Article

SM+S
social media + society

Social Media + Society
July-September 2021: 1–12

DOI: 10.1177/20563051211035694
journals.sagepub.com/home/sms
SAGE

Naming the Ghost: Self-Naming, Pseudonyms, and Identities of Phantoms on Zimbabwean Twitter

Albert Chibuwe[1], Phillip Mpofu[2], and Kudakwashe Bhowa[3]

Abstract

In Zimbabwean online spaces, especially Twitter, use of phantom names is widespread. It is arguable that this is partially a result of the country's repressive political environment. It is the names that the nameless Twitter characters select and the motivations for using specific names that are the focus of this present study. The study is grounded in anthroponomastic concepts of pseudonymity and self-naming, and self-presentation and identity theory as well as semiotics of names while methodologically it is qualitative. Specifically, the study deploys archival research and netnography to gather data. The study found out that the ghosts' adopted names are reflective of what they tweeted. The messages they tweeted were reflective of the online identity that they assumed; however, over and beyond that, their tweets exposed their political, and to an extent, religious inclinations. The tweets also exposed their origins and the spaces they once occupied or currently occupy. Finally, the article concludes that hiding behind a ghost name may hide the name of the person but it certainly does not hide the identity/identities of the person behind the phantom name. His or her being is self-evident in his or her tweets—they imprint themselves into their tweets. The anonymity in online spaces may, after all, be just superficial.

Keywords

ghost, pseudonyms, self-naming, Twitter, identity, Zimbabwe

Introduction

There is a burgeoning scholarship on social media in Zimbabwe; however, this scholarship has tended to focus more on social media and politics (Chibuwe, 2020; Chibuwe & Ureke, 2016; Mutsvairo, 2016; Ncube, 2019). Literature on self-naming and use of pseudonyms (false names) in online spaces remains scarce. While Jakaza (2020) explored identity obfuscation on social media, he overlooked aspects of self-naming and pseudonyms that are also key in identity mystification. Present studies have focused on self-naming and pseudonyms during Zimbabwe's liberation war (Pfukwa & Barnes, 2010), Christian re-naming practices (Mashiri et al., 2013) and pseudonyms on online newspaper platforms (Nhongo, 2018; Ntini & Mangeya, 2020). For that reason, self-naming and pseudonyms on digital social media platforms is an understudied subject. More so, this scholarship is also largely descriptive rather than analytic as it focuses on meanings of the chosen names (pseudonyms) without extending the analysis further to unravel the link between the pseudonyms and the posted content. In this literature, scholars merely describe the messages and how the selected names are either event-driven or mock politicians but do not unravel the identities that manifest in the names and messages/discourses they produce and circulate. They understand pseudonyms simply as a strategy deployed by readers to hide identities and to disassociate themselves from their views (Nhongo, 2018) and social media users' effort to obfuscate identities (Jakaza, 2020).

In this article, we argue that in as much as pseudonyms enable netizens to hide their names, they may not be successful in hiding the identities of the person behind the ghost name. This is because one cannot unwrite themselves from what they write. The individual inadvertently inscribes himself or herself into what s/he writes (Murchison, 2010; Schwandt, 2005;

[1]University of the Free State, South Africa
[2]North-West University, South Africa
[3]Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

Corresponding Author:
Albert Chibuwe, University of the Free State, P. O. Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa.
Email: albertchibuwe@yahoo.co.uk

Stokes, 2003). In online spaces, just as elsewhere, writing (and arguably self-naming) is a political act (Clark & Ivanic, 1997). The writer is present in the text even in his or her absence; the author is invisible yet visible. It is the intention of this present article to interrogate; self-naming and aliases in online spaces, specifically Twitter; the tweets by the self-named to unravel the identity of the person behind the pseudonym. Indeed, digital spaces provide anonymity and it gives netizens the audacity to spew vitriol and to savagely attack opponents (Chibuwe, 2020; Chibuwe & Ureke, 2016). However, the foregoing scholarship does not extend the analysis to unraveling how the fictitious names behind the ghosts and what the ghosts write or tweet may help expose their identities. It is the intention of this article to fill this void. This is important because not only are identities multiple and constantly shifting but identity is also performative (Mhiripiri & Tomaselli, 2010, p. 286) and a social construct (see Mano, 2004; Zeleza, 2006). Arguably, all identities, claimed or given, are a construction (see Mano, 2004; Zeleza, 2006). In this regard and as Mhiripiri and Tomaselli (2010) argue, "social order is a continuous and interlinked process of staged performances" (p. 286). However, in performances such as the ones Mhiripiri and Tomaselli (2010, p. 286) studied, the individual "is simultaneously conscious of being in and out of character" and the success of the performance depends on being able to keep "the individual" from intruding on the performance.

In the context of this study, we argue that the use of pseudonyms paradoxically allows the individual to simultaneously hide a part(s) of the self while allowing (an)other part(s) to come to the fore in the performance. For example, on one hand, hiding the given name and anything that connects to it behind a pseudonym or ghost name; on the other hand, allowing one's true political or religious views or identity to come to emerge behind the cloak of the ghost name. We argue that this has its own pitfalls as that which one is trying to hide always intrudes into that which is exposed, that is, into the performance (see Mhiripiri & Tomaselli, 2010) while that which is exposed also inadvertently exposes that which is hidden. It is an activity in which, on one hand, that which is hidden is inadvertently exposed in that which is revealed. On the other hand, that which is revealed inadvertently reveals that which is hidden. In this case, through examining the performance of the ghosts (the naming and the tweets), this scholarship seeks to unravel the identities of the selected Twitter ghosts. In the context of this study, anonymity and or the self-naming and tweeting are a performance. As Ntini and Mangeya (2020) observe,

> online spaces not only provide participants with anonymity but also with an opportunity to construct their own virtual identities. They are free to disrobe or strip off their real personal identities and put on adopted fake names which they then use for interaction in these spaces. (p. 13)

But these "adopted names," we argue, are the veil behind which they hide some parts of the individual ("some identities") while allowing others to manifest. We argue that the adopted name may simultaneously mask the person's real name but enable him or her to unmask his or her real beliefs, attitudes and opinions about certain issues. Similarly, a person's real name and position in life may mean that their known identities are a performance (Lippmann, 1922). This is what led Lippmann (1922) to argue that no man is a hero to his valet, because the valet himself knows the person behind the façade and is himself a part of the façade and/or performance. In the light of the above, we thus argue that adopting a pseudonym is not so much an act of stripping off or disrobing (Ntini & Mangeya, 2020) but an act of putting on another name to mask the name(s) they already have. It is a performance in which the hidden individual is kept in check. Just like identities, we argue, these names co-exist but with one in the foreground and another in the background at any given time. However, there is, we argue, constant slippage between the multiple identities. We also argue, like Mhiripiri and Tomaselli (2010) that self-naming [in online spaces] could be subversive. In a context where both subaltern and elite interests have appropriated Twitter for political purposes and hide behind ghost names (see Chibuwe, 2020), we seek to explore what self-naming on Twitter means for both these groups.

On (Self-)Naming and Identity in Online Spaces

Social networking sites are hosts of digital singularity (Stiegler, 2008), that lead to radical and creative alternatives (Venn et al., 2009) in naming the self and self-presentation (Zhao et al., 2008). In essence, through freedom of name choice, social media gives users power to manage impressions (Shafie et al., 2012). Zhao et al. (2008) describes self-presentation and self-naming strategies on the cyberspace that show anti-normative behaviors. Similarly, Evans et al. (2017) argue that identities constructed in offline environments differ from those constructed in anonymous online environments. Thus, the advent of the internet has transformed the traditional conditions of identity construction (Burgh et al., 2002; McKenna et al., 2002). The naming strategies used by digital media users reflect deviance from established social norms since the netizens choose socially unsanctioned names (Hu et al., 2017; Shafie et al., 2012). This is because anonymity on the cyberspace provides a unique environment for users to behave more freely and openly with less restraint (Back et al., 2008; Koole, 2010). It also leads to the construction of unstable identities by some users online (Siedman, 2014). However, through different naming strategies, users amass social capital for establishing online social relations and networks (William, 2007). Furthermore, since naming is an act of power, which implies control and authority over the named object (Guenther, 2009), online self-naming is arguably an act of self-liberation (Coleman, 2016). Therefore she or her who names is exercising control and power over the named. In this

context, self-naming becomes an act of one exercising power over the self.

In light of the above, it is arguable that, the names netizens select on digital communication platforms provide important information about their identities; what they intend to say and; to whom they intend to say it to. In other words, claimed online identities or names are, arguably, reflective of the person behind the online name's identity (Manago et al., 2008). Identity is the sense of the self (Goffman, 1963) and how a person behaves behind a pseudonym or his or her real name is reflective of his or her identity, since identity is performative (Mhiripiri & Tomaselli, 2010) and the performed/not hidden or not performed/hidden is reflective of the person's identity. It is arguable that what is performed behind a phantom name is perhaps a true reflection of a person's identity than what is performed when one is using his or her real name. Furthermore, it is arguable that everyday performance when one is wearing his or her real name is deceptive (Lippmann, 1922). This is because, as Mhiripiri and Tomaselli (2010) note, the performer is conscious to keep the individual from the performance. We argue, unlike Mhiripiri and Tomaselli (2010) who saw performance in terms of spectators (tourists) and the performers (#Khomani/Bushmen), that life itself is a performance. The performer (individual), we argue, consciously keeps the individual from the performance thus depriving the spectators (the society) a glimpse into the person behind the performance. This is plausible given Foucault's (1980) submissions that discourse disciplines and regulates the sayable and unsayable. Challenging the boundaries of discourse by saying the unsayable leads to one being branded as mad (see Descombes, 1994). As Rice and Waugh (2001) note, "since the middle ages the madman has been the one whose discourse cannot have currency with the others. What the madman uttered singled him out as a madman" (p. 219). In the light of the above, it is arguable that in the offline spaces where people use their real names, they have little power to define themselves whereas, due to anonymity and lack of physicality online, they have the power to do so through, among other things, self-naming (see Baker, 2006). In this respect, the desire for inclusion in offline spaces (this is not to say there is no such desire for inclusion online) leads people to conform as failure to conform leads to exclusion. It is thus arguable that this desire for inclusion rather than exclusion leads the performer to keep "the individual" in check. However, both or all versions of the individual; the hidden and the not hidden, are part of the identity or identities of the person behind the ghost name.

In the context of this study, we conceptualize the "individual" in a partially different manner from Mhiripiri and Tomaselli (2010). Here the individual is perceived as both the person who is hidden behind the pseudonym and the one who comes to the fore behind a phantom name. The camouflage enables the person behind the pseudonym to speak without fear of being labeled insane. It is arguable that, the anonymity afforded to netizens by digital platforms enable the performer (the netizen) to allow the individual (hidden behind a pseudonym) to come to the fore. This is because, with a reconstructed social media identity, people are able to express themselves online with less fear of sanctions and disapproval from others (Hu et al., 2015). Thus, an individual's self-expression online may no longer be purely positive as it is in offline environments (Ma et al., 2016).

It is thus arguable that even though the name could be fake (see Baker, 2006), the performance could be a reflection of the individual especially in repressive contexts where reprisals might follow if a person uses his or her real name. What they do with their real name is equally a performance, and if closely analyzed it will, arguably, reveal that which is performed behind ghost names. In contexts where violence is visited upon dissenters, it is arguable that the "individual" is kept in check in everyday life. But a glimpse of him or her is, arguably, seen in jokes that cleverly mock the elite (see Mbembe, 1992). Humor arguably becomes the shield enabling the "individual" to appear behind a cloak of laughter in a context where anonymity is impossible. But in online spaces where there is lack of physicality and anonymity (see Baker, 2006), the fake names netizens assume, arguably enable the individual to operate freely behind the phantom name. The "fake" could actually be the other version of the individual's identity. On one hand, and as Suler (2002) notes, the internet provides an outlet for expression of an individual's "hidden-selves." On the other hand, it provides the exploration of various non-conventional identities (Rosenmann, 2006). The "hidden-selves" and the non-conventional identities are arguably part of the individual's identity/identities which had all along been kept in check by the person's everyday-life performance inspired by the desire to belong and to avoid reprisals. This makes offline life a performance while phantom online names demonstrate the desire of persons behind the names to use names which more accurately reflect who they are or have become (Niedt, 2016; Vella, 2013). In this context, Bechar-Israeli (1995) observation that people could create a new self in cyberspace is revealing though problematic. It could be that the new is not new after all but it is old and only new in the sense of the new self-given name. The names themselves arguably communicate something about the person as the selection of the name itself says something about its bearer even though his family name and individual names are unknown. This is plausible given that, offline in African societies, names carry huge significance since they reflect an individual's ties with certain tribes, families and communities (Ngubane & Thebethe, 2013).

The socially situated relationship between naming and identity is clearly articulated by Gee (1990) who states that individuals alter their behavior in different contexts to manage how they both view themselves and are viewed by others. Names are, therefore, significant in defining an individual's identity on social media since they reflect the user's identity preferences. This study argues that digital communication platforms such as Twitter which have no

"true name" policy present people with an onomastic opportunity to study the namers, the named, and the names and their identities. Every self-given name has a semantic and symbolic intent (Van der Nagel, 2017), and this study, therefore, is interested in unmasking the identities of the ghosts behind phantom Twitter accounts through analyzing their names and contents of their tweets.

Theory

The study's theoretical gaze is grounded on insights drawn from anthroponomastic concepts of pseudonymity and self-naming, self-presentation and identity theory as well as semiotics of names. Pseudonymity is an anthroponomastic category that refers to the use of false names (Aleksiejuk, 2014; Van der Nagel, 2017). In the practice of writing, use of pseudonyms is deployed by authors keen to conceal their real identities. In the same way, when used as Twitter handle usernames, pseudonyms replace legally known names to mask the identity of the performer. Use of a pseudonym permits the hidden individual to participate on Twitter with no consequences associated with the tweets and comments. As an anthroponomastic category, pseudonyms are picked by bearers, that is, self-selection of internet names (Aleksiejuk, 2014). In the context of this article, self-naming refers to a conscious choice of a Twitter username that is different from the legitimate name, thereby guaranteeing facelessness of the account. Since pseudonymity on online spaces is valuable to individuals seeking ways to evade any real-world stigmas, prejudices, harassments, or reputational issues (Kumayama, 2009), in a semi-authoritarian state like Zimbabwe, pseudonymity on Twitter is a self-protection mechanism for the concealed individual. Consequently, the hidden individuals can unreservedly express themselves on Twitter without the need of being socially or politically sensitive. This is because pseudonyms hide the known identity while allowing the unknown identity to come to the fore behind the cloak of anonymity.

Pseudonyms allow the backstage performance to come to the fore while the front-stage performance goes backstage (see Goffman, 1959) since the netizen is worried about reputational and safety issues. In online spaces, it is arguable that self-naming inverts Goffman's (1963) self-presentation model founded on impression management and dramaturgical analysis of the front-stage (the public setting where individuals present their official stance aligned with social expectations) and the backstage (individuals step out of character without the risk of destroying impressions constructed in the front stage and openly violating expected conduct). The online space exhibits the evidence of distinct front-stage and backstage performances. However, we argue that the front-stage and back stage are not mutually exclusive and are characterized by constant slippage; a slippage that allows the front-stage performance to intrude into the back stage performance and vice versa. It is a slippage that also simultaneously allows backstage performance to be enacted on the front stage (of course behind a pseudonym) and front-stage performance to be enacted backstage. The backstaging of front-stage performance and the front-staging of backstage performance under the cloak of pseudonymity enable the performer to maintain their reputation, avoid arrests in repressive states while enabling their hidden identity to come to the fore but with no negative consequences on them (see Ross, 2007). Thus, pseudonymity as a mask allows online users to exhibit the usually concealed backstage behaviors, attitudes, and emotions in the front-stage, in this case the Twitter sphere.

Furthermore, the Twitter pseudonyms are semiotically viewed as a type of signs. According to the semiotic theory, names are a kind of sign; they link our understanding to things in the world, thus a name stands for its bearer, and a name and its bearer are connected through the perceptions in individuals' minds (Boonpaisamsatit, 2011). Similarly, pseudonyms provide the bearer with a social identity, they can be identifiers of who the bearers are in the society and expose their perspectives. Therefore, social media pseudonymity can afford hidden individuals to redraft their biographies without negatively affecting real-space and other online relationships (see Kumayama, 2009). Online pseudonymity is a form of self-presentation and that is influenced by both environmental and individual tastes, values and worldviews (Aleksiejuk, 2014). Thus, pseudonyms carry emotional and symbolic meanings of the hidden individuals' personal preferences, qualities, and aspirations. As a result, the names that authors choose signal important information about them (Van der Nagel, 2017). The study, therefore, offers a critical examination of self-naming and pseudonyms on Zimbabwean Twitter and how they reflect the masked user's real identities.

Methods of Data Gathering and Analysis

For purposes of data collection, we utilized virtual ethnography and archival research. Within the premises of this research, virtual ethnography is understood and deployed as a form of virtually mediated qualitative research, which includes the use of digital archives, and online (non)participant observation.

We specifically, identified pseudonyms of ghost Twitter characters we already follow and those whom we did not necessarily follow but followed for the sake of this study. We acknowledge that self-naming pre-dates digital media but we opted to interrogate such practices on Twitter because for the socially and politically disenfranchised, alternative and/or digital media platforms have become "secure" avenues for free expression and for challenging state hegemony in an increasingly repressive Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2011; Ncube, 2019). As Karekwaivanane and Msonza (2021) note, between 2014 and 2020; social media, in particular Twitter, has been

used to mobilize citizens for political and social action in Zimbabwe. However, elite interests, including state and ruling party, have also invaded social media (see Chibuwe, 2020). This, coupled with increased state surveillance in online spaces, has seen an increase in the arrest of citizens for alleged online [political]crimes (Karekwaivanane & Msonza, 2021). However, netizens are increasingly resorting to the adoption of ghost names to hide from the prying eyes of the state and avoid arrest (see Chibuwe, 2020). Twitter in Zimbabwe has consequently become a hub for ghost names. It is these names and what the characters behind them tweet that are the object of analysis in this present work. Following Berg's (2017) argument that throughout their online activities, citizens leave digital footprints which make them less anonymous, this article seeks to unravel, through an analysis of the ghost names and their tweets; the identities hidden behind the ghost names.

The ghost handles selected for study were Egypt Dzinemunhenzva @Edzinemunhenzva, mmatigari @matigary, Mai Matigary @MaiMatigari, Madhorofiya @WaMavenga, Cde Zvombo Zvehondo @vitalis_zvombo, Mbuya Gudo from Dotito @MamoyoT, Sekuru Gudo veku-Dotito @sekuru_gudo, Baba Bhinzi @DatZimDude, and Mai Bhinzi @maibhinzi. A description and discussion of these cyber ghosts will be presented in the following section. However, for purposes of data analysis, we utilized textual analysis approaches to discover "the 'ideology' or 'system of beliefs' underlying a message . . . to find the hidden meanings and values which may not be explicit at a first reading" (Stokes, 2003, p. 77). Specifically, we deployed semiotic analysis and thematic analysis to analyze purposively selected ghost Twitter characters and their tweets with the intention of unraveling their omissions, biases, peculiarities, intentions, beliefs, thoughts, and desires (Schwandt, 2005, p. 297; Murchison, 2010, p. 166). This study is a semiotic endeavor since, as Hall (1977) states, sign systems "speak to us as much as we speak in and through them" (p. 328). We, therefore, understand the ghost names on Twitter as signs, which can provide information about the individual behind the ghost name. Following Kristeva (1980) and van Leeuwen (1996), the signs (ghost names) become "codes within codes" in which identities can be coded and decoded. The ultimate goal of all this is to expose the identities of the (not necessarily real names) of the persons behind the ghosts. We seek to expose their religious, cultural, and political inclinations by tying their names and their tweets together with the hope of profiling their identities. The purpose is not to expose the persons who otherwise do not wish to be exposed. It is for this reason that in our analysis we will not use software, which seeks to unravel the given name(s) of the person(s) behind digital footprints. Our intention is to show that the "fake" online identity may actually be one version of the individual (the backstage performance) that is kept in check in the everyday by societal restrictions (norms, values and beliefs) and repressive laws.

The sections below present the study findings thematically. First, we present the names, their meanings and their relationships in the online community. Second, we discuss the issues that the selected characters focused on. Third, we then link the names to the discourses in ways designed to unravel not only how the tweets are in sync or out of sync with the assumed identity, but also what the names and tweets reveal about the real persons behind the pseudonyms. Finally, we present the conclusions of the article.

The Phantom Characters, the Tweets, and the Meanings of Names

Mai Bhinzi, which could mean either Bhinzi's (Beans) mother or Mrs Bhinzi (Mrs Beans), and Baba Bhinzi, which could mean either Bhinzi's (Beans) father or Mr Bhinzi (Mr Beans), suggest a husband and wife scenario. This is true of Sekuru Gudo (Grandpa Baboon) and Mbuya Gudo (Grandma Baboon), on one hand, and Matigari and Mai Matigari (Matigari's mother or Mrs Matigari), on the other hand. Both Mbuya Gudo and Sekuru Gudo are usually anti–Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and anti-government while Matigari is usually pro-ZANU-PF and government. However, Mai Matigari is anti-ZANU-PF and government. Matigari, however, does not praise anything and everything about and by ZANU-PF, government, or its officials, as he is sometimes highly critical of government policies and individuals. The same is not true for the others. Mai Matigari regularly re-tweets posts by anti-government critics such as Hopewell Chinóno, Team Pachedu, Professor Jonathan Moyo, Mbuya Gudo, Sekuru Gudo, and so on and opposition politicians such as Nelson Chamisa. Some of the pseudonyms of the selected netizens have sexual connotations, for example, Baba Bhinzi and Mai Bhinzi. In Zimbabwean street lingo "bhinzi" (beans) refers to the female genitalia. However, in real life, there are people who go by that surname. But evidence here suggests that these are aliases with sexual connotations.

Apart from names with sexual connotations, some of the selected netizens assumed names of animals, for example, Sekuru Gudo and Mbuya Gudo. In Shona folklore, *Gudo* (Baboon) is usually cast as a dim wit at the mercy of the witty and ever-scheming Tsuro Magen'a (Hare the clever one). Thus, as a sign baboon implies being a dim wit and also points to one's habitat, in the Zimbabwean context, as the bush or mountains. This is in tandem with the two characters' claims that they stay in the backward rural Dotito area of Mt Darwin. In addition to animal names, others assumed names of plants, for example, Madhorofiya (*Opuntia*, prickly pear, cactus). This plant has variations and it produces an edible fruit; however, it also produces very small pricks that may cause a terrible skin reaction. Yet another of the selected netizens assumed the name of a comic-like fellow called Egypt Dzinemunenzva who unexpectedly contested in two successive post-2000 presidential elections. It is almost a given that

he is not the person behind the Twitter handle as a journalist friend of one of the authors confirmed in an informal conversation that the fellow doesn't even have a smart phone that enables him to go online. Another character selected for study calls himself Cde Zvombo zvehondo (Comrade Weapons of war). Finally, two of the selected netizens—a "couple" if their names are anything to go by—Matigari and Mai Matigari, assumed the name of a fictional character in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel by the same name—Matigari. The fictional Matigari is a revolutionary character; a freedom fighter in pursuit of truth and justice. He emerges from the bush where he was waging war against the colonists only to discover that a parasitic Black elite was now in power.

Ghosts and Their Issues

There was general polarization into pro-government and anti-government positions among the netizens, that is, one group was pro-ZANU-PF and government while the other group was pro-Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC A). But there was one ghost who took neither side. However, on issues of football these political identities were invisible. Football loyalties took precedence over political loyalties as foes momentarily united to celebrate, to commiserate over their team's loss or exchange banter with rival fans either over their team's victory or over loss. They generally tweeted about local issues but occasionally pro-government cyber ghosts tweeted about international issues. But focus was on demonstrating that the West are hypocrites and the present regime is not despotic as they like to paint it. For example, @matigary tweeted "Are US and Britain about to impose sanctions on Angola?" (5 February 2021). The tweet was a response to a tweet about Angolan police killing "unarmed protesters again." On the same day he also tweeted "Social media abuse: UK government threatens companies with 'large fines.'" He also tweeted about the Russian government expelling the Danish and Polish ambassadors for meddling in their politics. Madhorofiya @WaMavenga on 25-01-2021 tweeted about how election results in America are sacrosanct and how "you don't undermine the electoral system by casting doubt on its integrity . . . But sadly we don't want to emulate it. We constantly practise the opposite." The intentions of @ mmatigary was to demonstrate that sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the West were not about human rights abuses as they purport as demonstrated by their failure to sanction Angola for a similar offense.

Furthermore, tweeting about the Russian expulsion of the Danish and Polish ambassadors was meant to demonstrate that Zimbabwe is too lenient with the Western ambassadors especially, the British and American ambassadors. These two have been accused of meddling in the affairs of the country by actively sponsoring regime change programs. This is plausible given his 5 February 2021 tweet in which he said Zimbabwe's foreign policy needs to be tough while blasting the UK ambassador Melaine Robinson, whom he derisively called Mereniya, for having become an activist. He concludes by saying Patrick Chinamasa should replace the late S.B. Moyo as Foreign Affairs Minister. In another tweet earlier on the 5th of February 2021, he had also attacked the US ambassador to Zimbabwe Brian Nichols whom he called "Tomatisi (Tomatoes) Gweshegweshe."[1] He claimed that his days are numbered (in Zimbabwe) and stated that, "Biden can make him a useless minister of psychomotor activities . . ." This was arguably a threat of expulsion on Brian Nichols. The reference to a Minister of psychomotor activities should be understood in the context of post-2013 Zimbabwe in which the then President, the late R.G. Mugabe, appointed Josiah Hungwe as the Minister of Psychomotor activities. The appointment was considered by many as an attempt by Mugabe to humiliate Hungwe by giving him a useless portfolio. Similarly, Madhorofiya's tweet was an attack on the opposition MDC-A's continued rejection of the results of the July 2018 election. Nelson Chamisa, the opposition MDC A leader, has maintained that the election was rigged and has steadfastly refused to recognize President Mnangagwa's presidency.

In addition to the above, Zimbabwean elections are one of the topics that the ghost netizens tweeted about. Pro-opposition MDC-A ghosts argued that elections in Zimbabwe were a waste of time. It was also argued that Twitter is useless in so far as election campaigning in Zimbabwe is concerned. For example, a conversation between government critics Mbuya Gudo from Dotito @ MamoyoT and LynneM @lynnestacia on 5 February 2021 went like this: @lynnestacia—"election *hapana hapana kuzvifonera* (election is a waste of time akin to one phoning oneself . . .)" @MamoyoT—"Time and resource wasting *kutaura chokwadi* (to tell you the truth)" @ lynnestacia—"*hazvishande* (it does not work) in a militarised state" @MamoyoT—"*Kungosimbisana tichipana ma* likes otherwise *hapana hapana* (we are just encouraging each other [here on Twitter] and giving each other 'likes' otherwise it is useless)." The two ghost government critics, it is apparent, consider elections in Zimbabwe a waste of time due to a "militarised state." In this context, rationale disputation becomes irrelevant and the only thing Twitter discourse can do is to generate likes as implied by @ Mamoyo T. But pro-government ghosts had no problems with the elections; however, they had issues with the opposition MDC A's tendency to always reject all election results as not legitimate. For example, Madhorofiya @ WaMavenga on 25 January 2021 tweeted about how election results in America are sacrosanct and how "you don't undermine the electoral system by casting doubt on its integrity . . . But sadly we don't want to emulate it. We constantly practise the opposite." This tweet should be understood in the context of furore following the storming of the Capitol Hill in the United States where the then US President Donald Trump was roundly criticized for that violence. He was subsequently impeached—a move that

set a precedence in the United States as no other former President has been impeached before.

Corruption, COVID-19, and the regime's alleged ineptitude were the other topical issues that were discussed. Again here discussions were polarized into anti-government discourse and pro-government discourse. The discussions were also characterized by mockery of the opposition political parties, officials, and leaders. The anti-government ghosts focused on the death of high ranking officials due to COVID-19 arguing that their deaths and those of ordinary people could have been avoided had the regime been efficient and not corrupt. For example, Mbuya Gudo from Dotito @MamoyoT on 21 January 2021 tweeted;

> Those cars you bought for chiefs, ministers etc. won't save us from *majuru* (ants). The equaliser *haasi kutamba mukuru* (is not playing senior), AK 47 *haina basa ikozvino* (right now AK 47 is useless) you will learn to respect our nurses and doctors . . . you can keep @daddyhope in Chikurubi all you want but he was right!!!.

In response to a question by @ccmarapira, "If you become president of your country today what will you ban?," Mbuya Gudo responded "ZANU PF" (6 February 2021). She also dared those advocating the re-opening of churches to first serve as volunteers at hospitals in order for them to get a full appreciation of what COVID-19 is all about. This distaste of ZANU-PF was also displayed by @EDzinemunhenzva who mocked ZANU-PF officials such as Vice President Chiwenga, used obscenities to insult young people who support ZANU-PF, and attacked the party's ineptitude and blame game. For example, on 25 January 2021 he tweeted, "*Musazokanganwe kusara muchinatira zumbani vakadaro vaChiwenga vopinda muprivate jet kuenda* China (Don't forget to steam yourselves with Zumbani [indigenous herb] said Mr Chiwenga as he boarded a private Jet to China)." This was accompanied by a picture of a masked VP Chiwenga comfortably sitting on a couch with two masked men in suits having a conversation with him while kneeling each on one knee in front of him. The tweet is also accompanied by a laughing emoji. In this instance, he was no doubt mocking the VP, who also doubles up as the Health Minister, for seeking medical treatment in China at taxpayers' expense while citizens have to make do with Zumbani. The VP, as reported in the media, has been in and out of China for medical treatment. On yet another day, he tweeted that ZANU-PF is only good at the blame game arguing that it blames sanctions for the poor economy; MDC for the potholes; America for the sanctions; third force for abductions; Hopewell Chinóno for Police brutality and; Doctors for COVID-19 deaths. He asks "*Ko imimi penyu ndepapi* [which one is yours?]." Here @EDzinemunhenzva was simply pointing out the many things the ruling party has refused to take blame for yet they happened under its watch.

However, one anti-government ghost somewhat asked the authorities if all those that died of COVID-19 "have taken cholera dose. We might be sitting on a solution . . ." @MaiMatigary 1 February 2021. But she showed her dislike of ZANU-PF when she attacked exiled former ZANU-PF Ministers as part of the ZANU-PF that destroyed Zimbabwe's health system and yet they are currently "safer (in exile) than most Zanu gurus . . . " The Ministers who fled during and soon after the coup that toppled the late former President Robert Mugabe in November 2017 are arguably safer because they are in foreign countries with better health delivery systems than Zimbabwe whose health system was destroyed by years of economic and political turmoil. The government's tendency to arrest activists at a whim was also criticized. Finally, the anti-government ghosts generally mocked government, government policies such as Pfumvudza,[2] ZANU-PF, its officials and sympathizers while pro-regime "ghosts" such as @matigary, @vitalis_zvombo and @WaMavenga attacked opposition officials and activists. For example, Matigari attacked two MDC A lady officials for deliberately breaking COVID-19 lockdown rules by demonstrating without masks yet turn up in court in full personal protective equipment (PPE) gear. The ghosts mainly attacked or mocked the MDC A officials and activists sympathetic to its cause while speaking highly of the MDC-T's Douglas Mwonzora. For example, Cde Zvombo Zvehondo @vitalis_zvombo tweeted, "This man [Douglas Mwonzora] is a thorn for Chamisa [the MDC A leader]. He may lack extensive grass-roots support but he has more strategic relevance." And @Edzinemunhenzva mocked the MDC A factional fighting. He, on 22 January 2021, in response to a story about chicks sold as broilers when they were not, tweeted, "*Hanzi* (It is said) they (the chicks) fight like MDC factions." There was also general talk and jokes about love.

The acrimonious break up between a Member of Parliament and his girlfriend also dominated discussions with some disputing the allegations by the ex-girlfriend that he was a homosexual. For example, @vitalis_zvombo tweeted that,

> fathering 18 children and expecting two more is no child's play. Only a man with an insatiable appetite for *lula lula* (sex) pulls that off. *Zvekuti ngochani bla bla kupenga* (Saying he is a homosexual . . . is madness). It's dry out there, women are hungry.

Another ghost tweeted, "[name of legislator] *akabata benzi ruoko* (he [name of legislator] held the hand of a fool)" accompanied by three laughing emojis. However, Matigary @matigary criticized the legislator as an "extortionist" who claims to be related to every powerful person in the country. He tweeted, " . . . every powerful person is his *sekuru* [uncle]" (5 February 2021). Others just joked about the feud between the legislator and his ex-girlfriend. There were also jokes about; a Pastor and staunch government critic who had recently been exposed for having an extra-marital affair and Valentine's Day, which was approaching. Finally, there were exchanges of "love" messages between "couples" and also

football banter. For example, Mai Bhinzi @maibhinzi tweeted, "*Ini ukanditengera maruva* e$700 *ndokuramba*!" ("If you buy me [US]$700.00 flowers I will divorce you." And on 21 January 2021 the following exchange took place between Mai Bhinzi and Baba Bhinzi @DatZimDude: @DatZimDude—"Always and forever—my mother and the love of my life @maibhinzi" to which "she" responded; "love you too babe" accompanied by the heart emojis. There were more or less similar exchanges between the other "couples" with Sekuru Gudo vekuDotito tweeting, on 5 February 2021, a picture of Mbuya Gudo from Dotito @MamoyoT with the message, "#Copied: *Guys ma*chocolates *emu*pharmacy *anotengeka ne*medical aid [four emojis showing shyness] ndafunga vale" (Guys can one buy chocolates in a pharmacy with medical aid. I am thinking about Valentine's Day).

Discussion: The Link Between the Pseudonym(s) and the Tweets

Most of the assumed pseudonyms of the netizens studied are in tandem with the messages they tweeted. For example, @matigary's pro-regime tweets arguably project the revolutionary traits of the fictional character Matigari. This is because ZANU-PF has always cast itself as a revolutionary party being punished by the West through sanctions for economically empowering its citizens. This motif of Zimbabwe being punished for a just cause is implied in @matigary's tweets about: whether the United States and Britain will sanction Angola; Ambassador Melaine Robinson's and Brian Nichols' alleged meddlesome behavior. Here @matigary is presenting himself as a critical voice against imperial machinations—a trope that is very pronounced in ZANU-PF's post-2000 discourse. This revolutionary posture is also evident in Madhorofiya @WaMavenga's and Cde Zvombo Zvehondo @vitalis_zvombo's attack on the opposition Transform Zimbabwe leader, Jacob Ngarivhume. The tweets of the three reflect their assumed identities but they also reveal their "real" identities as ZANU-PF supporters. Furthermore, Matigari's tweets expose his identity as a well-educated person. S/he has knowledge of a wide variety of subjects—this has often led to the theory that @mmatigary is actually many persons. However, the style of writing and narrative are consistent thereby demonstrating that it is one person.

Similarly, Madhorofiya @WaMavenga is a staunch ZANU-PF supporter as he defended the party and attacked; journalists for trying to paint Zimbabwe as crisis-ridden; Transform Zimbabwe's leader Jacob Ngarivhume for urging people to call Western embassies about human rights abuses and; the opposition for disrespecting the electoral process. He is indeed as prickly as Madhorofiya (the prickly pear) as demonstrated by the pot-shots he fired toward regime critics and opponents. But Cde Zvombo Zvehondo (weapons of war) tweets suggest that he is a ZANU-PF supporter. Post-2000 and in the face of a stiff challenge from the opposition MDC, ZANU-PF has often talked about going back to war if it loses power. He also mocked two MDC A officials who appeared in court in full PPE saying, "court appearance is showbiz for them" (4 February 2021). He also valorized Nelson Chamisa's and the MDC A's rival Douglas Mwonzora saying that even though he lacks grass-roots support he is a thorn in Chamisa's flesh and he has more strategic relevance. The reference to strategic relevance is two-fold: first it could refer to how Mwonzora has proven to be a better strategist than Chamisa. Second, he could be of strategic relevance to ZANU-PF since he has proven more effective in keeping Chamisa in check while he is also likely to carve into the MDC A's support base than ZANU-PF's. This would, arguably, give ZANU-PF's Presidential candidate Emmerson Mnangagwa a better lead in the 2023 presidential election compared with the smaller margin he defeated Chamisa with in the July 2018 election.

However, Madhorofiya is outside Zimbabwe, most probably Europe, because on 29 January 2021 he tweeted that he had been vaccinated stating that he cannot let conspiracy theorists win. He further claimed that, "so far no side effects, will see how it goes" (21 January 2021). The tweet included a picture of the vaccination certificate with the name rubbed out. Most African countries, if not all, had not yet taken delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine by the 21st of January 2021. It is arguable that utilizing a pseudonym while he is outside the country could be because, like many, he went away on the pretext of persecution by the regime and thus could not be seen to be supporting the regime he purportedly ran away from. Alternatively, he does not want his social circles to know he is pro-regime given the polarized and sometimes toxic nature of Zimbabwean politics. In contrast with the foregoing characters, Zimbabwe Son @SonZimbabwe's name suggests that he is a patriot whose allegiance is not to an individual or a political party but to Zimbabwe. This implied identity in the name is manifest in his tweets where he neither sided with the ruling party nor the opposition. He advises Ngarivhume that Whites do not care about Blacks and criticizes ZANU-PF for arresting people but also seemingly holds its view on Whites. For example, he asks Ngarivhume why he was advising people to rush to Western embassies with the country's problems;

> Like what for @jngarivhume? I know you're frustrated but *vanhu avo kwamukuenda* kana hoot about you (those people you are running to do not care a hoot about you). I wish you could stay in their communities *vanhu ava* (these people). Rather involve ANC or AU or SADC or Botswana, etc not these Westerners. *Abalandaba lathi labo* (They don't care about us). (26 January 2021)

He criticizes both the ruling party and the opposition and, unlike ghosts sympathetic to MDC A, he does not rabidly oppose and savagely attack Douglas Mwonzora of the MDC-T who outsmarted Chamisa and the MDC A in the

courts. He, like, Cde Zvombo Zvehondo could be based in the Western world or he was once based there. He appears to be talking about Westerners' prejudice against people of color from firsthand experience. It is arguable that he once occupied or currently occupies their spaces and was/is discriminated against. He is also definitely proficient in both Shona and Ndebele. In another response to @matigary on 5 February 2021 he says,

> Despite defending those making Zimbabwe hard blindly, asi 1 thing (one thing) I love about *u sekuru* (you uncle) Mhofu, Zimbabwe *munoti ndeye ma*Zimbabweans (you say Zimbabwe is for Zimbabweans) & I love your attitude towards our country. I wish people could live amongst these westerners *kuti vawone kuti avatide at all asi zvatonazvo* (so that they could see that they do not love us at all, they love what we have).

This cements the argument that @SonZimbabwe is certainly resident in the White world and has been a victim of prejudice.

The same trend where an assumed name's philosophical assumptions are reflected in the tweets by the ghost is evident in the case of Mai Bhinzi. The name has, in urban street lingo, sexual connotations and in the analyzed tweets @maibhinzi often made reference to sex and sexual relationships between men and women both implicitly and explicitly. "She" could not resist the sexual connotations even when discussing football, for example, tweeting, on 30 January 2021, that, "*Haa* Manchester United *ichandiuraya ne*HIV *chaiyo*" (Manchester United will kill me with HIV). This was after the team had lost a match. This is not surprising given the fact that the name implies the female sexual organ; however, it is her love of football that raises the possibility that the real person behind the ghost might be a man. It is possible that @maibhinzi is a man since the sport is usually favored by men. In Zimbabwe very few women passionately follow soccer. On the contrary Baba Bhinzi does not tweet sexually suggestive messages and one of his tweets suggests he is an urban dweller who grew up watching cartoons of witches using brooms to fly. On 3 February 2021, he tweeted an image of a witch flying aboard a broom with the message, "You walking home from a party at 3.30 am, you look up and see this, what's your next move?" The reference to coming from a party at 3.30 am and the image of a witch flying on a broom suggests that he or she is an urbanite. Western cartoons' image of a witch is one flying aboard a broom while an African rural child's imagination of a witch is one of a naked person who flies in a "*rusero*" (winnowing basket) or rides a hyena when going on witching expeditions. Both Mai Bhinzi and Baba Bhinzi are, if their names and tweets are anything to go by, arguably youthful urban high density suburb dwellers. This is because the reference to the female sexual organ as "bhinzi" (beans) is common in urban high density street lingo. Furthermore, football is more popular among the urban high density dwellers than among the low density suburb dwellers. In fact, football in Zimbabwe is associated with the subaltern classes (see Ncube, 2016).

However, with regard to @EDzinemunhenzva the person behind the handle is not the real Egypt Dzinemunhenzva because, as stated earlier, a journalist friend confirmed that he is not on Twitter. Furthermore, the ghost's wanton use of insults and obscenities also demonstrate that it is not the original Egypt Dzinemunhenzva who is a small-time businessman in a township called Wedza. The person is also sympathetic to the MDC A and is definitely a supporter of the party as shown by his mocking of Douglas Mwonzora. But he tried to hide this by poking fun at MDC factions for fighting too much and at himself "Egypt Dzinemunhenzva." His mockery of Egypt Dzinemunhenzva, for example, "*Vatsigiri ve*FLOANP *garai makagadzirira kudaidzwa ku*Inaguration! (FLOANP supporters be ready to be invited to [my] inauguration!). President Egipita paState House pfocho" [accompanied by laughter—laughing emojis], demonstrates that he is not the real Egypt Dzinemunhenzva. Nobody caricatures himself like that when seeking votes. In the Shona language "*pfocho" is an idiom that is usually used to describe someone going off the road/off rail spectacularly. His mockery of the MDC factional fighting appears to be targeting both but in reality the target is the Mwonzora faction of the MDC which outmaneuvered the MDC A. His deep sympathies for the MDC A are also demonstrated by how he constantly attacked ZANU-PF but not the MDC A. Thus, the online Egypt Dzenemunhenzva is not the real Hwedza-based small-time businessman and politician, Egypt Dzinemunhenzva. He is arguably an MDC A supporter who appropriated a real person's name as his or her online ghost name. It is not unusual for netizens in Zimbabwe to hide behind a real person's name. Politicians have been the main victims of this.*

The foregoing scenario is also reflected in the Gudo family. Both Mbuya Gudo from Dotito and Sekuru Gudo veku-Dotito are sympathetic to the MDC A. They constantly attacked ZANU-PF and mocked its corruption and ineptitude. Both claimed to be from Dotito and occasionally tweet about being resident in Dotito (a remote rural village in Zimbabwe). However, the discourses they grapple with (elections, corruption, etc.) demonstrate that they are either resident in urban Zimbabwe or are in the diaspora. This is because of the rural-urban divide and the disadvantaged economic situation of rural Zimbabwe including Dotito. internet access, and electricity remain a pipe dream in rural Dotito—a ruling ZANU-PF stronghold. The irony of "tweeting" from Dotito is not lost as the place is backward and cut off from the digital networks. It is, therefore, arguable that these are MDC A sympathizers trying to bring ridicule on Dotito. The place has been ridiculed for continuing to vote for the ruling ZANU-PF party despite it having benefited little from ZANU-PF's over 40-year rule. Furthermore, Mbuya Gudo's call for those agitating for the opening of churches to "volunteer *kuHospital kuti vanzwisise* Covid (volunteer at the

hospital so that they appreciate/understand Covid") on 5 February 2021 demonstrates her skepticism toward churches in Zimbabwe. If she is a Christian she is, arguably, not a devout one. This sophistication is further demonstrated by Sekuru Gudo who, on his timeline, claims to have never seen the inside of the classroom. However, his ability to indicate that one of the jokes he tweeted was not his but copied shows that he is someone who went not only to school but to an institution of higher learning because he understands that acknowledging sources is sacrosanct. He is certainly someone who knows that plagiarism is an academic offense which discredits one. Chances are that Sekuru Gudo is a college graduate.

Conclusion

The article concludes that keeping the individual out of the online performance, that is, preventing him from intruding into the performance is a conscious endeavor epitomized by the use of pseudonyms but it is not always a successful one. Use of pseudonyms is an attempt by netizens to background the front stage, that is, the known individual and his front-stage performances while allowing the background performances (the unknown) to come to the front stage behind the cloak of a self-given name. The ghost name becomes the cloak behind which the known hides while the unknown, which is still part of the person's identity, comes to the fore. The pseudonym is the veil behind which the suppressed identities flourish. However, as the above-mentioned findings demonstrate, the backstaged front-stage performance has a way of always intruding in these back stage performances being enacted front stage. This has the effect of making the veil of pseudonymity transparent in such a way that the profile of the person behind the veil or cloak becomes highly visible. The cloak of pseudonyms allows the back stage performances that are consciously kept in check to come to the front stage. But the difficulties associated with keeping them at bay demonstrates the fluidity of identity and thus the dangers of exposure in online spaces as ghosts eventually leave digital footprints that gives one a clear profile of the person(s) behind them. These digital footprints are an example of how we inscribe ourselves into the text (see Murchison, 2010; Schwandt, 2005; Stokes, 2003) in the process inadvertently allowing the deliberately hidden identity (back-stage performance) to occasionally intrude into the performance through tweets and the self-given names. In other words, in making the unknown known behind the veil of a pseudonym while trying to hide the known behind the veil of the pseudonym, the netizen only succeeds in inscribing both into the text. These moments of intrusion are crisis moments for pseudonymity as both the backstaged front-stage performance and the front-staged back stage performance are occasionally, even though fleetingly, enacted front page. This has, as noted earlier, the effect of making the cloak of pseudonymity transparent thereby exposing the netizen to the risk of exposure especially in repressive environments. The crisis moments of pseudonymity are self-evident in instances the cyber ghosts failed to keep the known individual at bay, for example, Baba Bhinzi's tweet of an image of a broom riding witch and his acknowledgment of an unknown creator of the joke he shared exposed his urban upbringing and his possible college credentials even though he tried to hide this by claiming that he has never seen the inside of a classroom. It also exposed the type of television he consumed as a child. Similarly, both Amai Bhinzi and Baba Bhinzi exposed their urban high density (ghetto) background by their use of urban street lingo. The study also concludes, like Evans et al. (2017), that identities constructed in offline spaces differ from those constructed in anonymous online spaces. However, offline identities that the ghosts try to hide have a way of intruding into their online performances. The individual behind the pseudonym inadvertently inscribes himself into his or her pseudonym and what s/he writes. This confirms observations by scholars that the individual inadvertently inscribes himself or herself into what s/he writes (see Murchison, 2010; Schwandt, 2005; Stokes, 2003). Both the online and offline identities are part and parcel of the netizens' identities and in both instances the identities are performances. The identities are both authentic; none is fake. The online spaces allow the suppressed identity to come to the fore due to their anonymity while offline this identity is suppressed due to the desire to belong. The self-naming by the ghosts is thus designed to enable the suppressed to come to the fore without worrying about reputational damage. However, the suppressed offline identity has a way of intruding into these online performances in the same manner the "hidden" identity has a way of intruding into the offline performance as well. Furthermore, the identity the netizen will be trying to suppress intrudes into the performance through the pseudonyms themselves. The self-naming act and the tweeting are both moments of performance by the netizens. As noted with regard to, for example, Baba Bhinzi and Mai Bhinzi; their pseudonyms and tweets expose them as youthful urban ghetto or high density suburbs' residents or as tracing their origins from the urban ghetto. This is further buttressed by the contents of their tweets which are equally associated with the urban high density youth. But this is not to say pseudonyms only expose the physical spaces occupied by the person hiding behind them; pseudonyms may also expose political inclinations for example Zimbabwe Son's neutral posture is captured in "his" name. Online pseudonymity inverts Goffman's front-stage and back-stage model in attempts to hide the known identity in contexts fraught with threats of reprisals. However, this inversion and the subsequent performance(s) is characterized by crisis moments in which the backstaged front-stage performances keep intruding despite how hard the person behind the ghost name tries to keep them at bay. The article also concludes that even though the pseudonyms

as signs are meant to both hide the front-stage performance while bringing the back stage performance to the front stage, they are also arguably a statement of intent. In other words, they both hide the front-stage performance while revealing the backstage performance on the front stage. Ironically, it is the process of self-naming together with the tweeting that also inadvertently exposes that which the netizen seeks to hide, that is, the front-stage performance. For example, Baba Bhinzi and Amai Bhinzi's attempts to hide the front stage through their selected names inadvertently expose their urban high-density ties. This is so because signs reverberate with the conditions of their production and circulation. The ghost characters as signs were produced in specific contexts and these contexts are self-evident in the signs or tweets that they produce as well. The individual cannot unwrite himself/herself (both back stage and front stage) from the text.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Albert Chibuwe https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3905-6541

Notes

1. Gweshegweshe was a character in 1990s Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's ZTV drama. The ambassador has some resemblance to the man with the character of Gweshegweshe.
2. Pfumvudza is a government program spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture geared toward boosting agricultural produce in the country through providing inputs and knowledge on the method of farming accompanying the program.

References

Aleksiejuk, K. (2014). Internet names as an anthroponomastic category. *Onomastica*, *3*, 243–255.

Back, M. D., Stefan, C. S., & Boris, E. (2008). Becoming friends by chance. *Psychological Science*, *19*(5), 439–462.

Baker, P. (2006). Moral panic and alternative identity construction in Usenet. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *7*(1), n.p.

Bechar-Israeli, H. (1995). From Bonehead to clonehead: Nicknames, Play and Identity on Internet Relay Chat. *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication*, *1*(2), n.p.

Berg, J. (2017). *Digital democracy: Studies of online political participation*. Abo Akademi University Press.

Boonpaisamsatit, N. (2011). Names and naming: Semiotic, linguistic and anthropological perspectives. *Feu Academic Review*, 5–20. http://journal.feu.ac.th/pdf/v5i1t2a2.pdf

Burgh, S. A., McKenna, K. Y. A., & Fitzsimons, G. M. (2002). Can you see the real me? Activation and expression of the "true self" on the internet. *Journal of Social Issues*, *58*, 33–48.

Chibuwe, A. (2020). Social media and elections in Zimbabwe: Twitter war between Pro ZANU-PF and Pro-MDC-A Netizens. *Communicatio*, *46*(4), 7–30.

Chibuwe, A., & Ureke, O. (2016). "Political gladiators" on Facebook in Zimbabwe: A discursive analysis of intra-Zimbabwe African Union-PF cyber wars; Baba Jukwa versus Amai Jukwa. *Media, Culture and Society*, 38(8), 1247–1260.

Clark, R., & Ivanic, R. (1997). *The politics of writing*. Routledge.

Coleman, A. L. (2016, June 10). What's in a name: Meet the original Cassius Clay. *Time*. http://time.com/4363225/original-cassius-clay-muhammad-ali/

Descombes, J. (1994). *Modern French philosophy*. Continuum.

Evans, S. K., Pearce, K. E., Vitak, J., & Treem, J. W. (2017). Explicating affordances: A conceptual framework for understanding affordances in communication research. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *22*(1), 35–52.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977*. Pantheon.

Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourse*. Falmer Press.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Simon & Schuster.

Guenther, K. M. (2009). The politics of names: Rethinking the methodological and ethical significance of naming people, organisations and places. *Qualitative Research*, *9*(4), 411–421.

Hall, S. (1977). Culture, the media and the "ideological effect." In J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, & J. Woollacott (Eds.), *Mass communication and society* (pp. 315–348). Edward Arnold.

Hu, C., Samer, K., Huang, J., & Ranatnavelu, K. (2017). Disinhibition of negative true self for identity reconstructions in cyberspace: Advancing self-discrepancy theory for virtual settings. *PLOS ONE*, *12*(14), Article e0175623.

Hu, C., Zhao, L., & Huang, J. (2015). Achieving self-congruency: Examining why individuals reconstruct their virtual identity in communities of interest established within social network platforms. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 50, 465–475.

Jakaza, E. (2020). Identity construction or obfuscation on social media: A case of Facebook and WhatsApp. *African Identities*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1804829

Karekwaivanane, G., & Msonza, N. (2021). Zimbabwe digital rights landscape report. In T. Roberts (Eds.), *Digital rights in closing civic space: Lessons from 10 African countries* (pp. 61–84). Institute of Development Studies.

Koole, S. L. (2010). Self-regulation of self-regulation. In K. D. Vohs & R. F. Baumeister (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory and applications* (pp. 101–112). Guilford Press.

Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*. Columbia University Press.

Kumayama, K. D. (2009). A right to pseudonymity. *Arizona Law Review*, *51*, 427–444.

Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. Harcourt, Brace and Co.

Ma, X., Hancock, J., & Naaman, M. (2016). Anonymity, intimacy and self-disclosure in social media. *Online Communities-Identities and Behaviors*, 3858–3873. https://s.tech.cornell.edu/assets/papers/anonymity-intimacy-disclosure.pdf

Manago, A., Graham, M., Greenfield, I., & Salimkhan, G. (2008). Self-presentation and Gender on MySpace. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *29*, 446–458.

Mano, W. (2004). Renegotiating tradition on Radio Zimbabwe. *Media, Culture & Society*, *26*(3), 315–336.

Mashiri, P., Chabata, E., & Chitando, E. (2013). A socio-cultural and linguistic analysis of postcolonial Christian naming practices in Zimbabwe. *Journal for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, *2*(2), 163–173.

Mbembe, A. (1992). Provisional notes on the postcolony. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, *62*(1), 3–37.

McKenna, K. Y. A., Green, A. S., & Gleason, M. E. J. (2002). Relationship formation on the internet: What's the big attraction? *Journal of Social Issues*, *58*, 9–31.

Mhiripiri, N. A., & Tomaselli, K. (2010). Language ambiguities, cultural tourism and the #Khomani. In K. Luger & K. Wohler (Eds.), *Kulturulles Erbe und Tourismus: Rituale, Traditionen, Inszenierungen* (pp. 285–296). Studien Verlag.

Moyo, L. (2011). Blogging down a dictatorship: Human rights, citizen journalists and the right to communicate in Zimbabwe. *Journalism*, *12*, 745–760.

Murchison, J. M. (2010). *Ethnography essentials: Designing, conducting, and presenting your research*. Jossey-Bass.

Mutsvairo, B. (2016). Dovetailing desires for democracy with new ICTs' potentiality as platform for activism. In B. Mutsvairo (Ed.), *Digital activism in the social media era: Critical reflections on emerging trends in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 3–25). Palgrave Macmillan.

Ncube, L. (2016). 'Bhora mugedhi versus Bhora musango': The interface between football discourse and Zimbabwean politics. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 1–18, DOI: 10.1177/1012690213518316.

Ncube, L. (2019). Digital media, fake news and pro-movement for democratic change (MDC) alliance cyber-propaganda during the 2018 Zimbabwe election. *African Journalism Studies*, *40*(4), 44–61.

Ngubane, S., & Thebethe, N. (2013). Shifts and continuities in Zulu personal naming practices. *Literator*, *34*(1), 431–482.

Nhongo, R. (2018). The meaning of pseudonyms in selected Zimbabwean online newspapers. *Nomina Africana*, *32*(2), 95–106.

Niedt, G. (2016). Social media affordances and the capital of queer self-expression: Facebook, Ello, and the nymwars. In A. Novak & I. J. El-Burki (Eds.), *Defining identity and the changing scope of culture in the digital age* (pp. 99–116). IGI Global.

Ntini, E., & Mangeya, H. (2020). A dialogic analysis of audiences' interactions on online media sites in Zimbabwe. *Communicatio*, *46*, 64–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2020.1762687

Pfukwa, C., & Barnes, L. (2010). Negotiating identities in guerrilla war names in the Zimbabwean war of liberation. *African Identities*, *8*(3), 209–219.

Rice, P., & Waugh, P. (2001). *Modern literary theory*. Arnold.

Rosenmann, A. (2006). Forced online: Push factors of Internet sexuality: A Preliminary study of paraphilic empowerment. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *51*(3), 71–92.

Ross, D. A. R. (2007). Backstage with the knowledge boys and girls: Goffman and distributed agency in an organic online community. *Organization Studies*, *28*(3), 307–325.

Schwandt, T. A. (2005). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics and social constructivism. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 292–331). SAGE.

Shafie, L. A., Nayam, S., & Osman, N. (2012). Constructing identity through Facebook profiles: Online identity and visual impression management of university students in Malaysia. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 65(2), 134–140.

Siedman, G. (2014). Expressing the "true self" on Facebook. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 31, 367–372.

Stiegler, B. (2008). *Acting out*. Stanford University Press.

Stokes, J. (2003). *How to do media and cultural studies*. SAGE.

Suler, J. (2002). Identity management in cyberspace. *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytical Studies*, *4*, 455–460.

Van der Nagel, E. (2017). From usernames to profiles: The development of pseudonymity in internet communication. *Internet Histories: Digital Technology, Culture and Society*, *1*(2), 312–331.

Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). The representation of social actors in discourse. In C.R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 32–70). Routledge.

Vella, A. J. (2013). A digital identity: Creating uniqueness in a new contextual domain. *e-Learning and Digital Media*, *10*(3), 285–293.

Venn, C., Boyne, R., Phillips, J., & Bishop, R. (2009). Technics, media and teleology: Interview with Bernard Stiegler. *Theory, Culture and Society*, *24*(7), 334–341.

William, D. (2007). The impact of time online: Social capital and cyberbalkanization. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, *8*, 580–584.

Zeleza, P. T. (2006). The inventions of African identities and languages: The discursive and developmental implications. In O. F. Arasanyin & M. A. Pemberton (Eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 36th annual conference on African linguistics* (pp. 14–26). Cascadilla Proceedings in Project.

Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S., & Martin, J. (2008). Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, *24*(5), 1816–1836.

Author Biographies

Albert Chibuwe (Dr) is a research fellow in the Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice at the University of the Free State. He is also a senior lecturer in the Media, Communication, Film and Theatre Arts Department at Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. His research interests are in political communication, social media, media framing, Indigenous language media, journalism education, and practice.

Phillip Mpofu (Dlitt et Phil) is an extraordinary researcher at North West University, South Africa, in the Indigenous Language Media in Africa Research Entity. He is also a senior lecturer in the Department of African Languages and Culture at Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. His research combines sociolinguistics, language politics, virtual communities, and African language media.

Kudakwashe Bhowa (Mr) holds a Master of Science in Media and Society Studies from the Midlands State University and is an independent researcher. His research interests are in social media and politics.