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Self-disclosure In Enacting Friendship in Facebook

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Abstract

People have always disclosed information about themselves to enact virtual friendship in social networking sites particularly in Facebook. The types of messages disclosed about themselves posted in Facebook wall have shown the initiative of Facebook users to share the happenings in their life with their Facebook friends. The case study aims to examine the ways in which Facebook users reveal themselves to others through their Facebook wall posts, in order to better understand self-disclosure as a resource for enacting friendship in Facebook. Facebook posted messages from the participants' Facebook profiles were collected in one year's time, then the messages were analysed and categorised into various types of self-disclosure. Content analysis was used to collect data. The majority of the posted messages are self story-telling through state and action statements and affective statement. The Facebook users act as story-tellers were noted as they story about their personal experience as a form of self-disclosure to enact friendship. The implications in term of self-disclosure and friendship are discussed.

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Keywords: Self-disclosure; friendship; Facebook.

1. Introduction

What is self-disclosure? Self-disclosure is a main key for people in establishing and developing relationships in online settings in the same way as it is in offline contexts (Dindia, 2000). Researches on self-disclosure focus more on revealing highly delicate information such as personal fears, deep religious faiths, and potentially disgraceful information. However, self-disclosure also attends to less serious information (e.g., "I love home-made pizza") (Greene, Derlega and Mathews, 2006). Self-disclosure of "superficial" information or everyday activities plays a significant role in starting and maintaining a relationship. Continuous disclose about personal information bring consequences to relationship development and maintenance. This is because self-disclosure is an important component

of how researchers view friendship (West, Lewis and Currie, 2009) and romantic love (Gibbs, Ellison and Lai, 2011).

The online spaces provide new platform for users to enact self-presentation that may also be different from face to face settings. Previous studies have examined self- presentation online (McKenna, 2002) and internet dating site (Gibbs, 2006). The popularity of Facebook has attracted scholars to pay attention to self-presentation issue on this social network sites. Kim (2011) for example, examined the effects of self-presentation on subjective well-being on Facebook as paths to happiness. They found out that an honest self-presentation strategy may increase happiness that originated from social support provided by Facebook friends. However, Mehdizadeh (2010) studied the influence of narcissism and self-esteem to self-presentation on Facebook. The study revealed that individuals with higher narcissism but lower self-esteem were associated to greater online activity and self-promotional content. Online users perform different self-presentation strategies in different online settings.

1.1. Definition of self-disclosure

The conventional definition of self-disclosure is “verbal” expressions of oneself, but not included visual expressions, such as how people dress-up themselves (Kim and Dindia, 2011). However, the original definition of self-disclosure is not sufficient for Social-Networking Sites (SNSs) communication as SNSs support nonverbal communication. People can present their preferred physical appearances online and share some informations which they intended to share online. People do not have many opportunities to change their physical appearance on face-to-face settings. Unlike offline context, people can manipulate their appearance through touch up, make up or dressing in online settings. The degree of authenticity of a person in online context can be less compared to offline setting.

The degree of authenticity of online users somehow is very much associated to disclosure of themselves. Qian and Scott (2007) examined the relationship between anonymity (both visual and discursive) and self-disclosure in blog. The findings show that discursive anonymity has higher amount of self-disclosure than visual anonymity as the users target certain audiences. These also depend on how the target audience make the bloggers feel how much personal identification information they need to provide on their blog. In contrast, Facebook provide a wider space of self-disclosure to indicate higher degree of authenticity of the online users. Facebook users can present themselves in either verbal or visual form, or both. Kim and Dindia (2008) examine a content analysis of Americans’ self-disclosure in MySpace with Koreans’ self-disclosure in Cy-world, which is the most popular social-networking site in Korea. They found that Americans who use MySpace tend to disclose more about themselves and used more self-references in About Me column compared to the Koreans users in Cy-world. However, in term of type of disclosure, the Koreans users prefer to use photos and blog entries compared to Americans MySpace users. The real-self of users in online setting was very much depends on the online items they choose to disclose themselves.

Facebook users share information about themselves or perform self-disclosure so that their friends are able to know more about who they really are. Douglas and Mcgarty (2002) commented that a person disclosed clues about their offline identity when they were sharing information about themselves and building connections with others. More than seventy-six percent of SNSs users declared that other persons would be able to figure out who they really are based on the information they revealed online (Lenhart, 2009) (adapted from Bateman, Pike and Butler, 2010). In fact, Facebook tends to be a non-anonymous SNS setting which reveal the personal details of a user such as name, gender, status, affiliation, job, hobbies and opinions in the “About Me’ column. Users can also post their activities about themselves on the wall.

These studies have examined dyadic conversation between strangers in a laboratory setting, focusing on anonymous or at best pseudonymous text-based communication. Yet little is known about self-disclosure strategies to enact friendship among Malaysian youths in social-networking sites, especially Facebook. In this context, this study examined the phenomenon of self-disclosure in enacting friendship among Malaysian youths in social-networking site, Facebook. This study tried to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the frequency of self-disclosure strategies in Facebook posted messages?

RQ2: What are the Malaysian youths’ strategies of self-disclosing in enacting friendship?

This study used two theories, Self-presentation theory by Goffman (1959) and Social Network Theory by Milroy (1987). Goffman (1959) brought forth the self-presentation theory. The theory explains self-presentation is the way people present themselves to others. In a process of communication, there is an intention to change or adjust the appearance, manner and setting of themselves to control the impression that other people might have toward them. Similarly, self-disclosure in Facebook is more or less the same with self-presentation as people reveals the information about themselves to another person according to their will, which they can control the impression they want other people perceive toward them.

On the other hand, social network can be explained as a structure which involves direct interaction of people or indirect interaction mediated by other people. The interaction and involvement of people in this social network are based on the mutual engagement of sharing a collection of norms and patterns of behaviour. The structure of network will be distinguished by the type of connections in different communication medium (Milroy, 1987). The structure of social network consists of participants and relationships. The social network tie is constructed when the ties of various strengths from the centre individual is linked directly with other people.

2. Methodology

This case study tried to describe self-disclosure phenomenon among Malaysian youths who are Facebook users. This study applied case study design as the study can be conducted within naturalistic research methodologies. The research was designed as a holistic single case design, which enable a single unit to be analysed holistically to investigate all the changes and the process (Creswell, 2007). Table 1 presents the research questions, data collection tools and data analysis methodology.

Table 1. Research questions, data collection tools and data analysis methodology

Research questions	Data collection tools	Data analysis methodology
What are the frequency of self-disclosure strategies in Facebook posted messages?	Posted messages of participants	Frequencies analysis
What are the Malaysian youths' strategies of self-disclosing in enacting friendship?	Posted messages of participants	Content analysis

2.1 Participants

This study used a convenience sample of friends of the researcher in her Facebook friends list. Five female participants were working adults whom volunteered to participate in this study with ages ranged from 25 to 45 years old. The participants were selected based on the following characteristics: (a) They are active Facebook members for more than 2 years. (b) The numbers of friends in Facebook exceed one hundred friends. (c) They log in to Facebook more than three times per week. (d) They have posted more than five status messages within a week. (d) Their status messages have received several comments.

2.2 Data collection and data analysis

A semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used as data collection tools. For the purpose of keeping their identities confidential, pseudonyms were created for the participants. Researcher used qualitative coding technique to analyse all collected qualitative, which is online textual messages. The data were read many times to identify an initial set of descriptive data categories (Denzin, 1989; Silverman, 2001). Next, emergent patterns were identified and sorted based on different categories. Researcher examined their findings after completing data coding. Data after coding were transcribed onto a computer and evaluated using content analysis techniques. Data coding were conducted based on the different types of self-disclosure which reported by Qian and Scott (2007). The types of self-disclosure reported are disclosing personal information, disclosing feeling and emotion, and disclosing thought.

3. Findings

The findings are explained in detail below according to the research questions.

RQ1: What are the frequency of self-disclosure strategies in Facebook posted messages?

Types of self-disclosure	Frequency (%)
Disclosing personal information	135(45.45%)
Disclosing feeling and emotion	66 (22.22%)
Disclosing personal opinions and thoughts	14 (4.7%)
Disclosing self-motivation	5(1.7%)
Personality tests	5(1.7%)

RQ2: What are the types of self-disclosure in enacting friendship among Facebook users?

The messages posted in Facebook consist of two statements, which are state and action statements, and affective statement. From the findings, Facebook users used more state and action statements compared to affective statement. In state and action statements, disclosing personal information strategy has the highest frequency compared to other strategies. Facebook users described the matters they have done and the people they have interacted in their life. One of the Facebook users posted messages about one of her family members especially her beloved youngest daughter, named Hannah. The posted messages are '*Hannah & d mannequin...*', '*I can fly!*', '*Little Hannah cried all day!*' and '*Homework time with mama*'. These posted messages are mostly described her youngest daughter have indicated the bond of a mother and her daughter. The Facebook user perform her identity as a mother and also a friend to her daughter revealed intimacy in a relationship. Secondly, Facebook users also revealed her working condition. As working is a part of real life, the posted messages have revealed the attitude of Facebook users toward her work. The Facebook user continue her work even though it was raining, '*working in the rain.....*'. The posted message '*gotta get them done.....*' portrayed her determination to get her work done. Besides, Facebook users also disclosed activities they done such as traveling such as '*back to serdang....*', '*mothers' day in bahau.....*' and '*back to penang servicing princess felicia....*'. Facebook users also posted her shopping and outing activities such as '*enjoying myself in s'ban...food, new clothes, bag, n titbits of coz....*' and '*Had a great movie ,marathon.. 2 great movies in one night...Water for elephant n Thor..*'. Gathering with people, '*i had a BLAST dinner lazy nite n an AWESOME gathering with students*'. Moreover, Facebook users tend to post their current state on Facebook. They shared with friends the activities they were doing at that moment and hopefully their post will be viewed by their Facebook friends. The posted messages revealed the Facebook users' current state are '*is pondering over the sign coding schemes*', '*Now going 2 keningau*', '*anticipating brasil-portugal match tonite!*', '*office stuff are making my head bigger and bigger*' and '*is having fun time in ump's library....*'. In sum, Facebook users described themselves, happenings and people around them through state and action statements.

On the other hand, Facebook users described their life through affective statement. In affective statement, the strategy of disclosing feeling and emotion come after disclosing personal information. Facebook users expressed their feeling in posted messages. The posted messages contains affective words such as 'like', 'want', 'love', 'hate', 'miss'. These can be found in the examples like '*i hate the smell of hospital*', '*i love dancing to MJ's smooth criminal! Ow!*', '*But i like yesterday's match btwn argentina n korea.*', '*is very satisfied with brazil's performance in group stage.*', '*I'm so lovin' travelli' alone.*', '*i miss my social life back in kuching.. I miss swimming@stampark with my fren, i miss kook mi, i miss d busy uptown kuching.. I miss my bed n burke the cat..*'. The Facebook users were expressed either their positive or negative feeling toward things they encountered in life.

Facebook is a platform for Facebook users express their thought or personal opinion freely. Facebook users encountered experience they think should be spoken and shared with their friends in Facebook, for example '*Omg I saw a handsome doctor at d hospital juz now. He looked cool with a drink in his hand.@_@*'. The Facebook user personally thought the doctor she saw was good-looking. The other two posted messages were interrogative sentences such as '*Will Italy succeed or succumb to*

failure like france?’ and *‘Will Spain live up 2 my expectation of will they be a let down?’*. Facebook users expressed their uncertain thought about the situation thus their thought were expressed through interrogative sentences. From the examples above, the messages posted by the Facebook users was aimed to update their friends about happenings occurred in their life.

On the other hand, Facebook users disclosed their high encouragement towards their friends. This can be seen as Facebook users encouraged their friends and themselves not to give up in the process of completing the task. They persuade themselves and think in a more positive way for instance *‘Maybe i can shed sum weight fast this way. Think positive. There must be a reason why i’m sent here’*. Besides, Facebook users also posted the first plural pronoun “we” to indicate Facebook users and their friends were in the same boat. Thus, encouragement shown toward their friends indicated they have more intimacy bond in their friendship. The first plural pronoun ‘we’ has been used repeatedly in these posted messages, *‘v r not alone...v fight together’* and *‘v gotta keep holding on... no matter is a project or a thesis’*.

Last but not least, Facebook users posted the result of personality tests from other websites, such as *‘Super Birthday Code’* and *‘Which Historical Character Are You?’* Facebook users wanted to know more about themselves thus they took the personality tests which related to their interest.

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the posted messages in Facebook disclosed users’ physical and mental activities. Their self-disclosure were summarised as how they presented part of happenings in their offline life to cyberspace. The messages posted by users showed that most of the posted messages fall into personal disclosure category as Facebook users disclosed their everyday activities, working life, family members, location and social activities (e.g., gathering, festival celebration, wedding ceremony and holiday vacation). Furthermore, Facebook users also disclosed their feeling and thoughts toward some occurrence in their Facebook profile. As an implication, Facebook users revealed part of themselves such as inner-self, thoughts, interaction with other persons and share their life on cyberspace. High disclosure of personal information about daily life influence relationship development and maintenance (Greene, Derlega and Mathews, 2006). This is because self-disclosure facilitates the formation and development of interpersonal relationships (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Self-disclosure is the main way how Facebook users perform friendship to maintain offline relationship and at the same time keep their information “up-to-date” among their Facebook friends.

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