how Malay women use *The Sims Social* on Facebook in relation to other media provides a holistic picture of their experience and the dynamics of reflexivity.

This chapter also situates this in the context of literature on women, leisure time and media as discussed in Chapter 2. Since women's media engagement is connected to their leisure time, this chapter also presents and discusses the reasons for women's selection of *The Sims Social,* and SNGs in general, with a particular focus on factors that directly influence women's leisure, play and time.

Malay women's media consumption: The internet and every other media

The focus group and in-depth interview sessions showed the importance of the internet in these women's lives. The internet was the most consistently used media on a daily basis. The internet was used for multiple reasons- for entertainment, research and information, news, education and communication. Following are some examples of responses when participants were asked about their most used media:

> Definitely the internet. Since turning 15, I started using the internet until now. I even met my husband online. I can basically say that my life revolves around the internet. I don't watch TV or listen to the radio. TV series or dramas like *Grey's Anatomy* or *Grim*, which my mother-in-law recommended, I watch online where they're all downloaded using BitComet, through torrent or peer sharing. (MWH)
>
> The internet. Even when I am in the office, I use YouTube to listen to music and watch music videos or religious programs. I also use the internet to do a lot of research. As I am currently planning for my wedding, I use the internet to search for my wedding dress, wedding packages and so on. . . (MWG)
>
> The internet, yes! (MWI)
>
> To me, Facebook and Twitter are a part of my daily routine. So usually, what I'll do on the net is to watch YouTube videos or documentaries and sometimes read the news. Most of the time I will watch tutorial videos for graphic design work as I am a self-taught designer, particularly on Adobe . . . I am trying to learn it online. (MWF)
>
> Surfing . . . YouTube. I love watching videos on YouTube particularly the how-to-videos creating cute things and cooking videos. The meals are presented beautifully, like you know? Those sorts of things. It could be baking or even a simple sandwich, which they've made to look cute! There's a user called 'ochikeron' from Japan. I also use Facebook, emails and monitoring the Air Asia website to look out for good promotions, because I love to travel. (MWC)
>
> I use internet the most, obviously. Internet and TV. I use internet to do research for work. I am always online. Research for study purposes – internet again! Basically my life revolves around the internet. Yeah, shopping, too – I have to use the internet. (MWE)

These quotes from the participants indicate the prevalence of the internet in their lives.

> I use the internet a lot! Internet . . . followed by the TV maybe? I download them [TV programs]. It is easier to watch them online. My mum and I take turns watching the downloaded programs or sometimes we do it together – there's nothing that I follow on TV anymore. (MWD)
>
> I will be online. I only spend two hours on TV a day, between 7pm and 9–10pm for news or if there's any good drama after news hour. Daytime, the TV is my daughter's and when my husband's around, he'll be watching his football program. I don't mind it because to me the internet is more important! (MW3)
>
> I never anticipate this problem, at least not until I got married [laughs, group laughs]. There will always be differences; it's like us against our better halves. At first I thought couples should share everything and be accepting, for example having the same interest in TV programs. Then, reality checks in – there will be a 'not interested' look on his face and he'll move away. Likewise, I cannot accept the type of program he's watching. So it's really a problem – happens a lot when we watch TV. No problem like that for the internet – we have our own computers. (MW4)

> We have a wi-fi connection, two computers at home – one desktop and one laptop and no issue. (MW5)
>
> At home we all use wireless. Each of us has our own device. My niece has her iPad, my mum has a hand phone. Everybody has their own device. (MW6)

The majority of the participants acknowledged having at least one device of their own for personal use to access the internet, seeing it as a personal medium that gave them the freedom to choose and engage with content at their convenience. Smartphones were mentioned as the core contributing factor making the internet a more accessible option:

> I guess partly it's because I have a smartphone. Everything is easy, everything is at the tip of your fingers . . . I guess it's the era. (MW7)
>
> Internet and TV. My mobile phone is important to me as I use it to communicate. I use Twitter to communicate with my business partner and you can hear the 'Tweeting' notification sound 24/7. And although I am not in range when I am at home, I just utilise my Unifi (wi-fi service) to continue to communicate with everyone . . . I can also continue to keep in contact through Twitter. (MW8)
>
> When I am bored, like while I am waiting for someone, I will take out my phone and go on to Facebook, because at times, that's the only thing available; the phone just happens to be there. I cannot give a specific reason why I log on to Facebook. (MW5)
>
> Umm, I will surf the net using my iPad, using my mobile phone, using my desktop, using my laptop – like I'll be online on all these, all at once. (MWE)

The conversation with the Malay women participants also revealed another important reason- the internet had become their number one media selection. The internet allowed them to be more in control of their time and enabled multitasking. As they were either busy at work or at home with children, the internet, specifically social media and *The Sims Social,* was a perfect match for their small, fragmented moments of free time throughout the day. This is coherent with the notion of women's play, leisure and fragmented, uncontaminated free time as discussed by Rosemary Deem (1987), Mattingly and Bianchi (2003), Aitchinson (2003), Winn and Heeter (2009), and Chess (2009). In general, the participants described *The Sims Social* as something they engaged with at their convenience because it allowed them to multitask:

> It depends on the amount of time I have. If I have only a short bursts of time to spare, social networking will be a better option. If I have more time then I'll go out, maybe for a movie. (MW4)
>
> I will be on the computer from morning until night. Whenever I am free, I'll play. It all depends on the energy level. I'll have a few tabs open simultaneously. The computer will be switched on from eight in the morning until noon and it continues until night. (MW3)

> I play and multitask it with house chores. (MW8)
>
> It is very random, in between tasks like while doing my assignments. I don't have specific times. (MW4)
>
> I'll play it in between my work. When I am done with my job and have passed it on to the other departments. While waiting for the job to make its way back to me, that's the time I'll be playing because that's when I'm free. (MW6)
>
> I will 'steal' some time. When I complete a job, I'll play for a while. Then I get back to work, finish it and then play again – alternating between work and play. (MW9)
>
> In the morning, as I am about to get myself ready to work, I'll just check it for a while – do the basic, routine stuff. Then take my shower, and so on. Then during lunch time, I'll play it once more – just for a while and then before commuting home. At home, I'll be on the computer almost all the time and playing. In the office, I'll play for 10 or 15 minutes max, just to get the important stuff sorted out. I time everything. Yeah, surprisingly, I do that [laughs]. I even set the time for him [her Sim] to go to work. (MWA)
>
> Unlike some players – they have the know-how to unlimited energy – I only have 15 [energy units], thus I have to work with pretty much what I have. 15 energy [units] is not much, you know – there's nothing much you can do with it – but it's great because it sort of regulates the way I play. I'll stop once the energy is finished. I get back to work and after like an hour, I'll come back to the game. I spend around 15 minutes each time I play and will come back every hour. (MW10)
>
> I will log in to Facebook and to play *The Sims Social* like for an hour, at least, when I am at home. At the office, I'll spend around 10 or 15 minutes on *The Sims Social* and Facebook. I'll play till I have consumed all the energy and switch to Facebook while waiting for the energy to load up. So I'll be switching between TSS to Facebook. Sometimes I play up to an hour per session and will switch back and forth from play to work. I can play up to four hours per day. (MW9)
>
> It's the same for me as well . . . at the office, I keep Facebook on . . . switch back and forth from Facebook to TSS. I'll play as long as I have the energy and then when the energy's finished, I'll switch back to other things and wait for it to re-energise. (MW6)

Interviews and discussions with these Malay women show how easily *The Sims Social* became embedded in their daily lives. Because playing *The Sims Social* did not take much of their time, it could be incorporated easily while doing work – be it studying, working or while doing house chores. *The Sims Social*, like other casual games, was designed to be flexible (Juul 2010) enough for these women to be able to incorporate the game into their daily lives, be it at work or at home. Being able to arrange play around their daily routines also spared these women from feeling guilty:

> I never feel guilty because I only play when I have the free time. I've done all the housework, now let's find some other work – yeah, play *The Sims.* (MW7)
>
> I guess, no, because I am able to multitask while playing. (MW8)

> No, never once I have I felt that way [laughs]. I only play games when I have free time – when I'm done with all my work. Why should I feel guilty? (MWA)

For some of the women, playing *The Sims Social* was a passion and also a reward they felt they deserved: time to themselves.

> Umm . . . I will find time because playing *The Sims Social* and *The Sims* series is something I'm passionate about. I never feel guilty about it, because I allocate my time, like a lot of my time to my work, to my study and so on. So, why should I feel guilty for having two or three hours a day to do something I am passionate about? We have 24 hours a day, eight hours of pure work, and then two or three hours of study and then why not reward yourself. (MWE)

> No, no guilt. It's making time for yourself. We can make time for others like for friends and families. So we should make time for ourselves. (MWB)

> I justify it like, I've worked so hard this week and okay, I deserve this, it's my time, just go ahead and do it. (MWC)

> Sometimes I feel that way [feeling guilty] but then there are also times that I just like, I need this for myself, so I can be sane sometimes . . . (MWD)

However, some of women mentioned that playing *The Sims Social* and digital games could be counterproductive, which made them feel guilty.

> Yeah, yeah . . . sometimes. Games excite you for a while and once you're done with it, you're pretty much done with it. Unlike books, no. There's always something new. If you read one book say, 10 thousand times there will be 10 thousand new things for you to discover. So, it's something like that. Games, they pretty much, how, do I say? Numbing you in the process of thinking or something like that . . . I think. (MWF)

> I sometimes feel I am selfish. At times when my mum starts nagging about me being locked away in my room. She insists that I help her in the kitchen. But there are days when you don't feel like helping – just feeling lazy. I thought to myself … there's no need for my help, my mum can manage it on her own, but yeah, it gets to me. It made me feel guilty. Not too much, just a little bit [laughs]. I will respond to her by saying, 'I have this important thing to attend to, I'll settle this quickly and be right down' [laughs]. (MWG)

> Sometimes, honestly, I didn't take my shower – the whole day. I wake up: TSS. Go downstairs and lunch. Go back to my room and back to my TSS. Then my husband came back and saw me just lying around playing *The Sims Social*, and then he started nagging. Now, I have become a little bit better; at least I shower [laughs]. (MW1)

Feelings of guilt or not stemmed from the pleasures participants derived from their engagement with the internet and *The Sims Social*. Playing *The Sims Social* did not give them a direct feeling of being productive, but being able to fit *The Sims Social* in their own time satisfied them and allowed them to brush the guilt away. They also felt they deserved to be rewarded for all the hard work they did.

Television, although still being incorporated in their lives, appeared to be less significant, with most rating TV as the second most used medium or one used simultaneously with the internet.

> I'd say TV would be my second most used media, but still, I don't use it much. I can say that my life revolves around the internet. TV is only used on weekends. Like coming home from work, I'll sit in the living room for a while – that's my definition of 'watching TV'. (MWA)

> Before there was *The Sims Social* in my life and before I became addicted to the internet, I watched TV only. Now I do both. I do watch the TV, it's not really effective [laughing] because I do both at the same time. I play TSS while watching TV. (MW9)

Instead of watching their favourite syndicated TV programs on television, participants preferred downloading their favourite programs via file sharing hosts such as isoHunt, which stream torrent files. Most of the TV programs that were watched were US television programs such as *2 Broke Girls, How I Met Your Mother, Supernatural* and *Merlin*, which were either downloaded or purchased in the form of DVDs, commonly watched continuously for a few hours until the season was completed.

> The programs that I want to watch are not available on local channels; like *2 Broke Girls*. My friend and I follow this program. And because she has Unifi, she'll do the downloading. (MW2)

> I don't watch TV . . . not much. My mum is a hardcore TV fan, not me. I do follow some series: *Suits, How I Met Your Mother, House, CSI, Friends*. I just download them from torrent files. (MWF)

> TV? Oh I don't. Basically I will go to megashare.info where I get to watch all the TV programs. I don't really have to download anything; I just watch them online. (MWE)

> I simply download any movie I want to watch, even TV series. Like, a few days ago, I wanted to watch *Merlin* so I downloaded the whole season. I don't have to wait to watch the whole season on TV. (MW8)

> I used to watch TV a lot but since I am busy now . . . I don't have the time to watch TV. I used to follow certain TV series such as *Grey's Anatomy*, and the old ones like *The X Files*. But now . . . no more . . . [laughing]. (MW7)

Often, the participants were engaged in different activities on the digital platform simultaneously: social media, digital gaming (including both casual games/SNGs and MMORPGs), reading, watching videos on YouTube, browsing and writing blogs.

Watching TV in its traditional sense has been taken over by the internet, where watching downloaded programs (syndicated series or sitcoms) happens at the same time as engaging with social media or playing digital games. The importance of the internet has also forced TV to converge with the internet and launch 'catch-up TV' such as Tonton by TV3 and live streaming of live TV programs. The personal

video recorder (PVR) technology introduced by Malaysia's only satellite TV – Astro – has provided an option for viewers to catch up with their favourite TV programs.

Having the internet as their more important, personal medium, these women seem to readily 'give in' to other family members when it came to TV watching. The function of television had changed through the way they utilised it: it was used for social purposes, as a way to bond with family members – husbands, mothers, and children – rather than as a sole source of entertainment and relaxation.

> My mum watches [*Keeping Up With The Kardashians*]. They are a silly and a crazy bunch, like seriously?! But we still want to watch it. My sister hates them so much and she'll say, 'Oh, I hate them – I want to change the channel' and my mum and I will say 'no, no, no . . . don't change the channel!' [Laughs]. This is my way of spending time with my family because it's just so much more fun to watch it with them. When you watch it alone, it's boring – no one to talk to and there'll be no commentator. (MWC)

> It depends on when I get to watch the TV because I live with my sister's family. They will be watching something different to what I prefer, so if I happened to be in the living room, then I'll just watch what they're watching. (MW2)

Alongside the internet, participants also engaged in other electronic media like television, watching movies and listening to the radio. But most of the time, these media were not consumed in their 'traditional' pattern. Movies were considered a form of out of home social activity, watched in cinemas during weekends – although they did occasionally download movies or watch them from the internet.

> I use the internet a lot. To think of it – it is unavoidable because I work with the internet. I watch TV sometimes, most probably just to watch the news because there will be times when I watch the news on TV and say to myself, 'when was the last time I watched the news on TV?' I'll take my time to watch the news. Actually, we can get the news online, even from Facebook or Twitter without TV we won't be left behind. Books, yes, I do read during free time. I love to watch movies – I frequent the cinema or buy the DVD. (MW11)

> [I am] studying and because of that I don't watch TV at all. I am a 100% dependent on the internet. I do online readings and use YouTube for information or input. I do not follow any Malay dramas, such as *Adam dan Hawa* but I do watch movies . . . downloaded from the internet. (MW6)

Radio was the 'background' media, normally consumed during the morning or evening drive time in the car. Some of the participants listened to web radio as they play online games (such as *The Sims Social*) or while engaging with other internet activities. Radio was not a significant media choice because most preferred downloading or purchasing their favourite songs and listening to them via smartphones or iPods, which could be connected to their car stereos.

> The second most used media, most probably is radio because I tune into the radio when I am driving to and from work. I listen to FlyFM. I listen to the English radio station simply because I am used to it and there is lots of nonsense on the [Malay] radio and I don't listen to Malay songs . . . (MWG)

> I began playing *The Sims Social* when I started living in the hostel with a friend. We normally mind our own stuff. When I play *The Sims Social*, I will normally listen to the online radio. I mute the game's sound so I can listen to the radio, especially when I am out of energy. . . (MW2)

Some of them favoured English language radio station over Malay language ones. This is an important indication to the content type they favoured and were exposed to. English radio stations play more English language international songs (predominantly from the US), while Malay radio stations predominantly play Malay songs featuring local artists.

> I don't even listen to the radio anymore. I listen to my songs. I already have that – the decoder thing in my car. I plug it in; then just listen to my own songs because songs on radio, I can't, like, stand it anymore. (MWD)

The more 'traditional' media such as books and magazines were mentioned by some of the informants. Reading novels and self-help books before going to bed and, for those who were still studying, reading academic textbooks, was part of their media consumption. Entertainment magazines were mentioned during the sharing session, although these were not significant media as gossip and celebrity news was available online.

> Time for myself means I'd spend it reading books, mainly self-help books, watching documentaries and videos. Basically, reading [books]. I love reading because my mum is a dedicated reader. I think I got it from her. We [as a family] read a mixture of everything. Because my brother is all about business, he reads all business books. My mum is all about fantasy and love life, so my mum is the fiction kind of person. I'm more on self-help books, self-improvement, people's experiences and stuff. My dad is pretty much the same as me. (MWF)

> I love reading novels, both Malay and English novels, but now I don't have the time. It is sad and I am frustrated to think about these things that I can no longer do. I know as a student, I should be reading more, but I guess partly it's because I have a smartphone. (MW7)

Conclusion

The complexities of women's notions of play, leisure and time were very much dependent on sociocultural factors (gender roles) and self-identity factors. Findings from the Malay women in this research regarding media consumption patterns and experiences conform to the existing literature on women's play and leisure time (see for example Aitchinson 2003; Chess 2009; Deem 1987; Mattingly &

Bianchi 2003; Winn & Heeter 2009) in which leisure time is fragmented, and gratification and quality are central to leisure activities.

The internet, and especially *The Sims Social*, had significant impact on the way these Malay women consumed media and managed their daily lives. *The Sims Social* was designed for flexibility, allowing its players to 'multitask' while playing. Casual games design allows flexibility in terms of its speed and ease of access. They are easy to learn, require no previous special skills in video games, and require little time commitment to play (Casual Games Market Report 2007). Juul (2010) described casual games as 'highly interruptible', which means it is easy to pause, stop and restart with little effect on the player's enjoyment (Juul 2010). This gives players a sense of control, of being able to incorporate leisure and play in their daily lives. Participants' engagement with the media in general, and *The Sims Social* in particular, demonstrated prioritising and multitasking, as shown in existing research on women's play and leisure in their fragmented free time (Chess 2009; Mattingly & Bianchi 2003). This translates into productivity, pleasure and reward. Prioritising and multitasking became a way to dismiss feelings of guilt related to the pleasure they derived from their media engagement. In general, these Malay women found pleasure in being able to multi-task and having to find the time to engage with *The Sims Social* while at work or handling house work.

The interviews with these Malay women also revealed a significant pattern of media consumption, referred to as 'media multitasking', in which more than one medium is engaged with simultaneously (Xu & Wang 2017). Media multi-tasking commonly happens with internet-related activities such as playing games paired with social media like Facebook; or watching YouTube videos while listening to music online, browsing the web, listening to the radio or watching TV. The use of two or more media at the same time is not a new phenomenon, but the 'increasing ownership of internet-enabled devices has also resulted in simultaneous media consumption' (Reports and Insights: Turning Digital: The Asian Media Landscape, Nielsen 2012).

The informants of this research revealed they were engaged with other computer or internet-related technology while playing *The Sims Social.* They emailed, browsed the internet for reading or information, blogged and watching videos. This was possible because games like *The Sims Social* and other casual games require little attention, and can be played concurrently with other activities such as work in the office or home (Winn & Heeter 2009). Casual games enabled these women to spend their small, fragmented leisure time at their convenience.

The Malay women in this research also showed a pattern that suggests the proliferation of transnational, global media content among Malay women as a result of various media consumption practices on a daily basis. This proliferation was 'welcomed' because these Malay women had a preference for US-based programs and content over local content in all media they frequently engaged with; namely the internet, movies, TV series, reality TV shows and radio. This pattern is very important to note because media is an important tool in making a significant 'window' for a person to experience globalisation and modernity. Therefore, the selection of the content they watched or engaged with on a daily basis determined the messages they were exposed to.

While it is undeniable that the internet is populated with content from all over the world, most of the platforms and their content were predominantly developed and maintained in the US – social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and SNGs like *The Sims Social*. These are the outlets where globalisation and modernity were experienced on a daily basis.

For Malaysians, foreign media programs are not unfamiliar. Considering television was one of the most powerful media, particularly when it first started, Malaysian media scholars have written about how television was responsible for opening up Malaysians to globalisation and modernity on a bigger scale.

The first Malaysian TV station, *Rangkaian Satu* (translated to English as Channel One) was established in 1963 and broadcast local content solely in the Malay language. It was not until 1969, when *Rangkaian Dua* (translated as Channel Two, now known as TV2) was established, that imported programs came pouring into Malaysian TV due to the lack of expertise and funding to produce local programs (Karthigesu 1994). When television broadcasting in Malaysia entered the privatisation era, and TV3 was launched as the first private TV station in Malaysia, imported content increased and was mainly sourced from the US (Hashim 1995).

It was during these earlier days, in the 1960s and 70s, that a variety of 'primetime Western series like *Mannix, The Odd Couple* and *Streets of San Francisco* were reported as being the most popular programs' (Syed 2011, p. 99). After the privatisation period from 1980s to the 1990s, American programs continued to rule, with soaps like *Dallas, Dynasty, Baywatch* and *Beverly Hills 90210* (just to name a few) broadcast on local free-to-air television stations in Malaysia (Karthigesu 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1998). The flow of American pop culture continued with the introduction of satellite TV in Malaysia in 1996. Astro brought in latest music, movies and reality TV shows through channels like HBO, MTV, AXN, E! Entertainment and Diva Universal (*You Can Enjoy More Of The Latest TV Series From The U.S. | Press Release | Mediaroom | Astro 2015*).

With more than 95% penetration of radio and television across the whole population, almost all Malaysian households had access to satellite and free-to-air television channels (Pawanteh 2004). This shows the extent of media reach. For years, Malaysians have been exposed to American culture in particular.

Thus, representations of Americans and their way of life were not new to these Malay women because they had 'experienced' TV programs and movies, songs and music videos on MTV or Channel V. This was particularly true for the Malay women in this research, as their selection of serials and dramas were mostly American and represented American or Hollywood lifestyles, particularly in programs such as *How I Met Your Mother, 2 Broke Girls Suits, House, CSI,* or reruns of *Friends;* and reality TV programs such as *Survivors, Keeping up with the Kardashians* or *Fashion Police*. In other words, these programs had prepared them culturally for what to expect when they played *The Sims Social*.

In *The Sims Social*, the depiction of Western cultural values is ubiquitous. Religious celebrations such as Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving were accepted and considered normal by the Malay women. Apart from the fact that American/Western culture was familiar to these women, they have lived in a multicultural country of religious pluralism which contributed to their high tolerance and acceptance of differences.

Negotiation and tolerance are important, particularly in the Malay Muslim society in Malaysia. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Malays have gone through a long process of negotiating between and blending Islam and *adat Melayu* (Malay customs). The negotiation process continued as the Malays blended in with the Chinese and Indians prior to Malaya's independence in 1957. With the steady process of globalisation and modernity that began in Malaya prior independence in 1957, the Malays were gradually exposed to Western and cosmopolitan values. All of these required a significant amount of reflexivity.

Today, as the internet speeds the processes of globalisation and modernity at a rapid rate, Malaysians generally, and the Malays in particular, are exposed to Western values in different ways. Instead of a mere third-person watching Hollywood and Western TV, movies or music videos or listening to songs, the internet has brought more interactive and engaging media, such as Facebook and *The Sims Social*. The next chapter presents Malay women's engagement with *The Sims Social,* with a focus on the way it enables Malay women to experience Western/US culture and values through play in a way unmatched by more traditional media such as television.

Chapter 7: Malay women playing *The Sims Social*

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, globalisation has largely normalised American and Western cultural values among Malaysians. Globalisation has led to the convergence of Western and the local cultures, particularly via media. A handful of studies focusing on Malay women and their consumption of mass media have indicated that Malay women are able to employ critical thinking when they watch Western and Hollywood programs. They are aware that some sociocultural values of the media are not in tune with Malaysian or Asian culture in general, and Malay Islamic values in particular. Thus, they are selective in what they accept from viewing these programs.

However, the ways Malay women engage with *The Sims Social* are different from their engagement with media such as television. The element of play in *The Sims Social* offers a context in which the American and Western cultures and values can be experimented with in an engaging, safe and playful environment.

This chapter shows Malay women's experience of play in *The Sims Social*. Due to the nature of the medium, *The Sims Social* was not readily observable by the public, unlike TV or magazines. The chapter also highlights the negotiation of identity that happens in the game context, as it relates to being Malay, Muslim and a woman in Malaysia.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part presents the participants' first encounter with American and Western values in *The Sims Social* through the customisation of their Sims as enabled by the game's affordances. With options that are wide but not exhaustive, these Malay women negotiated their way through the customisation menu. The findings show the many ways Malay women position themselves within the game via their Sims as their identity negotiator, which also established their worldview as they embarked upon the game.

The second part of the chapter presents the participants' encounter and interactions with American and Western culture and values embedded in *The Sims Social* textually. It presents and discusses their performances of identity play in the game realm, highlighting both the acceptable, tolerable values presented in the game and the ones they rejected.

The performance of identity play by these Malay women within *The Sims Social* shows reflexivity at work in the act of switching of frames, in the terms of Pargman and Jakobsson's (2008) frame metaphor. As discussed in Chapter 4, the frame metaphor explains the way players manage their

multiple identities in different contexts while they are inside or outside the game. The nature of *The Sims Social,* which is played on Facebook, requires the players to constantly consider the consequences of their identity play for their more consistent self-presentation on Facebook. Thus, Linderoth's notion of self-presentation position taken during play combined with Pargman and Jakobsson's frame metaphor are used to describe the performance of multiple identities as these Malay women juggle identity play and self-presentation when engaging within the game realm. Frame switching was very active during play and this may have had a carryover effect on Facebook too. All of these issues are taken up towards the end of this chapter.

Sims as identity negotiators

The Sim was the player's locus of manipulation in *The Sims Social*. The customisation of the Sim was the first experience where players started to think about and negotiate identity. The build of the players' Sim somehow determines their worldview in the game: it sets the tone for the rest of the play in Littlehaven.

Most Malay women in this research began describing their Sims as a representation of themselves, before going on to further describe their Sim and the position of their Sim in the game. In the interviews, most described their Sim as a representation of themselves, with various degrees of aspiration or extension of selves. This can be interpreted as a form of exploration, freedom or escapism (see Image 7.1).

> My Sim represents me. This is obvious through her physical attributes like her hair length and she wears dresses all the time. I'll make sure she changes her dress when there's new dress option. Career wise, because I couldn't find a career that matches mine, I picked my dream job – a rock star. Because I cannot play a guitar, I let her learn and be good with the guitar. She represents me or something that I want to be. (MW10)

> She represents me. She has the same hair like mine, she's got bangs, and she wears glasses. I let her wear worn-out torn jeans, just like me. The only thing that's not the same is I can't play instrument, but she can because she's a rock star. (MW11)

> Yes, in games the character usually represents me. My Sim is a female (MW1)

> Well, she is totally my ideal self – a free-spirited, careless, very bubbly gal, because basically those elements are in me, like artistic, free-spirit and so on. She is thin, which is important because it is something that I hope to achieve in the future. (MWE)

MW11

MW10

WWE

Image 7.1: Players' Sims as representations of themselves

Several participants chose a male Sim in the game. A couple thought a male Sim was a better representation of them as a person and their personality (see Image 7.2):

> From the start I chose to be a man. I chose a male Sim because I don't really like girly stuff. I am not too interested in playing dress-up and those kinds of stuff. Although he's a man, he represents me. It's not that I want to be a man, no [laughs]. I guess growing up with my brothers has its influence on me. I love football; I like to do 'rough' things. As a child, I always wanted to wear boy's clothes and even insisted wearing pants to kindergarten. (MW7)

> My Sim is a male. I use my own name. His style, physique, everything resembles me. It's me but in a different gender. I would say, for me it's not that I really want to be a man. But then, hmm . . . if I were to be given the option, I want to be a man, I'd say I wanted to try to be a man. Not for real, just trying. So in a way, I created that Sim as a representation of myself in a male version. In the game you can do whatever you want to do – flirt, woo-hoo, anything! Nobody is going to stop you or scold you. It's ok to express it. (MWA)

WW7

MWA

MW8

MWC

Image 7.2: Male Sims as a representation of players' selves

There were a few who mentioned that their Sim was their alter ego, or a total opposite of their own personality (see Image 7.3):

> My Sim is a girl because I've never wanted to become something else. I make my Sim the person I will never be, like wearing revealing clothes because I don't in real-life. She's a musician, which I am not. So I would say it's more of a fulfilment of what I can't do. Almost like my alter ego. (MW12)

> She is me – an 'improved' version. She has hair like mine. Similarities stop there. Her clothes: sexy. I think she is the dark side of me [laughs]. I even have a relationship that allows me to 'woo-hoo'. So, I am like, 'yeah, let's woo-hoo' [laughs]. (MW6)

> My Sim is a female, someone else – she's a total opposite of me. If I were to be in the game, I wouldn't be like her. She has a *kiasu* [a Hokkien dialect word for 'selfish'] personality, a trait I cannot associate myself with. It is just a game character that I created to play the game. She has blonde hair . . . I just want to separate myself from the game, you know? (WMH)

Another two participants created a male Sim to play *The Sims Social* and described it as their idealised man. One of them stated in general the reasons for having a male Sim:

> I felt that being a woman in *Sims Social* is just too common and it's just all about wearing beautiful clothes. But being a man is about being macho. I wanted a character that has a possibility to exist in real-life – and must be good looking. My Sim is a representation of my ideal man in real-life. (MWC)

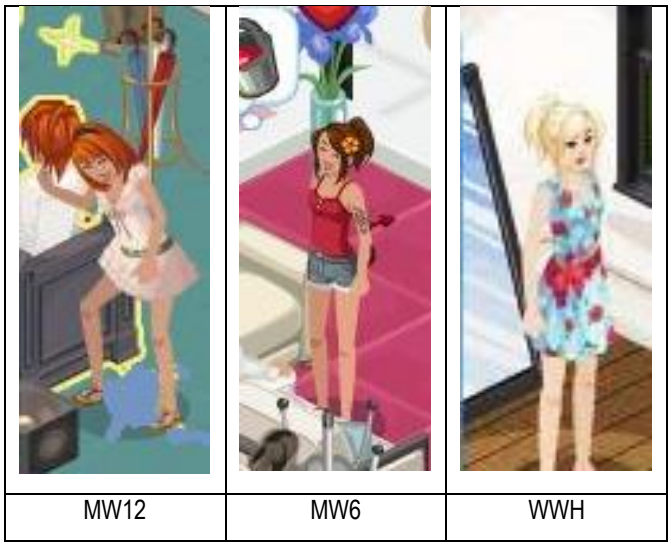
However, the other woman talked about how her Sim was inspired by her favourite footballer, Iker Casillas. She also talked about how some of the physical characteristics of her Sim were inspired by Hollywood actor Robert Downy Jr., which sparked an interesting conversation among the group.

> **MW8** : I created a male Sim because there are too many female Sims in there. I copied 100% my favourite footballer, Iker Casillas. He's sporty and everything about him, like his hair, resembles my kind of man [laughs]. So, when people asked me about my type of man, I basically describe my Sim. I like him because of his . . .
>
> **MW10**: Goatee? [Laughs]
>
> **MW8** : [laughs] yeah . . . like that 'Ironman' guy . . .
>
> **MW11**: Robert Downey Jr.
>
> **MW2** : Oh, I like him too [laughs]

A few participants described their Sim as a tool they created to navigate the game and win quests, accumulate house values and be the player with a top score (see Image 7.4):

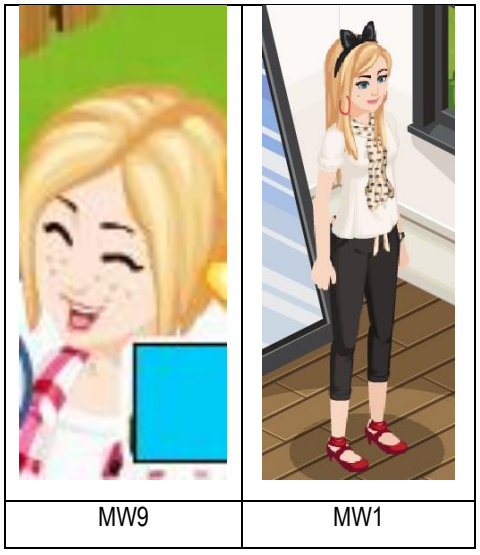
> She has got nothing to do with me. No connection whatsoever. The Sim is there to do what it is supposed to, which is to complete the tasks and quests in there. I just want to get the game moving. The Sim is not important; the quests are important. I used to think about what to wear, the hairstyle, but that was a long time ago. Not anymore. My priority is on the tasks. (MW9).

She is not me, and she's not somebody else and she is not what I aspire to be – nothing like that really. To me, she's like a doll, the doll we would buy from the store and play with when we were kids. Like the dolls made from paper – I play with my Sim the same way – change her clothes. And she is not a representation of me, no. (MWI)



MW12	MW6	WWH

Image 7.3: Sim as alter ego or total opposite



MW9	MW1

Image 7.4: Sim as tool

The interviews and focus groups revealed that the positions taken by these Malay women in the game were never static. They could switch to fit the attitudes, intentions and motivations of the player during play. This parallels Bayliss's description of the positions of characters during play. The switching of positions was more apparent in players who described their Sim as a representation of themselves or their aspirational selves compared to those who started the game identifying their Sims as merely a tool for the game. Understanding the way these women customised and described their Sims indicated that positions within the game exist simultaneously. Players may switch from one position to another according to the situations encountered during play.

As Malay Muslim women, religion and Malay culture were central to participants' identities. However, playing *The Sims Social* allowed them to be playful and take different positions in expressing themselves. Behaviours forbidden by religion could sometimes be unforbidden within the game realm, but some cultural norms were strictly obeyed by the players. This could be seen in the ways players expressed their opinions about the game:

> She's [the Sim is] me with freedom of expression. Like, in real-life you're bounded by something like religion or culture and money. (MW4)

> To me, there are some things that are acceptable because it's just play. Like my relationship with a girl and I feel just fine because it's not real. But there are things that I don't tolerate in the game like when it comes to home decorations with a fortune telling ball or Christmas – I don't have that in my house. Because in real-life I won't do that. I am not sure I can give you a reason for that, but maybe it has to do with my religious belief. I do not want my Sim to be engaging in things like that . . . I assume my Sim is a Muslim [laughs]. (MW10)

> In a way, my Sim is a reflection of who I am, so when it comes to clothing, I choose modest attire. (MW3)

Another example of bending religious rules could be seen through participants' opinions on how they would respond if hijab were to be included as part of dressing options in the game. This discussion on hijab was directed to participants in this research who observe the hijab in their daily lives. Responding to this question, the Malay women who observed the hijab expressed the feeling of relief and they appreciate the fact that *The Sims Social* excluded religious conventions – especially in the customisation for *The Sims* – because this allowed them to be playful in the game without feeling guilty or obligated to don the hijab in the game realm. For example, one of the participants stated that:

> I'd like the idea [that 'hijab' is not available as an option in *The Sims Social*]. TSS is a place for me to experiment with what I can't do in real-life, like my relationship with a girl in TSS – something that will never happen in real-life. (MW5)

Image 7.5: Examples of profile pictures in The Sims Social featuring Malay women who observe the hijab together with their Sims. Their faces were blurred to protect privacy.

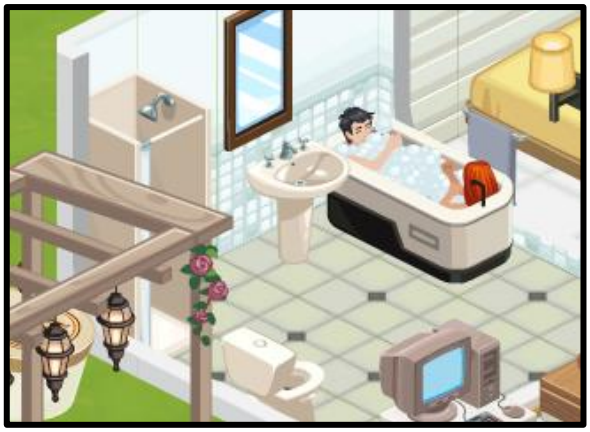
Image 7.5 shows examples of profile pictures in *The Sims Social* which belong to Malay women who observe the hijab in their daily lives. The game's profile picture uses players' Facebook profile picture and pairs it with their Sim. This is prominently displayed as the game's profile picture.

The encounter that started from the moment they created their Sims indicates the level of tolerance participants had towards the cultures and values embedded in *The Sims Social.* Play allowed them to experience American and Western culture. Their justification of their performance somewhat signifies the concept of magic circle. The next section focuses on the environment of the game, which is a significant touch point because players are open to a wider range of experiences embedded in the game in which they perform their identity play as part of the gameplay.

Playing in Littlehaven: the concept of magic circle

As we have seen, Malay women playing *The Sims Social* in this research were generally accepting and flexible towards the American and Western sociocultural values presented in the game. They performed behaviours which are unacceptable or prohibited among the Malays and Islamic values, such as wearing revealing and provocative clothing, engaging in unmarried or open sexual relationships, alcohol consumption, gender bending or swapping, celebrating religious festivals such as Christmas, Thanksgiving or Halloween, and engaging in fortune telling, which is prohibited in Islam. Below are some images taken from gameplay sessions showing Malay women engaging in these acts in *The Sims Social* (see Image 7.6 and Image 7.7).

Consuming alcoholic beverages



Premarital sexual relationships

Queer relationships

Participating in non-Muslim religious celebrations, e.g. Christmas

Image 7.6: The above screenshot images are examples of American and Western lifestyles being performed by Malay women in The Sims Social

Halloween

Fortune telling

Image 7.7: Examples of American and Western lifestyles being performed by Malay women in The Sims Social.

When justifying their performances in *The Sims Social,* participants emphasised the importance of separating *The Sims Social* from their real world. They stated that play should remain in the game context and should never be taken seriously, as indicated by these women:

> Yeah . . . I don't mind it really . . . for me it's just a game. Like in my case, my Sim is in a relationship with your Sim, and both of us are male. I don't have a problem with that . . . I don't mind [laughs]. Offline, we are both women, but I don't feel there's anything wrong. (MW7)

> To me, I don't mind because it's a game. We shouldn't be too immersed into thinking that the game is real. But for some, they might take the game too seriously. They take it outside the game and into their real-life. I do have a friend like that, I'll tell them, 'Relax, it's just a game'. A game is for you to enjoy. (MWC)

> We shouldn't get too emotionally involved with the game we play. Problems start the moment you mix game and reality. I play to release tension and just to be happy, as simple as that. (MWI)

> I have never really thought of that. It doesn't matter to me. I am not claiming I am a pious person. All the cultural values contradicting Islamic or Malay values in *The Sims Social*, I don't mind it at all. It's just in the game and it stays there. I don't practice it [in real-life]. My faith and belief in Islam doesn't change simply because I play this game. I have Christmas decorations on my door, the Halloween pumpkins and so on. . . it's just a game and I never really take it seriously. (MWG)

> Yeah. I think everything is okay. Because for me, I was brought up in a family where religion is important, but then again at the same time you need to respect other people's religion as well, I believe in reciprocating respect. I don't draw a line in what I do in the game because I know my limits in real-life and for me that is just a game. (MWE).

Although all these women felt accepting and comfortable with American and Western cultural beliefs and seemed able to compromise; the game environment was perceived as a simulation of 'reality'. To a certain extent, this shows the fluidity of identity of these participants, as they negotiate the sociocultural values presented in the game, and at times showing some form of 'person frame' raised as they negotiated their way through their encounters.

Up to this point, the concept of magic circle has been invoked as a means to negotiate differences. For these participants, there was a virtual 'wall' separating the game and reality, or, in other words, separating their playful character within the game context from their real world. The concept of the magic circle can be used to describe the justification that empowered these Malay women to think it is fine to play and experiment with identity in *The Sims Social,* as long as this stayed in the game. To most of them, their Sims were a representation of themselves which embodied freedom, personal pleasure or escapism. Negotiating identity as Malay women during play in *The Sims Social* at this point can be summarised as 'It's just a game'.

It was also easy for these players to detach themselves from the game, because the game did not resonate with them, due to the lack of a 'real-world element'. The depiction of American and Western values and lifestyles further enhanced the difference between these sociocultural and religious values and their own, thus instilling a sense of foreignness in the Malay women. This sense of foreignness can be seen as early as the moment they stepped into the game, in encountering the options for customising *The Sims*. This was evident in the way they described their Sims. The absence of options for customising their Sims at the very beginning of the game set the tone of the game, and they described the game as a place for pleasure, to experiment and play (as discussed in the previous section on the customisation of their Sims). This feeling contributed to the invoking of a magic circle among Malay women participants in this research. This indicated the process of reflexivity during play. Each and every encounter that required negotiation saw the 'person frame' prioritised in the process of negotiation.

In other words, justifying their performances that are against the Islamic values and culture requires them to interact with the values from the game in a reflexive process which invokes the concept of magic circle. Describing this from the frame metaphor (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008) perspective, this process saw the switching of frames or the state of mind of the Malay women- from being in 'character frame' to 'person frame' then back to 'character frame' as they make decisions while playing the game.

Often, the switching of frames happened during play in *The Sims Social* environment. However, a pattern was identified where frame switching was most noticeable in three areas: first, 'real-world' relationships; second, negotiating sexuality; and third, consumerist values. The following subsection presents findings related to these areas.

Negotiating relationships in Littlehaven

The Malay women in this study played *The Sims Social* with friends and family members like their husbands and partners, and some played with their lecturers. Switching frames from 'character frame' to 'person frame' in the game was obvious in these relationships and expressed by the Malay women. Interaction with people they have established relationships with in real world with was justified as a means to enhance their relationship. For instance, as expressed by this participant:

> There was like a season in the game where you could make pranks, the one with the spider. It was so hilarious watching my school friends being pranked! (MW2)

At times, the switching of frames was not limited to the game context, but it was taken out of the game context into the real-world context, as described by a participant relating one of her play sessions. During play, she was switching back and forth between being in character frame and person frame:

> When my friend is ahead of me in the game, I won't help her. Like, when she's way ahead of me, why do I need to help her? Yeah, I know I was being bad [laughs]. I laughed it off and said, 'Serve you right!' [laughs]. She's my best friend and later that night when we met for dinner, she asked me, 'I needed help. Why didn't you help me out?' and I told her, 'No way, because I haven't bought that stuff yet so you'll just have to wait for me, ok?' (MW2)

Established relationship protocols from the real world that were brought into the game through the 'person frame' may complicate gameplay. This complication was most obvious when it came to familial relationships, and participants expressed uneasiness and concern about matters related to sex and sexuality in the game context, particularly when it involved children. A lot of the time, players were concerned with the boundaries between familial relationships and the effect on children of such behaviours in the game:

> My uncle plays TSS with me. However, the idea of 'woo-hooing' his Sim is so wrong. I won't do it. Subconsciously, it feels like 'urgh' [disgust]. Knowing that's your uncle – to even think about it is disgusting because my Sim is me, and I've got emotionally attached to it. Although it's only a game, but there is the intention of doing that, you know? Even while you're in character you know, stuff like that? But I guess it depends on how a person defines their Sims, like what was their character based on when they first created the Sim. (MWF)

> I won't do any woo-hoo or that sort of interaction with family members, no, no. I have my nephew playing the game – no way. It is ok with friends or close friends, that's all. My nephew – never! We never woo-hoo because he is a man. Urgh [disgust]. Even though it's only a game, but it's just so weird. (MWC)

> Bad example, bad example, okay. I don't think it's a good example if kids were playing it. I mean kids love pretend play – copying what they always see happening around them like playing 'home'. Games like this, it makes people think it is okay and it's normal. (MWD)

> I am worried about how children think about these interactions in the game. Like a cousin of mine, she is always interested in the kissing or hugging interactions. I was worried, my cousin is still in primary school. When I asked, 'Hey what are you doing?' she just laughed; maybe she thinks it's funny. She was playing in front of other kids. It gets me worried. So I don't think this game is appropriate for children. (MWB).

> These types of games are not suitable for children. We as adults, we might be able to draw the line but I don't think children are mature enough. We can easily reason it as, 'it's just a game'. But children might have the tendency to imitate what they see from the game… (MW7)

During play, these Malay women noticed a lot of improper behaviour within the game that they found inappropriate within certain types of relationships, especially those involving children. This indicates

that the process of reflexivity triggered a lot of frame switching between being in 'character frame' and 'person frame' during play.

The play experience was different when they played with their husbands, fiancé or partners. They were more playful in exploring and experimenting within the affordances of the game. The 'person frame' was prioritised in the game because they were playing with a person they had an actual relationship with:

> I had a boyfriend and he used to play TSS too [laughs]. I persuaded him to play because I was bored, and I wanted him to be my soul mate in the game. But then, [laughs] this is kind of silly – we broke up, and we broke up in *The Sims Social* too [laughs]. I blocked him [on Facebook]. (MW11)

> I have to think about my partner's feelings when I play *The Sims Social*. My partner seems to be slightly unhappy especially when I woo-hoo in the game [laughs]. She starts questioning my behaviours in the game like 'Why do you have to woohoo with all these people?' I think she's probably jealous. She's ok with the fact that I play games, but it's what I do inside the game that bothers her, because it kind of reflects me in real-life [laughs]. (MWA)

Another participant described how her marriage was brought into the game when she became soulmate with her husband in the game. This by itself increased the complexity of frame switching as she played *The Sims Social*. Not only did she have to think about her marriage and husband in the game during play, but she also had to juggle other sociocultural and religious values as well as the 'self-presentation frame' during play:

> My husband started playing *The Sims Social* first and then he persuaded me to join in. We played for quite some time, then up to a point he stopped playing. But I kept playing and maintaining the relationship in *The Sims Social* so it wouldn't deteriorate. I cannot break the relationship or find a new soul mate because I don't feel like betraying him and our relationship, not even in *The Sims Social*. If I betray the relationship it will be out in the notification [on Facebook] and it is just not right. All our family and friends will be able to see the notifications and they might say, 'What's going on with you and your husband?' Because my Sim bears my name so in a way it is connected to me. I know the Sim is not really me, and it's just a game. It's not that I am worried about what others might say, but it seems inappropriate and we shouldn't play with things like this or even think about divorce. . . (MWH)

Just as familial relationships are tied to sociocultural and religious values, the same applies to relationships with authoritative figures, for example lecturers. In authoritative relationships, Malay society, and cultures around the world in general, demand some formality, especially in behavioural conduct. These expectations made their way into the game and were mentioned by several participants and agreed by majority of them, for example:

> My lecturer plays *The Sims Social* with me. In class, she's a fun lecturer. I tend to share the play interactions I had with my lecturer with my friends. Sometimes, her behaviour in the game gets me thinking and makes me feel uneasy, makes me wonder if she should be acting that way. (MW2)
>
> If you're with friends, I don't mind it really. I treat games as games. But, I guess if it involves people whom you look up to; like your parents, your lecturers or if I were a lecturer and my students were around . . . of course if I portray something weird in the game, they will be judgemental no matter what. If it's your friends, they might take it as fun, but if for example it's your student, they might change their mind about you because in class you're different (MW4).

The participants demonstrated the significance of sociocultural values brought into the game when the 'person frame' took priority, and also contemplated the effect of behaviour on self-presentation.

Negotiating sex and sexuality in Littlehaven

The Sims Social represented values and ideologies that were not parallel to Islamic teachings, particularly in matters relating to relationships and sexuality. The avatars in *The Sims Social* were free to socialise, and because it was a 'social' game, one of the ways to progress in the game included the avatars' social relationships with one another. Being social in *The Sims Social* was indicated by the relationship of an avatar with another avatar. From being acquaintances they could progress to the highest level in *The Sims Social's* relationship scale: 'inspired soulmates'. The progression of relationships was not bounded by any formal institution like marriage, unlike the previous *Sims* series, in which marriage played an integral part in relationships and starting a family. In *The Sims Social*, marriage was non-existent. Sims were free to engage in sexual relationships, which gave an indication that marriage was not regarded as an important social structure in society. This lifestyle, in which the institution of marriage is no longer important, reaffirms Giddens's understanding of modernity, wherein he believes that 'tradition' is unimportant and will diminish in a modern society.

Interactions such as flirting, kissing, homosexuality, gender swapping and sex before marriage were a 'reality' in the game. Partying and consuming alcoholic beverages were normalised as a way of life. These cultural values contradicted the values held by these Malay women, for whom Islam and Malay culture were dominant structures governing their identity, culture and everyday life. However, this depiction of culture was not one they found 'shocking', nor were they alarmed when they encountered it during play. They described it as something acceptable and demonstrated their ability to negotiate these cultural and values differences, while still acknowledging the fact that those cultures and values are prohibited in Islam and inappropriate in *adat* Melayu (Malay customs).

All this was done subconsciously and automatically, and most had never given it much thought; at least not until they participated in this research. This suggests that the vastness and proliferation of media globalisation encountered by these women had normalised most American/Western culture, values and ideologies and these were no longer perceived as 'new' or different. The American/Western culture encountered in the game resonated with that represented in the TV serials, dramas and movies they were familiar with. The only obvious difference was the medium.

The interviews and focus groups sessions revealed a lot about cultural values, negotiations and tolerance, as the women prioritised the 'person frame' and 'character frame'. During play, negotiation and tolerance of different frameworks presented in *The Sims Social* was a demonstration of reflexivity that happened almost automatically. Players negotiated Western values without compromising their own culture, values and religious beliefs. They were able to steer their way through *The Sims Social* without sacrificing the pleasure they derived from playing the game.

In terms of performing sex and sexuality in the game, there were mixed reactions among the participants. Despite the conflicting values from cultural and religious points of view, these Malay women performed sexual behaviours in *The Sims Social* and justified their own performances and those of others with phrases like 'it's just a game' or 'it's not in real-life'. On the surface, these phrases invoked the concept of magic circle that separated the game context from real-life, allowing them to engage with play.

> I don't mind it if it's with girls. It's just about going to their houses, and we don't really do anything, like it's just kissing and it's not like it's in real-life. In fact, we are best friends; she's my best friend you know. (MW10)

> At first I didn't want to have the double bed because it was a hassle to build the bed – because it had the 'hammer' symbol in which you have to get neighbours' help to build it. It is much simpler with a single bed, you just buy it and it's ready to use. But soon, all my neighbours seemed to be doing woo-hoo while I am missing out on that [laughs]. So I started building the double bed [laughs]. Now I have both single and double beds. I think as long as it [woo-hoo/sex] stays in the game it's fine. (MW9)

These Malay women justified their sexual behaviours as purely for play purposes as long as it is performed within the game context. Justifying their behaviours indicates the frame switching that happened during play, from being in 'character frame' to 'person frame' whenever the need arose. Most of the time, this was done to emphasise the context, indicating a reflection on their self-presentation on Facebook. Reflecting on one's Facebook identity during play meant switching to 'self-presentation frame'.

However, these Malay women still drew the line when it comes to 'woohoo' or sex with family members or children, even though it was within the game context.

The affordances for sex and sexuality in *The Sims Social* also raise questions about gender swapping. Players in *The Sims Social* were allowed to swap their genders with a payment of 20 SimCash each time. All 20 participants in this research knew about this function in the game and were open to this idea, mainly because of curiosity about the options available for Sim customisation. However, none of them had swapped their gender. A couple of them did express interest, but the expense deterred them from trying.

> I am interested to swap gender because I want to know more about men's clothing options, they look quite interesting. But we have to pay to swap, so I don't think I'll do it. (MW5)
>
> No. I am not interested at all, especially when men's clothing options suck. Even if it was free, I don't want and won't do it. I love the female character; you can shop and buy lots of things. Men's clothing is limited to tuxedo, t-shirts . . . that's it. (MWG)
>
> I just love being a girl. (MWD)

Some participants, especially those participants who felt strongly attached to their Sims, prefer to keep their Sim the way it was originally created, expressing gratitude to God for creating them the way they are. This indicated a strong 'person frame' being prioritised during play, as one participant puts it:

> God made me a woman so my Sim is also a woman. I feel my Sim is subconsciously attached to me. It feels like you've been living your life for the past 26 years knowing you're a girl, knowing nothing would change about it. It's like that. My Sim is not just a character, she's part of me – parts of what I want to be and aspire to be. I never aspire to be a man, or change [pause] or anything like that. Alhamdulillah [praise to Allah], I am happy the way I am. (MWF)

Participants who used a male Sim in *The Sims Social* also showed disinterest in swapping their Sim's gender for reasons that also evoked the concept of magic circle. *The Sims Social* was simply a space to experiment and play and was thus separated from the real world. Invoking the concept of magic circle justified their promiscuous behaviours, which in the real world would have been disapproved by sociocultural and religious values. The negotiation that happened in their minds as they engaged in identity play such as this saw their 'person frame' being prioritised during play. Quoting two participants with a male Sim in the game:

> I do not have a strong urge to swap my gender. I'm so comfortable being a man [in *The Sims Social*]. I am already a girl right now so why bother swapping and having another 'me' inside there in a virtual life? It defeats the purpose, doesn't it? If I am going to be me in there, it'll be a waste of time. Might as well forget about playing 'me' in the game and just do it in real-life [laughs]. (MWA)

> No, not for now, at least. I am just having fun flirting with the girls. I have three naughty friends just for fun; they are like my 'scandals'. I can flirt; switch girlfriends whenever I feel like it [laughs]. In games – everything can be done. Yeah, I don't mind, cause it's a game. You shouldn't get immersed into thinking that the game is real. (MWC)

Although *The Sims Social* allows gender swapping, these women were seemed a little disappointed with the fact that it prevents cross-dressing. This raised interesting discussion as the players questioned the game's limitation on cross-dressing or gender bending. Most of them were open to the idea of playing around with clothes and being able to try different clothing without having to change their gender. They were playful about these ideas as long as it stayed within the game context.

> I love the idea of being able to cross-dress. If I swapped my gender, I should be given the freedom to do whatever I want. Like if I [swap from being a woman] to a man, I should be able to access the clothes I owned when I was a woman- so I can wear my nightie for bedtime maybe? [Laughs]. (MW6)

> I couldn't care less about what people think about me. . . even if I ever cross-dress. The fact that I don't do it, it is not because of what people would think of me. But it's a personal choice – I want my Sim to look beautiful. For other players who do that or any weird stuff – I've come across players who are women but they have male Sims in TSS – I used to think twice and double-check the person and her Sim just to make sure I was playing with the person I thought I was playing with. But now, I just don't care how you look, I just want to complete my tasks, so that's about it. (MW12)

Most participants were flexible in their attitudes with experimenting with sex and sexuality in *The Sims Social*. All these opinions also show how these players used *The Sims Social* as a platform to play with identity, as long as it stays within the context of the game. Interestingly, one participant gave a statement that highlighted the fact that such behaviour could act as information 'given off', thus have self-presentation implications:

> This behaviour will get me thinking, 'Why did this person choose to put woman's clothing on a male Sim? Has this particular person lost his or her mind?' [Laughs]. (MW5)

Thus could also mean that, players may engage in self-presentation management, although it is done unconsciously as they started to think about the consequences of their playful acts- even among other players.

One of the participants questioned the limitations [preventing cross-dressing and gender-bending] imposed by EA in *The Sims Social*, but she projects an understanding that this limitation was a means to manage the game mechanics and profit making.

> I think the developer has a guideline. Like GTA [Grand Theft Auto], that game is seriously bad – like you can go on a killing spree, shooting or running people over with your car, things like that. But that's the game rules and unfortunately, one of the rules in *The Sims Social* is, 'you are not allowed to cross-dress'. You have to choose to be either a man or a woman and it doesn't matter about your sexual orientation. It's not that they disapprove of transgender or anything like that, but it would be a bit hard because then, they would have to develop three gender categories, which makes it even more complicated because they would need to cater to more options in the game. So it is just some kind of limitation in the game. Oh, yes, maybe they want to make money out of all this. (MWA)

Negotiating consumerist values in Littlehaven

A lot of the touch points where these Malay women engaged with cultures and values in the game also induced consumerist values. *The Sims* series is known for organising play around consumption, which many studies (for example Frasca 2001; Lehdonvirta, Wilska, & Johnson 2009) argue encourages consumerist values among players. As in previous *Sims* titles, *The Sims Social* was also organised around consumerist ideology and advertising, termed 'in-game advertising', which was made very apparent to the players. These themes were not new to the players either, because a majority of the participants had experienced these values in the previous titles under *The Sims* franchise at some point in their lifetime. These consumer and advertising values evoked mixed reactions and perceptions from the participants in this research.

The participants' engagement with consumerist values in *The Sims Social* can be put into two separate categories. First, those who spent for instrumental purposes, mentioning key words like 'competitiveness', 'increasing my house value', or 'beating the person higher than me'; or second, those players who spent Simoleons, SimCash or social points on products and brands for cosmetic functions, to express or explore their identity in the game. The following are responses by participants who spent for instrumental purposes:

> Status . . . competitiveness. (MW5)

> I want to increase my house value, so I will be the top scorer. I want to beat the person higher than me. (MW9)

> For me it's all about the next level, the next level, the next level. The satisfaction I get from playing is there. So I buy items that would increase my house value. I always buy furniture, always. Because I need to increase the house value, but not clothing or things like that, no. (MWE)

Using *The Sims Social* as a site to explore identity, expressing a self that would otherwise be impossible offline, was expressed by the following participant:

> [Laughs] Yes, I feel as Muslims we cover ourselves and the options for clothing are very limited. So, I let the Sim wear sexy clothes, even a bikini [laughs]. I let her explore things I can't do in real-life, like having very long hair. I buy lots of dresses and furniture as well. I adore beautiful things and I want to own things I can't afford in reality. I do this for my own satisfaction. Not for house value, not for strategy what so ever. It's like my very own doll house. In fact, I had one when I was a girl – the 'My Little Pony small set'. (MWG)

Throughout the interviews, it became more apparent that most participants had multiple objectives and they changed according to situations encountered during gameplay. This involved a combination of playing for instrumental purposes and for pleasure, switching according to the objective, intention or motivation being prioritised at a particular time. For example, the following participant related playing *The Sims Social* to accumulate house value and, at the same time, as a way to relive her childhood memories:

> **MWF**: I usually shop for the house, to increase the house value. Like, I am all about the future, so yeah house value plays a very important part. That is probably why I change furniture a lot – and buy the most expensive ones. Sometimes, I don't really care how it looks, even if it doesn't look good, I'll still buy it. I just want to move to a higher level, although nothing really changes when you 'level-up' anyway. I guess, it's all about the idea of 'living on the better street', you know?
>
> **Researcher**: So, you compete among co-players?
>
> **MWF**: Oh, no not really. I do have friends with house values worth half a million or more than that. Mine is only 200 thousand. Well to me, that's fine. I never really gave it a serious thought. Really, I play *The Sims Social* for the sake of reliving my childhood memories, yeah basically that's it.

Another example:

> I am always aiming to increase my house value. When I look at the quests, I will check out the house value and I will make a sum in my head to increase the house value by completing a particular quest. If it's around 15 thousand or more, I will definitely want to complete that quest. Normally I will complete majority of the task. I love to have everything in *The Sims Social.* All rewards or anything I can get from the shop just for the fun of it, because in real-life, I won't get it. (MW3)

No matter how the players engaged with consumerist values in the game – for instrumental purposes, exploration, escapism or a combination of the above – their decisions were mainly game-related. However, it is worth noting that material accumulation and consumerist behaviours were typically pursued more by players who played for instrumental purposes. This is not surprising as consumerist values are central to ensuring success in *The Sims Social* as well as other titles in *The Sims* series.

Some participants compared their real-world shopping habits to the game. Criteria considered in making actual purchases, such as price, quality, aesthetics, as well as outlook, personal interest or hobbies such as home decorating were brought into the game. Some examples from the interviews:

> Clothes are expensive in there. Sometimes, it cost you like thousands of social points for a decent t-shirt. That, to me, is expensive! I have to really think twice before buying it. The game can be very limiting in that sense. In real-life, I don't buy furniture or furnishings and all. But to play the game, you have to spend money on those items as well. You need to watch your spending [laughs]. (MWA).

> Hmm . . . I love to shop for the house and my Sim. In *The Sims Social*, I love to shop for beautiful things, and I don't care about the quality of the product since I can't judge the quality in a game. In real-life, once I spot something beautiful and I like, I'll inspect the quality and the price, but it usually goes down to how it looks. Gosh, I guess there isn't much difference in the way I make my decisions in or outside the game, is there? [Laughs]. (MWB)

> First of all, when I play Sims, I always buy things that are practical and have purpose. I buy what I need first. Secondly, after I have those things and more time, I'll make more [money] and then, I just use that money to buy me and you a bed. It's not like you can donate in Sims right? I only buy the necessities. I tend to just buy more furniture, I mean, there's not much you can do. You can buy more furniture. Oh yeah, I changed the attire the last time but even that I kept it simple because it's like, 'let me just change the shoes cause the top and the shoes are too expensive, Oh God!' So, yeah, I'm pretty furniture shallow [Laughs]. (MWD)

These responses were not typical. Other women said that their consumption behaviour in *The Sims Social* differed from their own consumption values.

> I am not easily influenced because I only pick what I feel is right. It's not like when everybody else wears Prada, I am pressured to have one. In-game I am so *kiasu* [a Chinese dialect word for selfish] but not in real-life. (MWH)

> In *The Sims Social,* whatever I want him [her Sim] to wear; I'll buy without giving it much thought. In real-life, it really depends on our pocket [laughs]. In there, money is important too but you can always ask from your friends. . . (MWC)

> My Sim shops less than me. I mean, okay, I'm a shopaholic. There is not a day when I'm online and not buying at least one thing. There's no way. Like my Sim, she only shops once a month or when there's a necessity, like sometimes to level-up you need to have one particular item. Only then will I buy, but other than that, no, I won't. When you play *The Sims Social* you need the cash and so on, and you need a strategy to play it. The cash should be allocated for future use, for example to advance a level or something like that. So I would save the cash. To think about it, I should be saving money in real-life not in the game [laughs] (MWE)

A majority of the participants shared one thing in common: they refused to spend real money on the game. For those who played for instrumental purposes, having plenty of neighbours (co-players) was sufficient to help complete quests and generate money in the game which could then be used to buy

different items in the game. Responses by the participants to questions about spending real money on the game:

> Never, it's a waste of money. Instead of spending money, the better way of doing it is by adding more neighbours. (MWI)
>
> I never spend unnecessarily, and I have never, ever added real cash. Because it's just a game and I have the time, which makes *The Sims Social* just too easy. (MWH)
>
> I never spend money in *The Sims Social*, but I have thought of it. If I was to spend real cash on the game, it's probably because I wanted to decorate my house. (MWA)
>
> No, never, I don't splurge on myself so why would I spend on my Sim? (MWG)
>
> I've never spent real cash on *The Sims Social*, but maybe in the future, who knows? I think money isn't an issue when a person finds something they really like in the game or maybe if they were addicted to the game. (MWB)
>
> I never spend a single cent on the game. I think it's a waste of money. I'd rather spend my money to buy points for my Sims 3 instead, because to me *Sims 3* is more than just a game. (MWE)

These interviews show the switching of frames during play between 'character frame' to 'player frame' and 'person frame' as the players justified and prioritised the need for material and value acquisition in the game and compared that to real-world expenditure. All the decisions made were determined by the objective of their play.

Negotiating brands and in-game advertising in Littlehaven

As part of the discussion on materialism and consumerist values, brands and in-game advertising were raised. Most of the participants were excited when they were asked about the brands and advertising experienced in the game. According to them, real-life brands brought realism into the game, as suggested by one of the participants:

> I think it's cool. Brands made TSS come to life. Because these brands exist in real-life and are those we use in our daily lives it made the game even more realistic. (MW7).

Realism in *The Sims Social* excited the participants as they were able to add personal touches, which led to stronger attachment to their Sims as they transferred the brands' established values and lifestyle into the game environment. Quoting some of the responses:

> I think it's quite cool if you're actually using it, it becomes really personal. For example, I'm using Dove [soap] when they had Dove in *The Sims Social.* I bought it because it makes my Sim more like me. (MWD)

> I got excited when I saw brands that I personally own, like the Samsung S3. Looking at it in *The Sims Social* makes me feel so happy [Laughs]. (MW8)

> Walls [ice-cream], Magnum [ice-cream], Nivea [body wash and lotion], Dove [soap], Samsung TV and at my loft I have a Samsung S3 [smartphone] [laughs]. It really adds a personal touch and fun to the game but it has to be functional in the game or else it won't be so great. Like the Samsung S3, it's just too small I can't even show it off [laughs]. I have Toyota Hybrid car, which is great because I can collect energy when I use it. In the game, being able to interact with the brand we own is important. (MWG)

Some participants also related their experience of encountering brands for the first time in the game. Through quests, they learned about the brands and the functions of the products:

> I pay more attention to the brands featured, like Diesel [brand] for example. I never really looked at the fashion by this brand before, but since playing the game, I was like, 'hey . . . the clothes by Diesel are quite nice'. (MW12)

> They managed to get my attention, creating awareness of the brand without making the players feel annoyed. (MW6)

> When *The Sims Social* featured Samsung S3 [smartphone], I almost bought it – almost. The advertisement in the game got me thinking about the brand because at that time I wanted to buy a new smartphone. In the game quest which offers Samsung S3 as the reward, you have to read the description about the product blah, blah, blah . . . which promotes the product featured – it can do this and that, multi-tasking whatever. So I thought, 'This phone is pretty good'. Since I am a gadget freak, that information led me to do more research and compare it with other brands, and I was this close to buying it, but I didn't [laughs]. (MWA)

Participants stated that products they saw in *The Sims Social* triggered their intention to purchase. They recalled times when they were out shopping and saw something similar to the brands they had seen in *The Sims Social*. These instances show the switching of frames occurring not only during play, but brought outside the game context.

> A lot happened to me with all *The Sims* series. There were a lot of brands that looked exactly the same. Like Ikea for example, I was tempted to buy it. (MW12)

> I saw Toyota Prius Hybrid [car] on the road for the first time, and I remember saying, 'Hey, Toyota Prius Hybrid was already launched in *The Sims Social*, and only now it's launched here?' [laughs]. (MWG)

> The best thing about playing *The Sims Social* is when I play with my cousin. When we are out shopping, we will notice all the products and brands from *The Sims Social* and we'll go 'hey, isn't this the one in the game?' I even buy it sometimes [laughs]. (MW8)

> I also had the same experience. Like whenever I see something that resembles the one I saw on *The Sims Social*, I feel like buying it in reality [Laughs]. I saw a sofa that looks exactly like the one I have in *The Sims Social*. I got excited and said, 'Hey this sofa is so beautiful, and it looks exactly the same as the one I own in *The Sims Social'*. This has been going on for quite some time now, and my boyfriend has started teasing me saying, 'Oh, no, here she goes again' [laughs]. (MW10)

> I've always dreamed of a hybrid car, and when *The Sims Social* featured a quest to win a Toyota Prius, I was like 'wow, I wish I could have this for real . . .' I really love hybrid cars. When *The Sims Social* features Prius, it really triggers excitement to own it, not just in the game but in real-life too. (MWH)

> I think it's brilliant how it is featured. For example, every time I use the 'hair spa' in the game, the brand appears quite obvious: 'Dove, Dove, Dove'. I ended up trying the product. (MW6)

However, not all encounters with brands and in-game advertising were positive. Some participants stated that they found over exposure to excessive advertising of the same brand had turned the game into an advertising space. Having brands embedded in the game without any meaningful interactions turned off the players. Here is an opinion by one of the participants:

> Sometimes I feel it's just advertising overload. Like where everything has to be labelled 'Dove' – from the chair, the mirror and all its products – my house was turned into an advertising space! Then I became selective, leaving only the shampoo in my house and I put everything else in the storage. The Toyota car doesn't really serve any purpose. It's parked in front of my house and it doesn't take me anywhere. So, I moved it into the storage. (MW10)

A majority of the players were positive about the experience with brands in the game. However, some participants acknowledged the existence of the brands in the game but were clear about not being affected by them:

> I don't know. Although I think it's quite a creative way to advertise, I didn't feel any intentions to buy those products. (MWI)

> I don't have a problem with this kind of advertising, but so far, I am still not influenced by it. (MW13)

The experience they had with brands and in-game advertising embedded in *The Sims Social* saw real-world elements being brought into the game, which created a sense of realism for the players.

The next section presents the findings about when identity performance was taken seriously and separating game context from the real-world context was not as simple as saying 'it's just a game'. At this point, the magic circle was no longer sufficient to make sense of their encounter with the American and Western cultures and values presented in the game, resulting in rejection of cultures and values

presented in the game by the participants. The next section discusses the findings about the 'disappearance' of the magic circle.

The disappearance of the Magic Circle

As seen so far in this chapter, the Malay women participants displayed flexibility in their encounters with the mostly American and Western cultures and values in *The Sims Social*. This was apparent in the way they performed their identity in the game in areas related to relationships, sex and sexuality. This flexibility existed in varying degrees, and saw the blurring of offline and online selves during play and several instances where the performances in the game context started seeping outside the game context too. The Malay women were flexible in their performance of identity in *The Sims Social*, performing unacceptable behaviours which were against their sociocultural norms and religious values.

However, this flexibility was not without limits. The participants recalled a few, isolated experiences in *The Sims Social* that they found unnegotiable. Most of these unnegotiable experiences were connected to religious values. The participants mentioned the wearing of religious symbols, such as a cross or a symbol they interpreted as the Star of David. Here are some examples shared by the participants:

> There was once I thought I saw one of my neighbours was wearing a necklace with a Jewish symbol. I felt somewhat obligated to inform her about the symbol but I was afraid if she might respond to it negatively, saying things like, 'it's only a game'. I was concerned because I know that she is religious and looking at her Sim wearing that necklace felt so wrong. I tried advising once saying, 'You look like a religious person, but the necklace you're wearing symbolises Judaism'. However, the reply I got from her was, 'So what?' After that incident, there was nothing much I could do. Well, as a Muslim, at least I've done my part. I've tried explaining and now it's up to her. The only reason I tried talking to her is because I know her in person and she's quite religious. However, the way she reacted got me thinking about whether she was pretending to be unaware [about the symbol] or a sign of protest towards me. (MW8)

> Personally, when it comes to these matters, I guess that's where I'll draw the line. I won't buy religious symbols and things like that for my Sims because it has got to do with our religion. But other than that, I have no issue. (MW10)

Image 7.8: Examples of symbols interpreted by the players as the Christian cross and the Star of David

The participants raised issues about being Muslim and observing their identity as a Muslim in *The Sims Social* because behaviour could be observed by the public, as clearly stated by these participants:

> To me, there are things I don't mind like my relationship with another female Sim, but I am more sensitive when it comes to decorative items like those fortune telling crystal balls or some Christmas decorative items, because I just won't do it in real-life, why should I do it in the game? I am a little bit sceptical when it comes to religious issues I guess? I assume that my Sim is a Muslim, and I don't want my Sim to practice *shirk* [the sin of practicing idolatry or polytheism or worshipping any being other than Allah]. But I won't be judgmental towards my friends who do have all these things. They have their rights and reasons for their actions. I feel it's a little weird that I think this way, especially when I am not a pious person [laughs]. (MW10).

> In *The Sims Social* all our movements or decisions can be seen by others, especially on Facebook and some might take it seriously and misinterpret it, especially being a Muslim. (MWG)

This was also highlighted other participants during the discussion:

> **MW8**: I do feel kind of weird when I visit some neighbours where they display symbols that are religious or superstitious, which are against Islamic teachings; especially when I do know them personally. It gets me thinking, 'what's with all these things in the house?'

> **MW10**: Yes, exactly.

MW8: Things like from the Haunted Mansion quest, has lots of items that are against our values.

MW10: and we can find lots of crosses hanging around.

MW8: Every time I win those quests and I get any things related to a religion or superstition, I sold them off.

MW10: those coffins, I don't like it and I sold it

Some religious values are negotiable, thus permitting these Malay women to engage in identity play in *The Sims Social*. But, the interviews showed that there were particular religious values that were intolerable to these Malay women. This was related to the sin of committing *shirk*. *Shirk*, 'to share' in Arabic, is a concept in Islam which literally means, 'the establishment of "partners" placed beside God' (Khan Sharvani 2016, p. 251). Committing the sin of *shirk* is regarded as the biggest sin in Islam. In fact, this sin is the one sin that is unforgivable by God, as it is denying the concept of the Oneness of God (Nasr 2009). According to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), *shirk* is divided into two types, the greater *shirk* and the lesser *shirk*. The instances related by the participants in this research referred to the greater *shirk*, which describes *shirk* committed openly or in other words, open polytheism.

It is clear that, for these Malay women, the refusal to engage in performances that could lead to *shirk* revolved largely around religious symbols. This demonstrated reflexivity at work in the ways religion was prioritised by the players despite the cosmopolitan values brought by globalisation and modernisation. These were instances where the 'person frame' was being prioritised during play.

Participants also stated that these symbols could create and invite negative responses to their offline selves. This signifies the significance of their self-presentation on Facebook, which was a representation of their offline identity as Malay, Muslim women. In this instance, the 'self-presentation frame' was prioritised, because they not only thought about their sin against God, but at the same time the impact on society, specifically to Malay society and Muslim society in general.

Performances in *The Sims Social* were open to interpretation by other players and audiences on Facebook. Interpretation or perception was unavoidable because some of the participants in this research believed that the identity play performed in *The Sims Social* was a reflection of the thoughts and feelings of the 'real-life' person playing the game. Quoting some participants:

> [laughs] Sometimes, The Sims' actions in the game can trigger thoughts linking the Sim to the player. For example, I sometimes find myself asking questions like, 'Why is this particular person behaving in such a way? Why does this person keep on woo-hooing me?' [laughs]. Like in those situations, especially when the actions were performed repeatedly. If it was only done a couple of times, I can rationalise it as, 'it's just a game'. But if too many times, and if you know this person in real-life, you could get awkward. This person might want to tell you something through the game, who knows? You just have to figure this out, decipher what the other person is trying to tell you. It is impossible if a person said that there's no connection what so ever between you and your Sim. The Sim you created is somehow connected to you. Just like artists and their paintings, it's unique and personal. However, to me, in games there are always two sides to it. Some actions could mean nothing because it's just a game. But, like in *The Sims Social*, if the same Sim has been woo-hooing you for three months and at the same time in real-life the same person show some sort of interest to you, maybe you can put the two-and-two together. (MWA)

> I believe in 'no accidents'. Everything happens for a reason, everything you see, or do, there are no accidents to it. So, to me, whatever actions a player takes in the game, like clicking any kind of interactions with my Sim, it gives me the sense of impression. You might rationalise it by saying, 'I did that without thinking', but to me it still subconsciously playing in your head. There must be some sort of a trigger. Not much but just enough to make you click that button. You might have only one character [Sim] or five which we don't know about, you know? It could be anything. Like me, I focus on myself. I try telling myself not to judge a person just based on their Sim. But sometimes your perceptions were built automatically – but I try not to be judgemental. (MWF)

Conclusion

As Malay women encountered and experienced the values presented in *The Sims Social*, they also saw their offline identities permeating the game context, assisting the process of negotiation and reflexivity. The process of negotiation or sense making is a two-way process, thus it fed into their offline self as well. So far, the discussion about the participants' performance in *The Sims Social* has demonstrated how identity is contextual yet fluid, resulting in blurring displays of online and offline selves.

This fluidity of Malay women's identity seems easily justified through the concept of the magic circle. However, a deeper understanding of their sociocultural and religious values revealed the deeper understanding that the 'magic circle' invoked by these Malay women was in fact a result of their complex process of reflexivity with sociocultural and religious factors taken into account. The reflexivity created the 'go or no-go' decision of these women to continue with their playful performances in Littlehaven.

The performance of self for Malay women playing *The Sims Social* was further complicated by the fact that their identity play was not anonymous, because *The Sims Social* was nested within Facebook. As

the play experience seeped into the Facebook platform, so did their identity play, resulting in a disruption of the identity performed on Facebook. The next chapter will discuss how Facebook enhanced participants' experience of playing *The Sims Social* and the different ways they managed the complexity of identity when two possibly clashing identities collided.

The act of prioritising different contexts during their engagement with *The Sims Social* can be accurately explained through Pargman and Jakobsson's 'frame metaphor' (with modification to include the context of self-presentation), in which the 'boundaries between different frames are permeable and it is possible (but not necessary) to move between them effortlessly' (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, p. 238). The way to understand the performance of self by these Malay women, according to this framework, is through their performances, as only one frame (person/player/character/self-presentation) is active within each and every moment in time in any context.

Chapter 8: Malay women on Facebook

Introduction

The play experience offered in *The Sims Social* was influenced by synergies between the game and Facebook that facilitated social interaction within and outside the game. Facebook not only provided the platform for *The Sims Social* to function, but also enabled the game to be experienced outside the game realm. This made the whole game play experience unique to *The Sims Social* players.

The synergistic effect of *The Sims Social* gameplay experience (and that of other SNGs) worked to enhance the sociability functions of both platforms. Players were able to share and publish their play 'achievements' and compete with friends on Facebook. In addition, players got to experience emergent play, and to interact with and assist each other in relation to the game in fan groups established on Facebook. All these affordances enhanced the players' play experience. However, they came with the risk of disrupting the more consistent identities the players sought to present on Facebook.

Chapter 6 presented a discussion of the general patterns of media consumption by the Malay women who were participants in this research. They expressed a lot of flexibility towards the experience of globalisation and the modern values brought predominantly by American and Western content on the internet and in digital games. The flexibility in their acceptance of these values was demonstrated through their performance of identity play in *The Sims Social*, as presented in Chapter 7. However, their flexibility in identity play in *The Sims Social* never negated the core elements of their identity, particularly in matters related to their religious values.

On the surface, these Malay women could be seen as invoking the magic circle concept to justify their playful behaviour in the game, allowing them to compromise their sociocultural and religious values during play. However, careful analysis found a complicated 'switching between frames', particularly between the 'character frame' and the 'person frame' in their attempts to negotiate the values they encountered during play. This demonstrated the significance of their sociocultural and religious values to their identities, which were brought into the game and were prioritised in some encounters with the values presented in the game.

Analysis of Malay women's experience of play in *The Sims Social* would not be complete without taking Facebook into account. Facebook is a platform that advocates for its users to be 'authentic' – a difficult term interpreted differently by different people. However, most research has found that Facebook users maintain a profile that is consistent with their offline self, although sometimes minor enhancement might

occur (Waggoner, Smith & Collins 2009; Weisbuch, Ivcevic, & Ambady 2009). These researchers have established the importance of impression management on Facebook. Goffman's notion of self-presentation is used in this thesis to explore the way Malay women manage their identity presentation on Facebook. The exploration of these Malay women's play experience in *The Sims Social* should not be isolated from their performance of identity on Facebook, because of the nature of *The Sims Social* as an application afforded by Facebook.

This chapter focuses on the participants' play experience, particularly as it was brought outside the game realm and emerged on Facebook. Without proper self-presentation management, this could have disrupted the identity performed on Facebook. To understand the dynamics of managing self-presentation for these Malay women who played *The Sims Social* in a platform where two clashing identities collided, Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation management is used to establish a basis for understanding the dynamics of the participants in managing their identities on Facebook. The frame metaphor developed by Pargman and Jakobsson is used and extended to include the Facebook context through the addition of a 'self-presentation frame' to complement the frames constructed by Pargman and Jakobsson: the 'person frame', 'character frame' and 'player frame'.

This chapter begins with a background overview of how Facebook was used by these Malay women in their everyday lives before focusing on their play experiences as they continued their play from *The Sims Social* into Facebook. This includes discussion of Facebook as a platform that affords *The Sims Social* and how the players utilised Facebook as a platform for play. Next, this chapter presents the many creative ways the participants managed their self-presentation on Facebook as they juggled the 'person frame', 'player frame', 'character frame' and 'self-presentation frame' while playing *The Sims Social*.

Facebook in the everyday lives of Malay women

Naturally, we perform ourselves differently in different contexts and for different groups of people (boyd & Ellison 2007). However, managing the presentation of self on Facebook is complicated because it merges everyone who we know from different stages and contexts of our lives in one platform. For example in Facebook by default, close-knit family members and friends from our childhood days are merged with colleagues from a different department who we met once, at a work-related meeting. This means, the networked public in one's Facebook account is made up of different types of audiences.

As *The Sims Social* players share their gameplay experiences, achievements and help-seeking activities from the game on Facebook, it exposes the players' identity play. This potentially disrupts

their self-presentation on Facebook, particularly among the unintended audiences. The unintended audiences are those who do not play games and to them, these behaviours are unwelcome.

This situation makes it difficult for those who play Facebook games because games and Facebook work in synergy in delivering the social experience to their users. As the name indicates, sociability was central to *The Sims Social*. The social elements were tied to asynchronicity. This game mechanic enabled gameplay experiences that are unique to SNGs. The participants' engagement with *The Sims Social* was not confined within the parameters of the game, but extended beyond the actual game parameters to include and continue in Facebook.

For the Malay women who were participants in this research, Facebook served a blend of functions. Most stated that Facebook is a medium for information sharing and keeping in touch with family and friends, especially if they rarely got the chance to meet offline. Although all of the participants played variety of Facebook games, games were not their main reason for having a Facebook account. The women stated their reasons for having a Facebook account:

> The first reason is to get connected with friends. I had Friendster, but then everyone migrated to Facebook and I followed too for networking purposes like my ex-classmates from school and university – just to look at their updates. (MWG)
>
> Facebook is more like a source of information for me. I don't create Facebook for games, no. Nowadays, we are too occupied with our own lives, we seldom get the chance to meet up with friends, so the idea of having Facebook to get in touch with friends is great. I actually make it a point to say hi to any of my friends every day, at least a 'hi'. (MWF)
>
> Usually I use Facebook to catch up with friends or connect with lost friends, keep in touch and updates. Apart from catching up with friends, it's also a great medium for sharing – sharing thoughts, quotes and news. Personally, sharing would describe Facebook best for me, because I am a sharing person. I love sharing information that I find useful. I'll scroll the newsfeed and when there's information that catches my attention and I find it useful or [think it may be] valuable to everyone else, I'll share it, why not? Sometimes, quotes or information can motivate or inspire you in a way. (MWA)
>
> Yeah, Facebook is great to keep in touch with people that are important to you, or when you need to know what they're up to, or if they have progress in their life, it's fun to know sometimes. Just your friends – not 'people' in general because I don't use Facebook to make friends. But it depends. If they have a bond of mutual friends and those friends are like, I'm close to them I'm okay [with making them Facebook friends]. I'm okay with getting to know new people, it's just that I don't like absolute strangers you know, that we have no mutual friends at all, like 'how did you find me?' you know? (MWD)

Parallel with the findings of previous studies on Facebook, as discussed in Chapter 4, Facebook was used as a platform to maintain existing relationships and re-kindle lost friendships. This also shows that friends on Facebook also know each other offline or in 'real life'. Although limited, these Malay women

found text, images, audio and video to be valuable means to express and receive impressions in online communication.

Several participants talked about how the posts and shares on Facebook, including text, pictures or videos, enabled them to interpret situations and reflect on their own online behaviours. One of the more interesting experiences shared by two of the participants was how these interactions made them feel like a 'stalker' when they browsed through their friends' Facebook pages:

> It happens sometimes with good friends, you know at times when I message her on the phone and she doesn't reply. Not long after that, I browse through Facebook and I see her status updates and pictures at almost the same time as I messaged her! I jokingly left a sarcastic comment, 'Oh there you are! No wonder you didn't reply to my message, you were too busy . . .' To think again, scrolling Facebook makes me feel like a stalker sometimes [laughs]. (MWC)

> I sometimes browse through photo updates; you know just looking at my friends' lives. It's not like I'm stalking or anything like that [laughs]. But people might get the wrong impression when you do that, but the truth is I was just looking at their pictures because you know, I was missing them. (MWB)

As Facebook was primarily used by these Malay women as an online representation of their offline selves, they realised the importance of Facebook as a platform of self-presentation and recognised the need to manage their profiles in a way that was consistent with their offline self. One of the participants explained the way she manages two Facebook accounts to segregate the people she knows according to the intimacy of the relationships:

> My personal account mainly consists of my friends. Like friends who really know me, those I befriended when I was back in uni, friends from high school. We grew up together; they have known me since I was small. Things are different at work. People at work wanted to sort of 'find out' more about me, and I don't feel comfortable sharing my personal life with them. I'd like to keep it private because I do not want to create problems especially at work. That is exactly the reason I have two accounts – one personal and one for work. (MWA)

She justified her actions as a way to silence the pressure she received from workmates:

> Apparently, these people from where I was working kept on pressuring me, asking me about my Facebook account, requesting me to add them to my account. I consider this 'peer pressure' you know? They kept insisting until I decided to create another account – meant for people who I am not close with. I seldom log in to that account. I did this because it gives me the control to choose the people who I think should know about me and my life. (MWA)

The participants in this research realised the impact of Facebook on self-presentation on both online and offline selves. Managing self-presentation through the kind of information shared on Facebook was essential to avoid 'problems', such as those related by the participant quoted above. Most information

on Facebook was intentionally shared or, in Goffman's terms, given. But it could also 'give off' information that could be misinterpreted by the networked public, thus risking the consistency of the performance of self on both Facebook and offline identity. As one of the participants of the research puts it:

> I think it's very important to manage your Facebook because it's a part of who you are and what you are throwing out there through the kind of things you post, you know. It definitely reflects something about you. (MWF)

The play identity from *The Sims Social* was one such source of information. Sharing gameplay experiences on Facebook was the default function, central to *The Sims Social*. The most common form was posts with 'headlines' such as 'completed building the Dreamer Double Bed', 'building BBQ patio' or 'new good friend status' embedded on the newsfeeds or timelines of *The Sims Social* players during play (Image 8.1). Sharing these posts on Facebook was one of the easiest ways for players to claim rewards from the game like energy, SimCash or Simoleons. Other players who clicked on these featured posts on Facebook were also rewarded.

The posts appeared as a dialogue box in the game, and players could decide whether or not they wanted to share this information on Facebook. They were also able to specify the audience for the posts through the privacy setting in the dialogue box. Sharing these posts without first determining the audience would make them appear on the player's timeline and newsfeed, where they could be seen by everyone in the player's network.

Image 8.1 Examples of gameplay achievements or experiences that could be shared on Facebook

Apart from the occasional irritated responses from friends on Facebook, most of these posts usually did little harm to the performance of self on Facebook in general. However, some posts from *The Sims*

Social could be too bold for some Facebook publics, particularly posts relating to sex and sexuality, such as announcing on Facebook that a player has had woo-hoo (sex) in *The Sims Social* (Image 8.2).

Image 8.2: Announcing a 'woo-hoo' on Facebook

Posts such as these on Facebook shared from their play in *The Sims Social* acted as information given and given off. Considering that information given on Facebook is within the control of the player, the focus is on the information given off because it has a higher tendency to initiate controversy, thus risking the players' performance of self not just on Facebook but also as a person. Posts from the game that referred to relationships, sex and sexuality touched on areas that are considered taboo and in conflict with the Malay's sociocultural and religious values. Without players realising, these posts could be misinterpreted, causing disruption to the presentation of self on Facebook. Actions in the game, and particularly those that were shared on Facebook gave off information and could affect players' self-presentation.

> I believe in 'no accidents'. Everything happens for a reason, everything you see, do, there are no accidents to it. I grew up with that understanding, thus for me any action taken in the game – say dating or woo-hoo – gives me some kind of impression. (MWF)

> To say that it has no connection [between the Sim and the player] whatsoever is a lie. I take it this way; when we create something – even if it's only an avatar – it is somewhat connected to you. Just like artists with their artwork: it is a personal creation, a form of expression and people will try to interpret it. It comes from you somehow; it is related to you. (MWA)

However, the way these players embraced the identity play performed within *The Sims Social* seemed more relaxed. Their accounts of the identity play performed in the game indicated freedom of expression – a cosmopolitan value, but one which was blended with an important Islamic teaching, to avoid being judgemental without first understanding a person's intention. Some of the responses from the participants:

> To me, I don't like to lay judgements on people. That is just not me because everyone has their own mind and they can think for themselves. If a Sim wears a sexy dress – or not – or whether a Sim is wearing a 'cross', I try not to think too much about it. I play it cool, take the advice given by a good friend of mine to not take games too seriously. (MWI)
>
> It's very subjective, so, it's up to you, how you are going to carry it, because in the end, I don't want to judge people because I don't want to be judged, as simple as that. (MWE)
>
> Everything you do in the game gives a certain indication about you. A player may just be taking the game as 'just a game' or it could mean something or anything. It really comes down to your intention. It is unfair to make conclusions simply based on their actions in the game. (MWA)

The word 'intention', *Niyyah* in Arabic and *Niat* in Malay, is a concept in Islam that concerns whether 'the correctness or incorrectness of the action is in accordance with the correctness or incorrectness of the intention' (The intention is the foundation of every action, 2015). To discuss the meaning of intention in Islam is beyond the scope of this research; however, it is sufficient to understand that intention is an important part of the religion because it determines the validity of the deeds performed. Deeds performed in Islam must be done only for Allah (God) and not for other purposes or for 'showing off'. This concept in Islam covers all aspects specific to religious rituals as well as everyday actions.

For the Malays, the concept of 'intention' is deeply embedded in their culture and is all encompassing in their daily lives. For these participants, it was wrong to judge another player solely on their identity play because the intention of the players was unknown, and could not be known, as 'intention' is a matter between the player and God.

The performance of identity play, either within the game realm or through posts shared on Facebook, revealed a complex process of reflexivity, an interplay of frames especially between the 'character frame' and 'person frame' and the 'self-presentation frame'. Although the participants in this research tried not to judge others, especially with regard to identity performed in *The Sims Social* and any posts on Facebook originating from the game, they generally agreed that posts on Facebook may give or give off information about the owner of the Facebook account.

Maintaining a consistent Facebook account was important to the participants. For the reasons discussed above, their identity play was not highlighted in their Facebook accounts, especially those who played in their authentic accounts, which were created to represent their offline self. These players managed to create a place inside Facebook where both Facebook identity and identity play could coexist without damaging the consistent self, presented on their Facebook accounts; a place referred to

as fan groups. In fan groups, both identities were visible to each and every member of the group, and this is one place on Facebook where both identities were truly permeable.

Fan groups

In fan groups, players could share their gameplay experience. There were a handful of fan groups for *The Sims Social* on Facebook. The Malaysian Sims was one of several fan groups created for Malaysian players of *The Sims Social*. It had 291 members and was maintained by several administrators who initiated the group to gather and help Malaysian players of *The Sims Social*. The group was maintained as a private group, which means it was not visible or searchable on Facebook. Members had to be invited to join by existing members of the fan group. The Malaysian Sims fan page became a hub where members could get to know other Malaysian players, add them as friends on Facebook, and later as a neighbour in *The Sims Social*.

Actions taken by members of this fan group included helping each other with quests and task completion, and sharing information, tips, cheats or advice (example Image 8.3) gathered from other sources such as the official *The Sims Social* website or other web sources. This took place in the 'player frame'. Within this frame, members shared their happiness (as shown in Image 8.5), vented disappointments and anger (Image 8.4) and displayed their creativity, such as by sharing a collage of screenshots of their Sim accompanied by a music video.

Posts in fan groups were normally screenshots of members' gameplay experiences. As related by a participant in this research, who was one of the Malaysian Sims fan group administrators, the main objective for establishing this fan group had a sense of nationalism attached to it:

> Where ever we go in this world, we would be drawn to find our own people, don't you think so? Just like you, when you go overseas to study, you would want to find Malaysians and Malaysian food, right? It's the same concept applicable when I started this group; I just wanted to find Malaysians who play *The Sims Social*. (MWI)

Image 8.3: Seeking advice among group members. Translation available in Appendix 6.

Image 8.4: Venting frustrations among group members. Translation available in Appendix 7.

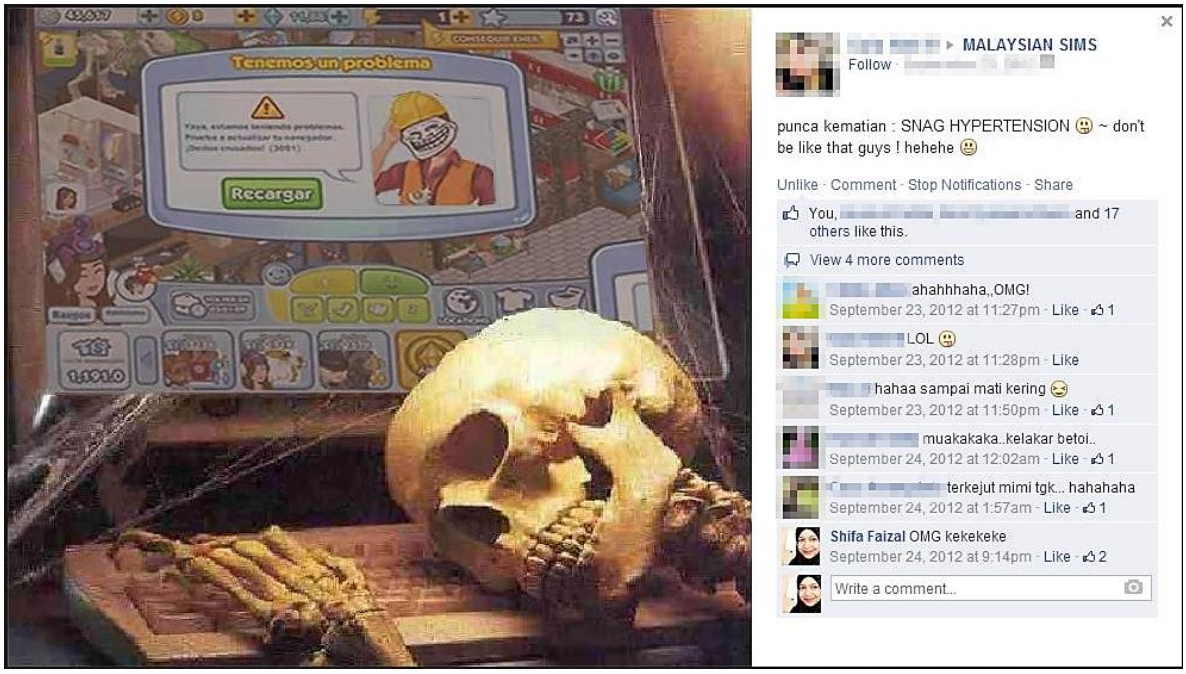


Image 8.5: Members sharing jokes in the fan group. Translation available in Appendix 8.

As Malaysian Sims was a private group, in which members required a reference from an existing member and were subject to approval from the group administrators, its members worried less about privacy settings and issues because the posts were confined within the parameters of the fan group page. One of the participants highlighted this:

> Malaysian Sims is a closed group; not everyone can be a member. Yes, you may send a request to join, but it's not easy for anyone to be accepted into the group. It's easier if you were invited. (MW8)

The administrators would normally do a basic background check to ensure they only recruited genuine Malaysian *The Sims Social* players in order to ensure the safety of their existing members. This was mentioned by one of the participants of this research, who also happened to be one of the administrators of this fan group:

> In fact, before we accept you in the group and approve your request to recruit players for this research, I did some background search on you. I cross-checked with the university you worked in, and with the students from the Faculty as well. That's why I asked more clarification from you like your ID. Only when we were satisfied, I approved you into the group where you're free to make announcements. If I don't know about you, I won't jeopardise the safety of the members of this group by letting you join in or [allowing you to ask people to] help you with this research. (MW1)

In the Malaysian Sims fan group, emergent play occurred as something organised by the administrators, as suggested by members of the group, or through adaptation from the official EA website or other games' fan sites. There could also be a spontaneous play among members. The

organised emergent play consisted on monthly 'Fashionista' and 'House Mania' contests. The 'Fashionista' contest was a search for the best male and female Sim, a contest that resembled the selection of prom King and Queen. The House Mania contest was a search for the best decorated house based on the current season or theme on *The Sims Social*. Members cast votes, and the administrators totalled the votes and announced the winner. Image 8.6 shows some examples from the 'Fashionista' Hall of Fame and Image 8.7 shows two houses featured in the House Mania contest in the Malaysian Sims fan group.

These contests sometimes led to a more spontaneous and creative play such as players dressing their Sims in traditional Malay clothing and the Malaysian flag, as shown in Image 8.6. Sharing gameplay experiences with screen shots taken from the game encouraged conversations. Sometimes, members created stories or dialogues based on screen shots of the activities and relationship of their Sims, and initiated conversations about interactions, achievements or other material from the game (Image 8.8).

These emergent play and sharing activities occurring in the fan group offered players a different play experience as compared to the game itself. Apart from being a place to help each other in the game, the fan page also enhanced creativity among co-players through activities and sociability elements increased bonding among group members.

Members in fan groups share similar game-related objectives and might establish some form of convention that encourages the interpretation of the identity performed in *The Sims Social* as play, rather than representing the 'actual' identity presented on Facebook. This could be seen through the posts and comments made in the Malaysian Sims fan page, in which members alternated in the use of their Facebook's profile name, their Sim's name and their actual offline name. This was evidence of bonding, comfort and trust among members of the fan group as shown in Image 8.8. Alternating the between the player's Facebook profile name, their Sim and their actual name indicated not only active but visible switching of frames between the 'person frame', 'player frame', 'character frame' and 'self-presentation frame' among fan page members. This could also mean that fan pages could be a place on Facebook where there is 'pure' permeability between identity play and 'authentic' identity.

Image. 8.6: King and Queen winners for the 'Fashionista' contest on the Malaysian Sims fan page.

Notice in both bottom pictures in 8.6: a male Sim with the Malaysian flag (bottom-left picture) and a male Sim wearing traditional Malay attire (bottom-right) created by the players themselves.

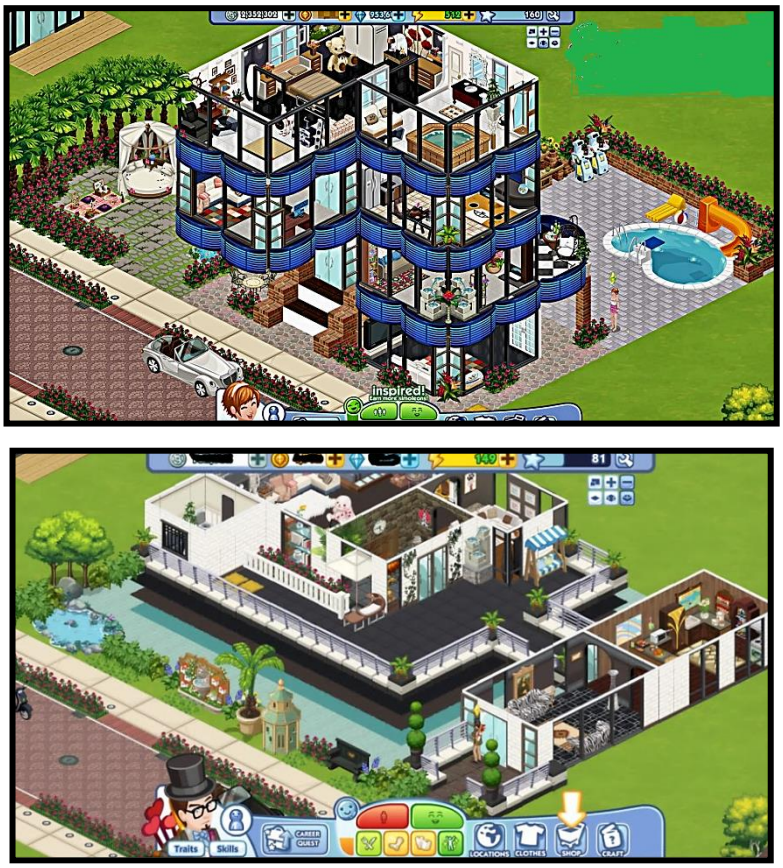


Image 8.7: Example of entries for the 'House Mania Contest' on the Malaysian Sims fan group

Image 8.8: Example of creative play in Malaysian Sims fan group. Translation available in Appendix 9.

This is a post in a form of an 'album' to document the love relationship between two *The Sims Social* players, which clearly stated the names of their Sims and their respective Facebook profiles. Translation is available in Appendix 9.

Minimising the risk of disrupting a performance of self on Facebook

Whether the game experience from *The Sims Social* was shared directly from the game to Facebook or in fan groups, minimising disruptive self-presentation required the management of privacy settings to establish the boundary of each and every post and share on Facebook. However, the application of privacy settings for the purpose of managing self-presentation on Facebook varied in its intensity depending on the type of Facebook account players used to play *The Sims Social*. As expected, these measures were more evident among participants who played *The Sims Social* via their authentic Facebook account compared with participants who play via an account created solely for game-playing.

Playing The Sims Social via an authentic Facebook account

Participants who played *The Sims Social* via authentic Facebook accounts were more concerned about matters related to their Facebook privacy settings and establishing boundaries when sharing gameplay experiences on Facebook. Their presentation of self is at stake when identity play permeates into the actual identity presented on Facebook. The clashing identities are made available for interpretation to everyone who has access to the player's profile. Although most of the game experiences shared on Facebook were not harmful to the presentation of self, this interpretation varied from person to person. Part of an audience on Facebook may find some posts provocative. Game-related posts may annoy those who do not play Facebook games. One of the participants clearly stated her concern about this matter in one of the interviews:

> Not everyone likes posts on games, which is why I always hide posts related to *The Sims Social*. I don't want my colleagues to know about the amount of time I spend on *The Sims Social*. So I will hide and delete, delete, delete [laughs]. (MW10)

However, most of the participants who played *The Sims Social* via authentic Facebook accounts were selective about with whom they played and shared their gameplay experiences to avoid the complications of a disruptive performance of self. The participants expressed being most comfortable playing *The Sims Social* and sharing the gameplay experiences, interactions and posts on Facebook with close family and friends who they described as 'really knowing them as a person':

> Nope, I can share about anything on my Facebook. I think, they don't think anything about my Facebook account or posts, because they are all my friends, they know me personally. (MWE)

> If with friends I don't mind it really. We treat games as games – not more than that. But, I guess if it involves other people, the weird things you do in the game could affect the way people look at you. (MW4)

> Between friends it's ok, maybe because we already know that person. But for those who we hardly know, it could get complicated. (MW5)

Interestingly, the participants were more self-conscious of what others might think of their performance on *The Sims Social* and Facebook than placing judgements on other players and thus, insisted on the importance of avoiding judgemental views or criticising others solely on posts from *The Sims Social*:

> To me, when I saw posts on Facebook or in the game where a Sim has four beds placed outside their house all for woo-hoo – the first thought that comes to my mind was, 'oh, this person is interesting, this person must be really fun', things like that, you know? I won't make a conclusion that this person is a maniac whatsoever. Anyway, people can interpret behaviours from *The Sims Social* in many different ways. (MW6)

> I reflect [the game] to myself; more towards myself. People can judge and we can't stop it, that's normal. But for me, I always reflect things [that takes place in the game] to myself. (MW10)

> I don't like to judge others. I don't mind if you want to be a woman, a man or gay – I'm cool with that. Who knows – maybe yes, in real-life this person wants to be gay but didn't do it for reasons like family or religion. But it's not wrong in *The Sims Social*, not by law or anything else. So I guess there's nothing wrong with doing it in there. (MWA)

There were times when some of the participants expressed some form of individualism:

> But sometimes, when I get a little bit crazy, I just thought, 'Who cares?' You know? If I bumped into any of these people and they started asking me questions about my game behaviours I'll just tell them off, 'it's only a game, why take it seriously?' Like yes, posts on Facebook or the game gave some indication about you but you cannot judge people based on games. (MWA)

> I couldn't care less about what people think about me. The fact of what I do or don't is my choice and it is not because I am afraid of what people will think of me. (MW12)

> I just want to do things my way. Not because of others telling me what I'm supposed to do or not. To me, I know myself better and that's enough. (MWI)

In the interviews, the participants were able to identify and describe the type of 'friends' on Facebook whom they thought were more flexible and accepting towards their gameplay experiences and posts on Facebook. This indicated indirect ways of managing presentations of their gameplay experiences on Facebook. They took this one step further to group people according to certain characteristics. Posts from *The Sims Social* were only shared with certain audiences based on these groups. This was done by specifying the group they intend to share with before posting each game-related post. Below are some of the participants who manage their audience on Facebook into groups and their co-players into groups to indicate them as players of *The Sims Social:*

> I make sure that every single person added into my Facebook account must be grouped into a specific folder. Those who I add for playing *The Sims Social*, I will group them in *The Sims Social* folder. My customer goes into my 'customer folder'. If I don't know them at all, I put them under 'online friends' folder. I customised the settings of each folder. Pictures, I keep it private so only family and friends can see. *The Sims Social* friends will only see pictures related to the game. (MW3)
>
> I customised my *The Sims Social* friends into one folder. So when I need to send requests, I will post it to my TSS friends only. I started to classify *The Sims Social* friends because of a comment I got from a friend telling me not to post game notifications on her timeline. Since that time, I realised that not all of our friends on Facebook can accept our game posts and notifications. (MW13)
>
> I grouped them – yeah, I do that. I did that because I do not want to get messed-up. I have lots of friends, international and local. Sometimes, I was like 'Who's this person?' For example when it's my birthday, I receive a lot of birthday wishes on my Facebook and I cannot recognise them all [laughs]. So putting them in groups will help me to identify them; like 'oh, this one is from this game and this other one is from another game'. Because I play lots of games, it make sense to categorise them according to game. Then I also categorised friends I know in real-life. I never specify the privacy settings on all these groups because I don't feel the need to differentiate them all, except for family members. (MWA)
>
> Oh yes, yes I do. I put them in a group – TSS group so that they'll only see posts relevant to them, particularly after the incident where one of my co-players complained about my posts. (MWH).

Playing *The Sims Social* jeopardised self-presentation on Facebook for several reasons mentioned above: the audience on Facebook could question your identity play; some may find game-related posts irritating. The tools provided by Facebook, such as grouping friends and the privacy settings, were underutilised, sometimes because 'it's too complicated' or because the participants were simply unaware of the tools and policy. Quoting a couple of participants on their feelings about specifying privacy on Facebook posts:

> I wanted to get everyone organised in my Facebook. But what happened to me sometimes, I tend to get myself confused. After I post something, I started having doubts, wondering "hey, have I made that post private or not?" I got so confused and then I had to double-check the post. It happened to me sometimes and this always makes me feel unsure and hesitant. If I got too confused, I will go back and delete the post. (MW2)
>
> I only play with my friends. I don't like the idea of approving strangers on Facebook for the sake of playing *The Sims Social*. I only have one white guy on my Facebook. I don't remember when I added him by accident, but he's the only one. He is quite active playing *The Sims Social* and gives all the gifts, which is good so I let him remain in my Facebook [laughs]. I also didn't know we can actually apply privacy settings to our Facebook friends. (MW10)

In a separate interview, a participant related one of the consequences of being too dependent on the privacy settings for each game post:

> I have to be extra careful with sharing my *The Sims Social* posts on Facebook; it's just too risky [laughs]. If my partner finds out from my timeline especially when it's a woo-hoo post, I could get into trouble. I try not to share – to hide or specify the privacy for these posts – but it's really hard you know? When you're playing you've got lots of things to share and there could be one or two posts that might just slip-through by accident and be shared it to the public [laughs]. (MWA)

Managing a Facebook audience by groups is not as easy as it seems. The Facebook user needs to create a group in advance, and select and assign individuals from their friends list to the particular group. After the group has been created, each time the account user wants to post or share anything on Facebook, the user needs to assign the post to the intended group or groups. The account user has to remember to classify each and every post according to the intended audience or group. For some of the players, this could be a tedious and time consuming task, especially when they were an avid *The Sims Social* player.

Fan groups and other The Sims Social sources

From the interviews, it is worth mentioning that most participants who played *The Sims Social* using their actual, authentic Facebook account were not interested in joining fan groups because most of them felt satisfied and comfortable playing with their family and friends:

> I do know everyone on my Facebook on a personal basis. I think you are the only person, and yeah there's one more that I don't really know – the rest I know them all. I have never been to any forums or groups to add friends to play *The Sims Social*. I make it a point to make my Facebook personal and always keep it that way. I know some people will add strangers on Facebook for the sake of playing games, but not me. (MWF)

> No, and I don't know about the existence of these groups. However, I do join the EA ones. I don't add strangers; I don't see the need to do it because I have enough neighbours already. I mean a hundred neighbours is enough, how many more do we need, right? So, no, well a hundred neighbours is basically enough so I don't think that I need to add 'outsiders' or anything like that. (MWE)

Most of the participants who preferred not to join any of the groups relied on other sources such as the official *The Sims Social* website by EA, the official and fan group pages on Facebook, and blogs to get information related to the game. They used these sources to gather information about the game and sometimes, to recruit new co-players:

> Most of the time, if I ever have to go to these forums it is normally because I need new information, especially some ideas on house decorating. I remember there was a time when I went to these forums because I wanted to learn how to create those multistorey houses. Most of the time I prefer to go to *The Sims Social* website to collect freebies . . . (MW10)

Although most of the participants played *The Sims Social* with family and friends, some also played with strangers. The fact that they used *The Sims Social* fan groups or official website to recruit strangers as co-players seemed to contradict their earlier statements [on being comfortable playing with family and friends]. Some of the participants did recruit and play with strangers because to them, playing with strangers required less commitment as the relationship was formed for the purpose of playing *The Sims Social*. Thus, game-related posts would not be associated with the player as a person.

> Yeah, at a certain point I did add some people. I normally go to *The Sims Social* website – the one under EA. You can find lots of people posting, 'add me, add me, add me'. So, I'll just add them on Facebook, which I think most of them are from US. Usually I will introduce myself, informing them that I am a daily player blah, blah, blah . . . and if I needed something, I will personally message them and say, 'oh I need this, this, this'. It's like making friends, but we only talk about games, and not personal life. (MWH)

> I play with a lot of players from outside Malaysia, which I randomly add. I did it through several ways. To me, the most important thing is to add active daily players; if you want to add strangers, make it count. For example, I added you, and from there I could get you to recommend me active players and I'll add them. I normally will send them a message on Facebook telling them about the game and wondering if they could be my friend on Facebook to play *The Sims Social*. I send a friend request, and they accept – simple! I don't join groups or anything like that. Forums I tried but it's not for me. It is for those who literally devote their lives to the game. OMG, don't these people have life? Oh, please . . . [laughs], I am just too occupied with work to do that. (MWA)

Most of the participants who added strangers as friends on Facebook for game purposes stressed the importance of managing co-players with folders and customising game posts to include only a specified list or folder to minimise the risk of sharing game-related posts with an unintended public. Grouping stranger co-players was important. Just as not everyone on Facebook can accept game-related posts, strangers-turned-co-players may be unable to accept regular posts that are intended for actual family and friends. As shared by one participant:

> I do experience some problems with those I have added for *The Sims Social*. There was once when I accidently shared something and made it public, so everyone on my Facebook could see it. Do you remember about the video on Facebook about a mother abusing her baby? Yeah, one of my stranger friends, she made a comment asking me to remove the video I shared. She said, 'can you please remove this because I think this is disturbing'. But I explained to her about my feelings towards the issue and why I feel it's important to me to highlight it in my Facebook. She accepted my explanation saying, 'oh, ok'. Then it's ok I guess. (MWH)

For most of the participants, playing *The Sims Social* with their authentic Facebook account was just natural because they did not feel the need to have a separate account to play games. Some stated that having more than one Facebook account would take too much effort. Managing co-players and setting

the privacy levels was seen as a hassle by some participants. One of the participants explained how she managed her *The Sims Social* players by simply identifying them through the word 'Sims' in their names:

> Oh, no, I never join any such groups. Just the official EA, and I cannot consider myself active in that forum. Even for all the previous Sims I played like 1, 2 and 3. If I needed anything, I'll just Google it. I'll collect all the cards and save it. I don't depend on groups. Same goes for gifts or bonuses; I'll get it straight from the official website. I don't need to be in fan groups to add players. I have lots of players, mostly Americans, I think? I have a few players from Asian countries like from India. I added these people when I started playing *Sorority Life*. For some reason I always prefer searching the 'Westerners' to help me with the gifts, send gifts what so ever, instead of Malay names, because it's easier for me to recognise them. I used to manage them but I couldn't be bothered anymore. Now, let's say I play *The Sims Social*, so when I need to post something, I just type 'Sims' and the list of people who play Sims will appear so I add them and select them. Those without 'Sims' at the end of their names, like most of my Malay friends, I can remember them by name, because there aren't many of them. Most of my friends are not into games. I don't need an extra account. I've thought about it, but no. I am too lazy to maintain another Facebook account. If I ever wanted to add new players, I can easily find them on *The Sims Social* pages on Facebook. I simply type 'Sims' and I can just add those with Sims on their names. (MWG)

Playing either with people you know or strangers can be complicated, especially when it comes to managing the Facebook public for the purpose of playing *The Sims Social*, as stated by this participant:

> With those people who we are really close with, they already know who you are and they won't have any negative judgements about you based on the posts from *The Sims Social*. We feel safe because we all know it's just a game. Same goes with those strangers whom we add for the purpose of playing the game. They only know you virtually, like what are the odds of meeting a friend from Africa whom you add to play *The Sims Social*? Almost zero chance. The most she knows about me is through the information I share on Facebook, like through my photos and other materials. But, the real problem is those whom we didn't meet for more than 20 years but they are on Facebook, like from primary school. They are a little bit difficult to manage. They only knew you when you were kids and they hardly know the 'you' today. So, I always play it safe with them. (MWA)

The empowerment of the 'game' account

Instead of separating their audience into groups and specifying the intended audience for each and every post, some of the participants preferred to keep their 'authentic' Facebook account separate from their 'game' Facebook account. Creating a separate Facebook account solely for *The Sims Social* seemed to free them from all the worry and risk in relation to managing self-presentation on Facebook because the game account's public shared the same 'this is just a game' nonverbal convention.

Having a separate account was empowering, as this account did not reveal any information about the player's identity (particularly their offline identity) and the majority of the audience was *The Sims Social*

players. It also meant that the player could play *The Sims Social* without having to worry about managing information 'given' or 'given off' as there was no identity to maintain. This relieved the players from worrying about clashing identities that could disrupt their performance of self. They were free to perform their identity play in *The Sims Social* in any way they liked and to share any of these experiences on Facebook as well as in fan groups without having to worry about their audience, privacy settings or their self-presentation because everyone in this account was also a 'Simmer'.

A separate account removed the burden of having to worry about non-players on the network being annoyed at receiving 'game invites' or posts on game-related matters. It also freed them from having to manage privacy settings, which, according to them, were quite tedious. Having a separate account to play *The Sims Social* relieved them from having to manage self-presentation on Facebook. Facebook was used only as a platform to login to the game.

Here are some quotes from the participants who had more than one Facebook account:

> I have two Facebook accounts, one personal, which is for family and friends, and the other one for games. In the Facebook account I don't have any information about myself, hmmm . . . maybe a picture of myself and the rest is all pictures of football and the game. In this account, I have a lot of friends, not actual friends but friends for *The Sims Social*. Most of them come from Europe, Spain and Mexico, most probably because the name I use for my Sim is a popular Spanish football player. They also add me into their Facebook groups. So I just accept and I learn a lot about the game from them. You can look at my house, and look at the amount of SimCash I have, you will definitely go 'Wow' [laughs], and it will get you excited. Some of them wanted to know me better and become real friends, I will tell them to add me on the other account. (MW8)

> I have a second Facebook account to play *The Sims Social*. I don't worry or feel guilty about posting anything about games or adding just about anyone into that account for the purpose of playing games. (MWI)

Making friends came easy for the players with separate accounts, particularly adding new friends for *The Sims Social* purposes. They did not fear adding anyone, including strangers, and they went to great lengths to get more neighbours, usually through fan groups. If, at any time, they were to find any of their neighbours inactive, they would remove them from their game without hesitation.

> Whenever we receive gifts, we know who sent the gift from the picture beside it and basically after some point, we are able to recognise the active ones and those who are not. I will go to those who are not active and check their Facebook page and see the most recent post on TSS. If there's no recent post on TSS, I'll delete them from my game. So I'll just maintain those who are really active. (MW8)

These women made friends from different parts of the world: North America, South America, Europe, and other parts of Asia like Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines. They helped each other in *The Sims Social's* quests, and provided links, tips and cheats for the game.

A couple of the participants became close to their *The Sims Social* friends from other countries and they developed into more than just in-game friends – their friendship made the big leap from the 'game' account to the real Facebook account. They became friends, wishing each other 'happy birthday', liking their pictures, making comments on the timeline, and even meeting up with each other and visiting each other's homes. One participant shared an account of making friends with a total stranger:

> **MW8**: It started when she helped me a lot in the game. We communicated a lot in Facebook, and then we started talking on the phone, WhatsApp most of the time . . .
>
> **Researcher**: On the phone? How did you have the courage to exchange phone numbers?
>
> **MW8**: I gave it to her because I trust her, and this only happens after five to six months of online communication. I only give my number to woman.
>
> **Researcher**: How do you know she's a woman?
>
> **MW8**: I just have the instinct . . . maybe from the information she provided on her Facebook. I can tell at first that she uses a fake account to play games, like me. But I can tell from the kind of pictures posted in her Facebook although it doesn't tell much information. But from the way she behaves through our communication, I can tell that she's sincere based on the similarities in our interests. We are friends now, and meet up like normal friends do.

This participant explained that for her to accept any of her 'game friends' as 'real friends' on her real Facebook account took several months. There was a process of getting to know each other through chats (on Facebook) and regular contact. The decision was based on the information in the communication and 'instinct'. She said:

> You'll somehow know whether this person is a fake or for real. (MW8)

Another participant shared a similar experience:

> I haven't got any friends like that on TSS, not yet. But other online games that I play – yes. In other Facebook games I have friends from all over the world, we chat and they are very nice. I do get invites to their homes, if someday I happened to be visiting their countries. I invited them over to my place too [laughs]. (MW1)

Although it was liberating for these Malay women to engage with *The Sims Social* via a separate game account, this certainly did not mean that they assumed a different identity when they played *The Sims Social*. The process of reflexivity still took place as they negotiated the values encountered during play. Like other players, those with a game account treated some values as unnegotiable on the grounds of

religion, as presented in Chapter 7. This demonstrates that Pargman and Jakobsson's (2008) frames were very much in use, as the players alternated from the 'person frame' to the 'character frame' and the 'player frame'. For the participants who played *The Sims Social* on a specific Facebook account, the only difference was the simplification of the 'self-presentation frame', as their game identity did not affect their offline identity, avoiding some of the complications of self-presentation management experienced by players who played with their 'authentic' Facebook account.

Playing The Sims Social with a dummy Facebook account

Some of the participants had more than one Facebook account to help them complete the quests in *The Sims Social*, or any other game they were playing. Having more than one Facebook account is practice even by some of the participants who played the game via their 'authentic' Facebook account.

> I have six Facebook accounts to help me with my game. I have one primary one, which is all real ... I create dummy emails and then create the Facebook account. (MW10)

Completing the quests in *The Sims Social* often requires a lot of help from neighbours. The pressure to complete the quests has led some players to create extra Facebook accounts. Having more than one Facebook account to help with games was justified as necessary by some of the participants who did it. From a different perspective, this defeats the purpose of SNGs, which are supposed to encourage and enhance sociability among family and friends on Facebook. Participants who used these 'dummy' accounts explained that they were only used to help them during 'emergency' times. However, some participants admitted that these accounts were 'not much of a help' because players needed more than just one 'extra' player to help with the game quests.

> I created two accounts but that was during my desperate times [laughs]. I created the account to help me with my tasks [in *The Sims Social*], because I was running out of time. It is just a dummy account and I didn't add anyone as friends, just myself. (MW13)

From the interviews, these Facebook accounts were created solely for playing games, and could be differentiated from an authentic Facebook account. In fact, there were two types of 'game' account – the first were created by players to avoid playing via their authentic Facebook account due to self-presentation complications. The second were game accounts created not to play games per se, but to help their main account from which they played the game. This second account was normally created in response the player's desperation to help the main account, particularly in completing certain quests in the game.

The first type of account had a more genuine feel. At the very least, it displayed a picture of the account owner (although it might not be displayed as the profile photo) and these accounts had a lot of active

game-playing friends from any nationality or background. These accounts functioned in the same way as any genuine player playing *The Sims Social*, minus the complications of managing self-presentations. As stated by one of the participants:

> I have two Facebook accounts, one is for the game and one is the personal account where I have my family and friends. I don't have any information on the game one, only a picture of me and I have lots of football related pictures in there, because it is related to my Sim. (MW8)

However, this was not the case with accounts created simply as a supporting tool to help the main account. There were no actual photographs of the account holder and no friends except the authentic account which it helped.

Conclusion

In the interviews, the Malay women who were participants in this project acknowledged the importance of managing their self-presentation on Facebook. From the interviews and discussions, self-presentation management was not a conscious act. The participants in this research were committed to behaviours that demonstrated efforts to maintain a self-presentation that reflected their offline self, thus minimising the risk of disruption to their Facebook accounts. These Malay women players acted in creative ways to ensure that their Facebook identities were, as much possible, consistent with their offline identities. They demonstrated sophisticated understandings of the characteristics of Facebook as a sensitive platform populated by people accumulated from different contexts throughout their life cycles.

For these Malay women, playing *The Sims Social* was mostly about being playful and having fun. However, there were matters related to their religion or cultural values that required negotiation. Their encounters with globalisation and modernity in the game demanded a complex form of reflexivity, as they explained their experience of play with a mixture of cosmopolitan values and Islamic and Malay cultural values. This showed the complexity of their thinking, understanding and tolerance with regard to the application of cosmopolitan values brought by globalisation and modernity, while at the same time maintaining other factors that were important to their identity: their religion and Malay cultural values. Each and every encounter with American and Western values triggered the reflexivity process, with players switching between 'person frame', character frame', 'player frame' and 'self-presentation' frame during play. The 'person frame' was prioritised over the 'character frame', particularly when the negotiation process involved issues related to family relationships, inappropriate content (especially for children), and certain religious issues.

The combination of religious, sociocultural and cosmopolitan values was visible not only as they explained their experience of play, but also in the ways that they described their experience with Facebook. Their understanding on the importance of managing self-presentation on Facebook was very sophisticated. This could be seen in the efforts they took to ensure that their Facebook accounts were managed consistently and to minimise any disruption brought by the identity play performed in *The Sims Social*.

Identity play performed in *The Sims Social* was recognised as a potential source of information that could cause disruption to their more 'authentic' identity presented on Facebook, particularly when shared with unintended audiences. Disruption happened because identity play produced information that was given or given off to the Facebook public, which may have influenced the Facebook public's perceptions about the particular player.

In maintaining a consistent identity on Facebook, and keeping up with game play in *The Sims Social* at the same time, the players went to great lengths to either manage the privacy settings on Facebook in order to ensure posts reached only intended audiences, or to segregate their audiences by creating a new Facebook account that was separate from their self-presentation on their more 'authentic' account. This shows that the 'self-presentation frame' was being prioritised at all times when it came to Facebook.

Chapter 9: Summary and conclusion

This thesis was a direct effort to explore Malay women's engagement with social network games played on Facebook and the negotiation of identity that happened as they encountered the globalisation and modernity encapsulated in a specific SNG, *The Sims Social*. The main reason for embarking on this research was significance of the topic of inquiry today. The shifting of the media landscape as we know it, with social media leading the way, has altered the way Malay women engage with modernity in a globalised world.

The participants in this research, Malay women who played *The Sims Social*, brought complex and interesting elements into the current body of knowledge. Their ethnicity, 'Malay', is in itself complex because it is defined by two important factors: first, professing Islam as their religion, and second, adhering to *adat* Melayu (Malay customs), which includes habitually speaking the Malay language. Both Islam and *adat Melayu* play an important role in the Malay identity and in the construction of Malaysia's modernity project.

This research aimed to explore the complexity of negotiating identity as Malay women in encounters with globalisation and modernity through two different but overlapping contexts in their everyday lives: the social network game *The Sims Social* and social network site Facebook.

The identity play performed in *The Sims Social* could only be fully understood if Facebook was included in the discussion. This is because TSS was exclusively played on Facebook, with Facebook providing the affordances for users to play. Gameplay activities were connected to players' social network profiles. This meant that the identities performed on Facebook and in *The Sims Social* respectively became somewhat permeable and become visible to unintended audiences. The consequences of this permeability were found to be complex for the players' self-presentation or 'authentic' identity as performed on Facebook.

Like other women in history, Malay women were traditionally confined to private spaces and were limited to traditional gender roles. Malay women gradually came into the public sphere during Malaya's pre-independence period, which was described as a turning point towards women's liberation, in parallel with Malaysia's modernity process. After independence, Malaysia experienced a period of rapid modernisation which saw Malay women's participation in economy grow, particularly during the Industrialisation era of the 1980s.

The Industrialisation era marked a curious but critical moment in history, in which Malay women were out in public for the first time. Large numbers of women emerged from their private spaces to join men in the workforce and contribute to the economy. With their newly found freedom and economic independence, Malay women were in uncharted waters as they were introduced to new lifestyles brought by modernity, such as new leisure time activities that encouraged consumption and materialistic culture. It was during this point of time that Malay women began to break free from 'the fixities of tradition' (Giddens 1990, p. 53).

The global Islam revivalism movement may have contributed to the success of Malay women breaking free from the boundaries of tradition. This movement happened at the time when Malaysia was moving towards modernisation. It called for the *adat Melayu* to be re-evaluated and refined to thoroughly reflect the tenets of Islam. This process encouraged Malay society to be critical of their own traditions and customs, particularly those that contradicted the teachings of Islam.

The reworking and refining of *adat* Melayu through Islam demonstrated the processes of reflexivity among the Malays. Islam induced the process of reflexivity that brought significant changes, not only in the lifestyle of the Malay's but also on a bigger scale as the Malaysian government integrated Islamic values in its construction of modernity. The growing importance of Islam does not mean the Malays dismissed *adat*, but rather that *adat* has been constantly re-evaluated and reworked to accommodate Islam alongside modernity.

As for Malay women, this process of reflexivity paved the way for Malay women to be part of Malaysia's modernisation effort, as tradition was no longer the dominant factor in the lives of the Malays. From the pre-independence era through independence and during Malaysia's modernisation process, Malay women invoked Islam and *adat* as a means to negotiate and respond to issues surrounding their encounter with modernity. Their experiences are a unique demonstration of Giddens' notion of reflexivity. Giddens downplayed the importance of tradition and religion in modern society; however, Malay women's experience suggested otherwise. Islam and *adat Melayu* are so embedded in the lives of the Malays that they became a source of reference and filter in the Malay women's process of reflexivity in their daily lives.

In contemporary Malaysia, Malay women have achieved a greater presence in politics and equal opportunity in education and the workforce. Malay women's engagement with modernity has shifted to include popular culture via media. The globalised media industry and the rise of the internet have made

the encounters with other cultures and values from all over the world inevitable, particularly with the dominant players from the US and other Western countries.

The American and Western culture, as presented on the mass media, are not alien to the Malays as their encounter predates the mass media era. The Malay Peninsula was colonised by three European powers – the Portuguese, Dutch and British – and the reign was abruptly taken over by the Japanese for three years. The legacy of Western culture continues to be part of Malaysia, largely through its influence on mass media, in the ample content that is imported from the US and the UK; in addition to content from non-Western countries.

The worries of the Malays about the influences of media to the Malay and their culture were discussed by the government, academician's society and the media regularly. Newspaper reports and academic studies (for example by Ungku Abdul Hamid 2002; Mohd Yusoff & Hanafiah 2015) expressed concerns about the values represented in global media content that were seen as compromising Malay culture and contrary to Islamic customs and *adat Melayu* (Malay customs). Content of concern included sexualised images, extensive consumerism, liberalism and representations of sexuality issues and extra marital relationships. It was feared that the global media was having detrimental effects on Malay women, risking Malaysia's vision of modernity which centres within cultural, religious and moral grounds. This moral panic about Malay women's morality was not new. As Malaysia has embraced modernity and globalisation, women, in particular Malay women, have been under constant surveillance by both the society and the government. Islam and *adat Melayu* function as points of reference in the surveillance on Malay women. Though it is not a formal monitoring system, it became a national agenda to protect Malay women from the negative influences of their engagement with global media, which, it was feared, could compromise Malaysia's approach to modernity. At this point, Islam and *adat Melayu* were both a solace and a contentious site for Malay women. Thus, Malay women were required to perform a delicate balance of Islam and *adat Melayu* in their daily encounter with modernity.

The balancing act required of Malay women was largely due to Malaysia's distinct model of modernity. It has adopted a capitalist model to support economic and social transformation while balancing this with a conservative take on culture and social structure, particularly as involves ethnic Malays (Crouch 1996). Due to this approach, modernity in Malaysia is full of disputes because it attempts to separate 'the public from the private realms (home and the world) but, on the other hand, modernity also breaches this boundary on its own terms' (Cheng 2006, p. 136 as cited in Syed 2011, p. 68). Malay women are caught in between these realms and they are regarded as 'metaphors for the conflicting aspects of modernity' (Stivens 1998, p. 93).

Research has been conducted to understand Malay women's consumption and engagement with media, namely television and its content, magazines, advertisement and others categorised as 'mass media' for example the studies by Idrus, Hashim and Mohd Mydin (2014) Ishak (2011) Ruslan and Abdul Latif (2016) Syed and Runnel (2014). However, the rise of the internet as the most popular communication medium today suggests that this mass media research needs to be complemented with research on digital media, and particularly in digital games and social media. Needless to say, people's engagement with digital media such as digital games and social media is somewhat different to their engagement with television and other mass or traditional media. This investigation of Malay women's engagement with digital games and social media also engaged with the complexities of Malay women's identities. Malay women in Malaysia today have more freedom and equality of opportunity than their counterparts in other Islamic countries, making their experience distinct. Exploring and understanding Malay women's engagement with modernity and globalisation via *The Sims Social* and Facebook also demanded this be understood in relation to other media they consumed to provide a holistic understanding of this phenomenon.

Theoretical and methodological underpinnings

The theoretical underpinning of this thesis is based in Goffman's (1959) theories on the *Presentation of Self*. Goffman argued that identity is contextual and that the management of self-presentation is crucial.

Managing identity and the performance of self was less complicated if it involved only one context at a time. Particularly in offline contexts (as discussed by Goffman) or at a time when the internet was a space where identities were largely performed anonymously. However, all that has changed, particularly on the internet, with sites like Facebook advocating for single, 'authentic' identities. Managing self-presentation on Facebook is complex because the networked public consists of people for whom we performed our identity differently in both offline and online contexts (boyd 2008). It is further complicated as more and more application program interfaces are integrated within Facebook (or any other SNS for that matter), mobilising identities performed in different contexts and collapsing these contexts in one, resulting in the 'mishmashing or disclosure of multiple identities' (Turkle 2006).

The Sims Social was a third-party application played on Facebook. To play *The Sims Social*, one needed a Facebook account and was bound by its terms and conditions. This also meant that the identity performed in the game context was visible to Facebook's networked public where identity would otherwise be managed to be consistent with the user's offline self. The overlapping of multiple identities on Facebook can cause confusion among Facebook's networked public. This is where Goffman's work

informed this thesis, emphasising the importance of self-presentation and impression management. However, Goffman's work needed to be extended to include a context like Facebook where multiple identities merge in one space. Meyrowitz (1985) extended Goffman's work to add the 'middle-stage' to Goffman's frontstage and backstage metaphors. Facebook can be regarded as a 'middle-stage' where audiences are able to observe and question the performance of multiple selves and build a cohesive narrative of a particular person. The complexity of this sort of context requires self-presentation management if one is to avoid disruption of identity where it may lead to inconsistency, or what Goffman might term an 'unbelievable' performance.

The multiple identities performed by Malay women playing *The Sims Social* on Facebook do not imply that the women who played *The Sims Social* had divided personalities. This is where Giddens work informed the research. Giddens suggests that self and identity are a reflexive project 'which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems' (Giddens 1991, p. 5). Thus, Malay women playing *The Sims Social* were bound to create, maintain and revise their set of bibliographical narratives from their continuous reflexive process in the contexts of both *The Sims Social* and Facebook. Reflexivity occurred within each and every interaction performed, but fundamental aspects of the players' offline selves were maintained throughout (Robinson 2007).

Giddens' notion of reflexivity suggests that cosmopolitanism thrives at the expense of tradition. That may be an accurate measure of modernity from a Western perspective. However, reflexivity in the context of this research should be understood from the Malay women's perspectives, as their experiences are socially and culturally different from Western society. As suggested by scholars such as Appadurai and Breckenridge (1995) modernity should be viewed as contingent to history, geography, culture, traditions and the impact of local events.

It is undeniable that in modern Malaysia, the internet accelerated the process of globalisation and modernisation. This saw cosmopolitan values coexisting alongside Islam and *adat Melayu*. The reflexivity process forced a critical interaction between cosmopolitan values, Islam and *adat Melayu*, resulting in multiplicities in the make-up of Malays. Years of globalisation, modernity and global media exposure have created diversities and layers of complexity in Malay identity. The make-up of Malays goes beyond its privileges, customs, religion and language. Therefore, when exploring Malay women's identity as they engaged with globalisation and modernity via *The Sims Social* on Facebook, Giddens' notion of reflexivity had to be extended to include religion and tradition alongside cosmopolitan values.

Overall, this research has found that the reflexivity described by Giddens' informed the intellectual processes of these Malay women. Although *The Sims Social* was played within the affordances of Facebook, the identity performed in each one was different. When in *The Sims Social,* participants' goals were related to play. Facebook, however, demanded the performance of a consistent identity that reflected the offline self. Goffman's theory enabled me to explore and understand the ways the participants in this research negotiated their self-presentation on Facebook. To complement these theories, the frame metaphor developed by Pargman and Jakobsson (2008) has been used as an overarching framework to explain the cognitive state of these Malay women players as they engaged with any of the online contexts without abandoning the 'real-life' context.

Pargman and Jakobsson (2008) translate the contexts each player engages in as frames, as in the way these contexts 'frame' the minds of the players. According to Pargman and Jakobsson, a gaming situation can be described as a frame-within–frames state. Before the game begins, the player is in an ordinary-life frame, termed as the 'person frame'. As the player prepares for the game, for example searching for a walkthrough on a game they inhabit the 'player frame'. While playing the game, the player is the 'character frame'. The frame metaphor establishes that 'at every specific point in time and for every utterance or action, only one frame is active' (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, p. 238). The frames are permeable, but only one frame is prioritised at a time. The act of switching frames happens automatically and, most of the time, effortlessly (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008).

Pargman and Jakobsson's frame metaphor assisted in understanding the cognitive states of the Malay women participants during their engagement with *The Sims Social.* However, the developers of the frame metaphor did not consider its applicability to SNGs such as *The Sims Social*, which exist within Facebook. This different context demands different identity performance or self-presentation. The identities performed in game spaces such as *The Sims Social* are based on more playful motivations such as exploration, experimentation or escapism. However, players needed to consider the effects of their identity play on their presentation on Facebook, because their identity play on *The Sims Social* could permeate and disrupt the more consistent (or a more authentic) representation of the players' identity as performed on Facebook. Likewise, identity performed on Facebook could permeate into the players' identity play or character within the game realm or in third places like the fan pages exist on Facebook. The possibility of any of the above situations happening was very high. The more consistent identity performed on Facebook, which reflected the offline self, could become jeopardised as it became layered with identity play arising from *The Sims Social* – unless this was properly managed.

During play, the players switched back and forth from being in 'character frame', 'player frame' and 'person frame'. The person frame was used when handling not only real-life or offline identity performances, but also performances of identity on Facebook. Switching to the Facebook frame became normal for *The Sims Social* player because the game's rules and mechanics were interconnected with Facebook. Sharing posts in order to gain a bonus or sharing news and achievements on Facebook required the players to consider the consequences of their actions in this difference of context and audience. For the purpose of this thesis, the person frame was extended to articulate two modes: the primary frame (offline frame) and the online frame, which I have termed the 'self-presentation frame'. Pargman and Jakobsson's work is very useful in describing the cognitive state the Malay women experienced as they engaged in identity play in *The Sims Social* and managed their more consistent identity on Facebook. The interactions between frames happened in concert with the process of reflexivity in maintaining a consistent presentation of self on Facebook, which reflected their offline selves.

Substantive propositions and theoretical implications

Conclusions on the perceptions and experiences of Malay women playing *The Sims Social* apply chiefly to the Malay women in this research. However, this research may be helpful in understanding other women in their daily engagement with SNGs. These findings give rise to substantive propositions (Glaser & Strauss 1967) presented in the following sections of this chapter. First, I present the findings of Chapter 6 with a focus on media engagement from a gendered perspective. Following this is an account of Malay women's engagement with *The Sims Social,* explained through Pargman and Jakobsson's frame metaphor and Giddens's theory of reflexivity. Next, I present the conclusions regarding Malay women's engagement with Facebook, with theoretical underpinnings from Goffman's self-presentation, Pargman and Jakobsson's frame metaphor and Giddens' reflexivity. Each of these sections considers how identity is managed, with an emphasis on gender, religion and culture.

Malay women's engagement with modernity through globalised media

Attempts to understand women's media consumption should consider gender as one of the important characteristics that shapes engagement with media. Gender and leisure time have an impact on women's engagement with media in general, and in the lives of the Malay women in this research. The findings on Malay women's engagement with media in general, and *The Sims Social* on Facebook, showed gendered patterns of engagement, with themes of prioritising, multi-tasking and productivity highlighted during interviews and focus groups. This conforms with the findings of other studies on the

role of gender in media engagement (see for example Chess 2009; Royce et al. 2007; William et al. 2009; Winn and Heeter 2009).

Although there have been positive changes in terms of gender equality; women still bear more responsibilities when it comes to family, children and household matters regardless of other work-related obligations. Malay women are still often expected to perform these gendered roles and this is very much interwoven with their sociocultural values. The Malay women in this research still considered these responsibilities a priority, and had less leisure time because of them.

In this research, Malay women described their engagement with media, and particularly the internet, as something significant in their lives. It was consumed as part of a consistent, multi-tasking activity. The internet was their source of entertainment, news, information and education. It was a communication tool used for email, chats and social networking on sites like Facebook and Twitter. Participants described how the internet gave them the freedom to choose, decide and manage their usage while engaging with other work at home or in the office around their time and schedule. The internet had become so significant in their lives that it was pervasive; these women were online at home, at the office and on-the-go, using popular internet applications such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and playing digital games like MMORPGs (such as *World of Warcraft*) and a lot of casual games. The smartphone was cited as one of the factors that made the internet more convenient and readily accessible.

The internet is also regarded as a private media and it has changed and opened up a variety of choices in Malay women's engagement with media. The research participants engaged with the internet in many ways, often concurrently. They watched YouTube while browsing Facebook; watched their favourite TV series or drama online through catch-up TV like 'Tonton' or accessed movies through peer-to-peer file sharing hosts like 'isoHunt'. The internet has almost taken over the functions of all other mass media. However, this does not mean that the more traditional mass media had been eliminated from participants' lives. Traditional mass media like television was regarded as a more familial media; a social activity in which media consumption was shared with the family – mothers, children or spouses.

The nature of SNGs like *The Sims Social* (and internet in general) is 'highly interruptible' (Juul 2010). This is a perfect match for women's fragmented leisure time. It has allowed them to be flexible with their time; enabled them to multi-task during work time and still be able to fit play in between 'prioritised'

tasks in the office or at home. Being able to multi-task was important because it prevented participants from feeling guilty about the pleasures they derived from the media they engaged with.

Most of the media content the Malay women in this research engaged with show a heavy preference towards American and Western programs and content over local content. Participants cited favourite TV series such as *How I Met You Mother, 2 Broke Girls, Suits, House, CSI* or reruns of *Friends*, as well as reality TV shows such as *Survivor and Keeping Up with The Kardashians*, and fashion-entertainment programs such as *Fashion Police*. This was important as this media content became an agent for globalisation and the selection of content made by the Malay women in this research was a window through which they engaged with cultures and values from a distance. These encounters with Western culture and values were not unfamiliar, considering Malaysia's long history of colonisation and its pluralism of religion and culture. Continuous exposure to transnational media content has somewhat normalised the foreign culture and values as they become appropriated into local contexts. All these encounters explained their level of tolerance, compromise and acceptance of the content presented in *The Sims Social*.

The following section highlights the second objective of this research and its related research questions. It presents Malay women's perceptions and experiences through their engagement with *The Sims Social* and the intersection of identities as they negotiated the culture, values and ideology presented within the game.

Malay women playing The Sims Social

Reflexivity during play in *The Sims Social* was highly complex as these women were seen negotiating and justifying their identities at the intersection of gender, sociocultural norms and religion. *The Sims Social* seemed to shape these Malay women's play experience as soon as they entered the game through its design and structure as well as the values embedded in the game. American and Westernised values and ideologies were significant in the game, and sex and sexuality, Christian rituals and celebrations, and consumerist values have been an ongoing controversy in all *The Sims* series.

On the surface, Malay women were flexible in their play experience in *The Sims Social*, accepting and negotiating the cultures, values and ideologies presented in the game. These Malay women could be seen changing the way they justified themselves in every encounter with the game's affordances and constraints, depending on their attitudes, intentions and motivations during play, whether these involved competitiveness, experimentation, curiosity fulfilment, narcissism or escapism. As they engaged with the game, traditional and religious rules were bent and sometimes broken. Participants suggested that

play in *The Sims Social* should not be taken too seriously, because to them, 'it is just a game' and it should stay that way. Their identity play should not be taken out of context.

Their encounters with sex and sexuality, celebrating religious rituals such as Christmas and Halloween and consumerist events such as Valentine's Day were all tolerable because it was part of play. They were not a problem as the players understood that *The Sims Social* was a context filled with American/ Western non-Islamic values as it was developed by Americans. Thus, they were able to make distinctions between these values and their own and to detach themselves through the notion of a magic circle. Perhaps it is the very 'foreignness' of the game that invoked the notion of a magic circle, which provided these women with the licence for 'playful transgression', to compromise their own cultural and religious norms.

However, *The Sims Social* was designed to take these playful identities outside the play context and into Facebook, by sharing posts on achievements and requests for help. There were crucial moments when these Malay women players had to decide whether or not they would share their experience on Facebook and risk their self-presentation on that platform. From the frame metaphor's perspective, these decisions happened within the 'person frame', and players had to justify the consequences of their act on two contexts: the real-world context and, more importantly, the self-presentation context. These Malay women normally made decisions that would not jeopardise the consistency of their self-presentation beyond the game. Maintaining a consistent self-presentation on Facebook was very important for the participants, so they decided to decline to share game posts on Facebook; to sort their friends into groups and post only to selected groups; or to play *The Sims Social* through a separate Facebook account created specifically for play.

There were several encounters in which these Malay women abandoned the 'play state' altogether and uncompromisingly rejected the values presented in the game on the basis of their religious and sociocultural values. This suggests that reflexivity exists all the time in the background during play. While these Malay women demonstrated flexibility in most of their encounters with the values presented in *The Sims Social*, there were some instances where the values presented in the game were intolerable, and religious or sociocultural factors dominated their decision. The prioritising of religion and tradition in these instances demonstrated the permeability of the magic circle. From the frame metaphor perspective, the moment the magic circle ruptures and play becomes un-play is the moment when the 'character frame' quickly switches to 'person frame'. The rejection of certain values particularly on sex and sexuality and on religious values presented in the game demonstrates the 'person frame' or the offline context being prioritised.

Most encounters with the values presented in *The Sims Social* were readily acceptable to these Malay women while in 'character frame'. They switched to 'self-presentation frame' as they started thinking about sharing their gameplay experiences and achievements, posting any game-related material on Facebook and inhabits 'player frame' when they seek help from co-players. The 'person frame' assumes the 'self-presentation' role because the process of reflexivity that happens at this moment is engaged in justifying and weighing the consequences of exposing identity play in the identity performed on Facebook and the offline self. Any time the 'person frame' was being prioritised indicated that religion and *adat Melayu* (Malay customs) were more significant that the play context. When the 'self-presentation frame' was being prioritised, it meant that self-presentation was more significant than play, which is also indirectly (but not necessarily) connected to the 'person frame'.

The final findings highlight the third objective and the final question that structured this research. It presents Malay women and their complex ways of managing self-presentation and their multiple, fluid and clashing identities as they collided on Facebook.

Malay women on Facebook

Facebook is a context that demands consistency in the performance of identity. The Malay women in this research maintained their Facebook identity to be as close as possible to their offline identity through their profile pictures and sharing of photos and updates. It became apparent that third-party applications such as *The Sims Social*, afforded by Facebook initially to facilitate social interaction among networked friends, may contradict Facebook's strict policy that advocates authenticity and consistency of identity.

By default, the identity play in games such as *The Sims Social* can surface on its host (Facebook in this case) and produced a sense of multiple identities. This can be an undesirable outcome, especially when the general public on Facebook perceive and expect an authentic performance of self. These multiple identities on Facebook became a source of information 'given' and 'given off' to the networked public – an often diverse set of people we know from different contexts of our lives. This information, especially information given off, may have a disruptive effect on the consistency of self-presentation as each individual in the network public makes sense of the multiple identities showcased on Facebook.

Maintaining consistency of identity, (or 'authenticity' as advocated by Facebook) in this context was complicated for another reason that stemmed from playing *The Sims Social*. As the game became intense, more players were needed to achieve game objectives and goals, urging players to recruit strangers to the game through Facebook. This clearly defied the original objective of playing SNGs,

which were initially set up as a way to enhance sociability and bonding between friends on Facebook. Having strangers as 'friends' on Facebook also complicated self-presentation management for these Malay women. Part of the issue lay in the notion of anonymity. Unlike any other games, the notion of anonymity was somehow not applicable in *The Sims Social,* simply because of the potential permeability of identities that existed between the game and its host.

Facebook is already a complex context because it merged different groups of people from different stages and contexts of our lives in one context. For these Malay women, engaging with *The Sims Social* risked their performance of identity because the layers of identity play from the game context often contradicted the identity presented on Facebook, and their offline identity as well. This was an unwelcome consequence of layering multiple identities onto the consistent narrative of their identity as maintained on Facebook. Consistency in their identity on Facebook was neither an anticipated nor a conscious strategy. It happened through the process of reflexivity. This is an 'online biographical narration' which is comparable to Giddens (1991) 'biographical narration', which they created, maintained and revised through reflexive processes. Hence, self-presentation on Facebook retained fundamental aspects consistent with their offline self.

Behaviours such as sharing posts, news and achievements from the game openly on Facebook for bonus points were risky. For these Malay women, filtering gameplay information happened during play; in the self-presentation-person frame. Each time they decided to share any gameplay information or experience, they needed to change the settings of the post to reach only the selected group or people. Some of the participants took a different approach. Instead of having to constantly think about and manage each and every post relating to their gameplay experience, they decided to play *The Sims Social* on a separate Facebook account altogether. According to them, this was a better way of managing self-presentation on Facebook; by separating their audiences from the start. Play became the reason for creating a separate Facebook account. This empowered these women because the play accounts had no offline identity and were associated with a networked public that consisted only of game players, thus eliminating the complication of managing their self-presentation on their everyday Facebook account. This also gave them the flexibility to add 'strangers' as 'friends' on Facebook purely for play purposes. It freed them from any commitments due to their shared understanding from the start: they are not real friends but friends only in *The Sims Social*. The only commitment was based on play, and inactive players were easily removed at any time with no guilt. Surprisingly, these accounts created solely for playing *The Sims Social* still had a genuine feel to them, and included pictures of the actual account user, although these were not necessarily displayed as a profile picture.

For those playing *The Sims Social* on their authentic or through a 'game' account, there was also the option of having a couple more Facebook accounts to help them with their game. This type of account, described as a 'dummy' account, was not a place where they really played *The Sims Social*, but only a tool to help their primary playing account during times of 'emergency' when time was running out. One thing in common among all the participants was the fact that each of them maintained a single authentic Facebook account. Frame switching rarely happened when they were on Facebook, where 'person frame' was the dominant frame. The only time frame switching was active on Facebook was during participants' interactions on the Malaysian Sims fan group. In this context, the Malay women continued playing; but this time with their Facebook accounts. Although these Malay women were no longer in the game context, they were in a player mode and emergent play was enacted. All of the members in the Malaysian Sims fan group were confronted with both game and Facebook identities at the same time.

The rationale behind frame switching in the fan group can be explained through the notion of permeability. Fan groups (such as the Malaysian Sims fan group) are the only context on Facebook that allows both identities to coexist because of the shared conventions among members of the fan group, in which identity play is accepted openly in that context, even though it occurred through a Facebook account connected to another type of identity.

Recommendations for future research

This research involved Malay women living in urban parts of Malaysia who played *The Sims Social* as the main participants. Claims about the generalisability for the population of Malay women in Malaysia have not been made. However, the perceptions and experiences of these Malay women were used to formulate substantive conclusions. The empirical conclusions about the perceptions and experiences of Malay women playing *The Sims Social* were limited to the respondents.

Further research utilising the same research design could be undertaken. A follow up of this group of Malay women could be done so as to understand further the evolution of their social media use in their daily lives. A longitudinal study would contribute a dimension to the current knowledge, although, it is not possible to understand the extent of their relationship with *The Sims Social* as the game no longer exists.

The method used in this study could also be extended to include women of other ethnicities in Malaysia such as Chinese and Indians, which could yield interesting data through the differences in their

sociocultural and religious backgrounds. Comparative analysis could also be used as a method. This research could also be extended to include men, who are also an understudied group in Malaysia.

There are a lot of opportunities for research in understanding the impact of third-party applications afforded on social media sites on individuals or groups of people, particularly on Facebook as it is the most popular social media in Malaysia.

While various theoretical and methodological underpinnings are available to understand the vast landscape of digital games and the performance of identity on social media, the understanding of human's engagement with technology should always include the understanding of sociocultural and religious values. Failing to include these factors would compromise the richness of the findings and the understanding of the phenomena being explored.

Appendix 1: Flyer for recruitment of participants

Call for Participants for Casual Game Study

Hi, I am looking for volunteers for an academic study on social network games. In this study I am attempting to understand Malaysian women's perceptions and experiences with social network games – games that are played via social networking sites such as *The Sims Social* or *Cityville* in Facebook. Therefore, I am interested to learn and record your perceptions and experiences on this issue.

I will be conducting a focus group discussion, with duration of an hour to a maximum of two hours. Each participant will be compensated for their time and efforts. Light refreshments will also be served during the focus group session.

If you're a Malaysian woman, aged 21 or older, play casual games and can spare me two hours of your free time in May 2012, I would like to invite you to participate in my project. If you're interested, please contact me and I will send you further instructions.

Thank you.

Contact person: Shifa Faizal

email: shifa.faizal@adelaide.edu.au

Appendix 2: Information sheet for the recruitment of participants

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Shifa Faizal. I am enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy program in Media Studies at the University of Adelaide. I am doing a research project titled: "Exploring the perception and experience of Malaysian women and casual games".

In this study I am attempting to understand your perceptions and experiences with casual games, especially social network games- (games that are played via social networking sites) such as '*The Sims Social*' or '*Cityville*' in Facebook. Therefore, I am interested to learn and record your perceptions and experiences on this issue. The areas we will cover include:

1. Consumption patterns: How often do you play with casual games? And how is this in comparison to other media? How do you play casual games? When and where do you usually play casual games?

2. Motivation, experience and perception: What are your motivations, perceptions and experiences playing casual games? How was your experience with digital games? Where do you normally play? How do casual games fit into your life-considering self, family and social life?

3. Managing roles and identities online and offline (in particular in SNGs): Why do you play casual games in Facebook? How do you play the games? With whom you play? Do you think games you play on Facebook reflect your image/true identity?

Although there have been studies on digital games, most of the studies were based on empirical data derived from Western perspectives. Therefore, this project for the first time, will try to look and contribute at this issue from the context of Southeast Asian nation such as Malaysia.

I would greatly appreciate it, if you could freely share with me your experiences and talk about your own perceptions and opinions regarding this issue, so I can compile and document it. The time required for the focus group will be about an hour to a maximum of two hours.

If you are willing to participate, I would appreciate it if you could please sign the attached consent form. Please note that this focus group session will be digitally video-recorded. Please be assured that I will do my utmost to respect, protect, and guard the confidentiality of our conversations during the focus group interview. At any time, you are free to change your mind or views or to withdraw any information provided during the course of the study. Should you have any queries regarding this project, please feel free to contact my supervisor or me.

Thank you very much.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Appendix 3: Consent form

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

STANDARD CONSENT FORM
FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE PARTICIPANTS IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

1. I, …… *(please print name)*

   consent to take part in the research project entitled: Exploring the perception and experience of Malaysian women and casual games

2. I acknowledge that I have read the attached Information Sheet.

3. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.

4. Although I understand that the purpose of this research project is to explore the complexity of casual games integration in the daily lives of Malaysian women, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.

5. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.

6. ☐ I agree to the interview being digitally recorded. (Please tick the box if you agree).

7. I understand that the researcher will respect, protect, and guard the confidentiality of the conversations during the interview and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.

8. I am aware that I should retain a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

……...
(signature) *(date)*

WITNESS

I have described to …….. *(name of subject)*

the nature of the research to be carried out. In my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Status in Project**:** …….

Name: ……..….

……...
(signature) *(date)*

The University of Adelaide
Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

This document is for people who are participants in a research project.

Appendix 4: Complaint form

CONTACTS FOR INFORMATION ON PROJECT AND INDEPENDENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The following study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee:

Project Title:	**Exploring the perception and experience of Malaysian women and social network games**
Approval Number:	**H-302-2011. This number is given once the project has been approved.**

The Human Research Ethics Committee monitors all the research projects which it has approved. The committee considers it important that people participating in approved projects have an independent and confidential reporting mechanism which they can use if they have any worries or complaints about that research.

This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (see http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e72syn.htm)

1. If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the project co-ordinator:

1.	**Dr Sal Humphreys** **Postgraduate Co-ordinator and Student Co-supervisor** **Media Discipline, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of Adelaide** **North Terrace Campus, Adelaide, 5005 SA, Australia** **Email: sal.humphreys@adelaide.edu.au** **Telephone: +61 8 8303 5227**

2. If you wish to discuss with an independent person matters related to:
   - making a complaint, or
   - raising concerns on the conduct of the project, or
   - the University policy on research involving human participants, or
   - your rights as a participant

   Please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat:

Ms. Sabine Schreiber
Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, The University of Adelaide
North Terrace Campus, Adelaide, 5005 SA, Australia
Email: sabine.schreiber@adelaide.edu.au;
Tel: +61 8 8303 6028

Appendix 5: Semi-structured interview form

Guide for Focus Group Discussion

Good evening, welcome and thank you for sparing your valuable time for us today. My name is Shifa Faizal, a PhD. student at the University of Adelaide, Australia. This project is being conducted as a requirement for my PhD program. As you can see, assisting me today is ……..

The purpose of this interview is to understand your perceptions and experiences with casual games, especially social network games – games that are played via social networking sites such as *The Sims Social* or *Cityville* in Facebook. Therefore, I am interested in learning and recording your perceptions and experiences on this issue. We are having discussions like this with several groups in Kuala Lumpur and the Klang Valley. As you know, you were selected as a participant in this discussion because you responded to my advertisement placed on games websites, through Facebook announcements or from a recommendation of your friend. The selection of participants for this discussion was based on your profile that fit with the requirements of this project.

Please feel free to express yourself, as this discussion is an informal one. Everyone is expected to participate, and there are no wrong or right answers, just different viewpoints. In other words, you do not have to agree with what everyone or anyone in the group says during the discussion. I am interested in all view points, no matter if they are positive or negative.

This discussion session will take between one and a half and two hours, with a short refreshment break. This session will be audio taped, as I do not want to miss any of your comments.

There are name cards placed in front of each us, to help us remember each other's names. However, please be assured that no one will be identified in the report of the project in any way. Let's begin by filling in your particulars in the form placed in front of you. Let's get to know each other, tell us where you're from, your profession, married or single and maybe why you think you wanted to be here... ☺

Ice-breaking:
Getting to know Malay women who play TSS.

1. Please share with me what your typical day looks like? From the moment you wake up till you are off to bed?
2. How about weekends?

Domestic work

1. Who normally does the domestic work/ house chores? (cleaning/cooking/child care?)
   ---why?
2. Did you get any help? (husband/helper/family members)?
   ---why?
3. Do you have a fixed scheduled or mutual agreement about 'who does what and when' or other agreement?
   ---why?

Leisure time

1. What does 'leisure time' mean to you?
2. What do you normally do when you have free time/leisure? (weekday/weekend?)
3. Do you have a 'fixed' time for leisure?—Why?
4. When do you usually do these activities? Where? With whom?
5. How much time do you spend/allocate to do these?
6. How much money do you spend/allocate for your leisure time activities?
7. How do you manage your full-time work/study and domestic chores and leisure time (and find time to play TSS)?
8. Have you ever felt 'guilty' about having a time to yourself/ 'me time' or leisure time? ---why? How about when playing TSS?---why?

RQ 1
Media consumption

1. Among all the media available, which one you use the most?
   i. TV : programs/type of programs you watched? Time? How long?
   ii. Radio : channels you listen to? When/where? How long?
   iii. Mag : name of the magazine(s)? Subscribe---yes/no?
   iv. Books :
   v. Internet: when do you usually get to use the Internet? Normally, why do you log in to the internet? Which website you normally visit? Do you blog? How long do spend your time online each day---at work/home/mobile?
2. Which one you love the most? second best, third? Why?
3. Who usually control media usage at home?

Experiences with digital games:

1. Is TSS your first encounter with digital games?
   No :
   i. What are other types of games you play? (consoles/computer games/online/offline games)

ii. When was the first time you were exposed to any type of digital game? Tell me a bit about it? (Who introduced digital games to you? When was it? How long have you been playing video games? Who bought it, for whom, where was this 'game' placed? With whom did you play it?)
iii. Who introduced you to TSS? How do you know about TSS?

Yes:

i. What made you interested with it?
ii. Who or what got you playing TSS? Are you playing with other games now?

2. Are you playing with other digital games apart from TSS?
    i. Online?
    ii. Offline?

(Console game(s)-Wii/Playstation/Xbox? Others?)

iii. Favourite genre? Why?
iv. With whom?
v. How long for each session of play (like, do you limit yourself?—why?)

3. Do you own any digital games systems/consoles at home?
    i. Who bought it? (if you bought it, why? Who play with it the most?
    ii. Where is the console (if any) is placed?
    iii. Do you play with it? How often? When?
    iv. Genre/type of game played?
4. Are you familiar with arcade games/family entertainment centres?
    i. Do you go there?
    ii. What do you think/feel about arcades?
    iii. With whom do you normally go?
    iv. When do you usually go? How often?
5. Casual games in general
    i. Do you play with other games on Facebook?
    ii. Do you have a game account?
    iii. Other SNS (to play games)?
    iv. How often do you play with these games as compared to TSS?
    v. Which one is your favourite and played with the most? Why?

RQ2

The Sims Social

Basics:

1. When did you first start playing TSS? (When it was first launch/introduced, invited or persuaded by friends/ advertisement/ others..)
2. Before TSS, had you ever played with any of *The Sims* Series before? Which series and how long? Are you still playing it?
3. What got you interested in playing with TSS on the first place? What keeps you playing/interested to play TSS?

TSS and time

1. Do you play every day? Weekdays/weekends?
2. Week days:
    i. How many times will you login to Facebook to play TSS in a day? Do you login to play? Or to check Facebook? Have you ever logged in to just play?
    ii. For each session, how long will you play? Approximately?
    iii. Normally, what are the times you play TSS?
    iv. Where do you usually play on weekdays?
3. Weekends:

i. Do you play as much during the weekend?
ii. Why?

4. How do find time to fit TSS into your life-considering self, family, work, house chores and so on? social life? How do you manage?
5. Will you be concentrating playing TSS or multi-tasking? E.g. while doing other things-working with computer/watching TV /listening to radio/cooking?

Spaces

1. Where do you usually play? Where do you feel most comfortable to play TSS? ---why?
   i. If at home, where do you usually play? Living room? Bedroom?
   ii. Office/during work time? Desktop? Office laptop?
   iii. Time?
   iv. Why? During breaks? –probe---for how long?
   v. With? Alone/family/friends?—probe---why?
2. Have you ever played with anyone watching? (Siblings/friends/son/daughter/partner/spouse) Please share the experience.

TSS experience

1. How many accounts on Facebook do you have to play TSS? Why do you need more than one account?
2. How many neighbours do you have roughly? How do you get neighbours? Why are neighbours important to you?
3. Tell me, how far is the relationship you have with your Littlehaven neighbours? Why?
4. Do you play/interact/socialise with your Littlehaven neighbours outside of the TSS? Please share?
   i. Do you limit the relationship? How? Why?
5. What else do you do 'outside' TSS itself, but still related to the TSS game? (fan site/forum/) what do you normally do there? Why do you do it? How many fan site/group related to TSS you joined?
6. What do you think of the quests in TSS? Do you try to do each and every quests or are you selective?--- Why?
7. How many 'properties' do you have for each of your Sim? Why do you need more than one property?

Your Sims/Avatar

1. Describe your 'Sim'? Who is he/she? When you created your Sims, how did you want it to be? (a representation of yourself, an ideal self or someone opposite?)
2. Tell me more about your Sim? Who is he/she?
3. When you specify the Sim's traits/characters, how do you make the selection? How do you feel about the options given in the game?
4. What is the gender of your Sim? ---why?
5. What is the name of your Sim? Any particular reason?
6. Have you ever swapped gender? ---why swap gender?
7. What do you think/ how do you think about the whole 'gender swapping'?
8. How many times? Why (change back)?
9. Do you prefer a male/female gender? –why?
10. Does your Sim have a soulmate? (can we have more than one soul mate at a time)?

11. Is this 'soulmate' of yours a person you know in real-life?
12. What do you think about this relationship?
13. What about your properties in TSS?
14. Your house? Describe your house?
15. What is your house value?
16. What are the things you value the most in the house? Why?

Affordances/limitations in TSS

1. How do you think/feel about the options given in TSS? In terms of the character for the Sim, the options given to the Sim, freedom, activities in TSS? Why?
2. How do you feel about issues concerning to our culture, religion and maybe simply our definition on the way of life (for instance relationship)?
   Probe with examples (if necessary):
   -Muslims have limitation on dressing options.
   -Attitude towards sexuality and relationships- without marriage, and multiple relationships and 'naughty friends', allowing 'woo-hoo' with just about anyone...?

Consumer culture/lifestyle/shopping

1. How often do you spend 'real' money on TSS? What is it normally for- Clothes/dressing up/completing quests?
2. Basically how much (roughly) do you spend per month for TSS? How often? How do you feel about spending money on these items?
3. Do you think its worth it?
4. Do you buy virtual items in the games you play? Probe---why? Do you think TSS push people to be greedy? More materialistic? Buy more things that are not important? What do you think?

Advertising in TSS

1. Do you aware of advertising in TSS?
2. Can you remember any brands featured in TSS?
3. How do you feel/ think about this?

Motivation, experience and perception

1. What makes you keep on playing TSS? (What keeps you motivated?)
2. What is your personal feeling/perception about TSS?
3. Have you ever feel guilty playing TSS?
4. What do you think of women engaging with digital games? TSS?

Regarding spouse/family/partner/:

1. Do they know about this interest of yours? How does your spouse/partner or family members react to your gaming activity? Probe-->why do you think so?
2. For those who are married, specifically, how do your husband/children feel about your gaming activity, particularly TSS? Do they know about this interest of yours? --- why?
3. For those who have partners/bf/couple, how do they feel about your gaming activity, particularly TSS? Do they know about this interest of yours? ---why?
4. Were they supportive/non-supportive? ---Example.
5. Do these people play games themselves?

RQ 3

Facebook

1. How many Facebook accounts do you own and you maintain? Why?
2. Do you separate your:
   game account (how many) to your personal account(how many)?----Why?
3. Do you keep the fact that you have more than one Facebook account private or you think it's ok for people to know about it? ---why?
4. Pls share with me, how do you manage all these account?
   i. how often you do you log in to each of these accounts?
   ii. how about the information for all these accounts? (how much and how little information on each account/how many friends on friends list).
5. What is the reason you sign up to Facebook? (Personal-networking/keep in touch/find friends or play games?)
6. Specifically, how long have you been playing games in Facebook?
7. Who introduces you to games in Facebook?
8. As far as you can remember, when was the longest time you did not log into your Facebook and play games? Why?
   i. How do you feel about that?
   ii. Do you think about your 'Sim'?
9. Do you always 'invite' friends to play with you and join your games? How do you feel about 'doing that'?
10. Would you normally 'share' your games activity on your Fb 'wall' and make it public to all friends? Why? How do you feel about this?
11. Have you ever thought about what people think of you via your Facebook account?
12. Do you think in some way, the Sim reflects the person who owns the FB account?

TSS and offline life:

1. How important is your TSS to you?
2. Does any of your Sim reflect you?
3. Do you think about TSS when you're not playing?
4. Have you ever experience or relate anything in real-life to TSS? For example when you go shopping and some furniture reminds you of TSS or Dunkin Donuts reminds you of TSS?
5. Overall, how do you think TSS relate to your life?

CLOSING:

Is there anything else you would like to comment on or add to this discussion?

Thank you for your contribution to this project. This was a very interesting and stimulating discussion and all your responses and views will certainly be an important asset to my project. I appreciate your participation very much.

End.

Appendix 6: Translation of Image 8.3

Image 8.3: Seeking advice among group members

Translation of text in Image 8.3 on page 175

Player's status	Your opinion….
	[name blanked] Peace be upon you…happy Eid-ul-Fitr & I seek forgiveness [from you] physically and spiritually **[name blanked]**… How are you? **[name blanked]** … **[name blanked]** request a favour from you? Only if you're free…Could you please remove your *The Sims Social* game? And when you're ready to play again, you can always add the game back…Thank you [name blanked]… Peace be upon you 😀
Member 1	**[name blanked]** There are a lot of effects Shifa...Among them are slow loading, snag…then we have to reload… Sometimes in the game we can't even enter the clothes section, snag all the time…That's why we have to remove those friends who haven't been active playing *The Sims* , our neighbours in the game…We can have countless friends in *The Sims Social*, but we don't need too many neighbours … ;)
Shifa Faizal	**Shifa Faizal** Oh…how do we differentiate between Sim friends and neighbours? And there's limit to add friends as neighbours? One more question, what does it mean to be 'inactive'? As neighbours, do we have to visit our neighbours frequently or is it sufficient if we help them with 'gifts' etc?

Appendix 7: Translation for Image 8.4

Image 8.4: Venting of frustrations among group members

Translation of Image 8.4 on page 175

[name blanked]

Dear friends... Since the news about TSS shutting down is out, I have become so down. I don't feel like continuing to play TSS, it's meaningless. I don't even feel like playing other games. With that…to all my neighbours…Feel free to remove me from your friends list at any time…I have lost all hope…
:(

Member 1 **[name blanked]** Same here, I am too lazy to play but as long as it is still exists I'll continue playing 😛

Member 2 **[name blanked]** don't remove [name blanked]… retain it as a collection…😀

Appendix 8: Translation for Image 8.5

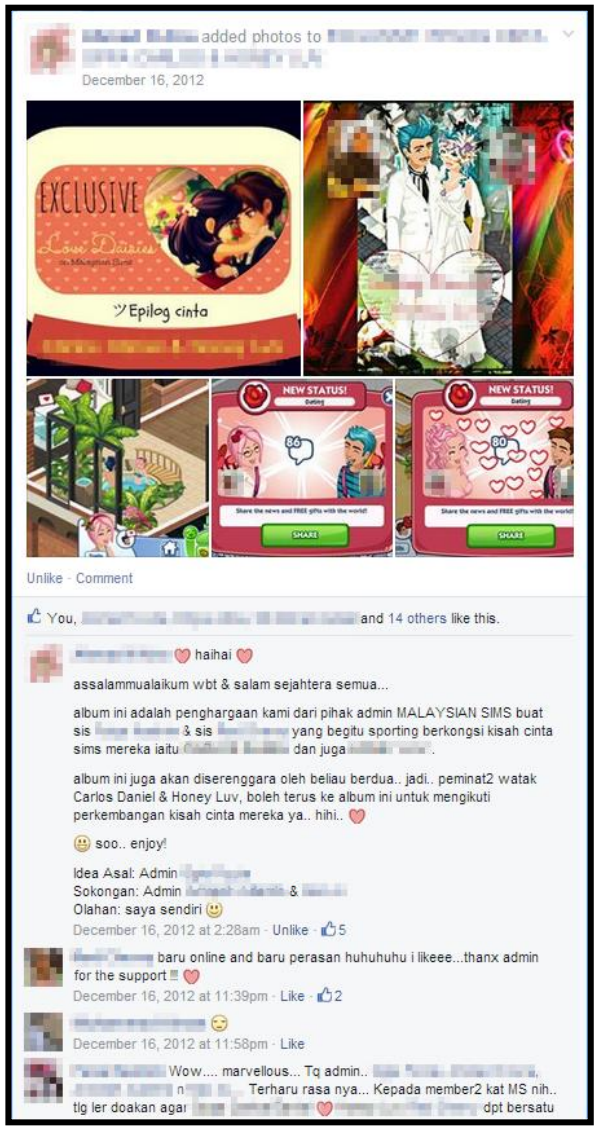
Figure 8.5: Members sharing jokes in the fan group

Translation of Image 8.5 on page 176

Player's status	Cause of death: SNAG [a term use by players to refer to unexpected problem related to the game] HYPERTENSION ~ don't be like that guys! hehehe [laughs]
Member 1	**[name blanked]** Ahahahaha [laughs] OMG!
Member 2	**[name blanked]** LOL
Member 3	**[name blanked]** haha [laughs] Dead and dried up skeleton
Member 4	**[name blanked]** muakaka…this is so funny…
Member 5	**[name blanked]** I am shocked…hahahaha [laughs]
Shifa Faizal	**Shifa Faizal** OMG kekekeke [laughs]

Appendix 9: Translation for Image 8.8

Image 8.8



Translation of Image 8.8 on page 180

Description on the picture	Exclusive Love Diary on Malaysian Sims Love epilogue **[Sim name blanked] & [Sim name blanked]**
Member 1	**[name blanked]** ♥ haihai♥ Peace, mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you and good day everyone… This album is a tribute from the admins in THE MALAYSIAN SIMS to sis **[name blanked]** & sis **[name blanked]** for being good sports, sharing the love story of their Sims **[Sim name blanked]** and **[Sim name blanked]…** This album is managed by both of them. So to those who love the characters of **[Sim name blanked]** & **[Sim name blanked]**, you can access this album to keep yourselves updated with their love story ya…hihi [laughs]…♥ 😀 So…enjoy! Original Idea: Admin **[name blanked]** Support: Admin **[name blanked]** & **[name blanked]** Edited by: My own 🙂
Member 2	**[name blanked]** I just got online and notice this huhuhu I likeee…thanks admin for the support!!! ♥
Member 3	**[name blanked]** 😐
Member 4	**[name blanked]** Wow… marvellous…tq [thank you] admin…**[name blanked], [name blanked], [name blanked] n [name blanked]**… I am so touched… To all my friends in MS [Malaysian Sims] please pray for Oppa [Korean term referring to slightly older man, like a brother] **[Sim name blanked]** ♥ **[Sim name blanked] [name blanked]** will last.

Reference

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