

# Media Consumption of Second generation Diaspora in Brussels

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Discussing online behaviours and the role of  
Social Network Sites in self-expression and  
cultural identity

Student Name: Madly Simba Boumba

Student Number: 384102

Thesis Supervisor: Ahmed Al-Rawi

Media, Culture and Society

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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## **Abstract:**

Some of the existing studies on the media consumption of diaspora (Georgiou, 2001, 2002; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Wood & Smiths, 2004; De Andrea & Levine, 2010; Ibold, 2010; Krivolap, 2011; Macri, 2011; Dobrowsky, 2012) confirm that the Internet provides diasporas with new spaces for communication, and a new context for thinking of identity and community. This thesis particularly explores the media consumption of second generation diaspora. It focuses on the ways members of the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels use Social Network Sites (SNS), especially when it comes to self-expression and cultural identity. This research particularly seeks to identify the various ways and different types of cultural elements that could be presented on SNS. In particular, the study centers on three dimensions: identity and cultural identity, online behaviour (especially on SNS), and the relationship between cultural identity and SNS. The research design comprises of two qualitative methods: two focus groups respectively conducted with five and seven participants, in addition to a series of 13 in-depth interviews conducted with the Congolese youth and emerging adults (18-30 years old). The participants were asked to particularly reflect upon their identities and cultural identities, on their online behaviour, and on the type of cultural elements they share or could share on SNS. The results of the research demonstrated that the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels often negotiates plural identities: double, African/Congolese, or Cosmopolitan. On a cultural and collective level, the participants were proud of their community but at the same time really pessimistic. This leads to two types of online behaviour and to the expression of different cultural elements. On the one hand, SNS are used as entertainment tools where the positive and negative cultural elements presented are presented in a humoristic way. On the other hand, SNS are used as empowering tools presenting claims of cultural identity and for cultural change within the community and more self-awareness. It was discovered that the interaction on SNS helps the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in their cultural identification process and feeling of belonging.

**Keywords:** Diaspora - Congolese diaspora – cultural identity – SNS – self-expression – participatory web - media consumption – identity – Brussels – Congo

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

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## 1.1. Diaspora and the African Diaspora

Originally, the word “diaspora” is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the proposition *dia* (over) (Cohen, 2007). It simply means the dispersal of a people from its original homeland (Tölöyan, 1996). Human beings have been in constant motion, but these movements have not always resulted in ‘diasporas’ (Butler, 2001). It is only recently that the term ‘diaspora’ has been systematically introduced and used in academic and policy discourses (Tsagarousianou, 1996). The use of the word has become so widespread as to force a reassessment of its meaning (Butler, 2001). It was first closely associated with the dispersion of the Jewish people, whereas now the term is also used to designate various kinds of dispersed communities.

In a globalised context of migration of information, myths, languages and people, the world can no longer be divided up so easily into such clearly demarcated and spatially bounded cultural worlds (Morley, 2001). And the notion of borders means very different things, depending which side of them you stand and how easily you can cross them, and Morley’s assumption is particularly true for the diaspora. As Karim (2007) states “ often viewed through the lens of migration from the Southern to the Western parts of the world, the term ‘diaspora’ has frequently been limited to “non-white” people who remain distinct as minorities in their new countries of residence” (p.362). Since the 1960s, it has then become associated with recent communities known as immigrants, guest workers, asylum seekers, displaced population, exile groups, overseas communities, ethnic and racial communities, and so forth (Safran, 1991; Tölöyan, 1996).

The increasing number of articles focusing on the concept of ‘diaspora’ and ‘diasporic condition’ indicates a widespread and growing interest in phenomena associated with it. Many academics attempted to even provide definition of the concept (to cite a few Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997; Butler, 2001; Karim, 2003, 2007; Tölöyan, 2012). The majority often tries to build ideal-type definitions of diasporas, perhaps linked to recurrent themes such as nostalgic links and memories, original home and homeland (Tsagarousianou, 1996). With authors such as Safran (1991) and Cohen (1997), “diaspora” is defined with a series of common features and characteristics that diasporic communities are supposed to meet. If Safran (1991) clearly revolves around the relationship of the diasporic group with its homeland, Cohen (1997) tries to push forward the debate by adjusting and adding other

elements at Safran's list, mainly emphasising on the strong links to the past of a diasporic group.

Tsagarousianou (1996) firmly thinks that these definitions are a "checklist of characteristics" which are "quite restrictive and attempt to artificially and somewhat arbitrarily reify what in essence constitutes a snapshot of complex and ongoing processes" (p.56). Indeed, in her paper, she stresses the importance of maintaining a sufficiently critical, flexible and open definition of diaspora and diasporic culture "in order to avoid reifying the concept and overlooking the multitude of experiences relating to diverse patterns of migration and settlement modes" (Tsagarousianou, 1996, p.64). For Tsagarousianou (1996), the concepts of 'ethnicity', 'mobility' or 'displacement' are not sufficient parameters to allow us to make sense of diasporic phenomena. After all, diasporas are not given or objectively definable communities, they actually belong to what Anderson (1991) has called "imagined community" continuously reinvented and reconstructed.

As Tsagarousianou (1996) and Butler (2001) argue, we have become less clear about what defines diasporas and makes them a distinct category. Butler specifically argues that it is a necessity for diaspora scholars to search for a consensus on the definition of diaspora. However, it seems to Butler (2001) that most scholars seem to agree upon 3 basic features: after the dispersal, there must be a minimum of 2 destinations; there must be some relationship to an actual or imagined homeland; and there must be self-awareness of the group's identity.

For the purpose of this thesis, the diasporic group under scope is the Congolese Diaspora which by definition also belongs to the broader term of African diaspora. According to Cohen (1997), it is possible to give credible meaning to diasporic groups by giving typology of diaspora (victim, labour, trade, imperial and cultural diasporas). For the author, the African diaspora is what he calls a "victim diaspora", which refers to a more sinister and brutal meaning of diaspora. It involves collective trauma (slavery for Africans), banishment, servitude, forced migration, etc. Indeed, to many, the simple word "Africa" signified enslavement, poverty, denigration, exploitation, white superiority, the loss of language and the loss of self-respect (Cohen, 1997). Although the primary focus on the African diaspora has been placed on the slave trade or other "victim-related" associations (Cohen, 1997), Harris et al. (1996) argue that one should remember that Africans travelled voluntarily throughout much of the world long before the slave trade existed. For instance, Gnamankou (2005) explains that Africa was linked to Europe by ancient trade routes long before the Greco-Roman period.

Gnammankou (2005) explains that until the 16th Century, the African diaspora was principally located in Southern Europe, for the most part in the Iberian peninsula and the Mediterranean area (Sicily and Italy). From the mid-16th Century onwards, the author argues that the African presence extended throughout the rest of Europe. Near the end of the 19th Century, after the abolition of the slave trade and slavery in the Americas, Europe launched the great project of colonization. The aim was to exploit the vast natural and human resources of Africa. The Berlin conference of 1885 consecrated the partition of Africa and marked the beginning of the colonial era. The powerful forces of the time (England, France, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Italy) divided up the African continent and founded their colonies.

When the colonial era ended, after less than a century in most cases, the colonial identity had not fully matured. Consequently, Harris et al. (1996) explains that until the 1960s, most Africans retained a primary allegiance to their colonisers. For the authors, this period marked an accelerated gravitation of Africans to settle within the major cities of the colonial powers: France for the Senegalese, Malians, Ivoriens, Haitians, Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and others from French-speaking areas; England for the Ghanians, Nigerians, Kenyans, South Africans, Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Barbadians, and others in English-speaking areas; Portugal for the Angolans, Mozambicans, Cape Verdians, and Brazilians; the Netherlands for the Surinamese; and Belgium for the inhabitants of Zaire (name changed in 1971 to become Congo) (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009).

That is why Gnammankou (2005) affirms that the African presence in present-day Europe is even greater than ever in history. He argues that most, if not all, European countries contain at least a few hundred African settlers; unsurprisingly the majority are mainly in the UK, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, Spain, Italy – the ex-colonial powers- and to some extent Russia, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries. Harris et al. (1996) explains that the major cities of the Western powers thus became loci for the gathering of diverse ethnic and political groups of African origin. The United States Congress suggested that an estimated 7,000,000 individuals of African descent currently live in and have long had a presence in Europe, forming an influential part of the African diaspora (ENAR, 2012).

Nevertheless, Gnammankou (2005) assumes that there are other reasons than 'colonial allegiance' for Africans to choose to live in Europe: political reasons (i.e. seeking asylum), a better standard of living, specialised training in public or private academic institutions, and family reunification. Now those diasporas are considered as what Byfield (2000) identifies as "overlapping diasporas". He explains that new African communities have

been formed in Europe, and together they have forged multinational, multi-ethnic urban black communities of overlapping diasporas with both shared and competing interests. The concept of “overlapping diaspora” creates an analytical space for African migrants who, reside outside of the continent, remain politically and ideologically connected to and defined by politics within Africa.

### 1.1.2. The Congolese diaspora in Brussels

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to the rise of transnational communities in European cities (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009). According to the authors, this transnational network formation has transformed the socio-cultural mix of Europe's larger cities, resulting in the emergence of ethnically highly diversified, multicultural, and cosmopolitan cities. Such accounts are particularly clear in the city of Brussels which hosts a proportionally high number of immigrants (35% of the total number of immigrant in Belgium) (Hanseeuw, 2012). On January 1st, 2013, the total population of Belgium was of 11.099.554 people including 1.195.122 people from a foreign background (Belgium Federal Government, 2013).

Since the second part of the 20th Century, Belgium has been considered as a veritable land of immigration (Hanseeuw, 2012). In fact, as the author explains, after 1947, 4% of the total Belgian population consisted of foreigners. In 2008, statistics showed that foreigners represent 28.1% of the total population (Belgian Federal Government, 2013a). In 2006, the three first countries most represented in Belgium are in order Italy (171.918), France (125.061) and the Netherlands (116.970) directly followed by Morocco (80.579) (Direction générale Emploi et marché du travail, 2008). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is ranked at the 12th position with 14,216 people and is the most represented country from the sub-Saharan Africa (Direction générale Emploi et marché du travail, 2008). Yet, the debates about ethnic statistics in Belgium, extensive naturalisation and the difficulty of enumerating undocumented migrants make it impossible to give precise figures about the number of migrants of sub-Saharan African origin living in Belgium (Grégoire, 2010). However, as the author argues, because of its colonial past, it is definitely people from the current DRC that form the oldest and largest African diaspora in Belgium.

The immigration of foreigners in Belgium is mainly concentrated in urban centres such as Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Louvain, Charleroi and most importantly Brussels (Hanseeuw, 2012). Officially, in 2006, the Brussels-Capital region was hosting 6856 Congolese people (part of the 40,185 in the entire Belgium), representing the most important

sub-Saharan community in Brussels (Belgium Federal Government, 2013). The other most represented migrants' countries in Belgium are Rwanda (8,635), Ghana (4,945), Cameroon (4,914), followed by Mauritius, Burundi, Ivory Coast and Angola (Grégoire, 2010). As Grégoire (2010) highlights, those diasporas are also known as the "Pan-African" communities of Belgium.

In such context of migration and thus multiculturalism, the city itself is rescaling in important ways, and this is particularly clear in Brussels (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009). Matonge (named after one shopping district in Kinshasa (the capital city of DRC)) is a great example of how cities have been transformed by diasporic communities. This neighbourhood represents a symbolic centre in Brussels not just for Congolese people, but also for other African communities living in Brussels, in Belgium and all over the world. Therefore, the authors explain that Matonge functions, both symbolically and materially, as a key signifying place in the construction of Congolese diasporic identity, while shaping a new form of 'glocal' urbanity in Brussels.

However, the authors highlight that in terms of multi-scaled identity formation the Congolese diaspora is a particular and largely ignored ethnic group in Belgium, something they find significantly odd considering the particularly atypical migration history of Congo. Indeed, they argue that the Congolese diaspora does not fit in the literature on European Urban transnational immigration (which tends to focus either on migrating labour or on refugees). This specific diaspora offers a uniquely important and extraordinarily rich group who have formed special histories, geographical trajectories, scaled networking, and urban embedding. In addition, this community is atypical because most people migrated through personal choice and not as a result of migration policies from the Belgian state or of special post-colonial arrangements.

For Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw (2009), the Congolese migration to Belgium is a product of the common colonial past, although very different compared with, for example, the commonwealth experience or the earlier slave-based African diaspora. This history began when the 1885 Berlin conference assigned 'Congo Free State' as the personal possession of Leopold II, then King of Belgium. As Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) mentions, since 1885, the country was under the absolute control of the Belgian empire, which means that the country's enormous wealth has served to enrich the country's rulers, their external political allies and business partners and not to meet the basic needs of the native people. During this period, the only movement of Congolese people to Belgium was exclusively for urban exhibition display where the imported "exotica" "performed" live shows about 'everyday' life in Congo: playing tom-tom, performing traditional dance and mimicking tribal wars (Etambala, 1993).

According to census data, there were 15 Congolese in Belgium in 1910, 28 in 1920, and 98 in 1930 (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009). During the colonial period, migration to Belgium was extremely limited; officially, there was no migration. The few Belgian residents of Congolese origins were students or the occasional rare visitors (Kagné, 2001). After the Congolese independence in 1960, a greater number of Congolese began to reside mostly temporarily in Belgium. Most of them were students assumed to return 'home' after completing their stint (Kagné & Martiniello). During the 1990s, then the dynamics of Congolese immigration changed rapidly as the conditions in Congo deteriorated. The temporary colony of Congolese students and diplomats increased with the arrival of permanently residing illegal migrants, asylum seekers and labour migrants (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009). Nevertheless, for a majority of Congolese people, Europe is always seen as a transitory step, a necessary step, but always transitory until the living conditions in Congo allow them to go back in their country of origin (Garbin & Pambu, 2009).

If historians do not deny the fact that Belgians effectively did build roads, schools and hospitals and even raised the living standards of some of their colonial subjects; repression, murder, forced labour, racism and exploitation were intrinsic dimensions of the Belgian rule in the Congo (Vantemsche, 2006). And this colonial domination is often remembered and described by the community in terms of political and cultural oppression (Garbin & Pambu, 2009). Taking such historical context into consideration, today, the Congolese diaspora in Brussels has to deal with complex identity processes. Truly, an important feature of this transnational community is the triadic relationship between the globally dispersed ethnic group, the place of residence (Belgium) and the homeland (Congo) (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009). And if this identity process is already complex for the first generation of Congolese people in Brussels, how the following generations are dealing with this triadic relationship?

### 1.1.3. The Second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels

Diasporas are multi-generational (Tsagarousianou, 1996). And the Congolese Diaspora is no exception. The Second generation of this diaspora (mainly representing the new and modern generation of the diaspora) represents the most important member of the 'African community' in Brussels, but unfortunately they are a neglected group in Brussels. Being myself from this particular community and generation, I surely know that this group has always a lot to say about its cultural identity (referring here to a set of elements linked to the Congolese origins) either off-line or online.

The only study found discussing this particular group is the publication of Garbin and Pambu (2009). They present a range of opinions of parents talking about the emerging generation, who sometimes have a symbolic or imagined relationship with the homeland – a sort of ‘nostalgia without memory’. New generations have to deal with plural identities more so than the first generation. Those parents are pretty concerned about their children being “out from their roots”. For some, even if they were born in Europe, they must know the history of the country. It is rare that they can speak the languages of Congo or knowing what is happening. Moreover, some parents refuse to speak to their children in a Congolese language; one interviewee explains that it is a pity because many Congolese are losing their identities.

In this research, the discussion about identity and “cultural identity” mainly refers to the multiple and sometimes complex identities of the younger generation of the Diaspora. From my personal social experience online, it seems that they are indeed claiming something on SNS and there are no published studies dedicated to the relation between Social Networking Sites (SNS) and cultural identity of this particular community.

## **1.2. Scientific and societal relevance**

Despite the increasing academic interest in the digital diaspora phenomenon, rapid technological changes such as the introduction of social media and mobile Internet require continuous revision (Oiarzabal & Reips, 2012). As most of the studies in the field highlight, there is a clear need for better understanding on access and use of digital media by ethnic groups (Karim, 1998). The impact of media used by minorities on identity formation also needs to be studied. The extensive use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) constitutes a fairly new dimension in the study of migration and diasporic communities that has recently begun attracting the attention of scholars from a variety of disciplines. However, this is still very much an under-researched area, particularly regarding the study of the use of ICT's by migrants within Europe (Oiarzabal & Reips, 2012). It is clear that the debate on the ‘nature’ of diasporic communities is only just starting. The process of defining or better understanding diasporic phenomena is marked by experimentation, continuously informed from debates on identity, ethnicity, globalisation, etc. (Tsagarousianou, 1996). Some of the existing studies (Ibold, 2010 & Krivolap, 2011) have already explored the correlation between the Internet and the cultural identity of diasporic groups, but none have explored this correlation on SNS. Therefore, the attempt of this study is to contribute to this academic debate by analysing the interaction between cultural identities of a specific diasporic community and the use of SNS for self-expression. It would be of scientific

relevance to understand to what extent online behaviour could be representative of an identity construction and self-expression process. The African diaspora under the scope is the Congolese diaspora in Brussels. According to Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw (2009), this ethnic group is a particular and largely ignored ethnic group in Belgium, a surprising fact considering the historical past between the Congolese people and Belgium. The only study found so far about the Congolese diaspora in Belgium and the notion of identity is the one of Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw (2009). It mainly focuses on identity formation of the first generation; however there was no link to the media consumption and behaviour of this diaspora and its new generation.

From a societal perspective, it would be of interest to explore how the new and younger generation of the Congolese diaspora (a particular and largely ignored ethnic group in Belgium) could deal with their cultural identity especially on SNS. In fact, in an increasingly multicultural society as the Belgian society, this generation of individuals represent interesting subjects to analyse in terms of identity. Those individuals (often defined as the second or third generation in European countries) often have to negotiate between multiple identities (most likely the one from their parents and the one developed in the host country of their parents). Moreover, the fact that they can also be categorised as young people or emerging adults living in Western societies, make them individuals more familiar with the use of SNS. It would then be socially interesting to focus on this new generation of the diaspora, a generation relatively different from the first generation.

### **1.3. Research Question and Sub-questions**

The main research question of the thesis is: "How could the use of SNS help the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels express their cultural identity?" To answer it, three sub-questions related to key concepts of the study have been developed:

- 1) "What elements the second generation of the Congolese diaspora associate with their identity and cultural identity?"

Here, the aim is to gather what elements this generation actually consider and associate to what is part of their identity and cultural identity. This question is particularly important to understand what common, important and characterizing associations they make when it comes to their Congolese identity and culture.

- 2) "What type of online activities is this generation engaged in, especially when it comes to SNS?"

This question is to investigate what sort of online activities is this second generation mostly engaged in. It will help to draw a general understanding of what they actually do online, and to some extent understand for what purpose they consume this particular technology.

- 3) "What characteristics of their cultural identity they would express or are expressing on SNS?"

This last sub-question attempts to link the two previous notions (identity and online behaviour). Here, the purpose is to actually know what type of characteristics or aspects related to cultural identity these individual could express on SNS, and subsequently understand why these particular characteristics are being expressed.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

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### 2.1. Identity and cultural identity of the diaspora

#### 2.1.1. Diaspora and identity

The notion of identity can be conceptualized in various ways and is currently often attached to the nation state, but when globalisation opens its borders to various groups of people, things become more complex. In social theory, this particular phenomenon has been vigorously debated for the last few decades. To name but a few, scholars such as Hall (1990, 1996), Dayan (1998), Mainsah (2009), Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw (2009), and Ibold (2010), have all implicitly come to the agreement that the process of identity formation is less straightforward than ever before.

As Hall (1996) argued, in late-modern societies, globalisation is seen as a particular process of change. It forces societies to be in a constant, rapid and permanent change. And individuals in such societies are fragmented, composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities. Indeed, the very process of identification has become more open-ended, variable and problematic. It involves different levels of production, confrontation but also adoption (Dayan, 1998). And this is particularly true for diasporic groups who have crossed borders and have to negotiate their identity in “an alien culture” (Wenjing, 2005). Gathering knowledge about identity becomes then a complex task because it is a dynamic concept, an ongoing process continually achieved through communication (Ibold, 2010).

For diasporic groups, the dominant theories claim an orientation towards the homeland as an essential feature of their diasporic identity. The argument of Tölölyan (2012) and Tsagarousianou (1996) is that academics must be careful not to locate the diasporic's home in the ancestral homeland too easily. The notion of home that many researchers stress is questionable as the issue of home within contemporary diasporas becomes somewhat irrelevant. Morley (2001) is one of the academics discussing the complexities and contradictions of the ideas of identity, place, belonging and ‘home’ in our contemporary mediated world. He exposes how the nation comes to be presented as a symbolic home of who does or does not come to feel ‘at home’ within it. Similarly to Morley (2001), Hall (1996) presents Benedict Anderson's idea that the concept of nation has to be understood as an ‘imagined community’. He sees national culture as a discourse, a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our conception of ourselves.

In a diasporic context (where migration is often viewed as a movement from the Southern to the Western and wealthier parts of the world), this discourse is difficult to articulate. In truth, this context of diaspora has undeniably changed the cultural landscape of many Western countries. And if cultural diversity has always characterized Europe (Georgiou, 2009), the debate about its cultural richness is not new. As Aissaoui and De Sousa (2008) claimed, the contact of diverse cultures is source of enrichment but also of questioning. Europe has to be depicted as a common and distinct cultural home that excludes and (re-)creates otherness when it does not fit in a model of universalism and appears as competing particularism (Georgiou, 2009), and members of the diasporas are often considered as the eternal “others”. In 1995, this concept of “otherness” has been approached by Said (1995) who argues that people are still forced to live through the identities ascribed to them by others, rather than through identities they might choose for themselves. Indeed, the other is essential in the construction and individual process of identity, and this could be particularly true for diasporas living in a multicultural society. Morley rather talks about this “otherness” in terms of “rituals of exclusions” facilitated by the media.

### 2.1.2. Cultural identity

In ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, Hall (1990) argues that there are two ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. The first way is to see it as a shared culture, where people experience identity in collectivity and hold in common a shared history and cultural codes. The second vision is to think of it as a matter of ‘becoming’ and also a matter of ‘being’. ‘Cultural identity’ is then not a static but rather dynamic process that involves constant transformation. For Hall (1990), cultural identities are points of identification, not an essence but a positioning. As Mainsah (2009) explains, for Hall, identity ought to be seen as a production that is never complete, always in process, always constituted within, not outside, representation. He gives the dynamic attribute to the term. Indeed, identity cannot be understood as an “either/or” process but as a more inclusive “and/and” process. Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw (2009) support the same argument stressing that identities of diasporic groups are indeed not fixed, but continuously renegotiated, subjected to multiple contradictions and transformations. Mainsah (2009) rather talks about “multi-directional gazes” when it comes to the construction of diasporic identities: looking inward to the local context of the host country, backwards to the home country, and all around to the global context.

In the same vein of idea, Matsaganis and his colleagues (2010) explain that the term ‘hybrid identities’ implies the mixing of two identities – that of the ancestral country and of the country of settlement – coming together to create something new that is not recognizably of either culture. For the Black diaspora we could even speak about a specific ‘black’ hybrid identity. Indeed, the ‘black cultural identity’ can be seen as a part-unity, a shared culture, sutured by the collective black experience, resulting from a shared history of slavery, colonial domination and anti-colonial struggle (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw, 2009). And this hybrid aspect is closely related to W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of “double consciousness” as it suggests that diasporas have on the one hand a consciousness of their homeland and on the other hand their identity while adapting to new societies (Harris et al., 1996). Gilroy expanded W.E.B. Du Bois’ crucial notion of “double consciousness” to argue that the development of black atlantic culture is a modern one and must be recognized and accounted for its very hybridity.

As Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw (2009) mention, this “double consciousness” is of course not equally strongly present among diasporic people. They explain that those who are less embedded in the locality emphasise their ‘Congolese’ side. Not surprisingly, the more intense the “glocal” connections, the greater the sense of belonging both to Belgium or Congo in our case. Linking this idea to the use of media, Echchaibi (2001) gives the example of France’s North African communities, second and third generation youth that have developed a new genre of music called *raï* that mixes home and host country traditions, just as these youth identify themselves as a mix of two cultures, because they feel at home in two or more places (as cited in Matsagani et al., 2010).

However, the term ‘cultural identity’ as used in Ibold’s study, is more appropriate to use in our context because it encompasses more categories of identity and allows a range of worldviews. As the author brings out, discussing identity is often singling out a single dimension or characteristic of identity for investigation (e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion, etc); but with the term more categories can be encompassed at the same time and a broader perception of identity is allowed. Indeed, ‘cultural identity’ is midway between personal identity (which deals with questions such as: Who Am I?) and collective identity (which deals with questions such as: Who Am I as a member of my group and in relation to other groups) (Ibold, 2010). Similarly, Hall et al. (1996) would rather conceptualize and position cultural identity at midway between what they define as an ‘enlightenment subject’ and a ‘sociological subject’ (the ‘enlightenment subject’ being a very individualist conception of the subject and his identity; and the ‘sociological subject’ being an interactive conception of identity and the self, formed in the interaction between self and society). On some other dimensions, Brewer and Gardner (1996) approach the idea arguing that identity works at different levels

(personal, relational and collective levels), and these levels represent distinct forms of self-representation in a cultural context.

### 2.1.3. Congolese diaspora and identities

In their study, Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw (2009) discuss the Congolese identity as relatively hybrid and multi-scalar. Through a series of in-depth interviews with first generation immigrants from Congo, they succeeded in mapping different spheres of identity of the Congolese diaspora. The first layer of identity consists of a pan-African or Black identity: as a consequence of their skin colour, they implicitly or explicitly feel part of the 'Black movement' which has its origins in the experience of the European colonisation of Africa. The second layer was described as a Congolese identity: in this layer individuals remain committed to their homeland and have lasting relations with Congo. The third layer is a regional Congolese identity: people are explicitly attached to their native region when they present themselves. The fourth layer is the urban identity: apparently some participants showed a strong local embedding to the city they live in (Leuven or Brussels identity, in the case of this study). The following layer refers to the Belgian identity: it relates to their affinity to Belgium and to how they are considered by the Congolese in Congo when they go back to the homeland. And finally, the last layer is the cosmopolitan identity: many participants were not concerned with Europe and rather see themselves as cosmopolitan. In the light of the present research, apart from providing preliminary thoughts about Congolese identity, those layers are interesting descriptions to take into consideration while discussing the identity of the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels.

### 2.1.4. Younger generation diaspora and identity:

As Gillepsie (1995) has explored, the young people of diasporic groups have to negotiate between the parental and peer, local and global, national and international contexts and cultures which traverse their lives. This generation of young people (often defined as the second or third in European countries) is an intriguing one in terms of identity construction. Indeed, even if they were mostly born in the host country of their parents (or if they came at a young age), they will always be considered as (or have the feeling of being) strangers wherever they are (Aissaoui & De Sousa, 2008).

To borrow a term used by Aksoy and Robins (2000), those young people are 'acculturated' which means that we are more likely to understand their identities as not static, but rather as thought about, changed, abandoned and reclaimed. Indeed, if identity is inherently something complex for all individuals, it might be something even more

complicated for those younger generations of diasporic groups who have to negotiate multiple identities (most likely the ones from their parent's and the one's developed in the host country of their parents). And through the media, they might have impressions that they could have some places of belonging.

At birth, the individual develops an identity imposed by the society that surrounds him/her: name, surname, and identity capital based on his history, origins, experience, and the relation with his environment (Aissaoui & De Sousa, 2008). Being confronted with other cultures results in a vital need to assert our own identity and to position ourselves in relation to others. For young immigrants, it is simultaneously managing multiple cultures and this confrontation between identity of origin and the others, results in a number of crisis of identity that appear in the speech (Aissaoui & De Sousa, 2008). The authors acknowledge a sort of malaise among this younger generation of immigrant because living in a situation of multiple cultural belonging is very difficult for younger generations of immigrants. If their parents are already encountering some sort of identity issues because they are often considered as foreigners, it apparently seems that the younger generations have the same feeling. Aissaoui and De Sousa (2008) wonder how to understand this feeling among this second generation of individuals. To do so, they had a look at the second generation of the Portuguese diaspora and at the second and third generation of the Maghreb diaspora in Rouen (France). Here, the investigation focuses on the second generation of the Congolese diaspora.

## **2.2. Diaspora and media consumption**

### 2.2.1. The Internet era

In an increasingly globalised society, more and more individuals are experiencing ongoing flows of cultural materials from one nation to another and this mostly with the use of new media technologies (Appadurai, 1996; Crane, 2002). In such complex context, diasporic communities – that have crossed borders to establish themselves away from their homeland – are more likely to negotiate ideas of place, space, identity and belonging in significantly different ways (Morley, 2001). Their connections are becoming increasingly significant in the light of what is viewed as the diminishing importance of national borders and the growing global linkages among non-state actors. The very concept of diaspora implies that there is a real or imagined relationship among scattered peoples, which is sustained by some form of communication or contact (Hiller & Frantz, 2004). Karim (2003) argues that those

communities' links and identities are maintained through media such as film, television, videotape, Internet chat groups and websites.

Karim Karim was among the first scholars to discuss the topic, and afterwards emerged a rich body of literature on diaspora and their media use. They have mainly examined how diasporic communities have used communications media to maintain and develop community ties on a local and transnational level. Most of the approaches of these previous studies focus on topics such as consumption of transnational media (Karim, 1998; Aksoy & Robins, 2000; Gillespie, 2000; Georgiou, 2006; Mainsah, 2009); construction of identity (Cottle, 2000; Sreberny, 2000; Georgiou, 2001), multiculturalism (Husband, 2000; Siapera, 2006), community belonging and nostalgia (Morley, 2000); and the new online experience of the diaspora (Karim, 1998; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Georgiou, 2006 ; Siapera, 2006; Breen, 2007; Mainsah, 2009, Oiarzabal & Reips, 2012).

In the light of this Thesis, the interest is particularly focused on the online experience of diasporic groups. With the recent rise of Internet usage all over the planet, diasporas have found another means of communication to sustain their community ties and identities with both their homeland and others in diaspora. Possibilities for sustaining immediate contact are increasing as the Internet provides new spaces for communication flows that transcend geographical borders (Castells, 2001). Hiller and Franz (2004) discussed ideas of 'ties' arguing that there are three types of online relationships identifiable among diasporic people: the new ties (developed as the first need of the migrant to establish new relationships), old ties (retained and nourished as it is important to sustain identification with the home community), and the lost ties (rediscovered thanks to the use of the Internet). The Internet has allowed relatively easy connections for members of communities residing in various continents (Karim, 1998).

In most cases, diasporic online communication is diverse and it combines the use of emails with a more limited use of the web for information, entertainment, and education (Georgiou, 2001). Also, it appears that most recently, members of diasporas are increasingly turning to web blogs to engage in discussion with each other on contemporary political and cultural issues. In 2006, Georgiou defines email as a powerful competitor to the telephone and post. It is interactive, relatively inexpensive and easy to operate (Karim, 2007). However, it is important to note that there is an unequal accessibility to the new media; they are not universally available and it is primarily the more affluent members of transnational groups who seem to be benefitting from them (Karim, 1998; Mainsah, 2009), and therefore are the most active in producing electronic cultural resources.

But, as Hiller and Franz (2004) ask: is there any difference between diasporic online communities and other forms of online community? If online communication for the members of diasporas has similar characteristics with other groups, it has nevertheless changed the very dynamics of diaspora (Karim, 1998; Georgiou, 2006). First, the Internet offers an easy and cheap way for different minorities to gain visibility, voice, and surpass the boundaries of space and dominant cultural ideologies. Next, diasporic communities see in the Internet an opportunity to communicate beyond geographical and national boundaries. In addition, in their online presence, diasporas can claim their space, rights and celebrate their identity and cultural particularity in the national context where they live. Finally, for many members of diasporas – especially for the younger generations – their presence on the Internet and other media allows them to actively construct, communicate and celebrate their particular diasporic identities, which are not the same as those of their parents and those of the people living in the distant “homeland” (Gillespie, 1995).

Indeed all generations of immigrant people do not have necessarily a diasporic consciousness. While it appears that older immigrants prefer content exclusively related to their cultural backgrounds (for reviving lost touch with their diaspora), younger ones seem to want a broader variety (Karim, 1998 and 2007). As Karim explains, the communal identity that emerges is not the old one but one that is hybrid often negotiated in the country of settlement and through interaction with other individuals/groups in that society.

### 2.2.2. Constructing a ‘virtual community’

New technologies like the Internet have become quotidian resources among migrants who use them to develop, maintain, and recreate informal national and transnational networks in both the physical and the digital worlds, while reinforcing and shaping their sense of individual and collective identity (Oiarzabal & Reips, 2012). They have facilitated instantaneous flows of information and ideas as well as the ritual exchange of symbols and images thereby serving to construct and affirm ‘imagined’ – and now increasingly – ‘virtual’ communities (Cottle, 2000). When Morley (2001) was arguing how diasporic are in a sense forced to speak home not simply as a physical place but also as a virtual place where “imagined community” exist (Anderson, 1991), it was without knowing that those “imagined communities” would finally find some places online. Indeed, the Internet has allowed most diasporic communities to discover and re-discover this shared imagination and commonality (Georgiou, 2006).

Rheingold (1993) was the first to come up with the term 'virtual community', identifying the cyberspace as a 'place' where the users electronically reconstitute the relationships that existed before migration. Several other academics re-used the term to discuss the web experience among diasporic peoples (Karim, 1998, 2003; Cottle, 2000; Mitra, 2000; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Georgiou, 2006). Mitra (2000) used the term to reconceptualise the notion of 'community' in the Internet age. She asserts that the organisation of human activities has become more complex with the availability of fast, efficient, and powerful means of communication that can have a significant impact on the way people organize the communities they live in and interact with. Cottle (2000) follows the same vein of idea saying that we are now to see new technologies as important tools serving to construct and affirm an 'imagined' and 'virtual' 'community'.

On some other level, Karim (1998, 2003), Hiller and Franz (2004) and Georgiou (2006) clarified that the Internet is not used to build a virtual community that previously existed based on face-to-face interactions. Karim argued that the benefit of online media should not be found in facilitating communication among already connected individuals and groups, but on the contrary should provide a virtually and instantaneous medium for the formation and cultivation of new relationships among people who could share similar interests and experiences. Moreover, he adds that this has nothing to do with Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community' (1983) since it is extra-national, the communal identity has to be thought in a different way. Given this context of new community space online, scholars such as Georgiou (2006) see in diasporic people newly empowered media producers.

### 2.2.3. Empowering the diaspora

Georgiou (2006) supports Karim's idea by claiming that diasporas are actually constructing new community spaces where members are now seen as particular empowered producers of media content, providing alternative media in local, national, and transnational spaces. Karim (2007) talks about a particular sort of globalisation: "the globalization-from-below", and diasporic members have been increasingly important participants of such counter-global phenomenon which does provide an alternative to the long-standing Western dominance of international media flows ("the globalization-from- above"). Matsaganis et al. (2010) regroup this aspect under the broad term of ethnic media. Also described as minority media, those ethnic media have encountered a rapid growth and success in North America and Western Europe (Deuze, 2006). According to Deuze (2006), several studies explain this trend as an expression of increasing worldwide migration patterns. For Mark Deuze, the explanation of such success lays in the worldwide emergence of all kinds of community,

alternative, oppositional, participatory and collaborative practices, in part amplified by the Internet. Thus, to understand the broad term of ethnic media and the changing ways in which people use their media, it is necessary to have a critical awareness of an increasingly participatory global media culture in multicultural societies.

And it is in such context, that my study investigates the online experience of the younger generation of the diaspora, especially when it comes to what they present online and related to their cultural identity. Moreover, as it has been claimed that the Internet allows diasporic people to become particular empowered producers of media content (Georgiou, 2006 and Deuze, 2006), it is in participatory web culture that I am going to explore what younger generation of the diaspora produce online.

#### 2.2.4. Participatory web culture: SNS and the younger generation in perspective

With the emergence of a web 2.0 context, we have converged from a passive consumption of media content to more active media consumption (Jenkins, 2004). Indeed, users are now not only receivers of content but are becoming increasingly producers. This new ‘participatory culture’ (Van Dijck, 2009) has considerably challenged the traditional distinction between producers and users, and also led to new ways of structuring identities (Ibold, 2010).

In their definition of web 2.0 Blank et al. (2012) stress the importance of platforms which create simple, reliable environments where users can do what they want. The attention is then completely oriented towards the audience members who have become participative users or “produsers” – a term deployed by various academics to denote how users’ agency hovers between the bipolar categories of producer versus consumer, and of professional versus amateurs (Van Dijck, 2008). The notion of ‘participatory culture’ (Van Dijck, 2009) tends to accentuate the emancipation of the engaged citizen, who unleashes his needs for self-expression and creativity onto the digital spaces expressly created for this purpose.

Web 2.0 is then this Internet which provides platforms through which network effects can emerge. The technologies work now as networks and have some effects and implications of technological change on mass media culture, urban life, global politics, and the nature of time and history. The new age of information Castells (2011) discusses is where SNS completely enter into action. In this regard, SNS are interesting ‘participative’ platforms, particularly popular among young adolescents and emerging adults (especially as a primary site for communication and identity (Tynes et al., 2011).

Often falling under the broad umbrella term of social media, SNS are platforms allowing users to connect with strangers and those with whom they already have a relationship (Beer, 2008). When Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined SNS as web-based services that allow individuals to accomplish a certain number of actions in order to enhance the individual for more interaction and participation with the medium, they took into account the increasing popularity of such platforms especially among young generation users. Here, SNS will mainly refer to the participative platforms defined as UCC (User-Created-Content) in the OECD report (2007). UCC are intelligent web services that empower the user to contribute to developing, rating, collaborating on and distributing Internet content. In the OECD report (2007), they are characterized as content made publicly available over the Internet; which reflects a certain amount of creative effort, created outside professional routines and practices. And the activities aimed at expressing their 'cultural identities' online will refer to what they create, share and identify as related to their diasporic community. Online behaviour will then refer to how SNS could allow individuals to express and/or present themselves online. Tynes' article (2011) can provide some insight into how people (especially young generation of users) could particularly enhance an ethnic identity online. His study is about the online behaviours of adolescents and emerging adults who more specifically use SNS for social and informational exchanges about what it means to belong to a racial or ethnic group. The thesis addresses the exact same phenomenon but with a particular focus on the second generation of the Congolese Diasporic group.

## **2.3. When identity meets technology:**

### 2.3.1. Literature review

It has been argued in the previous section that the media have been actively used to think about questions such as identity among diasporic communities. Some of the existing studies (Aksoy & Robins, 2000; Gillespie, 1995) have had a particular look at the role of television in such identification process. While Aksoy and Robins were concerned with the development of transnational television from Turkey, particularly across Europe, Gillespie explored how young people negotiate their identity, reaffirm and challenge the parental tradition and this through their preoccupations with television narratives.

While their studies do focus on television, my study differs from theirs in investigating the online sphere. There are numerous recent studies (Georgiou, 2001, 2002; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Wood & Smiths, 2004; De Andrea & Levine, 2010; Ibold, 2010; Krivolap, 2011; Macri, 2011; Dobrowsky, 2012) confirming that the internet undeniably meets the basic informational and communication needs of an ethnic community. It has been claimed that, for

immigrant populations, the Internet and other new media technologies offer a new context for thinking of identity and community (Georgiou, 2002).

Georgiou (2001) is one of these scholars who are mainly interested in the relation between media consumption of diaspora and ethnic identity especially when it relates to ethnic identity construction in the public space. The author states: "The reason for emphasizing the need to study the public space and public life within the field of media studies, in particular, generates from the conceptualization of media consumption as a cultural behaviour that exceeds the narrowly conceived activity of receiving the media, and primarily relates to the participation of audiences in the production of meanings and the increasing role of media discourse in everyday life" (Siverstone, 1994 and Ang, 1996 as cited in Georgiou, 2001: 312). In that sense, she is interested in the way minorities become active participants in the process of identity construction (especially when they have to coexist and compete with other mainstream ones in their daily existence). Her analysis was then focused on the role of electronic ethnic media consumption in the construction of contemporary ethnic identities in North London.

In the same vein of idea, Wood and Smiths (2004) and Macri (2011) also explored how people construct and present themselves but within a social and online environment. On a more general level, Wood and Smith discuss the construction of online identity and how personal identity affects interpersonal communication. Similarly but rather focused on the diasporic experience, Macri explores the complex meaning and the role of virtual space in the process of articulation of diasporic narratives of identity. In brief, the author analysed the Romanian community in Ireland and provided an empirical account of the way these community members use essentially the online spaces as sources for their collective feelings of diaporic identification and also as sources to negotiate and articulate these identity narratives. The argument here is that online spaces can act as essential tools in order to construct identity narratives and to negotiate symbolic identity places.

By the same token, Georgiou (2002) claims and confirms that the Internet has indeed expanded spaces for community communication and has provided new opportunities for self-expression and self-representation. For Dobrowsky (2012), those new community spaces can also largely be seen as platforms fulfilling the individual's demand for socialization. Indeed, the author argues that the individual needs to develop sophisticated competences of communication and online spaces enable the individual to identify and reflect his/her personal needs. According to the author, identity is conceived as "the realization of an individual's competence of construction of communication in interactive situations"

(Dobrowsky, 2012, p.91). Then SNS provide spaces of communication in which individuals can work on their identity in a process of interaction.

This thesis is particularly concerned with the process of cultural identity construction and self-expression online. Ibold (2010) and Krivolap (2011) have specifically focused on that aspect of identity. For Krivolap (2011), one of the possibilities to make sense of a correlation between the Internet and identity, is to see Internet as a tool helping to develop cultural identity (ies). He discusses the influence and use of the Internet in the process of cultural identity development and highlights that the Internet is this space where one can acquire a new identity or self. For the author, it is a new dimension of social reality where one can perform a great deal of potentialities, which are impossible to fulfil in other spaces. For this thesis, the attention is paid to the interaction between the cultural identities of a diasporic group and the use of SNS for self-expression. My interest is not solely to link new media technologies with identity and culture such as Wood and Smith (2004), Ibold (2010), and Krivolap (2011) did in their publication, but it is also to link those concepts with the notion of diaspora.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

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## 3.1. Choice of Method

### 3.1.1. A qualitative method: Ethnography

For this thesis, a qualitative research method is chosen to collect data. As Hennink and his colleagues (2010) explain, qualitative research is a broad umbrella term difficult to define as it covers a range of techniques and philosophies. But what can be commonly said is that this approach allows researchers to examine people's experiences in detail, by using a set of research methods such as focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, observation, content analysis, life histories, etc. With those methods, researchers explore people's knowledge, attitudes, practices on a particular topic or issue, and this is done from the perspective of the study participants (O'Leary, 2014). That is the reason why, very often, qualitative research refers to as an *interpretive* approach. It allows an inductive and deductive logic and accepts subjectivities, multiple perspectives and realities for both the participant and the researcher. In fact, this method is useful in "the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278, in Zhang and Wildemuth).

In qualitative tradition, researchers need to be open-minded, curious and empathic, flexible and able to listen to people telling their own story (Hennink et al., 2010). Indeed, they are pushed to work at delving into social complexities in order to truly explore and understand interactions, lived experiences, belief systems that are part of individuals, institutions, and more interestingly here of cultural groups (O'Leary, 2014). Cultural groups are here what makes this study of interest, not solely because the research subjects are all part of the same cultural group, but also because it refers to a specific form of qualitative research: *ethnography*. O'Leary (2014) defines it as "[...] [the] study of cultural groups in a bid to understand, describe, and interpret a way of life from the point of view of its participants" (p. 133). By this statement, the author highlights that shared experiences, common beliefs and behaviours – that bound together cultural groups- can be seen as a strong vector of study. Ethnography explores the methods, rules, roles, and expectations structuring any given situation. And from the point of view of its participants, this method tries to understand the symbolic world in which people live. This research is not searching for an "objective truth". The goal is to "see" things the way group members do, and grasp meanings that they use to understand and make sense of the world.

Similar to the study conducted by Ibold (2010) on the interaction between cultural identity and Internet use in the everyday lives of urban Kyrgyz youth, and the study conducted by Macri (2011) on the online discussion forum of the Romanian Community in Ireland; I will also conduct a quick ethnography. Indeed as the authors have argued by analysing the relation between identity and online media use, this type of research is effective at documenting what people know, feel and do. Ibold (2010) even adds that in a quick ethnography, a researcher enters the cultural context with a theoretical framework connected to a specific data collection plan. In the light of this thesis, the cultural group under the scope is the second generation of the Congolese diaspora, and the particular topic is the discussion around the online behaviour of this population, especially when it comes to what they present and/or express about their cultural identity. By conducting qualitative methods, I would like to gain an intimate understanding of what those individuals associate to their cultural identity and how they relate to it on SNS. I believe that a qualitative method is useful for my research in terms of flexibility of interpretation. Indeed, discussing concepts like cultural identity and particular experience such as online expression requires multiple perspectives and open interpretation. Moreover, as an ethnographer, trying to describe and interpret meanings from within a culture/and generation, will certainly result in a richer project, especially if conducted in a flexible, natural and human context. As argued earlier, the goal of this research is indeed to search about cultural identity and expression on SNS. In our particular case, the fact that I am myself part of this cultural group could strengthen the use of such method. Indeed, as O'Leary (2014) argued, being an *insider* rather than an *outsider* (someone from very divergent culture for instance) might help the researcher to gain easy access to participants and build trust during focus groups and interviews, and might also facilitate participants disclosure.

### 3.1.2. Mixed methodology

As mentioned earlier in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the research question of the study is: "How the use of SNS could help the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels express their cultural identity?" To answer it, three sub-questions related to the key concepts of the study have been developed:

- RQ1: "What elements the second generation of the Congolese diaspora associate with its identity and cultural identity?"
- RQ2: "What type of online activities is this generation engaged in, especially when it comes to SNS?"

- RQ3: “What characteristics of their cultural identity they would express or are expressing on SNS?”

I have decided to answer those questions by means of focus groups and in-depth interviews, the most common methods of data collection used in qualitative research (Gill et al., 2008). In general, the reasons to employ mix approaches are quite diverse and depend on the sort of data we want to collect. But very often (and among other arguments), mixed methods offer more than just one way of looking at a situation, and they facilitate capturing varied perspectives (O’Leary, 2014). However, mixed methods do not automatically suggest that a researcher explores quantitative and qualitative approaches. In our case, the combination of focus groups and in-depth interviews is what is called in social sciences a qualitative method triangulation. A qualitative method triangulation is a method which is advocated as a strategy to achieve more comprehensive understandings of phenomena (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). For Lambert and Loiselle, combining individual interviews and focus groups enhance data richness. If, as argues Longhurst (2003), talking with people is an excellent way of gathering information, then the combination of those two methods is perfect for data collection. Additionally, citing Krueger and Casey (2000: xi), Longhurst (2003) explains that focus groups and interviews are all about talking but also

[...] about listening. It is about paying attention. It is about being open to hear what people have to say. It is about being non-judgemental. It is about creating a comfortable environment for people to share. It is about being careful and systematic with the things people tell you. (p. 103)

Lynn Michell asserted that focus groups were a rich and productive way of gaining access to ‘public knowledge’ and of highlighting the way in which social exchange can inspire opinions and attitudes. However, Michell also found out that some aspects of her participants experiences were excluded from the focus groups. In that regard, interviews allowed the researcher for an in-depth exploration of some of the experiences of her participants. For this study, the approach is similar. First, through focus groups I tried to gather collective information about the key concepts of the research (cultural identity and online behaviour) and also about trends and relevant online phenomena linked to cultural identity. Then according to what was gathered, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants (meaning, participants involved in the discovered phenomena). The next sections explain in detail the choice of each method.

### 3.1.3 Why focus groups?

From the 1990s on, there has been a new wave of interest in focus groups, and it is now used across a broader range of disciplines (Wilkinson, 2004). According to Lunt and Livingstone (1996), this method frequently used in social sciences and also explored recently in audience reception studies, is useful when researchers seek to discover participants' meaning and ways of understanding. Indeed, focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them (Morgan, 1998). Often referred to as 'group interviews', this method involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion about a particular topic or set of issues (Wilkinson, 2004). This group of people (usually between 6 and 12, according to Longhurst (2003), but between 5 and 8 for this Master Thesis) meet in an informal setting to talk about a particular topic that has been set by the researcher (Longhurst, 2003). What generally happens is that the facilitator keeps the group members from straying away from the topic, while allowing them to explore the subject from as many angles as they please. The most obvious advantages of such a method are: the quick collection of data from a large number of research participants, their 'naturalistic' aspect including a range of communicative processes (joking, storytelling, arguing...). Also, the fact that a group context can facilitate personal disclosures, and group interactions, allow respondents to react and build upon the responses of other group members (Wilkinson, 2004). Agar and MacDonald (1995) see this interaction as an important missing element in interviews. For Longhurst (2003), focus groups are often recommended to researchers wishing to approach a new field. Also, they provide an excellent opportunity to gather preliminary information about the topic.

In this research, focus groups provided one opportunity to gather preliminary information about the topic, especially in terms of online phenomena related to cultural identity. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, 2013, a preliminary focus group had been conducted in Brussels (in the Hotel Novotel Brussels) with 4 young people of the Congolese diaspora, which has been recorded and transcribed (a summary is provided for guidance in the appendix). This focus group has opened doors on interesting paths of research such as the relevance of investigating online phenomena among the group. Two phenomena have been exposed: the Nappy phenomenon (a feminine movement which claims a return to a natural and unaltered afro hair texture). This phenomenon is surprisingly popular among afro-women all over the world, not just among Congolese women living in Brussels. The second observed phenomenon is the French Vine. It consists of the creation of six-seconds looping videos shared on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, mainly by young people of the Congolese

diaspora. In their videos, the 'Viners' reproduce sketches of stereotypical African and social life situations, most of the scenarios are humoristic clichés. A detailed presentation and the relevance criteria of each phenomenon will be presented in detail in the results section of the Thesis.

In addition to that, I believe that focus groups facilitate and encourage discussion especially about cultural identity and online behaviour. Focus groups are often made up of people who share something in common, or know each other. Here, focus groups were mainly organised with people who already know each other, and who share in common their cultural baggage. Topics such as cultural identity and online behaviour are better discussed among people who know each other, and who are part of the same cultural group. Indeed, in such context, collective patterns on cultural identity and online behaviour could definitely enhance data richness. Further, for my ethnographic case, the cultural experience, not only on a physical level but also on a virtual one, is the most interesting part. Agar and MacDonald (1995) actually explore how an interest in focus groups could be developed into a more elaborate interest in ethnographic research. As Morgan (1988) argues, the key characteristic of focus groups is "the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (p.12). In that regard, Press and Cole (1999) study about women's views on abortion is a great example of previous studies which have investigated how focus group participants responded to specific media texts on varying topics. For my case, the interest was rather focused on the relationship between media and the cultural reproduction of identity. The focus groups was used to answer the two first sub-questions of the thesis.

### 3.1.4. Why interviews?

In-depth interviews (also known as semi-structured interviews) are often called conversation with a purpose (Legard et al., 2003). It is a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, tries to elicit information from another person by asking questions (Longhurst, 2003). Generally, those questions are predetermined and unfolded in a conversational manner, giving the interviewees options to take different paths and explore different thoughts, feelings, issues they feel important. In-depth interviews give importance to the language which illuminates meaning (Legard et al., 2003). They lead to perceptions and opinions, but also give insights into issues and situations that are not immediately perceptible (Laforest, 2009). Furthermore, they are useful for detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviours, which is not easily available through other data collection processes (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Because they are presented as ordinary conversation,

they might provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which people may feel more comfortable to share (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Even though it differs from other data collection methods, its explanatory nature allows a certain sense of flexibility especially in terms of interpretation of what will be said and discussed. I believe that individuals' insights are always worth hearing. This process of interviewing has to be seen as a conversation in a manner to seek for true human interactions. Because after all, those individuals are not some sort of homogenous subjects under research; they are individuals experiencing the interaction between media, culture and society in a particular way.

The role of this method in the light of this research is to collect personal data to answer the sub-questions of the thesis, especially the third one ("What are the elements of their cultural identity they would express or are expressing on SNS?"). In fact, all in-depth interviews are only conducted with individuals related to the online phenomena explored during the first stage of the study (the focus group). Using the data collected from the focus groups, in-depth interviews will allow an inner exploration of the phenomena investigated. In addition to gather personal reflection about cultural identity and online behaviours (especially on SNS), interviews are especially used here to discuss the relation between cultural identity and use of SNS. The desire was to explore the core interest of the research, to dig into the particular online experience of those active individuals, and understand through an intimate conversation how social platforms could help them express their cultural identity.

## **3.2. Sampling**

### 3.2.1. Selection criteria

In qualitative research, only a sample of a population is selected for any given study. In relation to the research question, sampling pertains to the second generation of the Congolese diaspora living in Brussels as the research units. Concerning the methods used (focus groups and interviews), the three general and basic criteria in selecting the research units are the following:

- 1/ Interviewees and focus group participants had to belong to the Congolese diaspora;
- 2/ Interviewees and focus group participants had to belong to the second generation of the Congolese diaspora (the approximate age of this generation usually ranges between 18 and 30 years old);

3/ and Interviewees and focus group participants had to live in Brussels

### 3.2.2. Sampling strategies

In order to organise the focus groups, people were selected from my friends and family network, and I made myself sure that they were meeting the prescribed criteria. Moreover, I tried to focus on people I thought would be most likely to provide particular insights into the research topics. I particularly tried to select people who already knew each other, in order to facilitate interaction and avoid awkwardness. Indeed, the challenge of focus groups is very much adopting the group rules. For instance, in such situation, some may feel insecure and speak less, while others will be dominant speakers. I believe that organising a focus group with friends and/or relatives who know each other will reduce this risk, and create more of an open atmosphere for sharing whatever information.

On the other hand, for interviews the selection criteria had to be further narrowed down as the interviewees had to somehow be involved in one of the online phenomenon investigated. The main focus here is to gather in-depth opinions and information from participants who generate content on SNS. As mentioned earlier, thanks to the preliminary focus group conducted in December, 2013, I had already singled out two phenomena: the Nappy Movement and the French Vines. For those phenomena, I simply applied the criterion and the snowballing sampling strategy. First, going through my personal social and online network, I looked for active Nappy girls and Viners. Of course, they all had to be Congolese, between 18 and 30 years old, and living in Brussels. Also, I tried to open up my field of observation by looking outside my social network and by exploring the social platforms available and related to the Nappy movement and the Vine phenomenon. Then, during those interviews, I asked participants if they knew other Nappy girls active online or other Viners (fitting my selection criteria). For the other phenomena, they were chosen according to what was discussed with focus group participants and interviewees. The online phenomena chosen were the ones which arose the most during the experience and related to what participants and interviewees described as cultural. For those phenomena, I first asked participants if they knew Congolese between 18 and 30 years old living in Brussels and involved in these particular phenomena. Then, I looked for participants in my social network and on social platforms.

### **3.2.3. Size of data sets and number of research units**

To what concerns the actual data sets of the research, I tried to find a sufficient number of interviewees and focus group participants. But in qualitative research it is very often a matter of time (what can be done in a certain period of time) and point of saturation (when sufficient material has been gathered). My initial plan was to organise a minimum of 2 focus groups and between 10 and 15 interviews. Within a month (April, 2014), I managed to organise 2 focus groups (one conducted with 5 participants and another with 7 participants) and 13 in-depth interviews. The first focus group was conducted with 5 female participants aged between 23 and 29 years old. The second focus groups consisted of 3 male and 4 female participants aged between 18 and 24 years old. In all, in-depth interviews were conducted with 6 male and 7 female interviewees all aged between 19 and 28 years old.

The types of data generated are notes, audio recordings, and transcripts. All focus groups and in-depth interviews have been recorded (audio transcripts are available and will be provided) and transcribed verbatim. All focus groups were conducted in French and each lasted for approximately 2 hours. For the interviews, 12 were conducted in French and one in English. Their duration ranges between 27 minutes and 1hour. All of the transcripts are not included in the appendices but are available on Sin-Online. The questions outline of each focus groups and in-depth interviews are provided in the appendices.

### **3.2.4. The kind of data collected**

The kind of data collected is more behavioural and motivational related (reflections about online behaviours, reasons and methods of self-expression on SNS platforms...) but is also composed of several point of views (mainly about identities in relation to media). Indeed, I wanted to collect opinions, impressions, and general online experiences especially regarding what the participants relate to their cultural identity. However, I did not content analyse what was said online. Those data - which are mainly reflections, opinions and impressions about expression of cultural identity online – was to understand how - in a highly mediated and increasingly multicultural society - those specific members of the Congolese community could assess their cultural identity with the use of new media technologies.

## **3.3. Operationalisation**

The research question of this thesis focuses on three important dimensions related to diaspora. As showed in the theoretical framework, those dimensions refer to the cultural

identity, the media consumption (especially the online usage), and the relation between diasporic identity and new media technology use. My sub-questions have been developed in relation to those three dimensions. The questions outline for all focus groups and interviews were structured according to those three dimensions.

The first sub-question “What elements the second generation of the Congolese diaspora associate to its identity and cultural identity?” concerns the first dimension of the research. As Macri (2011) has argued, identity and what we associate to it is a process that can hardly be measurable. However, I believe that it can be observed through different meaning people give to it. To operationalise this part, I will base my definition of cultural identity on the one exposed by Hall (1990) in my theory chapter. As the author argues, there are different ways to discuss cultural identity. The first way is to see it as a shared culture, where people experience identity collectively and hold in common a shared history and cultural codes. The second vision is to think of it as a matter of ‘becoming’ and also a matter of ‘being’. In that sense, what will be observed is what my subjects experience collectively when it comes to their Congolese culture. More precisely, what are the typical associations of the Congolese culture they can make, think, share, and remember collectively or individually from the perspective of this particular generation.

The second sub-question “What type of online activities is the second generation engaged in, especially when it comes to SNS?” deals with the media related concept. With the rise of the Internet, scholars such as Georgiou (2006) and Karim (2007) have argued that diasporas have started to construct new community spaces where members are now seen as particular empowered producers of media content, providing alternative media in local, national, and transnational spaces. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, the focus here is on this new web 2.0 participatory culture. By online activities, I am referring to what is said, shared, commented, produced on SNS. Focus groups will be more focused on the general aspect on the SNS use of the diasporic group, and interviews will particularly focus on UCC (User-Created-Content) which will reflect on the creative and non-professional practices of the subjects.

The third sub-question “What are the elements of their cultural identity they would express or are expressing on SNS?” was observing what is actually shared, commented, created on the participative platforms and directly linked to what the subjects identify as their cultural identity. What counted as evidence were all actions made online and related to the cultural associations the subjects provided. Focus groups and especially interviews were important to enlighten this connection.

### **3.4. Method of analysis**

#### 3.4.1. Thematic analysis

To analyse my data, I decided to conduct a thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define it as a qualitative technique aimed at “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (p.79). Indeed, even if a thematic analysis requires more involvement and interpretation from the researcher part, it focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas (themes) within my data. As Braun and Clarke (2006) explain: “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). Here, the themes are related to cultural identity, online behaviour and the relation of those concepts. I labelled what was relevant to me (ideas, expressions, activities, opinions...). Also, what was considered as relevant in this study was something that has been repeated several times like a pattern, something that surprised me, something the interviewee stated as important, something that reminded me of the theoretical framework of the research, etc.

#### 3.4.2 The coding process

According to Marks (2004), the coding process in a thematic analysis can be revealed under two forms: a deductive coding and an inductive coding. Marks (2004) argues that the deductive coding refers to the process in which the researcher introduces pre-determined theoretical ideas and themes. Here, and as mentioned earlier, the deductive coding refers to the key concepts of the thesis: cultural identity, online behaviour and the relation of those concepts. On the other hand, the inductive coding is the process in which themes are identified as a result of the raw data collected (Marks, 2004). In this research, the inductive coding is realized in three steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

As explained by Daymon and Holloway (2005), the first level of an inductive analysis is the open coding which consists of dissecting the data into discrete fragments. To do so, I went through my data several times and started to create tentative labels for chunks of data that summarize what I saw happening (not based on existing theory – just based on the meaning that emerged from the data). I looked for distinct concepts and categories in the

data. Everything said by the participants and interviewees was of matter because the focus was primarily within the text.

The next step of analysis was the axial coding. It consists of making links between codes and grouping conceptually similar data to form categories (Daymon and Holloway, 2005). In this approach, I used the key research concepts to identify relationships among the open codes. Those relations were mainly differences, similarities between the open codes.

Finally, the last stage of analysis is the selective coding. Daymon and Holloway (2005) identify it as the process in which the researcher has to select a core category and relate it to other categories. It aims at discovering overarching themes that together answer the research questions. In this last stage, transcripts were reread and themes related to sub-questions of the research were selected.

# Chapter 4: Results

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This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the data collected from the focus groups and interviews conducted during the research. The findings are divided into four parts: identity and cultural identity, online behaviour and SNS, elements of cultural identity on SNS and the four online phenomena: Nappy movement, Vine phenomenon, Gospel nomination and “Tu sais que t'es Z quand...” (TCQTZ) group. Each section provides an overview of the different themes that have emerged from the data.

## 4.1. Identity and cultural identity

For this research, the interest was to understand how the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels could think about its identity positioning, first from an individual standpoint and then from a more collective perspective. To do so, this first section is divided into three parts: one dedicated to an individual identification, a second one dedicated to a collective identification, and a last one presenting the different elements associated with the Congolese cultural identity.

### 4.1.1. Individual identity

Inspired by the work of Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw (2009), for the first and individual part, the following “identity” list had been presented to all participants.

Citizen of the world	African
European	Afro-European
Belgian	Afro-Belgian
Congolese	Belgo-Congolese

This list exposes different suggestions mainly used to help the participants engage in discussion about their identity. Among the 25 participants, 5 considered themselves as Belgo-Congolese, 4 as Afro-European, 4 as Africans, 4 as citizen of the world, 3 as Congolese living in Belgium, 2 as Congolese, 2 as Afro-Belgian and one as an African living in Belgium. All participants were then asked to explain their choice(s). Several themes emerged from their explanation.

#### *4.1.1.1. The double identity*

The majority of the participants (15 individuals out of 25, representing 60% of the participants) claimed to have a double culture. Indeed, 5 of those participants considered themselves as Belgo-Congolese, 4 as Afro-European, 3 as Congolese living in Belgium and one as an African living in Belgium. The main argument given by these participants is the difficult dissociation between the two entities that Europe/Belgium and Africa/Congo represent to them when it comes to identity. In fact, they consider the Western/Belgian and African/Congolese influences as two important and inseparable elements of their identity. As Chelsea (24 years old, focus group participant) argued, they are the product or a mix of two different cultures. In most cases, Europe and Belgium relate to the place where they were born, where they have been raised, where they live, study, and work. On the other hand, Africa and Congo relate to their origin, the roots which they should not forget about, and also they can relate to all the cultural practices (such as traditions, food, language, etc.) inherited from their parents. Nevertheless, among the 15 participants claiming this double culture some distinctions have to be made.

The 5 participants presenting themselves as Belgo-Congolese found it more appropriate to be specifically named as Belgo-Congolese: firstly because they were born (or arrived at a young age) and raised solely in Belgium, and secondly because they have unavoidable and specific Congolese roots from their parents.

For the 4 participants who took Afro-European over Belgo-Congolese, the reason lies behind the simple fact that the terms “Afro” and “European” encompass a broader idea of identity and allow a range of views. Nevroz (20 years old, Viner) and Noémie (29 years old, focus group participant) explain that generally, in Africa, cultures are relatively similar, so they can also easily be called Africans. Chelsea (24 years old, focus group participant) mentioned that for her, Africa equals Congo and Europe equals Belgium, so there is no need for a distinction. Also, Laeticia (24 years old, Nappy girl) and Nadège (28, focus participant) highlighted that Europe is a more determining term to use. They do not feel Belgian but rather European because their way of living and thinking is somehow more “Western”.

Merveille (24 years old, Gospel Nomination) and Christopher (22 years old, Gospel Nomination) chose to be named as “Congolese living in Belgium”. For both, it was important that Congo comes first in their identity. Merveille explained that being Belgian is just a matter of identity documentation; however being Congolese is how she will always be perceived because of her skin colour and her origins. In the case of Christopher, he confessed a recent awareness of the importance of his Congolese roots. He realized that before he was not feeling Congolese as such and that did not bother him much, but after this self-awareness,

he felt the growing desire to be seen as a Congolese first and as a Belgian second. He explains what triggered this self-awareness:

[...] I have never thought about the consequences... about when I will get old and will be asked by my child: "well, from which country are you from?" What am I going to answer to that? I mean, yes ok, I have already seen the Congo, I have already been there, but what? When we go there, it is mainly as tourists. The only thing that differs me from a White man is the fact that I am Black. (Christopher, 22, Gospel Nomination)

The point which Christopher highlights here is similar to what the other 15 participants have also expressed. It appears that the main identity concern of these participants relates to a confused feeling of belonging. It seems sometimes difficult for these participants to feel Congolese/African or Belgian/European; and this is applicable to participants born in Belgium and for those who arrived at a young age. Indeed, this double identity is a double-edged sword and can at the same time generate confusion as well as advantages. During the research, the participants were asked to be more explicit by giving examples of circumstances where they felt more Belgian/ European than Congolese and vice versa.

Among the 15 participants who identified themselves as having a double identity, 6 felt more Belgian/European whilst outside the Belgian borders. Three of them (Chelsea, Cynthia, and Arnaud, all focus group participants) had the chance to go back to the homeland and explained that they were always considered as Belgian (and nothing else) by the Congolese people. This feeling is also similar for Christopher (22 years old, Gospel Nomination), Merveille (24 years old, Gospel Nomination) and Olivier (23 years old, focus participant) who has yet to travel to Congo, but seemed pretty convinced that they will feel and be recognized only as Belgian. Arnaud (24 years old, focus group participant) specifies that even with relatives living in European countries (e.g. France, the U.K., The Netherlands, etc), he is always seen as the "Belgian" cousin or nephew. A situation suggesting that feeling Belgian can also happen within Europe.

Laetitia (24 years, Nappy girl), a Bachelor student, provides another international example. Soon she will be going on Erasmus to India, she realized that in such context she will automatically be welcomed as a Belgian Student. For her, it will make no sense to be welcomed and to present herself as a Congolese student. As Cynthia (26 years old) has highlighted in the first focus group, even if they have Congolese origins, they do not know the culture as such. Laetitia (19 years old, Gospel Nomination) shared the same opinion by pointing out that the lack of knowledge in *Lingala* (one of the main languages spoken in Congo and the most spoken by the Congolese diaspora) has a lot to do with this. Christopher

(22 years old, Gospel Nomination) argues that, for him, knowing the language that is where the cultural experience begins. He stated that he feels more Congolese when he speaks the “approximate” Lingala he knows.

This last account allows us to switch to the situations where participants expressed feeling more Congolese/African than Belgian/European. Indeed, as Christopher argued, the ability to speak the language is something that plays an important role in the Congolese identification process of the participants. Sara (19 years old, focus group participant) exposes that speaking Lingala (the one she has learned and practised among friends) considerably helps her not to forget where she comes from. In addition to the practise of the language, the respondents also present their eating habits, the way they behave with family and friends, the way they party and celebrate events such as weddings or funerals, as important elements that make them feel Congolese/African.

On another level, it appears to Laura (29 years old, Nappy girl) that feeling Congolese/African can also be something related to the behaviours others have towards the people of the diaspora. She explained that people from the diaspora are confronted with social behaviours which involuntarily highlight or recall their difference. For her, these types of behaviours are a product of the human curiosity. In general, this curiosity takes the form of questions about the homeland. For this generation (born in Belgium or arrived at a young age), the homeland is not something they feel automatically familiar with. In other words, sometimes they are actually realizing that Belgium is closer to the signification of what homeland is as opposed to that of Congo. But, as Laura argued, sometimes social behaviours generate the opposite feeling.

But overall, the 15 participants agreed on the advantages and enrichment of having a double identity. In brief, Belgium is generally seen as the country related to the conventional and/ or administrative matters of the everyday life of the participants. For this generation, it is more related to the educational environment (schools, university, etc.) and the working environment. In that sense, the Congolese culture is rather seen as the familial environment but also as a special difference, a particularity of their identity. Hélène (23, focus group participant) even described the Congolese culture as a sort of richness or treasure.

#### *4.1.1.2. The African/Congolese identity*

Six participants (representing 24% of the respondents) claimed to be African or Congolese before anything else. Contrary to the majority of the respondents which found Europe/Belgium as important as Africa/Congo in their identification process, these six participants did not find it necessary to express their affinity with Belgium or Europe. Each of

them automatically explained with pride how their Congolese/African origin plainly defines who they are.

While four participants described themselves as African, only two of them mentioned being Congolese. For a majority, African is a more appropriate term to use firstly because it encompasses a broader idea of identity, and secondly because strong similarities exist among African people. Yet it is clear that within that unity of African culture, many differences prevail. According to Gillian (22 years old, Viner) who feels 100% African, what is valid in all African countries is the African pride. However, what differs is the experience of diverse cultural characteristics (such as the language, as obviously highlighted by Gillian). In other cases, as with Fens (28 years old, Nappy girl), feeling African instead of Congolese is a matter of identification (the difficulty to relate to certain characteristics of the Congolese culture) and recognition (not being recognized as a Congolese within the community because of atypical physical characteristics).

As a general rule, this percentage of respondents has particularly expressed not feeling at home in Europe or Belgium. For them, if they do not belong to one place, it means that they surely belong somewhere else. Indeed, each of them automatically finds this other place of belonging in Africa in general or in the homeland. However, not feeling at home does not mean to these participants that they lack acceptance in the host country of their parents. David (21 years old, Viner) was born in Africa but has been raised in Belgium since the age of 4, he pointed out the following:

If we look thoroughly into the Black history... I mean... they [talking about European colonisers] came in Africa, you see, and they instilled us with their values, such that... even in our countries after the colonisation we became a bit like them. We dress up like them, you see, we speak French like them... so when we arrive here we are not totally lost [...] (David, 21, Viner).

If the colonial values have facilitated this participant's integration in the host society of his parents, it appeared to Arnaud (20, focus group participant), Gloria (18, TCQTZ), and Hélène (23, focus group participant) that the colonial past has strengthened their African belonging. As explained by Arnaud, even if it remains a sensitive topic (often intentionally avoided by Belgian people as he argued), the colonial period cannot be forgotten because of its indirect implication of the bad living conditions in Congo, and in the ways the diaspora construct its identity in the host country. For this second generation, the colonial past has generated a permanent feeling of underestimation (vis-à-vis European/Belgian people) and difference (primarily as a consequence of their skin colour) which has helped them forge a strong African/Congolese identity. In that sense, these respondents do not feel concerned

about Europe or Belgium, they only link it to a decent place to live and where knowledge can be acquired. Moreover, they argue that they are always in a Congolese environment (e.g. David (21, Viner) and Wivine (18, focus group participant) explained having mainly Congolese friends), and they aspire to go back to the homeland. Indeed, Belgium/Europe is only seen as a transitory step before heading to the homeland, their ultimate place of belonging.

#### 4.1.1.2. *The Cosmopolitan identity*

If Africa/Congo and Europe/Belgium are significant terms for 60% of the participants, 16 % of them found these dualities somehow restrictive. In fact, four participants indicated that they belong to a larger entity and described themselves as world citizens. They believe that in times of globalization, they must be open to the world. They feel at home in many places, as is the case with Lydia:

When I travel anywhere else in the world, people don't know that I'm not African [Sic]  
[...] That means for me... or to me... that I belong everywhere, and the world is just  
open to me. And I am a citizen of the world... [echos] And I really don't [sic] want to  
put myself in... boxes. I mean... European, African... I am neither. I just enjoy the  
world. [pause] It is a bigger... bigger definition, it is a bigger place than just Europe  
[...] (Lydia, 28, Nappy)

In the same vein of idea, and in comparison to the participants who felt more Belgian/European outside the borders and more Congolese/African inside the host country/continent of their parents, those participants preferred to qualify this feeling as a complexity rather than a duality. The international context participants are sometimes put into, triggers a feeling of complexity which is better explicable by a more global and cosmopolitan perspective of identity. They assert that no place in the world could define who they are.

On another other level, it has also been demonstrated that the multicultural aspect of a place can be a sufficient element to select the identity term of world citizen. Indeed, the high percentage of immigrants in Belgium and especially in Brussels has transformed the way people see and position themselves. Belgium has become such a multicultural place that participants such as Hélène (23 years old, focus group participant) argue that the Belgian culture has become something very abstract because it encompasses a variety of cultures. For this generation, this plurality of cultures in the country where they grew up in, has inevitably influenced who they are and how they position themselves. This is particularly

the case for Patrick (26 years old, TCQTZ). He explains that growing up around so many different types of people, from different cultures, has allowed him to learn from them and them from him. Today, he clearly describes himself as a mix of Italian, Algerian, Tunisian, Belgian, etc., which makes him a citizen of the world.

#### 4.1.2. Collective identity

In this section, we discuss how the second generation of the Congolese diaspora think about their collective identity: first as part of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels, and second as part of the second generation of the diaspora.

##### *4.1.2.1. Congolese diaspora in Brussels*

Surprisingly when it came to discussing the Congolese diaspora in Brussels, many of the participants primarily expressed really negative associations to it. Indeed, this reaction especially occurred during the second focus group where the 7 participants wanted to skip the question. Chelsea (24), member of this focus group, explains their reaction by the negative ways the Congolese diaspora is often talked about outside and inside the community.

The 12 participants of the two focus groups conducted, particularly agreed upon the fact that the Congolese diaspora in Brussels is generally misrepresented by Congolese people spending their times in *Matonge* (the so-called “African neighbourhood” of Brussels). But as focus group participants and three interviewees have argued, this category is one among many others. Indeed, it appears that this community can be categorised on different levels and in different ways. According to the specific testimonies of the three interviewees, the community can be thought in three different ways: in terms of generation, social categories and social environment.

Merveille (24, Gospel Nomination) understands and describes the Congolese diaspora in matter of generation. As she explained, there are two generations: the first generation, the one of their parents (a generation that arrived in Belgium with various difficulties, who have now placed their entire hope in the succeeding generation); and the second generation, constituted by people born and/or raised in Brussels (a generation forced to work hard in order to achieve what the earlier generation did not achieve). From another standpoint, Laura (29, Nappy) rather socially classifies the community as follows: the “Matonguistes” (Congolese people spending their time in *Matongue*, and not doing anything productive for the community), the “intellectuals” (educated and integrated members of the

diaspora, talking about politics all day long), and the “born here” (individuals born and/or raised in Brussels, who have a different mentality and are willing to make the community shine). For his part, Christopher associated the notion of community in Brussels with his social environment (friends and family).

But in general (except in the case of Laura, Merveille and Christopher), the discussion about the Congolese diaspora in Brussels mainly refers to the first generation of the diaspora. One of the participants (Patrick, 26, TCQTZ) approached the topic of discussion with a straightforward attitude. He spontaneously described the community as “Christians, scattered, without any vision and unstable”. His argument roughly resumes the recurrent themes that emerged from the discussions.

#### 4.1.2.1.1. A religious community

Among the totality of the participants, 12% particularly identified the Congolese diaspora in Brussels as religious. Nevroz (21, Viner) argued that the African man is in essence a believer, someone who has strong religious convictions and rituals. From what Patrick (26, TCQTZ) and Christopher (22, Gospel Nomination) have even revealed, the Congolese diaspora in Brussels is indeed a community of believers mainly of the Christian faith. It appears to the participants that Christianity has become an important characteristic of the Congolese community in Brussels. Patrick even observed that the social construct of the Congolese community in Belgium is often built around Christian churches. He expressed this as follows:

When we arrive from the Congo and we arrive in Belgium... how can we integrate ourselves in the Belgian society? It is through churches. So, most of the Congolese, when they arrive in Belgium, well, they go to church because this is where they will find a maximum of Congolese people, so this is where they do their registration in the Belgian society. (Patrick, 26, TCQTZ)

Here, Patrick highlights how churches are consciously used as a means of social integration by the first generation of the diaspora. Christopher (22, Gospel Nomination) explained that in general Congolese people in Europe manifest much love for Christianity. He added that this is because they seem to represent a vast majority not only in Belgium but also in Europe, there is the assumption that the Congolese is Christian per se. However, Christopher wished to make it clear that in Congo, the majority of the people might not even be Christian. He argues that before Christianity played an important role in their lives, Congolese people were animists. The interviewee believes that there are still a great number

of animists in Congo. Therefore, Christianity should be attributed specifically to the members of the Congolese diaspora and not Congo as a whole.

#### 4.1.2.1.2. An unstructured community

In the discourse of 68% of the participants (representing 5 interviewees and all members of the focus groups), the Congolese diaspora is seen as disorganised and disunited. For the majority of the participants, the disorganisation is firstly located in things the first generation were not able to accomplish for the following generation. Participants such as Patrick (26, TCQTZ) mentioned that the community is not oriented towards its youth and has no concrete plan for it. These participants particularly feel as though they have been left without resources (especially financial). They claim this by comparing their community to other diasporic communities such as the Maghreb, Asian, or even Jewish communities. When compared to those communities, Noah (27, Viner) argues that the first generation did not invest in serious businesses but rather in useless matters such as clothing (referring to "La Sapologie", an extravagant movement of Congolese people ....), music, etc. Merveille (24, Gospel Nomination) links this behaviour to a lack of ambition from the first generation of the diaspora. The participants see this disorganisation as an important weakness of the community. For them, it is the reason they are not as well "considered" (to borrow Hélène's expression) as other diasporic communities in Belgium.

The Congolese diaspora in Brussels has also been depicted as disunited by the respondents. The main argument relates to the concept of solidarity which is somehow missing from the community and towards the homeland. In this regard, Cynthia (26, focus group participant) compared the Congolese diaspora to the Maghreb community in Brussels. She revealed that within this community there exists a strong sense of solidarity (especially with regards to the working environment). However, within the first focus group, this particular point provoked very long discussions among participants. As Amandine (23, focus group participant) explained, the Congo is already a country very diverse and when people gathered in places like Europe, it did not mean an automatic expression of solidarity. In fact, they (participants of the two focus group specifically) highlighted that they were somehow united but for the wrong reasons. Gloria (18, TCQTZ) pinpointed one example:

If we take for instance, the issue of street gangs we have in Brussels and which involved an important number of Congolese people, we can observe that they were killing each other even if they were from the same country of origin, from a same land. (Gloria, 18, TCQTZ)

#### 4.1.2.1.3. An unstable community

A general pattern of instability among the Congolese community has been identified by 48% of the participants. The participants more engaged in such identification were members of the first focus group. They explained this instability by a frustration existing in the community. From what was discussed, this frustration comes from a complex of inferiority where the community encounters vis-à-vis the “White man”. As David (21, Viner) highlighted, this complex can take its origin in the colonial past. He explained that when the Western countries undertook their project of colonisation and arrived in Africa, they brought with them values and habits (such as the French language or Christianity for the Congolese people) African people had to adopt. Consequently, and as Patrick (26, TCQTZ) exposed, the Congolese people have developed strong skills of adaptation and the propensity for mimicry. While immigrating in Europe (and in a strong desire of integration), they easily tend to imitate the Western culture on various levels. For the 48% of the participants, those levels referred, *inter alia*, to elements such as language, clothing, hairstyle, and names.

Additionally, members of the first focus group discussed that this adaptation processed through mimicry has somehow lead to a deep problem of underestimation within the community. The five participants described this underestimation by a lack of self-confidence, the loss of certain values, and the subconscious unwillingness to perpetuate the culture. From what has been discussed, it seems that a feeling of “White superiority” exists which has resulted in sentiments of shame and non-acceptance in the community. As Cynthia and Amandine expressed, it is as if the Congolese people are in a way “forgetting who they are”. Noémie added:

Things have actually become very pejorative. [...] Integration, yeah, it is good, it is when I speak a good French, etc. But when apparently I bring things that are from my culture of origins, then suddenly it is perceived as something pejorative. (Noémie, 29, focus group participant)

Indeed, African clothing, natural hair, the practice of Lingala have been presented as pejorative cultural elements firstly for the first generation and consequently for the second. Cynthia (26, focus group participant) highlighted that this negative perception of some elements of the culture (generated by the imperative desire of integration) has somehow lead to the subconscious unwillingness to perpetuate the culture. She compared the Congolese diaspora to that of the people from the Maghreb, and explained how this community has the desire to perpetuate its culture and succeed in doing so through the cultivation of the

language, food, clothing, rituals etc, something which the Congolese culture has difficulty in practising themselves. Indeed, 84% of the total respondents mentioned not speaking Lingala at home because their parents did not find it appropriate to teach them the language. This great majority of participants (mainly representing the ones born and raised in Belgium) argued that what they know is the basics of the language, which they sometimes practice with friends but almost never with their parents.

#### *4.1.2.2 The second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels*

While describing the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels, 18 out of 25 participants implicitly and explicitly expressed the need to compare their generation to the one of their parents. Indeed, representing more than the majority of participants (72%), those participants explained their identity as unavoidably linked to the ones of their parents. Even if their mentality is automatically different (because they were born and/or raised in Belgium), the way they define themselves can only be done by looking at the actions of the precedent generation. Patrick (26, TCQTZ) brought out a discomfort pre-existing in the first generation and projected on the second generation. This discomfort related to notions of disorganisation, instability, frustration, etc. (as previously exposed); has triggered two different reactions among the second generation of the diaspora: proactivity or passivity. From these reactions, two types of second generation emerged.

##### 4.1.2.2.1. The proactive generation

The proactive generation is defined by young individuals as having the ambitious desire to change the negative perception created by and within the community. The reason for such pro-activity has been explained by two factors: the difficult past experienced by the first generation and a constant reminder of difference.

Four interviewees expressed that the first generation of the Congolese diaspora has encountered multiple difficulties in the homeland and also within the host country. While Merveille (24, Gospel Nomination) mentioned work employment as one difficulty often encountered in the host country, Nevroz (21, Viner) talked about the hard living conditions in Congo. Nevroz explained that the second generation is often reminded of the bigger opportunities they have and should take into consideration. Therefore, the second generation feels forced to excel where the previous generation did not. This promotes a sense of pro-

activeness and the encouragement to push one's limits. However, this sense of pro-activeness can also generate a feeling of difference. Amandine gave evidence of this:

I remember, my mum [...] She was saying: "At school... if your White friend got 8/10, you must have 9/10". Really to say that because you are Black, you have to fight more than others. (Amandine, 23, focus group participant)

Noémie (29, focus group participant) added that belonging to a minority means being "the ambassador of your skin colour". To avoid misrepresentations, Noémie explained that they always have to excel in every domain. This constant reminder of difference can also generate a feeling of pride. This was particularly true for participants who expressed a strong feeling of belonging to their African/Congolese culture. They are proud of who they are and want to claim this difference.

Noah (27, Viner) exposed how this generation is or could be proactive. For him, the second generation has to follow the example of the elderly: mainly by taking the good and changing the bad. For the good things, Noah referred to the courage to immigrate in a completely different environment, and Nevroz (21, Viner) referred to the mental strengths of members of the first generation of the diaspora. He explained that these members are often immigrating with a mission in mind: to help their relatives in Congo and create more opportunities for their children. With regards to the negative aspects, they are linked to different elements creating discomfort in the community. So where there was disorganisation, instability, underestimation, they want to add organisation, self-confidence, self-awareness, values to Lingala, and pride. Indeed, as Patrick (26, TCQTZ) argued, they want to be the "lights of the community". In his opinion, a majority of the second generation is aware of this and it is this which gives him good hope for the future of the community.

#### 4.1.2.2.2. The passive generation

Two important reasons of passivity have been given by three participants. In fact, David (21, Viner), Gloria (18, TCQTZ) and Patrick (26, TCQTZ) have explicitly presented this passivity as a reaction to the actions/experiences of their parents, and as an issue of skin colour. These participants highlighted three general arguments. The first argument is linked to the disorganised aspect of the first generation of the diaspora. Members of the second generation blame the passivity of their parents but do not show any willingness for change, in other words they maintain this generational discomfort and accept it. Patrick finds this behaviour comprehensible but not sufficient for resignation and surrender. The second

argument relates to the lack of awareness concerning their origins. David qualified the second generation unaware of what really constitutes their culture of origins. Indeed, for him the Congolese culture goes beyond elements such as music, food, language, etc., it also means knowing the history of Congo, the tribe one belongs to, and so forth. He particularly insisted in the role of the parents in such transmission, but in Europe this role has somehow disappeared and been replaced by an imperative desire of integration. Gloria particularly pointed out the “too integrated” individuals as the ones showing no interest in the homeland. For Noah (27, Viner), knowing the history of Congo is more than a cultural element, it is a cultural duty that allows members of the diaspora to identify themselves and progress. The third argument expressed was of the difficult past experienced by the first generation in Congo. Indeed, David explained how some members of the second generation living in Brussels take many aspects of their life for granted. He argued that they are neither aware nor grateful for the chances they have to be in Europe. For instance, unlike their parents, they have the chance to study in good conditions. For David, the only way to be more conscious is for them to go back to Congo to see and understand.

The second reason for passivity was made explicit by Gloria. For her and three other participants, the skin colour plays an important role in the passivity of some members of the Congolese second generation. If this difference can trigger cultural pride (as argued earlier), for Nevroz (21, Viner) and Sabrina (29, focus group participant), it actually generates a feeling of shame and condemnation. Sabrina supported the fact by confessing the following:

Our skin colour... [...] As my mum always told me, it is already a malediction. A malediction, why? Because that is true, we always have to justify ourselves on all things. (Sabrina, 29, focus group participant)

#### 4.1.3. Elements of Cultural Identity

During the research, participants have been asked to provide the typical elements they associate with their cultural identity. Out of the 25 participants, 22 (representing the 88% of the participants) explicitly answered the question. From what has been exposed, 14 cultural elements emerged: the food, the traditions, the importance of values (particularly the respect for the elders and the family), the music, the language, the conviviality, the strict education, the belief, the pride (related to attitude and clothing), the physical appearance (mainly related to the skin colour), the Congolese history, the open-mindedness, the ease of

adaptation, and the strength of character. The three most cited are explained further in this section.

It appeared that food, traditions, and the importance of the values were the three most cited cultural elements. Indeed, for the seven participants who mentioned it, food appeared to be the first element associate with the Congolese culture. As Olivier (23, focus group participant) highlighted, food can really define a country and/or a region. In that sense, the typical Congolese dishes are seen as important connections with the Congolese culture. Cynthia (26, focus group participant) even realized that Congolese dishes are what make her feel more Congolese and by extension African. In addition, for her and Noah (27, Viner), it is always part of their weekly food diet.

With regards to traditions, Olivier (23, focus group participant) explained it as distinct practices “inherited from our ancestors”. For the participants, these practices appeared to be weddings and funerals. Indeed, among the 7 participants who saw traditions as a cultural element, 4 associated the customary marriage (or dowry for some) to an important and distinct Congolese tradition. As Sabrina (29, focus group participant) argued, the dowry is a good example of a cultural practice that allows the second generation to better understand the Congolese culture. Laetitia (24, Nappy), for instance, could not consider herself getting married without the customary marriage, for her it is the most important (and even indispensable) part of a wedding.

The third most cited cultural element is the importance of the values. From what has emerged, values were mainly referring to the respect for elders and the importance of the family. For what concerns the respect for elders, Merveille provided details:

[...] I do not know very well other African cultures, but I know that in our culture, since a very young age, we are taught to respect our elders, even if there is a three or six months age difference, we have to show respect. And not necessarily towards family members [...] mainly towards all of those who came before us, because they have more experience [...] (Merveille, 24, Gospel Nomination.)

This value is seen as a very positive cultural element. Merveille, Gloria, Hélène and Noémie, particularly appreciate it. However, Sabrina regrettably explains that nowadays such value is fading away. Next to this value, the importance of the family has also been presented. Laetitia (19, Gospel Nomination) and Noémie (29, focus group participants) reported that the family (generally bigger than Belgian families) plays a significant role to the Congolese people and largely to African people.

As a general sentiment, all participants expressed the desire to transmit those 14 cultural elements. As it has brightly been presented by Arnaud (24, focus participant) and Leaticia (24, Nappy), the cultural elements (in their various forms) are what shows the beauty of a community, and they want to perpetuate the specific beauty of the Congolese community.

## **4.2. Online behaviour and SNS**

This section provides an overview of the reflections, opinions, and impressions of the participants about their general online behaviour (a matter mainly discussed with the 12 focus group participants) and their use of SNS. It is organised in three sub-sections dealing with the use of the Internet, the use of SNS, and the link between SNS and identity.

### 4.2.1. Internet usage

During the two focus groups, all participants commonly agreed that the Internet was the medium they used the most. It has been described as an essential tool in the everyday lives of the participants. The seven participants of the second focus group even discussed how the Internet has completely replaced all other traditional forms of media. Chelsea expressed the following:

[...] Well, a day without Internet for me it is just impossible. Someone can break my TV today, if I have Internet, I would not care, just lying in my bed or I do not know at the terrace and I have internet, I can live. [...] Before, when were younger, Internet was not accessible for everyone. But now, we have Internet for 24 hours. It is like you are obliged to use the Internet. (Chelsea, 24, focus group participant)

As Chelsea mentioned, the easy access to the Internet has resulted in the daily need to use it. Here, the attention is particularly paid to the motivation variables linked with Internet usage and the actual Internet activities. From what has emerged from the discussions, there are two types of motivation variables (usefulness and entertainment) and there are 9 online activities (messaging, browsing, streaming, video calling (or “Skyping”), sharing, commenting, creating, tagging and mailing).

#### *4.2.1.1. Motivation variables*

The 12 focus group participants, while describing the Internet as an essential daily tool, mainly refer to its great usefulness in terms of speed, accessibility, connectivity, and

choice. Cynthia (26) and Boris (20) mentioned the speed of the Internet as being very useful. According to Boris, we are now living in the culture of the immediate and the Internet is a high standard medium for such thing. Boris explained how annoying it can be to wait weeks for the next season of his favourite series to appear on TV, but with the Internet everything is much faster. It has also been argued that the medium allows accessibility to a range of information and content (something relatively important for all the focus group participants as they were all students or emerging adults). For this second generation of the Congolese diaspora, it appeared that the Internet is mainly used for educational and job seeking purposes. Four participants found the connectivity aspect of the Internet very useful as it helps them to maintain contact with friends and relatives. Hélène (23) admitted that without the services of Skype (an online video calling platform) she would not have enjoyed her Erasmus program. Finally, participants such as Arnaud (24), explained using the Internet gives the freedom to choose what people want to watch and listen to. Arnaud argued that traditional media are always programmed in such a way that the user's choices are restricted, however with the Internet; the user has more choice flexibility.

Regarding the entertainment variables, Olivier (23), Arnaud (24) and Nadège (27) explicitly report that for them the Internet is rarely a medium which hints at seriousness. They supported their argument by saying that on the internet they can find anything and everything. In the second focus group, participants particularly discussed how this entertainment aspect was related to their SNS usage (an aspect which will later be discussed in the SNS usage section).

#### *4.2.1.2. Online activities*

During the discussions, nine online activities emerged: messaging, browsing, streaming, video calling (or “Skyping”), sharing, commenting, creating, tagging and mailing. Surprisingly, when participants were asked to enumerate their online activities, the majority (8 participants out of 12) implicitly referred to their online behaviour on SNS, as if online activities automatically signified SNS activities. Indeed, they argued being active online when sharing, commenting, “liking”, debating, or streaming on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Cynthia (26) was the only participant who mentioned being active through mailing.

Three participants mentioned using francophone online media, three American, two European and two African. Nadège (27) explained that she does not look for information on Congolese online platforms but rather on African websites because she is concerned about the entire continent in general and not only about Congo. Members of the second focus group expressed a similar behaviour. Moreover, they argued that online Congolese media platforms are rarely visually attractive and are lacking in clear content. They debated the fact that Congolese online media is generally something which is not visible. Chelsea (24) explained that this is due to the difficult living conditions in the homeland. The other members of the second focus group explained that this comes as a result of a lack in initiative and financial support from the Congolese diaspora to develop online projects. Thus, participants of the second focus group expressed their reluctance to use Congolese media, not because they dislike to, but more because the quality of the media is so poor.

#### 4.2.2. SNS usage

As argued in the previous section, all focus group participants agreed that, the conversation about online behaviour was automatically linked to SNS usage. It appeared that the SNS are the most important online platforms for the participants. Also broadly discussed with the 13 interviewees, the popularity of SNS has been explained by Laura (29, Nappy) and Gillian (22, Viner) in terms of user empowerment. Laura explained:

On social networks, we have this possibility... it is a bit as if we were on TV. Usually, getting on TV it is not something possible for everyone, but with social networks it is possible. So people feel allowed sharing whatever they want. (Laura, 29, Nappy)

However, this empowerment is not perceived as a good thing for participants such as Christopher (22, Gospel Nomination) or Laetitia (19, Gospel nomination). They consider the use of SNS as a form of addiction which they would like to escape. Christopher particularly revealed that using SNS was a daily practice and it would be a habit hard to break away from. Chelsea (24, focus group participant) added to this point by mentioning the ease of access to SNS thanks to mobile devices such as smartphones. Chelsea expressed that, people are constantly connected and are therefore always tempted to use SNS.

It was clear during the research that SNS are used for various reasons and in different ways, depending on the user and the platform. As with the use of the Internet, attention is particularly paid to the motivation variables linked to SNS usage and to the actual SNS activities. From what has come out of the conversations with the 25 participants, the motivations and activities on SNS vary depending on the platform used. The main six social

platforms that were discussed are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Tumblr. But in general, the motivational variables mentioned were usefulness and entertainment, and the activities described mainly consisted in sharing, commenting, “liking”, watching videos and instant messaging.

#### *4.2.2.1. Motivation variables*

SNS have been presented as useful platforms for: sharing and creating content, promoting event and activities, maintaining connection with friends and relatives, watching videos, job seeking, and getting informed. However, participants such as Nevroz (21, Viner) or Hélène (23, focus group participant) admitted that their first motivation to join a SNS platform, was because they felt forced to. They explained that nowadays so many things are happening on SNS that they felt obligated to follow the trend, in order to be connected with others. During the focus groups and interviews, the participants gave more explicit motivational explanations about their Facebook use. The following motivations were expressed: sharing and creating content, promoting events and activities, maintaining connection with friends, relatives and schools, and being informed. Apparently, Facebook seems to be the easiest platform to use for sharing various type of information, and also the most performing platform as it allows for a range of activities. Laetitia (24, Nappy) even argued that she did not see the point of going on other platforms as Facebook provides everything she needs. Whereas, Cynthia (26, focus group participant) reported that she joined Facebook only for educational purposes. The participants of the second focus group also discussed how Facebook has become an indispensable educational tool. Arnaud and Hélène admitted with examples, that not being on Facebook can actually be consequential for students.

According to 64% of the participants, SNS like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube were seen as new forms of entertainment. During the focus groups, participants discussed that before the Internet era, TV was the main entertainment tool of preference. However since the arrival of SNS, they admitted that they were not watching TV anymore. As mentioned earlier, all focus group participants debated about how SNS is rarely seen as a serious form of media. The main argument for such an account was the type of content provided on these platforms. Six interviewees explicitly confirmed posting mainly humoristic content on SNS while four focus group participants confessed going on SNS for gossip on friends and celebrities. However, Christopher (22, Gospel nomination) declared that he wanted to be entertained with something else than SNS. Laetitia (19, Gospel nomination) argued the same. She mentioned that some young people should actually try to reduce their SNS use and have “a life outside SNS”. Olivier (23, focus group participant) actually realized

that the entertainment aspect of SNS estranges people rather than bringing them close together. He argued not physically seeing his friends as often as before.

#### 4.2.2.2. SNS activities

Seven main SNS activities have been presented by the participants: sharing, commenting, “liking”, creating, uploading and watching videos, and instant messaging. Of course, the activities varied depending on the functionality of the platform. Unsurprisingly, all participants, without exception, mentioned having an active Facebook account. For 64% of them, Facebook is considered as the platform where they are the most active and that is used on a daily basis. In terms of activities on Facebook, the participants mainly explained sharing photos, videos, moods and educational related content, commenting on friends’ posts, “liking” content, creating and promoting events, watching videos and instant messaging. Four participants considered Facebook as the easiest and most useful platform to do all these activities. The second most popular SNS mentioned by participants was Instagram. It appeared that 32% of participants considered Instagram as the most used platform. Sabrina (29, focus group participant) argued being active on Instagram by sharing her reworked pictures, commenting on content, tagging people, exchanging opinions, and following other users. For three of the Viners, the platform was mainly used to create videos. But in general, this chunk of participants explained using Instagram mainly for editing pictures. Seven participants also mentioned Twitter. Among the seven, four reported being active by sharing frivolous content about their life, two explained having an account but not being active on it, and one just mentioned the platform reporting its complexity and arguing how “vicious” it is. Regarding YouTube, four participants talked about the platform and only two explicitly considered it as one of the most used SNS. Those participants mainly associate the platform with the simple action of watching a video. For Laetitia (24, Nappy), YouTube is not a good means of communication. For instance, she argued that the interaction with people is not as easy as on Facebook, thus leading to Laetitia rarely commenting on any particular content. Arnaud (24, focus group participant) and Gillian (22, Viner) mainly associate YouTube to a music channel, where they listen to their favourite music or upload their music video. Gillian particularly explained that 90% of the content on his YouTube channel are music videos which he uploads frequently. For LinkedIn and Tumblr, the platforms have been cited by a few percentage of the participants (2 for LinkedIn and one for Tumblr), but none of them provided an actual explanation of their activities on those platforms.

### 4.2.3. SNS and identity online

The discussion about the relation between SNS and identity was particularly animated during the two focus groups conducted. Participants expressed some confusion on the topic. However, two opposing opinions were expressed: identity cannot be expressed on SNS and identity is indirectly expressed on SNS. Despite this, the same participants paradoxically presented the two opinions.

#### *4.2.3.1. Identity not expressed on SNS*

When the topic was brought up by the researcher, seven participants explicitly argued that identity could not be expressed on SNS. For these participants, identity refers to all aspects of one's personality and life. In that regard, they find it impossible to express a whole identity. They are categorical, what is shared on SNS represents just a fraction of whom we are. Gloria (18, TCQTZ) stated further that on SNS, this fraction of identity is only valid if the user decides to be sincere in his/her posts; what Nadége (26, focus group participant) identified as a form of online hypocrisy. In the same vein of idea, the respondents of the second focus group particularly debated how SNS users often get lost between the real and virtual worlds. They explained that SNS platforms assist some users to create or shape lives that they are not even living. However, for these six categorical participants, it is undeniable that people only share what they really want to share. According to ten participants, what is presented on SNS mainly represents the nicest aspects of someone's life. Chelsea provided some insight:

On Instagram, Facebook you are going to sell the sunny sides of your life [...] you only show those sides. Actually, it is being yourself without really being yourself. It is just what you select from your life [...] (Chelsea, 24, focus group participant)

Indeed for Chelsea, only selecting the nicest aspect of a life does not represent your full identity. Arnaud (23, focus group participant) expanded on this topic by stating the fact that generally SNS are visible to a great number of people, and not everyone wants to reveal everything about themselves, even to people they know. Gillian (22, Viner), Cynthia (26, focus group participant) and Noémie (29, focus group participant) supported this reflection, stating that people should always retain some form of privacy about their lives. Arnaud stated that it is for this reason; SNS users limit their actions, only present the nicest parts of their identity. In fact, from what was discussed with the participants, the content related primarily to identity in general and impersonal content. Olivier (23, focus group participant) revealed that what people can extract about one's identity on SNS is mainly related to what the person

likes or dislikes, but nothing more. For this category of participants who do not believe that identity can be expressed on SNS, when someone does something online, it is always a conscious action. And this is particularly true for platforms such as LinkedIn, where Cynthia (26, focus group participant) for instance, pays an extreme importance to her image, and the way she is going to sell her identity or brand her image.

#### *4.2.3.2. Identity indirectly expressed on SNS*

On the other hand, for the other half of the participants (12 participants), identity can clearly be expressed on SNS. For focus participants such as Arnaud (24), Noémie (29) and Nadège (27), identity can be unconsciously or indirectly expressed on SNS. They explained that the music, the videos, the posts, the pictures and cover pictures you share on SNS, to some extent represent who you are and not what you consciously choose to be. As David (21, Viner) claimed, sharing what we like, is similar to sharing a part of our personality. Here, contrary to what was argued in the previous section, it seems that this fraction of identity presented on SNS is enough to claim that identity can be expressed on SNS. As Patrick (26, TCQTZ) argued, selecting a part of our identity, can be considered as expressing one's identity. Working as a communication manager, Patrick expressed that on SNS he has chosen to present himself as an entrepreneur in order to attract similar profiles.

Additionally, the two viners Noah (27) and Nevroz (21), and the focus group participant Arnaud (24) made it explicit that SNS platforms are important modern tools that help people to express their identity. They explained that what they could not express in real life, they found it easier to express it virtually. In that sense, SNS platforms are significantly empowering users in self-expression. In the cases of Noah and Arnaud, they confessed to being relatively shy individuals, rarely disclosing aspects of their personality in reality, but on SNS they feel somehow empowered to do so. In Nevroz's case, he is a graphic design student and he explained that his motivation to create videos on Instagram was primarily for fun but also as a medium for him to exhibit his drawings and consequently showing another facet of his personality. From the conversation conducted with the participants, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram have been implicitly and explicitly presented as the SNS platforms where identity or fractions of identity can easily be expressed.

### 4.3. Elements of cultural identity on SNS and online phenomena

In this section, the attention is focused in particular to the characteristics of cultural identity that participants express or could express on SNS. This part presents first the general reflections and opinions of the participants with regard to SNS behaviours, secondly it also presents the different cultural elements manifested on SNS. The second part is dedicated to the presentation of online phenomena related to cultural identity.

#### 4.3.1. Elements of cultural identity on SNS

As presented earlier in this chapter, the discussion over the expression of identity on SNS led to two trends of opinions to emerge: on the one hand, some argued that identity could not be expressed on SNS; and on the other hand, a bigger number argued the possibility of an indirect expression of identity on SNS. Regarding the expression of the cultural identity on SNS, it appeared that some particular cultural elements of identity can be consciously and unconsciously presented. The majority of the participants (14) explicitly stated consciously expressing cultural elements. What appeared to be consciously displayed were claims (e.g. claims of identity or of revolting problems in Congo) and the promotion of what is valuable in the Congolese culture. Laura (29, Nappy) explained this last aspect:

I like to share things which highlight the beauty of our culture [...] things which are unknown here [*supposedly in Belgium or Europe*]. Because we always have this image... people are very limited in what they think they know about others. (Laura, 29, Nappy)

Here, Laura implicitly argues that SNS are useful platforms in the process of cultural exchange. This supposes an obvious diversity of culture and individuals in the social network of the participants. In contrast, three participants revealed not consciously sharing elements of their cultural identity for three reasons: the lack of knowledge about the culture, the lack of interest in sharing, and the shame to share this part of their identity. Each of them expressed their views. For Christopher (22, Gospel Nomination), he chooses not to share cultural elements due to his lack of knowledge. For him, there is a difference between what is called Congolese cultural identity in Congo and the cultural identity of the Congolese diaspora. In that sense, he argued consciously expressing elements only related to his diasporic cultural identity. For Laeticia (24, Nappy), cultural identity is not something she is willing to share,

not because she feels ashamed but just because she has no interest to do so. On the contrary, Sabrina (29, focus group participant) disclosed that she was a bit ashamed to expose her cultural identity. But when she realized that a great number of people were expressing their cultural identity on SNS, she felt encouraged to do the same.

Two participants argued that cultural identity is something unconsciously expressed on SNS. Nadège (28, focus group participant) explained that via her Facebook news feed, people can clearly understand that she has Congolese roots because of the many articles (mainly about Congo) she posts on her wall. Gloria (18, TCQTZ) supported this argument saying that the expression of identity is something automatic, it comes instinctively. As the Congolese culture is part of their identity, they displayed it on SNS without even thinking. However, it appeared that seven types of cultural elements can be consciously expressed on SNS.

These seven cultural elements are: life anecdotes, the language, elements of physical appearance (skin colour, hair and clothing), elements related to the living and political situation in Congo, the pride, the food, and the music. Nine participants explicitly mentioned expressing typical situations Congolese young people experience in their diasporic life. These participants explained that they enjoyed depicting with humour typical daily life anecdotes. By doing so, the more they felt part of a community, sharing similar cultural experiences. Regarding the language, eight participants have already posted and expressed something in Lingala. They explained that when they post something in Lingala it is often to be solely understood by members of the community (e.g. for gossip, mockery, etc. purposes). Five participants explained expressing elements related to their physical appearance. With regards to skin colour, two focus group participants admitted posting content about discrimination and racism in Europe. They declared feeling the need to express their occasional discomfort in the host country/continent of their parents. Others prefer to take this physical aspect as a subject of mockery and share it on SNS with people who can understand this sense of humour. The other physical aspects were hair and clothing which were mentioned by Laura (29, Nappy). According to the participant, hair (particularly the afro hair care and the braids) and clothing (especially African wax fabrics) should be considered as typical yet artistic practices in the African culture. She argued that she likes to express them on SNS in order for others to see the beauty of her culture. Five participants mentioned posting content related to the homeland. This content is general information or claims of the revolting political situation and/or the living conditions in Congo. On SNS, these participants explained that they felt empowered to at least share and debate it somewhere. Only three participants mentioned the Congolese pride as a cultural element expressed on SNS. Apparently, SNS users express their Congolese pride just by mentioning their

Congolese identity (through posts, photos, comments, etc.). Food is another cultural element that is apparently expressed on SNS. Two participants mentioned it and further explained that people from their generation often present it in a humoristic way. Finally, Patrick (26, TCQTZ) and Laetitia (19, Gospel nomination) mentioned sharing song lyrics and/or music videos of famous Congolese artists.

From what emerged from the data, cultural elements are presented in two ways: humoristic and serious. It appears that elements such as life anecdotes, physical appearance (mainly skin colour), language, and food, are expressed with more humour while the other elements are presented on SNS in a more serious manner. The first reason presented is the entertainment factor of the SNS. As argued earlier by the participants, SNS are often seen as entertainment platforms where people share humoristic content with friends, relatives and the rest of the world. The second reason that was brought forward was the link to the cultural trait of the Congolese individual. Gillian (22, Viners) clarified this particular point in conversation: for him, humour is what really represents the Congolese culture (the way people talk, greet each other, present themselves, etc.). Therefore, we could also implicitly say that humour is an additional cultural element expressed on SNS.

The three main SNS associated with the expression of cultural identity and mentioned by the participants were: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. As Facebook is used by 100% of the participant, it was obvious that participants related to it as a platform where cultural identity can be expressed. Generally, the Facebook activities the participants were involved in consist of posting humoristic and serious statuses (in French and/or Lingala), sharing videos, articles and pictures, and commenting content (in French and/or Lingala) on their profile, on the profiles of Congolese friends or relatives, and on private and public groups. For example, Olivier (23 focus group participant) shared during the discussion that once he had created a Facebook group specifically dedicated to the demystification of the negative perceptions of the Congolese man. He argued that the group was a huge success in his social network. On the whole, all seven cultural elements seemed to be easily expressed on Facebook. Besides Facebook, two participants asserted that Twitter was a distinctly interesting platform in terms of expression of cultural identity. In fact, Nevroz (21, Viner) affirmed that on Twitter it is particularly easy for Congolese people to recognize each other. As he advanced, the uniqueness of Twitter is the ability to mark keywords or topics with the sole use of the symbol #, otherwise known as a “hashtag”. In this way, Twitter users from Congolese origins can automatically categorize a message related to the Congolese identity. It appeared that the cultural elements presented on Twitter mainly focused on the Congolese pride, the language, and life anecdotes. However, the use of “hashtags” on SNS is not only

exclusive to Twitter users. Actually, “hashtags” are also widely used on Instagram. Sabrina (29, focus group participant) provided some details:

[...] On Instagram, young people, when they are Congolese, they claim it at 200%. They insert “hashtags” like #team243 or #243, #DRC, #Kin. So basically, they take a picture and then they describe themselves 243, RDC, Kin... They are sharing where they come from. And it is true that you can automatically recognize that they are Congolese [...] (Sabrina, 29, focus group participant)

Here, Sabrina demonstrated a clear example of Instagram activities related to cultural identity. Through the use of “hashtags” referring to Congo’s country code (#243), to the abbreviation of the homeland’s name (DRC, the Democratic Republic of the Congo) or to the capital city of the Congo (Kinshasa), Instagram users from Congolese origins show how proud they are of their Congolese identity. These last accounts demonstrated that the Congolese pride is a cultural element that is easily expressed on platforms such as Instagram.

#### 4.3.2. Online phenomena

In this research, two focus groups were conducted for two reasons: first, to highlight the patterns of identity, cultural identity and the patterns of online behaviours, and second to identify potential online phenomena related to cultural identity. The results revealed that focus groups mainly helped in identifying patterns of identity, cultural identity and online behaviours. During the focus groups, two online phenomena were presented to the participants: the Nappy movement and the Best French Vine. All twelve participants agreed upon the relation between cultural identity and the two SNS phenomena, but unfortunately a few came up with similar online phenomena. Nevertheless, the five participants of the first focus group spoke about beauty contests on Facebook (e.g. Miss Congo Belgium) and about Facebook pages that were dedicated to African wax fabrics clothing. In the second focus group, the seven participants only managed to come up with one phenomenon, which was also related to Facebook pages on Congolese beauty. As Congolese beauty pages and beauty contests on Facebook were mentioned in both focus groups, particular attention was paid to this phenomenon. Unfortunately, none of the persons that were contacted responded.

On a positive note, the focus group participants and interviewees provided surprising and interesting cultural elements during the focus groups and interviews, - such as beliefs or

a sense of pride - which were worth exploring online. It happened that on my social network, one phenomenon was particularly popular on Facebook especially among my Congolese friends: the Gospel nomination (somehow related to the cultural element of "belief"). Also, during the interview process, two participants explicitly presented the Facebook page "Tu sais que t'es Z quand" (TCQTZ) as a good example of expression of cultural identity on SNS. All in all, four phenomena were singled out and explored with thirteen Congolese individuals from the second generation diaspora in Brussels: the Nappy movement (related to physical appearance), Vine phenomenon (related to life anecdotes), Gospel nomination (related to belief) and TCQTZ (related to life anecdotes and language). They provided an in-depth exploration of how the second generation of the Congolese diaspora can be specifically involved in a phenomenon related to their cultural identity. Below is an explanation of each phenomenon and their relevance in towards the research.

#### *4.3.2.1. Nappy movement*

In this research, four Nappy girls (aged between 24 and 29 years old) from Congolese origins and living in Brussels were interviewed. Their testimonies provided interesting insights into the origins, cultural perceptions and popularity of the Nappy phenomenon. From the four interviews, it was discovered that there are two ways to define the movement. The first definition can be interpreted as follows: it is the return of an Afro woman to her natural hair texture, with the simple desire to take care of her own hair. Two participants argued that a Nappy girl is an educated and privileged Afro woman who no longer wants to alter her hair texture (by straightening it or relaxing it with chemical products) and who decides to wear and appreciate her natural hair. Indeed, as these participants argued, within Afro/Black communities (and especially in the Congolese community) the proper maintenance of the afro hair is somehow unknown. In that sense, the Nappy movement does not necessarily happen out of a serious and growing awareness of one's Black identity, but rather out of the desire to learn the Afro hair texture. As Laetitia (24) explained, contrary to many friends of hers, her return to natural hair was not experienced as a significant and conscious stage of life.

The second definition was presented as follows: the desire of an Afro woman to return to a natural hair style to show the self-acceptance and self-awareness of her Black identity. Indeed, for Laura (29) and Lydia (28), the movement goes beyond the simple appreciation of the afro hair. They argued that hair can be the expression of one's identity. In that sense, the Nappy movement reflects a deep cultural issue related to hair encountered by

women in African communities. They explained that members of African communities have always perceived natural afro hair as something not aesthetic that requires transformation. The participants seemed to argue that this lack of self-esteem or malaise vis-à-vis of the natural afro hair is clearly related to a White beauty standard which has affected African people since the period of slavery and colonisation. In this perspective, the Nappy movement is seen as an alternative, a call to challenge the hegemonic White standard of beauty, or what Lydia refers to as “the norm”.

However, all four participants agreed that the movement originally started in North America. Two of them even argued that they started their Nappy experience by following Afro American Nappy girls and by reading Anglophone websites. During all interviews, they commented upon the fact that Afro Americans have always had a strong influence in the behaviour of Afro Europeans. They highlighted that this American influence has been at the same time negative (referring to the exportation of the chemical and destructive relaxing products) and positive (referring to the Nappy movement). But for Lydia (28), it does not matter where the movement comes from so long as it helps people to accept themselves.

The Nappy girls interviewed explained that the phenomenon appeared first on social platforms such as forums before reaching SNS. They expressed that thanks to SNS (mainly Facebook and YouTube); the Nappy movement has reached another level of popularity. As Lydia observed, SNS are border-free media which empower everyone to exchange all types of messages with people all over the world. In their particular case, the Nappy participants expressed the desire to change this negative perception of the natural hair, and with SNS they feel particularly empowered to do so. In general, their intention is to share knowledge and to bring awareness within the community (especially to the new generation). According to Laura, the popularity of such phenomenon will eventually become the norm: the more we see it, the less it will shock.

Regarding their SNS activities, the four interviewees mentioned being active mostly on Facebook. Their activities involved: sharing advice, expressing their malaise or pride vis-à-vis their hair, posting and commenting on pictures, YouTube videos, articles, etc. Three of the participants were part of a private Facebook group (temporarily joined for the purpose of this thesis) and one participant had a public Facebook page related to natural hair. The content of their Facebook page can be identified as User-Created-Content (UCC) as the Nappy interviewees represent users empowered by an intelligent platform (Facebook), to contribute in their way in developing, rating, collaborating, and distributing Internet content.

Their passion for their natural hair is what leads them to share content that is: creative, public, and out of professional routines and practices. Additionally, it appeared to the participants that the Nappy movement created a strong virtual community, always in the need for interaction online but also offline (e.g. meetings, conference, etc.). Regarding the importance of the online interaction, Lydia gave some evidence:

It is not about my page, this page, and other thing; it is about the well-being of everybody. And if I talk about something, why not link up with someone else who talks about that? [...] I am not doing it as a recognition for myself [...] it is really for the community [...] (Lydia, 28, Nappy)

#### *4.3.2.2. Vine phenomenon*

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Dom Hofman, the co-founder of Vine, introduced the platform as a mobile service that allows people to capture and share short looping videos (Hofman, 2013). Owned by Twitter, this mobile application allows users to create six-second looping videos to share in-app and on Facebook and Twitter. As Hofman (2013) argued, the Vine developers (sharing similar values goals with Twitter) believed that constraint inspires creativity, whether through a 140-character or a six-second video. Already in March 2013, social media bloggers, such as Greg Brown (2013), was labeling the service as “one of the leaders, if not “the” leader in social video” (Brown, 2013). Initially available only for iOS devices, the application was recently introduced on Android and Windows (Protalinski, 2014), providing its users with more flexibility and options. A few months later, Facebook introduced a video capability on the photo-sharing application Instagram in order to take on Twitter’s Vine looping-video application (Somers, 2014). Yet, for the four interviewees related to the online phenomenon, Viners are largely described as users creating short sequence videos either on Vine or Instagram. In the light of the study, the definition of a Viner will also embrace this large description.

From what emerged from the conversations, the four Viners have discovered the phenomenon via friends on Facebook and Instagram. They describe the applications as fun and creative platforms on the web. They all argued the importance of humour on such SNS. David (21) even explained that a Vine without a touch of humour is not a Vine. The video has to make people smile at least. To this, Gillian (22) and Nevroz (21) added that as soon as there is creativity, there is art; and Viners have become local artists who entertain a virtual community. It appeared for three of them that the phenomenon was first popular in America

before reaching Europe. These three interviewees did not deny being inspired and influenced by the American Viners. In fact, the content produced in these short videos is often an imitation of the American Vines and also content related to humoristic and stereotypical Congolese (and to some extent African) life situations. In terms of inspiration, the interviewees revealed being influenced by situations of their daily life, including aspects and elements of their cultural and diasporic identity. As a general rule, the four participants explained expressing (sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously) cultural traits of the Congolese diaspora. From what participants shared in the discussions, these elements are: humour, language, Congolese pride, education, belief, physical appearance and traditions. Surprisingly, it appeared that they like to make a mockery of their parents' cultural practices, especially the ones of their mothers (depicted as very identical in the Congolese community). Nevroz (21) explained how he usually proceeds:

[...] I can talk with my sister and say: "Hey, do you remember when daddy did that...?" then we laugh... and then I realize that I could do a video about it, we talk about it again, and I note it on my mobile phone. Then the idea becomes a note... it starts nurturing... in the meantime I already imagine the scenario in my mind [...] (Nevroz, 21, Viner)

In a participatory web culture, the Vines are easily identifiable as User-Created-Content, and the Viners as users empowered by the Vine or Instagram application. Through their creative, public and non-professional videos, they provide Internet content relatively appreciated by members of the Congolese diaspora. During the two focus groups, the 12 participants perfectly knew the phenomenon and confirmed that its success is very much linked to their ability to culturally identify themselves with the video content. As Merveille (24, Gospel Nomination) argued, these videos are funny and show self-derision, but can also easily reinforce clichés and stereotypes of the Congolese community. She gives the example of videos where Viners make fun of the African accent of a Congolese parent, she argued that for members of the community it can be funny, but for others, it can confirm negative and preconceived ideas. But the intention of the Viners is rather to create a feeling of cheerfulness. As Nevroz (21) exposed, with humour, it is possible to gather a great number of people and form a big virtual community; not only of Congolese origin but also people from all walks of life. The four Viners are particularly attentive to the interaction with their followers because their support is the source of their investment, and together they form a big virtual "family" to borrow Noah's term.

#### 4.3.2.3. *Gospel nomination*

The Gospel nomination phenomenon is a variation of the social media game known as Neknominate. Supposedly to have originated in Australia, the worldwide game popular on SNS (especially on Facebook and YouTube) consisted of the filming of an individual downing a huge quantity of an alcoholic drink, and then nominating a friend and challenging him to do the same. But the practice of the game has provoked the deaths of at least five men all under the age of thirty (Wilkinson & Soares, 2014). Such unfortunate events prompted people to launch a better initiative: the Gospel nomination on Facebook and YouTube is one of them. The phenomenon follows the same game regulations as the Neknominate but instead of drinking insane amounts of alcohol, individuals have to sing a religious or Gospel song. One focus group participant identified it as “public worship”. It was mentioned and discussed during the two focus groups and 4 interviews that the phenomenon was relatively popular among their Congolese friends. Consequently, it seemed of interest to explore the phenomenon as it was somehow linked to the cultural element belief. In this respect, three interviews were conducted with Congolese individuals that had been “Gospel nominated” and who shared their video on SNS.

Christopher (22), Merveille (24) and Laetitia (19), have all been “Gospel nominated” by their friends and have all posted their video on their Facebook profile. They explained that one of their motivations was the willingness to share their love for God and attempt to touch people. All three participants are from the Christian faith and they argued that Christianity plays an important role in their lives and consequently is a part of their identity. Two of them even identified belief as a distinct cultural element of the Congolese diaspora. They explained that they were raised and immersed into a religious environment since their early childhood. In addition to the three other participants involved in the research, Merveille associated the respect of elders also as an important value. She explained that for her, her belief was tied to the cultural values related to the respect of elders (God being the elder to Whom we must show respect). Laetitia even supported the fact that, in her opinion, the Congolese diaspora in Brussels is predominantly Christian. Though, Christopher expressed a reservation on the relationship between belief and cultural identity. He argued the following:

[...] as a believer, I would say that it [belief] is something that came later. [...] If it is sincere, the culture cannot be related to it. But when you actually “practice” religion, it can become cultural [...] with all the rituals and life events; it has become cultural from generation to generation. (Christopher, 22, Gospel nomination)

In terms of SNS usage, the participants observed the importance of SNS for such phenomenon. Actually, without SNS, they admitted that such interaction and expression would not be possible. Surely, they felt empowered to send what they believe to be as a strong message to reach out to a great number of people “without going out of your place”, as Merveille articulated. Their belief is what led them to create and publicly distribute creative, and non- professional Internet content. In fact, they associate belief to their identity and cultural identity, however, their expression was indirectly made public. Merveille sadly exposed that the phenomenon is in some way fading away, as a significant number of people on her social network (believer or not) have been nominated and/ or refused to follow the movement. The participant found the phenomenon as a good initiative which should continue online.

#### *4.3.2.4. “Tu sais que t'es Z quand...” (TCQTZ)*

The literal translation of the phenomenon means: “You know you are Z when...” The “Z” refers to the former name of Congo: Zaire. This appellation (and also the appellation Zaza”) is often used among Congolese of the second generation to describe themselves as Congolese. TCQTZ is actually a Facebook group exclusively composed of members from Congolese origins. They mostly share a post starting with the sentence “You know you are Z when...” directly followed by life anecdotes and experiences, photos, videos related to their Congolese culture. Their posts are expressed in French, Lingala or a mix of both. In this research, two members of the private group were interviewed. Patrick (26) explained that he discovered the phenomenon because he was tagged by a friend on a Facebook comment. Gloria (18), discovered the phenomenon because she saw a friend of hers posting Congolese clichés. In general, their motivation to join the group is their desire for self-mockery about their origins. As Patrick argued, it is easier to laugh about such things with people who are aware of the behaviours he depicts in his posts. He explained that he cannot post such content on his own profile page his non-Congolese friends (who have not been raised with the same cultural codes) may not really understand his humour. Both participants acknowledged the importance of humour on such platforms. For Patrick, humour is perceived as one thing everyone agrees on. However, Gloria confirmed that there are certain topics that are easier to discuss with humour. According to Gloria, the contents that are expressed more seriously are generally the ones aimed at affecting somebody.

Similarly to the SNS use of the Viners, the TCQTZ participants expressed many cultural elements: language, life anecdotes, physical appearance, education, belief, humour,

history, Congolese pride. In that respect, this Facebook page is mostly used to create or reinforce a feeling of belonging. Patrick made it clear in his statement:

This does not reinforce the idea of community [...] it allows people to affirm that they belong to this particular community. But it does not reinforce the idea of community because this reinforcement is established through [...] education, entrepreneurial, hmm... [...] all the project development around the community. (Patrick, 26, TCQTZ)

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and discussion

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The focus of this research was the media consumption of second generation diaspora when it comes to self-expression and cultural identity on SNS. The study particularly delved into the SNS usage of the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels. In this final part of the research, we will have a look at the ways previous chapters have helped answering the central research question. Moreover, we will discuss the limitations of the study as well as provide relevant suggestions for future research.

The formulated main research question was: "How could the use of SNS help the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels express their cultural identity?" The research findings showed that when it comes to the expression of cultural identity on SNS, second generation of the Congolese diaspora can use SNS in different ways: by claiming their cultural identity with pride or claiming for change (especially regarding problematic cultural matters such as self-esteem), and by using cultural elements as a topic of entertainment. The process of interaction is important in both usage. As highlighted in previous studies (Ibold, 2010 & Krivolap, 2011) network media is seen as something particular and new locations where members of the diaspora can think of their cultural identity Ibold (2010) and Krivolap (2011) also interested in the correlation between identity and online spaces argued that Internet is a new dimension of social reality where one can perform great deal of potentialities, which are impossible to fulfil in other spaces. In this research, SNS not only provides a new dimension of social reality, but also offers new means of interactions in the social construction of identity and cultural identity. Nevertheless, there are diverse dimensions to take into consideration to understand the relationship between SNS usage and cultural identity. These three dimensions refer to the key concepts and sub-questions of this study.

The first sub-question was: "What elements the second generation of the Congolese diaspora associate to their identity and cultural identity?" Scholars such as Hall (1990) and Mainsah (2009) have argued that identity and cultural identity are concepts particularly complex to grasp in a diasporic context because it is a dynamic process which involves the positioning of an individual in a particular environment. In this research, the particular environment of the second generation of the Congolese diaspora is the influences of two different cultures in their identification process. In their individual positioning seemed to perceive their identity in three different ways: double, African/Congolese, and cosmopolitan. For their collective identity, they rather associate negative elements of first generation of the diaspora, and two types of second generation (passive and proactive). Regarding the cultural

elements, several have been cited and related to different aspects inherited from their parents, and to Congo.

The second sub-questions were: "What type of online activities is this generation engaged in, especially when it comes to SNS?" The results showed that the behaviour of the second generation diaspora mainly depends on the platforms features and on the users. But in this case, SNS are used for entertainment and for its usefulness. The concepts of virtual community and empowerment appeared to be significant notions to the participants. As argued by Karim (1998, 2003), Hiller and Franz (2004) and Georgiou (2006), the Internet is not used to build a virtual community that previously existed based on face-to-face interactions but rather provides formation and cultivation of new relationships among people who could share similar interests and experiences. Indeed, in this research, the interaction on SNS was an important factor of identification. In the academic debate, empowerment was the key concept of a growing participatory web culture (Deuze, 2006; Georgiou, 2006; Karim, 2007, Matsaganis et al., 2010). Indeed, it was argued that users have become particular producer of Internet content. The findings showed that the second generation of the Congolese diaspora is no exception, and is actually generating (consciously or subconsciously) content about its cultural identity. The next section discusses this important aspect of the research.

The third and final sub-question of this research was: "What cultural elements the members of the second generation of the Congolese diaspora would express or are expressing on SNS?" Before answering this question, it is of relevance to mention the particular confusion the participants expressed vis-à-vis the relation between SNS and expression of identity. It appeared that the identity expressed on SNS is only a fraction of one's true identity. Additionally, the expression of identity on SNS is not a straightforward and conscious process. It means that it can also be indirectly expressed through different SNS activities. When it comes to cultural identity, the same is true. Macri (2011) argued that online spaces can act as essential tools in order to construct identity narratives and to negotiate symbolic identity places. The findings of this research are similar in the ways participants (especially interviewees) explained the type of cultural elements they present on SNS. The four online phenomena explored are particularly important to answer this last sub-question. The research showed through 4 online phenomena (Nappy movement, Vine, Gospel nomination and TCQTZ) that various cultural can be expressed on SNS. Those elements are either serious (such as physical characteristics for the Nappy girls, belief for Gospel nominated individuals), or more entertaining (such as diasporic life experiences, language, etc., for Viners and TCQTZ members). The reasons to express those particular elements is either for claiming a cultural change (as the Congolese community is relatively seen in

negative ways by the second generation members), or for auto derision (as humour, is perceived as an important factor for identification on SNS).

Nevertheless, this research present some point of limitations in terms of objectivity and of phenomena available online. As I am myself from the population under research, there might be less manifestation of objectivity in selecting, interpreting, and analysing the data. Indeed, being an insider is a positive aspect of the research in terms of access to participants, but maybe less positive in terms of interpretations of, for instance, what is perceived as part of a cultural identity. Moreover, more diverse online phenomena could have brought other insights in the research. Although happening on the different SNS, the Vine phenomenon and TCQTZ appeared to express similar cultural content.

Finally to conclude, this study has continued to build on previous researches exploring the online media consumption of diaspora. Even before the participatory web culture, online media were already seen as an important tool empowering the diaspora and providing new spaces to think about identity, with SNS, this trend is reinforced and allows much more potentialities to diasporic communities. While this study explored the Congolese diaspora in Brussels, the subject could be further explored with comparative studies. As many participants highlighted, African communities in Brussels (and to some other extent) in Europe share a lot in common in terms of cultural identity. It might be of interest to compare the SNS usage of the second generation of two different African communities, in order to identify similarities and differences in terms of expression of cultural identity on SNS.

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## Appendices

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## Appendix A

Overview table of the 25 respondents

NAME	AGE	PLACE OF BIRTH	OCCUPATION	GENDER	TYPE OF PARTICIPANT
Cynthia	26	Congo	unemployed	Female	Focus Group 1
Nadège	27	Brussels	Unemployed		
Amandine	23	Brussels	Event assistant		
Sabrina	29	Brussels	Unemployed		
Noemie	29	Brussels	Bachelor student		
Olivier	23	Congo	Bachelor Student	Male	Focus Group 2
Arnaud	24	Brussels	Bachelor student	Male	
Sara	19	Brussels	Bachelor student	Female	
Wivine	18	Brussels	Bachelor student	Female	
Boris	20	Brussels	Bachelor student	Male	
Chelsea	24	Congo	Bachelor student	Female	
Hélène	23	Brussels	Bachelor student	Female	
Lydia	28	Congo	Consultant	Female	Nappy
Laura	29	Brussels	Bachelor student	Female	
Fens	28	Brussels	Accountant for Telecommunication company	Female	
Laeticia	24	Brussels	Bachelor student	Female	
Noah	27	Brussels	Footballer	Male	Viners
Nevroz	20	Brussels	Bachelor student	Male	
David	21	Congo	Bachelor student	Male	
Gillian	22	Congo	Bachelor student	Male	
Merveille	24	Congo	Bachelor student	Female	Gospel Nomination
Christopher	22	Brussels	Bachelor student	Male	
Laetitia	19	Brussels	Bachelor student	Female	
Patrick	26	Congo	Student/ employed	Male	TCQTZ
Gloria	18	Brussels	Bachelor student	Female	

## Appendix B

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### Questions outline for focus groups

#### 1. Warming up questions

For the first question, Interviewer had prepared a basket with different identity tags and participants had (one after the other) to present themselves, pick the most suitable identity tag and explain their choice(s).

Citizen of the world	African
European	Afro-European
Belgian	Afro-Belgian
Congolese	Belgo-Congolese

#### 2. Identity and cultural identity

- ❑ What are the elements you often associate with culture?
- ❑ In that sense, how would you describe the Belgian culture?
- ❑ How would you describe the Congolese culture?
- ❑ What do you think constitute your Congolese identity?
- ❑ What are the most important aspects of the Congolese culture in your life?
- ❑ Why is it important to you?
- ❑ What are the most important aspects of the Belgian culture in your life?
- ❑ Why is it important to you?
- ❑ In what type of situation do you feel more Congolese? More Belgian?

#### 3. Online behaviour

- ❑ What media do you usually TV, Radio, Internet, Newspaper?
- ❑ Why do you use it?
- ❑ How frequently do you use it?
- ❑ How important is the use of media in your life?
- ❑ Why is it important?
- ❑ What sort of media do you consume the most? European, African, Belgian, African?
- ❑ How would you describe yourself online, rather active (meaning producing, sharing, content, etc.) or rather passive (mainly receiving content) media consumer?
- ❑ What type of SNS do you use most frequently?
- ❑ Why do you go on these particular platforms? (e.g. information, entertainment, etc.)
- ❑ What do you share?
- ❑ What do you comment?

#### 4. Link between cultural identity and SNS

- ❑ When you go on SNS how do you often present yourself?

- ② When it comes to your Congolese identity, what are you willing to share/present on SNS?
- ② Why this in particular?
- ② Can SNS be a place to express / present your identity in general? Why?
- ② Can SNS be a place to present and express of your cultural identity? Why?

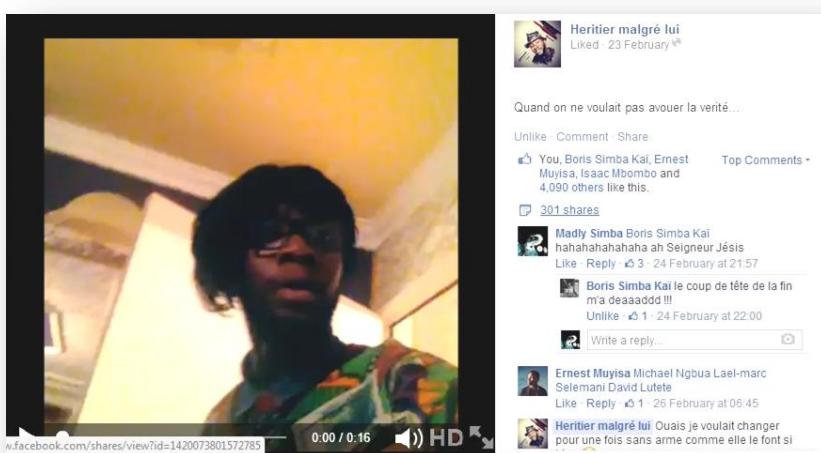
## 5. Online Phenomena

- ② Visual probe 1 (picture below), to introduce first online phenomenon:



- ② What do you know about the Nappy movement?
- ② What do you think about it?
- ② For you, can this be an illustration of a phenomenon which links cultural identity and SNS?
- ② Why would you think so?

- ② Visual probe 2 (video), to introduce the second online phenomenon:



- ② What do you know about the French Vine?

- ② What do you think of it?
- ② For you, can this be an illustration of a phenomenon which links cultural identity and SNS?
- ② Why would you think so?
  
- ② What other similar online phenomena (and somewhat popular among Congolese friends) do you think can be link to cultural identity on SNS?

## Appendix C

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### Question Outline - Nappy phenomenon

#### 1. Warming up questions

- ❑ Tell me a little about you.
- ❑ What is your name?
- ❑ What do you do in life?

#### 2. Identity and cultural identity

- ❑ How would you describe yourself today? (Interviewee received a list of terms to chose from or elaborate on) Why so?

Citizen of the world	African
European	Afro-European
Belgian	Afro-Belgian
Congolese	Belgo-Congolese

- ❑ For you, what are the characteristic elements you would associate to the Congolese culture?
- ❑ How would you describe the Congolese community here in Brussels.
- ❑ How would describe the Second generation of this community?

#### 3. Nappy phenomenon

- ❑ How would you describe the Nappy movement?
- ❑ Could you explain your own Nappy experience? (When did it start? what were your motivations? Etc.)
- ❑ How would you explain the relation between you Nappy experience and the expression of your identity?
- ❑ How could you link you Nappy experience and your use of SNS?
- ❑ What do you share, comment, create, express, liked to the Nappy phenomenon? Why, so?
- ❑ What importance it has for you?

#### 4. *Online behaviour*

- ❑ How important are SNS for you?
- ❑ How would you describe your SNS usage?
- ❑ If you had to, on which platform would you express elements of your cultural identity?
- ❑ What sort of elements linked to your cultural identity, would you be willing to share on SNS? Why?
- ❑ Any additional information?

## Appendix D

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### Questions Outline – Vine phenomenon

#### 1. *Warming up questions*

- ❑ Tell me about you.
- ❑ What do you do in life?

#### 2. *Identity and cultural identity*

- ❑ How would you describe yourself today? (Participants received a list of terms to chose from or elaborate on)

Citizen of the world	African
European	Afro-European
Belgian	Afro-Belgian
Congolese	Belgo-Congolese

- ❑ Why would you describe yourself like this?
- ❑ What are the elements you often associate to the Congolese culture?
- ❑ Why have you chosen those particular elements?
- ❑ How would you describe the Congolese diaspora in Brussels? Why would you describe it like that?
- ❑ How would you describe the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels (particularly in terms of identity and media use)? Why would you describe it like that?

#### 3. *Vine phenomenon*

- ❑ How have you discovered the Vine phenomenon?
- ❑ How could you explain the popularity of such phenomenon online?
- ❑ When did you start recording videos on the platforms? Why?
- ❑ What is the content of your Vine usually? Why?
- ❑ What elements of your Congolese culture could you present in your videos? Why?

- ❑ Where do you get your inspiration?
- ❑ How would you describe the Vine phenomenon and community today?
- ❑ How would you explain the importance of humor on this platform?
- ❑ What other Social platforms are you using? Why?
- ❑ How important is this platform in terms of expression?

#### 4. *Online behaviour*

- ❑ How important are SNS for you?
- ❑ How would you describe your SNS usage?
- ❑ If you had to, on which platform would you express elements of your cultural identity?
- ❑ What sort of elements linked to your cultural identity, would you be willing to share on SNS? Why?
- ❑ Any additional information?

## Appendix E

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### Questions outline – Gospel Nomination

#### 1. *Warming up questions*

- ❑ Could you tell me more about you?
- ❑ What do you do in life?

#### 2. *Identity and cultural identity*

- ❑ How would you describe yourself today? (Participants received a list of terms to chose from or elaborate on)

Citizen of the world	African
European	Afro-European
Belgian	Afro-Belgian
Congolese	Belgo-Congolese

- ❑ Why would you describe yourself like this?
- ❑ In general, what are the elements you often associate to the Congolese culture?
- ❑ Why have you chosen those particular elements?
- ❑ In your opinion is belief part of the Congolese culture? Why so?
- ❑ How would you describe the Congolese Christian community in Brussels? Why would you describe it like that?
- ❑ How would you describe the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels (particularly in terms of identity and media use)? Why would you describe it like that?

#### 3. *Gospel nomination phenomenon*

- ❑ How have you discovered the phenomenon?
- ❑ What do you think about it?
- ❑ What has encouraged you to do this video?
- ❑ What do you usually share on SNS?
- ❑ How could you explain the popularity of such phenomenon on SNS?

- ② What is the importance of SNS for such phenomenon?
- ② What is the importance of SNS in terms of expression?
- ② What other SNS are you using? Why?
- ② If you had to, what would you express about your cultural identity on SNS? Why?

#### 4. *Online behaviour*

- ② How important are SNS for you?
- ② How would you describe your SNS usage?
- ② If you had to, on which platform would you express elements of your cultural identity?
- ② What sort of elements linked to your cultural identity, would you be willing to share on SNS? Why?
- ② Any additional information?

## Appendix F

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### Questions Outline – TCQTZ

#### 1. *Warming up questions*

- ❑ Could you tell me more about you?
- ❑ What do you do in life?

#### 2. *Identity and cultural identity*

- ❑ How would you describe yourself today? (Participants received a list of terms to chose from or elaborate on)

Citizen of the world	African
European	Afro-European
Belgian	Afro-Belgian
Congolese	Belgo-Congolese

- ❑ Why would you describe yourself like this?
- ❑ In general, what are the elements you often associate to the Congolese culture?
- ❑ Why have you chosen those particular elements?
- ❑ In your opinion is belief part of the Congolese culture? Why so?
- ❑ How would you describe the Congolese diaspora in Brussels? Why would you describe it like that?
- ❑ How would you describe the second generation of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels (particularly in terms of identity and media use)? Why would you describe it like that?

#### 3. *TCQTZ phenomenon*

- ❑ How would you describe the phenomenon?
- ❑ How have you discovered it?
- ❑ What do you think about it?
- ❑ What has encouraged you to join the group?
- ❑ What kind of content did you post on the page? Why?

- ② How could you explain the popularity of such phenomenon on SNS?
- ② What is the importance of SNS for such phenomenon?
- ② What is the importance of SNS in terms of expression?
- ② What other SNS are you using? Why?
- ② If you had to, what would you express about your cultural identity on SNS? Why?

#### 4. *Online behaviour*

- ② How important are SNS for you?
- ② How would you describe your SNS usage?
- ② If you had to, on which platform would you express elements of your cultural identity?
- ② What sort of elements linked to your cultural identity, would you be willing to share on SNS? Why?
- ② Any additional information?