An Exploration Study of Self-disclosure Communicative Strategies to Enact Friendship in Facebook Wall Posts

Lai Yuh Ying[1]*, Yap Ngee Thai[2], Mohd Faiz Sathivellu[3]

[1]Academy of Language Studies, University Teknologi MARA Malacca, Malaysia, [2]Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, University Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia, [3]Al-Zahra University College, Muscat, Sultanese of Oman. *Email: yuhying@melaka.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Ever since the Facebook established, friending has become an easy thing as people take a simple click to bridge a connection. To connect with their friends, Facebook respondents disclosed information about themselves by posting messages on Facebook wall posts. The contents of wall post messages are more to disclose Facebook respondents' aspects of life. The initiative of Facebook respondents to share the happenings in their life with their Facebook friends is to maintain established virtual relationship as connecting friends through Facebook is free of charge and easy to reach. Thus, this study aims to explore the types of communicative strategies and the ways these communicative strategies used to maintain friendship online. This study can provide a better understand of self-disclosure as a behaviour category for enacting friendship in Facebook. Facebook posted messages from the participants' Facebook profiles were collected in one year time. This is qualitative case study. Content analysis was used to analyse posted messages. The posted messages were then categorised into types of communicative strategies in self-disclosure. 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 describe about their personal details and experience as a form of self-disclosure to increase the feeling of connecting with their Facebook friends.

Keywords: Self-disclosure, Communicative Strategies, Friendship, Facebook
JEL Classifications: L86, I31

1. INTRODUCTION

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 et al., 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 et al., 2009) and romantic love (Gibbs et al., 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 et al., 2002) and internet dating site (Gibbs et al., 2006). The popularity of Facebook has attracted scholars to pay attention to self-presentation issue on this social network sites. Kim and Lee. (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.

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, 2008). However, the original definition of self-disclosure is not sufficient for social-neworking 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.

Self-disclosure bonds friendship among site users. Jia et al. (2010) suggested that shared interests or values portrayed by other users' self-disclosed personal information enable them connect to one another and expand users' social network in social networking sites. Lampe at al. (2007) found that Facebook users disclose variety of their profile information tend to have more friends. Draper et al. (2008) commented that self-disclosure influences friendship in the content sense as it signified trust. Lo and Riemenschneider (2010) also supported that SNSs is to form networking among site users and to accelerate the formation of these network, site users must be willing to disclose certain extend of information about themselves in order their friends can identify and connect with them. Utz (2015) founds that positive and entertaining self-disclosures increased the feeling of connection between social-networking sites users and their friends, particularly when reading friends' updates.

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, affilliation, job, hobbies and opinions in the "about me" column. Users can also post their activities about themselves on the wall.

Yet little is known about communicative strategies that encourage Facebook users self-disclosed in enacting friendship among Malaysian youths in social-networking site, Facebook. This study aims to explore the communicative strategies of self-disclosure and how the communicative strategies used in Facebook. This study drawn upon 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.

This study aim to explore the phenomenon of self-disclosure in enacting friendship among Malaysian youths in Facebook wall posts. Firstly, this study is focus on types of self-disclosure communicative strategies used to enact friendship in Facebook wall post. Secondly, this study will explore how these self-disclosure communicative strategies were used to enact friendship online.

2. METHODS

This study applied qualitative case study method. Case study was designed to explore the self-disclosure phenomenon among Malaysian youths who are Facebook users. Creswell (2009) argued case study method is able to investigate all the changes

and process, the pattern of changes then can be analysed holistically to gain comprehension of the phenomenon. This research was conducted under natural setting where the data were not collected in a controlled experimental setting. In the natural setting, participants were connected to Facebook and posted status messages on Facebook post wall as usual. The posted messages of every Facebook users were the sample data for this study. The respondents of this study were friends of the researcher in her Facebook friends list. Researcher choose convenience sample method because ha can do observation freely and this method also create the feeling of not being observed to the respondents. The respondents can still cat normally under virtual observation unlike controlled experimental setting. Respondents in certain sense can act freely and not bounded to controlled experimental setting.

In this study, five female respondents were working adults whom volunteered to participate in this study with ages ranged from 25 to 45 years old. The respondents were selected based on the following criteria such as firstly, the respondents must be an active Facebook members for more than 2 years; secondly, the numbers of friends in Facebook exceed one hundred friends; thirdly, the respondents log in to Facebook more than three times per week; fourth, the respondents have posted more than five status messages within a week; lastly, the status messages of the respondents have received several comments.

2.1. Procedure
In this study, posted messages of respondents were collected for data analysis after obtained agreement from respondents. Researcher was logged in Facebook and collected posted messages of participants. However, researcher did not take part in any messages posting. Pseudonyms were created for the respondents to keep their identities confidential. There are 577 online posted messages collected from the respondents. To identify different communicative functions, qualitative coding technique was used to analyse online textual messages. The data were read repeatedly to identify emergent patterns in different categories (Denzin, 1989; Silverman, 2001). Emergent patterns were then sorted in different types of self-disclosure communicative strategies which reported by Qian and Scott (2007). The types of self-disclosure communicative strategies in Qian and Scott (2007) study are disclosing personal information, disclosing feeling and emotion, and disclosing thought. The number of posted messages were reported in frequencies. To explore different types of self-disclosure communicative strategies, this study adopted content analysis to analyse the posted messages collected in line with the coding scheme adapted from Qian and Scott's coding scheme.

3. FINDINGS

This section will address the findings of this study which consist of two aspects, the types of self-disclosure communicative strategies and how the self-disclosure communicative strategies were wrote to enact friendship online.

In this study, self-disclosure has been identified as behaviour category in enacting friendship. There are six communicative strategies have been identified throughout this study. The frequency

of the communicative strategies is presented as (Chart 1). The types of self-disclosure communicative strategies are disclosing personal information (135 posted messages), disclosing feeling and emotion (66 posted messages), disclosing personal thought (14 posted messages), disclosing self-motivation (5 posted messages), personality test (5 posted messages), and disclosing photos and messages (67 posted messages).

3.1. Self-disclosure Communicative Strategies
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.

3.1.1. Disclosing personal information
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 as below:
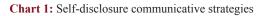
"*Hannah and d mannequin…*"
"*I can fly!*"
"*Little Hannah cried all day!*"
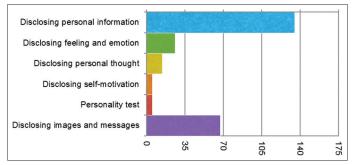"*Homework time with mama...*"

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.

These posted messages are mostly described her youngest daughter have indicated the bond of a mother and a daughter. The Facebook user perform her identity as a mother and also a friend to her daughter revealed intimacy in a parental relationship. Secondly, respondents also revealed her working condition. As working real life, the posted messages revealed the attitude of Facebook users toward her work.

"*Working in the rain…*"
"*Gotta get them done…*"

The Facebook user continue her work even though it was raining, "working in the rain….". The posted message "gotta get them

Chart 1: Self-disclosure communicative strategies

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….*"
"*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….*"
"*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 stu*"

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*"
"*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 as below;

"*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 wit 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 shred with their friends in Facebook and the examples are shown as below;

"*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?*"
"*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.

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 firs plural pronoun 'we' has been used repeatedly in these posted messages, as below:

"*V r not alone…v fight together*"
"*V gotta keep holding on… no matter is a project or a thesis.*"

On the other hand, facebook respondents posted the result of personality tests from other websites, such as:

"*Super Birthday Code*"
"*Which Historical Character Are You?.*"

Facebook users wanted to know more about themselves thus they took the personality tests which related to their interest.

Last but not least, Facebook respondents also uploaded pictures and wrote description of the pictures. The examples are as below:

UPM.Uni PLAY Mates.
Wak/Camelia's wedding 121211& 2011 Christmas
Birthday celebration 2012
A trip to be remembered- Penang Heritage Trip 27/8- 3/9/2011.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, the wall post messages in Facebook disclosed users' physical and mental activities. Their self-disclosure were summarised as how they presented part of 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 daily activities, working life, family members, and social activities (e.g., gathering, festival celebration, wedding ceremony and holiday vacation). Besides, facebook respondents also revealed their feeling and thoughts of some occurrence in their facebook status message. 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 et al., 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 foster friendship to maintain offline relationship and at the same time keep their information "up-to-date" among their Facebook friends. Self-disclosure is essential to the success of fostering friendship in social-networking sites.

REFERENCES

Creswell, J.W. (2009), Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches. 3rd ed. London: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Denzin, N.K. (1989), The Research Act. 3rd ed. Eagle wood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Dindia, K. (2000), Self-disclosure, identity and relationship development: A dialectical perspective. In: Dindia, K., Duck, S., editors. Communication and Personal Relationship. New York: Chichester. p147-162.

Douglas, K.M., Mc Garty, C. (2002), Internet identifiability on communication behavior. Group Dynamic: Theory, Research and Practice, 6(1), 17-26.

Draper, M., Pittard, R., Sterling, M. (2008), Self-Disclosure and Friendship Closeness. Hanover, IN: Hanover College.

Gibbs, J.L., Ellison, N.B., Heino, R.D. (2006), Self-presentation in online personals: The role of anticipated future interaction, self-disclosure, and perceived success in Internet dating. Communication Research, 33(2), 152-177.

Gibbs, J.L., Ellison, N.B., Lai, C.H. (2011), First comes love, then comes google: An investigation off uncertainty reduction strategies and self-disclosure in online dating. Communication Research, 38(1), 70-100.

Goffman, E. (1959), The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. US: Anchor Books.

Greene, K., Derlega, V.J., Mathews, A. (2006), Self-disclosure in personal relationships. In: Vargelisti, A.L., Perlman, D., editors. The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Jia, Y., Zhao, Y., Lin, Y. (2010), Effects of system characteristics on users self-disclosure in social networking sites. The Seventh International Conference on Information Technology. Las Vegas, Nevada: New Generations IEEE Computer Society.

Kim, J., Dindia, K. (2008), Gender, culture, and self-disclosure in cyberspace: A study of Korean and American social network websites. Paper Presented at the The Annual Conference of the International Communication Association.

Kim, J., Lee, J.E.R. (2011), The Facebook paths to hapiness: Effects of the number of Facebook friends and self-presentation on subjective well-being. Cyber Psychology, Behavior and Social Networking, 14(6), 359-364.

Lampe, C., Ellison, N.B., Steinfeld, C.A. (2007), Familiar Face (book): Profile elements as signals in an online social network. Conference on Human Factor in Computing Systems. New York, NY.

Lenhart, A. (2009), Adults and social network websites. Pew Internet and American Life Project. January 14, 2009.

Laurenceau, J.P., Feldman Barrett, L., Pietromonaco, P.R. (1998), Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74, 1238-1251.

Lo, J., Riemenschneide r, C. (2010), An Examination of Privacy Concernsand Trust Entities in Determining Willingness to Disclose Personal Information on A Social Networking Site. Lima, Peru: AMCIS.

McKenna, K.Y.A., Green, A.S., Gleason, M.E.J. (2002), Relationship formation on the internet: What's the big attraction? Journal of Social Issues, 58(1), 9-31.

Mehdizadeh, S. (2010), Self-presentation 2.0: Nacissism and self-esteem on Facebook. Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking, 13(4), 357-364.

Milroy, L. (1987), Language and Social Network. New York: Wiley Publisher.

Qian, H., Scott, C.R. (2007), Anomymity and self-disclosure on weblogs. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12(4), Article, 14.

Silverman, D. (2001), Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction. 2nd ed. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.

Utz, S. (2015), The function of self-disclosure on social-network sites: Not only intimate, but also positive and entertaining self-disclosures increase the feeling of connection. Computers in Human Behaviour, 45, 1-10.

West, A., Lewis, J., Currie, P. (2009), Students' Facebook 'friends': Public and private spheres. Journal of Youth Studies, 12(6), 615-627.