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WILL YOU BE MY FACEBOOK FRIEND? EXAMINING A NEW DEFINITION OF
“FRIEND” IN MODERN SOCIETY

By

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WILL YOU BE MY FACEBOOK FRIEND? EXAMINING A NEW DEFINITION OF “FRIEND” IN MODERN SOCIETY

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The Internet has brought about a new and popular medium of communication. Social networking has become the new way to communicate with existing friends and family as well as form new relationships over the Internet. Facebook, the most popular social networking site, is the focus of the study. Facebook offers multiple mediums of communication within one site. Users are not limited to wall posts and tagged photos of Facebook. Other features such as live chat, direct messaging and video-calling capabilities have pushed Facebook to become a primary medium of communication for many people. Understanding the significance of computer mediated relationships is important in taking the next step in evaluating the uses and significance of social networking as a new and popular phenomenon.

The present study aims to explore the relationship of time spent on Facebook and the perceived closeness and comfort levels within a relationship that also exists online. The subjects were first asked to evaluate their personal Facebook patterns. Secondly, the subjects will be asked to evaluate one relationship that exists on Facebook. Identifying one relationship will allow for a comparison of perceived closeness and comfort levels within face-to-face communication and communication through Facebook. In addition, subjects will be asked to measure their overall relational satisfaction based on their communications patterns with that person both online and offline.
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Introduction

The evaluation of social networking behavior has made it an interesting and relevant topic to study. Various researchers have touched on the reasons behind social networking, who takes advantage of social networking sites, and what effects these connections have on users. The most popular social networking site today is Facebook. With more than 1.6 billion page views each day, Facebook has made it into the daily media practices of over 21 million users (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). The beginning of Facebook started with college students in an attempt to connect students within each college to each other. This site was helpful in creating social connections with other students and forming bonds and friendships based on personal profiles, photo uploads and wall comments. Soon this site grew to include high school students. In 2006 Facebook went public, allowing everyone with Internet access to have a Facebook account. Facebook quickly became an addiction, not only to the college students, but also to most users. In 2006, Facebook was “used at over 2,000 United States Colleges and was the seventh most popular site on the World Wide Web” (Ellison, et al., 2007).

Evaluating the differences of being a Facebook friend or being considered a friend offline is relevant in social network research. Previous research has touched on relational development within a computer-mediated context, identity presentation and privacy concerns within Facebook (Ellison, et al., 2007). Drawing from the URT, this research aims to uncover the perceived differences between computer mediated relationships or Facebook friends, and face-to-face interpersonal relationships,. These comparisons will look at the perceived closeness of each relationship in addition to the level of comfort and reduced uncertainty within each relationship.

Understanding if the amount of time an individual spends on social networking sites plays into the perceived closeness and comfort of computer-mediated relationships is a main goal
of the present study. In addition to this, the application of the Uncertainty Reductions Theory (URT) will also be taken under consideration. This theory focuses on the steps people engage in during initial interactions to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability. (Steinfield & Lampe, 2009). The URT aims to uncover exactly how people become comfortable and establish interpersonal relationships with others based on their first initial interactions. This study will relate the URT to the perceived closeness of both parties within the computer-mediated relationships. Using this theory will help to understand how each relationship is compared in perceived closeness and comfort level. According to this theory, individuals with increased predictability and reduced uncertainty within a relationship feel more comfortable with each other. This study aims to explore computer-mediated relationships on Facebook. Specifically, this study examines if the amount of time individuals spend on Facebook will affect their comfort level with relationships maintained online. We hope to better understand the impact that Facebook has on perceived comfort and closeness levels within existing interpersonal relationships.

The Internet has brought about a new and popular medium of communication. Social networking has become the new way to communicate with existing friends and family as well as form new relationships over the Internet. Understanding the significance of these relationships is important in taking the next step in evaluating the uses and significance of social networking as a new and popular phenomenon. Not only for younger individuals who may be considered “tech savvy” but also for older generations who may also be adapting to this new way of communication.
R1: Does the amount of time spent on Facebook affect the perceived closeness and comfort of the computer-mediated relationship?

R2: Does the type of relationship determine the amount of time spent communicating on Facebook?

R3: Does higher levels of perceived closeness on Facebook lead to a more satisfactory interpersonal relationship?

R4: Does higher levels of perceived comfort on Facebook lead to a more satisfactory interpersonal relationship?

**Literature Review**

The Internet allows people to connect with others on a global level. The information each profile provides, such as age, school, interests, and photos, gives people a starting point for initial interactions. The area of interest within this study lies in the question if “Facebook friends” differ from the “friends users talk to at home, on campus, or at work?” An average Facebook user has hundreds of friends however, ask the same user how many friends they have offline, and prepare for a significantly smaller number (Pennington, 2009).

**Relational Maintenance**

Relational maintenance online for established relationships is common and necessary for successful relationships; however, the foundation of these relationships on social networking
sites versus face-to-face is what can be evaluated (Wright, Craig, Cunningham, Igiel, Ploeger (2008). 2008). Social networking provides opportunities for people to formulate new relationships as well as connect with existing friends. The Internet, or more specifically computer-mediated communication (CMC) is considered a valuable resource for relational maintenance for relationships formed online and offline. However, it is important to understand that Facebook supports a variety of relationships, intimate to acquaintances, and is not a specified site for any type of relationship (Wright, et al., 2008).

The influences of relational maintenance have been revealed as the amount of similarity between the two users and the attraction to one another. Wright et al. (2008) understand these influences appear in both online and face-to-face contexts. It is important to understand the factors that influence the maintenance of the relationship (Wright, et al., 2008). Wright et al. (2008) suggest that attitude similarity may cause a change in online relationships, because of the relative reduction of nonverbal and contextual cues. This means, without face-to-face communication, the nonverbal aspect of the communication is lost (Wright, et al., 2008). This is one of the main differences between offline and online communication that can affect relationships. Failure to understand nonverbal communication within a face-to-face conversation can lead to misinterpretation of the message.

According to Wright and his colleagues (2008), attraction is another important variable that affects relational maintenance. Within this context it is important to understand Wright et al.’s interpretation of “attraction.” Wright et al. (2008) considers attraction to be the “degree to which a target is seen as a likely friend”; however, they note that attraction is also related to physical attraction (Wright, et al., 2008). The information that can formulate attraction of the
user can be found on the user profiles through wall posts, photos, videos, or other comments that allow the viewer to make personal interpretations and impressions.

This study evaluated the factors that influence relational maintenance and compared them, online and offline. This study aimed to come up with some theoretical explanation of relational maintenance based on the Facebook usage patterns in college students (Wright, et al., 2008). The findings of this study showed that both attitude similarity and attraction influenced the amount of information one may disclose, thus increasing predictability and interdependence. Wright and his colleagues (2008) interpreted both predictability and predictability to be valued outcomes in relational maintenance. Although attitude similarity can be also developed in a face-to-face setting, Wright et al. (2008) found that attitude similarity was a predictor of social attraction. Both Ramirez (2009) and Wright et al. (2008) supported the idea that the greater similarity, the greater feelings of social attraction. This social attraction can lead to discussion and encourages Facebook users to initiate and continue conversation “with greater levels of intimacy”, or depth (Wright, et al., 2008).

Write et al. (2008) also uncovered the negative side of relational maintenance on social networking sites. Understanding the restriction of nonverbal as well as social contexts over the Internet leaves a certain level of uncertainty. According to this study, this uncertainty leads to a decrease in predictability and therefore, threatens the survival of the relationship. This finding applied to individuals with little to no interaction outside of Facebook. The predictability of an individual within a relationship can correspond to comfort level as well.

**Measuring Relationship Satisfaction**
In order to interpret the results of the present study it is crucial to establish a measurement of relationship satisfaction. A study done by Hendrick (1988) compares various measurements of relational assessment in order to create a generic measurement of relationship satisfaction. The study aimed to develop this measurement by exploring the most popular measurements used to assess feelings, thoughts and behaviors within relationships. Previous measurements, including the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (1959), the Spouse Observation Checklist (Patterson, 1976), the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1979), and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) (Hendrick, 1988, pg. 93) were considered. Although these measures were respected, Hendrick (1988) argued that they lack versatility and create restrictions in measuring general relationship satisfaction. These measurements are “oriented towards marital relationships” while his study aims to reveal a generic measurement of relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, 1988, pg. 93).

Comparing the results in the present study requires a measurement of relationship satisfaction. Hendrick’s study (1988) explores characteristics within each established measurement and aims to “provide initial information on the scale’s validity and potential utility” in creating a generic measure for relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, 1988 pg. 93). Hendrick’s study (1988) concluded in the creation of the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), a 7-item Likert scale. The RAS measures satisfaction, consisting of measures assessing “love and sex attitudes, self-esteem, communication, commitment, investment, and alternative partners”, thus creating a more generic and applicable measurement for relational satisfaction (Hendrick, 1988, pg. 94). The present study takes these conclusions into consideration when measuring the overall satisfaction of computer-mediated relationships in comparison to relational satisfaction in interpersonal face-to-face relationships. Revealing whether the communication medium
determines the overall relationship satisfaction will uncover the answers to whether or not Facebook can be considered an effective tool in relational maintenance and overall relationship satisfaction.

**Internet Socializing**

Haspels (2007) conducted a study involving a series of small community colleges, attempting to analyze if the presence and increased use of social networking have affected face-to-face communication and reduced the feelings of a small close community. Haspels (2007) points out that face-to-face communication as well as other social activities are part of the college experience. This study explores the “role that socializing has in cyberspace and what need it is filling for people in today’s society (Haspels, 2007, pg. 2).” Previous research has come to a variety of conclusions ranging from the “Internet is responsible for disconnecting people from their local face-to-face relationships and causing increased loneliness” to there being a “positive relationship between the Internet and social support” (Haspels, 2007, pg. 3).

**Uncertainty Reduction Theory**

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) by Berger and Calabrese (year) helps to understand interpersonal relationships, both on and offline as well as “explain how communication is used to reduce uncertainties” (West & Turner, 2010, p. 147). This theory is based off on first impressions and aims to evaluate the predictability within the communication process. West and Turner (2010) frame this theory around the assumptions that uncertainty “generates cognitive stress” and when strangers meet, their “primary concern is to reduce the uncertainty and increase predictability” (p. 150). Understanding and evaluating the strategies
people use to overcome these uncertainties can help to explain behaviors used within initial interactions online. In face-to-face communication some strategies people use would be observing from a distance, asking a third party for information, or taking an active role and asking questions for clarification (Haspels, 2009). However, these behaviors change once these interactions are occurring over the Internet.

The context of Haspels’s study (2007) was small, residential colleges that encourage social face-to-face interactions. A common theme that emerged from Haspels study was that “Facebook helps to build and promote face-to-face relationships (Haspels, 2009, pg.).” Haspels (2007) concluded that any uncertainty that occurs in initial interactions (online or offline) stimulates an information search in order to establish common ground; the information search can come from user profiles on Facebook. This behavior often facilitates face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, Haspels (2007) points out that Facebook is used as a way of expanding one’s circle of friends and can be used as an icebreaker in an attempt to establish a relationship. “Friending” someone on Facebook differs from considering someone a “friend” in a face-to-face context; however, “the act of ‘friending’ immediately moves the interaction through the stages of reducing uncertainty in initial interactions” (Haspels, 2009, pg. 6). Haspels (2009)’ study concluded that Facebook aids interpersonal communication and reduces uncertainty and that Internet communication “does not replace human communication; rather, it increases our range of human connectedness“(Haspels, 2009, pg. 15).

To understand if the URT can be applied to online communication research, it is important to reflect on past studies that have attempted this. A study by Flanagin (2007) investigated commercial markets as communication markets, looking through the URT as a way of looking at the information exchange and online consumerism. This study reveled that the
more information exposed about both the seller and the product, the more security the buyer felt. This study showed that the URT can be applied “to the environment on computer-mediated communication and interpretations are offered to explain individuals’ behaviors in initial encounters” over the Internet (Flanagin, 2007, pg.107).

A study done in 2009 by the Anthheunis, Valkenburg, Jochen explores the strategies individuals used to reduce uncertainty and get information about a person they recently met online. According to this research, there are three strategies that most people use in order to reduce uncertainty in a given situation: active, passive, and interactive strategies. This study uncovered that individuals that used interactive strategies were most successful in reducing uncertainty and becoming more comfortable with the other person. In addition, this study found that on social networking sites, lower level of uncertainty led to high level of social attraction. This study proposes high rates of uncertainty within the computer-mediated relationships can increase social attraction. This idea does not support the URT in that reduced uncertainty increases social attraction and comfort level.

**Friends: Quantity over Quality**

Why Facebook users choose to spend so much time, who and how they decide to accept to offer a friend request, and if the quantity or the quality of friends on Facebook matters most are important aspects of social networking research that will help to understand the present study. A study done in 2009 by Pennington explored what it meant to be a Facebook friend. She discovered that social networking sites mean creating more social ties. Reasons for using social networking sites such as Facebook range from “a way to get in contact with close friends,
expressing their relationship to their offline social network through a new venue, or a place to go when bored” (Pennington, 2009).

Pennington also explores the reasoning for why Facebook users have so many friends within their networking. She discusses overlapping networks, how everyone using Facebook seems to overlap with everyone else. In Pennington’s study, her subjects did not claim to frequently talk to more than 50 of their Facebook friends. Pennington suggests that Facebook friends are equivalent of everyday networks including schools, work, family, and friend connections (Pennington, 2009). This study noted social networking as a tool for establishing new relationships to add to already existing social networks. Pennington sees Facebook as a positive addition to the social world and sees it as another area of study for researchers to explore.

Popularity online is another aspect of computer-mediated communication that differed from an offline context. A study in 2008 done by Joseph Walther and his colleagues examined how the information given out on Facebook impacts the judgments of others. Pennington’s study also touched on the idea of Facebook popularity being linked with the amount of friends each user had. She discussed how behaviors such as un-tagging photos or deleting negative comments were all actions to “ensure popularity” and promote “social enhancement” (Pennington, 2009). Like Pennington’s study, Walther et al, (2008)’s study aimed to uncover questions about impression formation and the factors that influence it.

Walther et al. (2008)’s investigation revealed physical attraction of profile pictures as one of the main factors in impression formation. In addition to images, Facebook users use comments made by friends of that user to make judgments and impressions. They made a point to discuss the importance and value of forming impressions from others’ “testimonials” because users are not able to modify statements made by others.
Modes of Interaction

Another study done in 2009 done by Steinfield and Lampe explored the role Facebook played in the formation and maintenance of friendship networks among college students. This study revealed three modes of interaction over Facebook: Initiating, maintaining, and information seeking. These modes attempted to explain the behavior Facebook users engaged in. The initiating mode discusses behaviors aimed at meeting strangers through Facebook while the maintaining mode occurs when users are considered to be browsing Facebook, communicating with many people, friending new people, and meeting with close friends over the site. Lastly, the information-seeking mode describes using Facebook to find out additional information about individuals within the network, usually people that they have met socially (Steinfield & Lampe, 2009).

Like Pennington, Steinfield and Lampe (2009) came up with the conclusion that Facebook does not replace offline interactions, but is a “trigger for sparkling them.” They believe that the “online” and “offline” worlds are not “dichotomous entities, but rather overlapping spheres that offer different kinds of information and communicative possibilities” (Steinfield & Lampe, 2009, pg. 24).

This study also showed that not all Facebook friends are considered “friends”, reveling that only one third of a typical Facebook user’s friends are considered their “actual friends”. However, Steinfield and Lampe made a point to say Facebook users are experimenting with different identities and may “benefit from a more heterogeneous network.” In other words, these users are taking advantage of the social capital (Steinfield & Lampe, 2009). The Facebook
network allows users to explore new perspectives and explore social diversity; Steinfield and Lampe see these benefits as important at the life stage of a college student.

Methods

The present study was conducted using a survey questionnaire. The surveys were given out to 109 students at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), 61 females, 46 males and 2 participants that did not report their gender. Participants in this study ranged from 18-25 years of age with the exception of one student who was 47 years old. The students were asked to participate in a study on social networking. All subjects that participated in the study were students at RIT; the surveys were given out at the beginning of class. The participants were ensured their participation was voluntary and their responses would not be published.

The questions asked within the present study were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with the exception of questions inquiring about time spent (hours) on social networking sites and the question asking to categorize the subject’s relationship with the identified person. The subjects were given a statement an asked to rate it one through 5, one being ‘strongly disagree’ and five being ‘strongly agree.’ The first section of the survey asks about the subject’s social networking usage patterns, inquiring about their overall use and feelings of Facebook. The next section of the survey focuses on the subject’s personal Facebook profile and their overall representation of themselves over Facebook. The next section of the survey asks the subject to identify and existing relationship that also exists on Facebook. The subject is asked to answer the remaining questions on the survey based on their relationship with the identified person. The name of the identified person is not required; however, subjects were asked to categorize their
relationship as married, girlfriend/boyfriend, romantic relationship, close friendship, just friends, or an acquaintance.

The survey then inquires about the Facebook patterns within the identified relationship. The subject is asked to rate the levels or perceived comfort and closeness within their relationship in addition to their overall relational satisfaction. This section in the survey aims to uncover the Facebook patterns and communication mediums most used in the relationship. Once these patterns are identified, the perceived comfort levels, closeness levels, and overall relationship satisfaction is rated. The communication patterns over Facebook are compared to the communication patterns within the identified relationship’s face-to-face communication experience. The last section of the survey asks about the number of other social networking sites the subject is connected to with the identified person, followed by demographic inquiries including age, sex, major and ethnicity (See appendix, figure 8).

The subjects were given, as much time as they needed to complete the survey, although none of them took longer than 20 minutes. The subjects were told their answers would be kept anonymous and confidential. The researcher’s contact information was given on the consent form given to all participants for any questions pertaining to the study (See appendix, figure 9).

Results

Addressing RQ1 pertaining to the relationship time spent on Facebook in relation to the perceived closeness and comfort levels first requires a confirmatory factor analysis for both closeness and comfort variables. The results of these tests indicated that both measures for perceived closeness and comfort levels within the present study were reliable. The Cronbach Alpha values for measuring closeness is .755 and the Cronbach Alpha values for measuring
comfort is .712. These values indicate that both these measures are reliable and can be used in evaluating the research questions within the present study.

A t-test was conducted examining time spent on Facebook (M=1.44, SD=.970) and perceived closeness within relationships (M=2.5382, SD=1.00299) showing that there is a significant difference between the two variables. This shows that there is a positive relationship between the time spent communicating on Facebook and perceived closeness within an interpersonal relationship. To answer the second part of RQ1, the same procedure was conducted to uncover the relationship between time spent communicating on Facebook and the perceived comfort within a relationship. A t-test was conducted examining time spent on Facebook (M=1.44, SD=.970) and perceived comfort within relationships (M=2.9480 SD=.89256) showing that there is a significant difference between the two variables (t(108)=10.505, p=.000). This shows that there is a positive relationship between the time spent communicating on Facebook and perceived comfort levels within relationships. The t-tests conducted conclude that RQ1 pertaining to the relationship of time spent communicating on Facebook indicates that the more time spent communicating over Facebook, the higher levels of perceived closeness and comfort levels (t(df)=16.209, p=.000).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Closeness - TIME</td>
<td>1.08025</td>
<td>1.06864</td>
<td>.10283</td>
<td>.87640 - 1.28410</td>
<td>10.505</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2 Comfort - TIME</td>
<td>1.49691</td>
<td>.95972</td>
<td>.09235</td>
<td>1.31384 - 1.67999</td>
<td>16.209</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ2 pertains to the type of relationship having an effect on the time spent communicating on Facebook. Spearman’s Rho test was used to gage the relationship between the
type of interpersonal relationship and the time spent communicating on Facebook. Subjects were asked to categorize their relationship that existed both on Facebook and offline. The categories were married, girlfriend/boyfriend, romantic relationship, close friendship, just friends, or an acquaintance. The Spearman’s Rho test concluded that the amount of time spent communicating on Facebook is not associated with the type of relationship. The significance level of .161 provided statistical evidence that the type of relationship does not determine the time spent communicating on Facebook (p>.05). This finding is relevant to the present study; however, these findings are not crucial to the outcome. This test simply provides evidence that despite the category of relationship, the time spent communicating over Facebook is not significantly related to the category in which the subject selected in classifying the identified relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Relationship to IP</th>
<th>Hours spent Comm. with IP via Fb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spearman’s rho</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both RQ3 and RQ4 deal with relational satisfaction. These questions are important in understanding if perceived levels of closeness and comfort affect relational satisfaction. The satisfaction variables were split into two categories. One measured the overall satisfaction within the identified relationship from the perspective of the subject while the other category focused on the relational satisfaction over Facebook. These categories were analyzed with a confirmatory factor analysis that determines the Cr the reliability of both. Both overall relational satisfaction (Cronbach’s Alpha = .807) and relational satisfaction over Facebook (Cronbach’s Alpha = .971)
are considered reliable categories.

To evaluate the results for RQ3, a t-test was conducted examining perceived closeness (M=2.5247 SD=.99761) and overall relational satisfaction (M=4.3796, SD=.82278). This shows there is a significant difference between perceived closeness levels and overall relational satisfaction within a relationship (t(108)=15.750, p=.000). Another t-test was conducted to examine perceived closeness (M=2.5247, SD=.99761) and relational satisfaction on Facebook (M=2.2917, SD=1.20576). This shows that there is a significant difference between perceived closeness within an interpersonal relationship and relational satisfaction on Facebook (t(108)=-2.177, p=.032). These findings conclude that there is a significant difference between perceived closeness and relational satisfaction, both overall relational satisfaction and relational satisfaction solely over Facebook.

### Paired Samples Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>4.3796</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.82278</td>
<td>.07917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>2.5247</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.99761</td>
<td>.09600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SatisfactionFB</td>
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<td>1.20576</td>
<td>.11602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>2.5247</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.99761</td>
<td>.09600</td>
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</table>

### Paired Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction - Closeness</td>
<td>1.83494</td>
<td>1.22392</td>
<td>.11777</td>
<td>1.62147 - 2.04841</td>
<td>15.750</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SatisfactionFB - Closeness</td>
<td>- .23302</td>
<td>1.11255</td>
<td>.10706</td>
<td>- .44525 - .02080</td>
<td>-2.177</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To evaluate the results for RQ4, a t-test was conducted examining perceived comfort (M=2.9414, SD=.89400) and overall relational satisfaction (M=4.3796, SD=.82278). This
showed that there is a significant difference between perceived comfort levels and overall relational satisfaction within a relationship ($t(108)=13.349$, $p=.000$). Another t-test was conducted to examine perceived comfort ($M=2.9414$, $SD=.89400$) and relational satisfaction on Facebook ($M=2.2917$, $SD=1.20576$). This shows that there is a significant difference between perceived comfort within an interpersonal relationship and relational satisfaction on Facebook ($t(108)=-7.457$, $p=.000$). These findings conclude that there is a significant difference between perceived comfort and relational satisfaction, both overall relational satisfaction and relational satisfaction solely over Facebook.

### Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine the relationship between amount of time an individual spends communicating on social networking sites, more specifically Facebook, and how this measure plays into the perceived closeness levels, comfort levels and relational satisfaction within an interpersonal relationship. Additionally, the relationship between the amount of time communicating on Facebook and the type of relationship was explored. Subjects self-reported answers pertaining to these research questions based on an identified relationship that existed both on Facebook and offline. This way, comparisons can be made between computer-mediated communication patterns and face-to-face communication patterns.

The results concluded that there is a positive relationship between the amount of time spent communicating over Facebook and perceived closeness and comfort levels. These results
suggest that Facebook can be considered an effective tool in relational maintenance both on and offline. The more time subjects spent communicating over Facebook with the identified person, the closer and more comfortable they felt towards them. This phenomenon is not unexpected. Previous research and the theoretical framework behind the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) suggests that increased communication, regardless of the medium, will reduce uncertainty within interpersonal relationship, increasing comfort, confidence and closeness within the relationship. However, the present study validates that Facebook specifically can be considered a valued tool in maintaining computer-mediated relationships; in addition, because the identified relationships also exist offline, these findings also suggest that Facebook can be considered a valued tool in face-to-face relational maintenance.

Type of relationship was also taken into consideration within the present study through attempting to uncover a relationship between the category of relationship and time spent communicating over Facebook. These findings uncovered a potential pattern in whether or not specific types of relationships relied on Facebook more in maintaining their relationship. We found that there is not a significant relationship between the type of relationship that the subject identified and the amount of time spent communicating over Facebook. These findings provide evidence that not one type of relationship, romantic or not romantic, rely on Facebook as a communication medium more than the other. The relationship categories included married, girlfriend/boyfriend, romantic relationship, close friendship, just friends, or an acquaintance. Previous research addressing modes of interaction within computer-mediated relationships suggest a potential correlation between computer-mediated communication patterns and the type of relationship. The present study revealed that there is not a significant correlation between the type of relationship identified and the time spent communicating over Facebook.
Measuring relational satisfaction of the identified relationship within the present study revealed that overall relational satisfaction and relational satisfaction over Facebook are positively related to perceived levels of comfort and closeness. The measure of relational satisfaction were split into two, measuring the overall satisfaction within the relationship both offline and online while the other measured the relational satisfaction of the relationship on Facebook. Relational satisfaction was split into two measures in an attempt to uncover a difference between the perceived comfort and closeness levels and the satisfaction of the computer-mediated relationship and the satisfaction of the overall relationship (computer-mediated and face-to-face interactions). Results to this RQ3 and RQ4 revealed that there was a significant relationship between both comfort and closeness levels and overall relational satisfaction. In addition, the results reveal that there is also a significant relationship between both comfort and closeness levels and relational satisfaction on Facebook.

The results for RQ3 and RQ4 reveal there is a positive relationship between perceived closeness and comfort levels and relational satisfaction both on and offline. These findings suggest that increased levels of closeness and comfort levels lead to a more satisfactory relationship. Previous findings within the present study offer evidence that the time spent communicating over Facebook is positively related to the perceived closeness and comfort levels; therefore, results for RQ3 and RQ4 suggest that because more time spent communicating on Facebook increased perceived closeness and comfort levels within an interpersonal relationship. Using Facebook as a main medium of communication and relational maintenance ultimately leads to a more satisfactory relationship overall.
Conclusion

The present study reveals that increasing the time spent communicating on Facebook will increase perceived closeness and comfort levels within an interpersonal relationship that exists on Facebook and offline. The amount of time spent communicating on Facebook is not dependent or consistent with the type of relationship, romantic or non-romantic. The overall relational satisfaction within the identified relationship has a positive relationship with perceived closeness and comfort levels; in addition, the relational satisfaction over Facebook is associated with perceived closeness and comfort levels within the identified relationship. Based on the findings of the present study, Facebook can be considered an effective communication tool for relational maintenance in relationships that exist both online and offline.

The study was hindered by several minor limitations. Subjects were responsible for categorizing their relationship with an identified person of their choice. Self-reporting these measures leaves room for error in the results. The demographic restrictions within the sample create a limitation within the study. Participants in the present study consisted of undergraduate students at RIT, many of whom are typically immersed in modern technology, ranging from 18 to 25 years of age. Thus, this sample is not representative of the entire population. Lastly, one participant with a reported age of 47 is considered an outlier.

To expand on this research in the future, it would be beneficial to broaden the demographic segments to include older generations. The present study included only students at the Rochester Institute of Technology. All participants within this study ranged in age from 18-25 with the exception of one participant who was 47 years of age. The Internet along with social networking has evolved past young generations. It would be relevant to examine the relational maintenance and communication patterns within computer-mediated relationships and compare
them among different generations. In addition, the possibility of including a study on Internet
dating would be relevant to this research. Internet dating has become popular within modern
society. Now, more than ever, there are more Internet dating websites, urging people to find their
spouse online. Internet dating focuses on meeting new people and forming deep connections over
the Internet, whereas the present study aims to explore the communication patterns over
Facebook in a relationship that exists both online and offline. Focusing on what behaviors play a
factor in increasing perceived closeness and comfort levels solely over the Internet could provide
new insight to expanding on this research and communication theory.
Figure 1: Frequency: Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>107</strong></td>
<td><strong>98.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Descriptive Statistics: Age and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.14</td>
<td>3.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Time spent communicating on Facebook vs. perceived closeness & time spent communicating on Facebook vs. perceived comfort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to IP * Hours spent Comm. with IP</th>
<th>less than an hour</th>
<th>1-2 hours per week</th>
<th>3-5 hours per week</th>
<th>6-10 hours per week</th>
<th>11-15 hours per week</th>
<th>21+ hours per week</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This person is my bf/gf.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a romantic relationship.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a close relationship.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are just friends.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider this person an acquaintance.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WILL YOU BE MY FACEBOOK FRIEND

Figure 5: Dot plot: Time spent communicating on Facebook vs. Closeness

Figure 6: Dot plot: Time spent communicating on Facebook vs. Closeness
Figure 7: Comfort vs. Relational Satisfaction (Overall and Facebook)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SatisfactionF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONSENT FORM

Will you be my Facebook Friend? Examining the new definition of “Friend” in Modern Society

You have been invited to join a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship of time an individual spends on social networking sites. Exploring the perceived closeness and comfort levels of computer-mediated relationships is a main goal of the present study. In addition to this, the application of the Uncertainty Reductions Theory (URT) will also be taken under consideration. You will be asked a series of questions pertaining to your personal social networking habits as well as a selected relationship that exists online.

The survey will take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The survey has little to no risk. There is a slight possibility of physiological stress when bringing up a personal relationship; however, the risk of completing this survey is no more risk than one endures on a daily basis.

By signing this form, you understand that you may withdraw from the data collection process and stop at any time.

All survey responses will remain anonymous and confidential. Your name will not be used in published data. The researcher will keep the data stored on a password locked computer. All personal information and answers will be kept entirely confidential.

You understand that you have agreed to participate in this study of your own free will. Please contact Jennifer Wilkens (jlw6411@rit.edu) with any pertinent questions about the research.
**Figure 9: Survey**

**Please rate the following statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have an account with a social networking site.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a Facebook account.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use my Facebook account weekly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use my Facebook account daily.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use my Facebook account more than once a day.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use Facebook on my mobile device.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have a Facebook application on my Smartphone (if applicable).

I use my Facebook account to keep in contact with family and friends.

I would consider myself an active Facebook account user.

I spend ________ on Facebook a day

a. Less than an hour
b. More than an hour
c. 2-3 hours a day
d. 3-5 hours a day
e. 5+ hours a day

**Please rate the following statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I feel my Facebook profile is a good representation of myself.

My Facebook profile could be deceptive to others.

I would be open to meeting new people on Facebook.
I have formed a new relationship from Facebook.  

I use Facebook solely for maintaining my already existing relationships.  

I value the relationships I form on Facebook.  

I would consider Facebook a place to make new friends.  

I feel more confident on talking to a person on Facebook then I do talking face-to-face.  

I feel comfortable with people I meet on Facebook.  

I feel close the friends I make on Facebook.  

Please identify one person you are friends with one Facebook:  

What is your relationship with this person?  

a.) We are married.  

b.) This person is my girlfriend or boyfriend.  

c.) We have a romantic relationship.
d.) We have a close friendship.

e.) We are just friends.

f.) I would consider this person an acquaintance.

*The following questions pertain to the relationship identified in the previous question.*

**Please rate the following statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would consider this person to be an avid Facebook user.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would find it odd if this person did not have a Facebook account.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel this person’s Facebook profile is a good representation of their overall character.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use Facebook to keep in contact with each other.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which features of Facebook do you use to keep in contact with this person? **Circle all the apply**

- Wall post
- Commenting (updates, posts, photos)
Tags (posts, photos, status updates)

Facebook chat

Messaging

Video chat

Other: ____________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Our relationship would not be the same without Facebook.  

1 2 3 4 5

I look at this person’s Facebook profile every time I go on Facebook.  

1 2 3 4 5

I hope this person views my Facebook profile page every day.  

1 2 3 4 5

Facebook is vital to the maintenance of this relationship.  

1 2 3 4 5

I act differently with this person on Facebook then when we are together in person.  

1 2 3 4 5
I am more confident towards this person when we communicate on Facebook compared to face-to-face communication.

I feel close to this person when we communicate over Facebook.

I feel close to this person after we communicate on Facebook.

I need to communicate with this person daily to feel close to them.

Facebook helps me feel close to this person when we are not together.

I consider Facebook to be a main medium of communication within this relationship.

I feel closer to this person when we are communicating face-to-face than communicating on
Facebook.

I feel comfortable with this person when we communicate over Facebook.

My comfort level increases with this person after we communicate on Facebook.

I feel more comfortable to this person when we are communicating face-to-face than communicating on Facebook.

I feel closer to this person the more we communicate.

I feel more comfortable with this person the more we communicate.

By spending more time communicating with this person over Facebook, I feel closer to this person.

By spending more time communicating with this person over Facebook, I feel more comfortable with this person.
I feel the time I spend on Facebook communicating with this person is dependent on the success of our relationship.

I am satisfied with our relationship overall.

I feel this person is satisfied with our relationship.

I feel Facebook has contributed to my overall satisfaction of our relationship.

I feel Facebook has contributed to this person’s overall satisfaction of our relationship.

Facebook helps to easy any doubts I have in our relationship.

If this person did not have a Facebook, I would not value our relationship as much as I do now.

I spend ________ hours talking to this person on Facebook per week:
a. Less than an hour
b. 1-2 hours per week
c. 3-5 hours per week
d. 6-10 hours per week
e. 11-15 hours per week
f. 16-20 hours per week
g. 21+ hours per week

I am connected to this person on the following social networking websites: Circle all that apply

Twitter
LinkedIn
MySpace
Google+
WordPress
Tumblr
Pintrest
Skout
AOL Instant Messenger
MSN Messenger

Other: ___________________

Answer the following demographic questions to the best of your ability:

I am _____ years old
I am a: Female / Male

My major is ________________________________

Please circle the choice that best describes you:

My ethnicity is:

a. Caucasian  
b. African American  
c. Asian  
d. Hispanic  
e. Middle Eastern  
f. Pacific Islander  
g. Other ________________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers are completely confidential and will not be published. Please feel free to contact the researcher for any questions pertaining to the research study.
Works Cited


