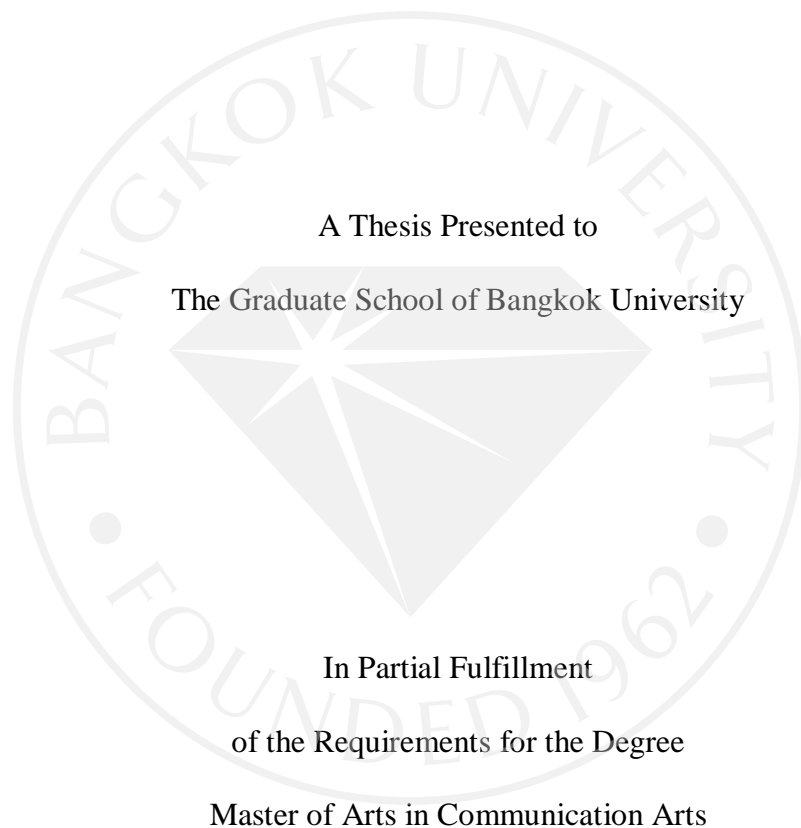


FACEBOOK AS RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE PLATFORM AND USERS'
PERCEIVED TIE STRENGTH: COMPARISON BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP TYPES



FACEBOOK AS RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE PLATFORM AND USERS'
PERCEIVED TIE STRENGTH: COMPARISON BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP TYPES



A Thesis Presented to
The Graduate School of Bangkok University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Communication Arts

by
Michael D. Wykoff

2019



©2019

Michael D. Wykoff

All Rights Reserved

This thesis has been approved by
the Graduate School
Bangkok University

Title : Facebook as Relationship Maintenance Platform and Users' Perceived Tie
Strength: Comparison between Friendship Types

Author : Michael Wykoff

Thesis Committee :

Thesis Advisor

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Ratanasuda Punnahitanond)

Thesis Co-advisor

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Chalisa Magpanthong)

Graduate School Representative

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Patama Satawedin)

External Representative

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Duangkamol Chartprasert)

(Suchada Chareanpunsirikul, D.B.A.)

Dean of the Graduate School

July 25, 2019

Wykoff, M. D. M.A. (Communication Arts), July 2019, Graduate School, Bangkok University.

Facebook as Relationship Maintenance Platform and Users' Perceived Tie Strength: Comparison between Friendship Types (176 pp.)

Advisor of thesis: Asst. Prof. Ratanasuda Punnahitanond, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to explore the role that Facebook plays in users' relationship maintenance strategies for their different types of friends and investigated if Facebook is a reliable communication channel to achieve high levels of perceived tie strength between relationship partners. The study examined how Facebook is used as a friendship maintenance platform with different friendship types, and whether that Facebook interaction is associated with users' perceived tie strength. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 purposively selected informants and the interview transcriptions were analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser, 1965).

The findings indicated that informants primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with acquaintances, and consider it a useful platform to maintain weak ties. Nearly all informants reported that the primary reason they use Facebook is to keep in touch and stay connected to friends who do not live near them, and all said that Facebook was an important part of their relationship maintenance strategies. The informants stated that they used more than one communication channel to maintain close friendships, that Facebook was not their primary method of communication

with their closest friends, and that they used a variety of messaging services to stay connected to their closest friends. This research does not offer any proof that increased Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies will lead to greater tie strength without other concomitant relationship maintenance strategies, nor does it offer support to the idea that a high level of Facebook interaction can move a friend along the relationship pathway toward greater tie strength.

Keywords: Facebook Interaction, Relationship Maintenance Strategies, Friendship Types, Perceived Tie Strength

Approved: _____

Signature of Advisor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research would have been impossible without the encouragement, support, and inestimable leadership of my primary advisor, Dr. Ratanasuda Punnahitanond; the astute comments and suggestions for improvement from my secondary advisor, Dr. Chalisa Magpanthong; and Dr. Hataitip Jirathun, who taught my very first graduate class at Bangkok University and set me on the course to success not only with this paper, but also in life, thanks to her expertise in intercultural communication.

Thanks to my interview subjects without whose contributions this research would not have been possible; to my friends and family who were understanding and patient over the past several years of intense study and research, especially Mr. Anthony C. Peregrin, who has been a constant in my life since time immemorial; and lastly, I could not have brought any of this over the finish line without the love and unconditional support of Soonthornwat Thanawatnanthachot.

Michael D. Wykoff

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Rationale and Problem Statement.....	1
1.2 Purpose of the Study.....	7
1.3 Scope of the Study.....	7
1.4 Research Questions.....	8
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	9
1.6 Definition of Terms.....	10
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
2.1 Facebook Interaction.....	13
2.1.1 Conceptual Definition of Facebook Interaction.....	13
2.1.2 Past Studies Examining Online Communication.....	14
2.2 Friendship Types.....	20
2.2.1 Conceptual Definition of Friendship Types.....	20
2.2.2 Past Studies Examining Friendship Types.....	21
2.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies.....	24

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	Page
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW (Continued)	
2.3.1 Conceptual Definition of Relationship Maintenance Strategies.....	25
2.3.2 Characteristics of Relationship Maintenance Strategies.....	26
2.3.3 Aspects of Relationship Maintenance Strategies.....	27
2.4 Perceived Tie Strength.....	29
2.4.1 Conceptual Definition of Tie Strength.....	30
2.4.2 Past Studies Examining Tie Strength and Closeness.....	31
2.5 Related Theories.....	36
2.5.1 Social Information Processing Theory.....	36
2.5.2 Social Penetration Theory.....	38
2.5.3 Relational Dialectics Theory.....	39
2.6 Theoretical Framework.....	41
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	45
3.1 Research Design.....	45
3.2 Population and Sample Selection.....	48
3.3 Research Instrument.....	51
3.3.1 Thematic Questions.....	52
3.3.1.1 Facebook Interaction.....	53
3.3.1.2 Friendship Types.....	54

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	Page
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY (Continued)	
3.3.1.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies.....	55
3.3.1.4 Perceived Tie Strength.....	55
3.4 Validity.....	56
3.5 Reliability.....	57
3.6 Data Collection Procedure.....	58
3.7 Data Coding Scheme.....	58
3.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation.....	62
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	65
4.1 Results of Data Analysis.....	66
4.1.1 Emerging Themes on Facebook Usage (FBU).....	66
4.1.2 Emerging Themes on Facebook Interaction (FBI).....	72
4.1.3 Emerging Themes on Friendship Types (FTY).....	83
4.1.4 Emerging Themes on Relationship Maintenance Strategies (RMS).....	89
4.1.5 Emerging Themes on Perceived Tie Strength (PTS).....	98
4.1.6 Emerging Themes on Type of Facebook User (TFU).....	104
4.2 Findings on Research Question # 1.....	110
4.3 Findings on Research Question # 2.....	114

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	Page
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	118
5.1 Summary of Findings.....	119
5.1.1 Facebook Interaction.....	123
5.1.2 Friendship Types.....	124
5.1.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies.....	125
5.1.4 Perceived Tie Strength.....	127
5.2 Discussion of Findings.....	128
5.2.1 Findings in Relation to Previous Research.....	132
5.2.2 Findings in Relation to Theory.....	137
5.2.3 Findings in Relation to Researcher’s Expectations.....	140
5.3 Limitations of the Study.....	142
5.4 Recommendations for Further Application.....	143
5.4.1 Social Media Developers.....	143
5.4.2 Public Relations Practitioners.....	144
5.4.3 Policymakers.....	144
5.5 Recommendations for Further Research.....	145
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	148
APPENDIX.....	160
APPENDIX A IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	161
APPENDIX B INFORMATION SHEET.....	170

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	Page
APPENDIX C INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	173
BIODATA.....	174
LICENSE AGREEMENT OF THESIS PROJECT.....	176



LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1: Samples' Profile.....	50
Table 3.2: Emerging Themes for Each Construct.....	60
Table 4.1: Number of Facebook Friends in Real Life.....	67
Table 4.2: What Devices Informants Use to Access Facebook.....	69
Table 4.3: Estimated Duration of Time Spent Daily on Facebook.....	70
Table 4.4: Level of Self-Described Facebook Usage.....	73
Table 4.5: Change in Facebook Usage.....	74
Table 4.6: Appreciation and Use of Birthday Greetings Function.....	76
Table 4.7: Negative Experiences on Facebook.....	78
Table 4.8: Other Social Media Sites Where Informants Have an Account..	82
Table 4.9: Other Communication Platforms Used by Informants.....	96
Table 4.10: Messaging Applications Used by Informants.....	97
Table 4.11: Type of Facebook User.....	108

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 2.1: Friendship Types.....	24
Figure 2.2: Relationship Maintenance Strategies.....	29
Figure 2.3: Theoretical Framework.....	42



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research aimed to explore the role that Facebook plays in users' relationship maintenance strategies for their different types of friends and investigated if Facebook is a reliable communication channel to achieve high levels of perceived tie strength between relationship partners. This chapter provides background information for this study, including the following sections:

1.1 Rationale and Problem Statement

1.2 Purpose of the Study

1.3 Scope of the Study

1.4 Research Questions

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.6 Definition of Terms

1.1 Rationale and Problem Statement

Social connectedness, defined as “the depth and breadth of interpersonal relationships an individual entertains with other people” (Zwier, Araujo, Boukes, & Willemsen, 2011), is one of the most fundamental of human needs and desires. Feeling connected to friends and acquaintances has a host of positive health benefits, including those both psychological and physiological (Zwier, Araujo, Boukes, & Willemsen, 2011). However, in today's highly mobile society, people may live far apart from their closest friends, and therefore, employ interactive communication via

different channels in order to stay in touch and subsequently enjoying genuine feelings of closeness despite no face-to-face encounters.

According to social information processing theory, social information, absent standard nonverbal cues, takes longer to establish in an online relationship than in an offline one. However, research has shown that an online relationship can begin to approximate that of an offline relationship given enough time (Walther & Burgoon, 1992). This theory was established well before social networking sites became an integral part of our lives and our communications, so the question arises as to the efficacy of using social networking sites in the friendship management strategies employed by individuals and if a social media communications channel can have an impact on perceptions of tie strength or closeness between and amongst their friends. Another pertinent question is how social networking users employ particular communication channels as part of their relationship management strategies for different types of friends.

Relationship maintenance strategies are important for any friendship, for in order to keep a relationship at the same stage without the risk of it regressing, relationship maintenance is necessary. Two individuals in a relationship will perform maintenance required to keep a level of relational satisfaction, which suggests that maintenance is primarily used to keep the relationship at the same level, rather than increasing perceptions of closeness or satisfaction (Vitak, 2012a). Any interaction between two relationship partners could be construed as maintenance, and these behaviors usually occupy the greatest proportion of the life of the relationship. Relationship maintenance may include verbal and non-verbal actions or behaviors,

and the quantity and quality of communication will vary based on the type of relationship and the strength of the tie, as noted by Granovetter (1983).

Studies by Stafford, Dainton and Haas (2000) and Stafford (2011) have shown there are specific aspects of relationship maintenance behaviors including advice, assurances, conflict management, openness, positivity, task sharing, and social networks, understanding, self-disclosure, and relationship talks. Dindia and Canary (1993) have discussed different definitions of relationship maintenance and the strategies that people use, including keeping the relationship alive; keeping the relationship in a *specified state of condition* in order to maintain intimacy; keeping the relationship in a *satisfactory condition*; and keeping the relationship “in repair.” Different strategies are employed depending on the stage of the relationship.

In her dissertation, Vitak (2012a) discusses how social networking sites have affected relationship maintenance strategies, with email and instant messaging being the first communication channels to be widely adopted as part of relationship maintenance. These two channels are private and one-on-one, while Facebook, the leading social networking site, is a more public, one-to-many communication tool. It is uncertain how behaviors on the social networking site are related to overall maintenance strategies of relationship partners, and in her research, Dainton (2013) discusses how the specific relationship between Facebook maintenance efforts and general relationship maintenance is not yet known. The results of her research suggest that the primary motive for Facebook use is to maintain relationships, but that the use of Facebook maintenance behaviors does not seem to impact a relationship much more beyond general maintenance activity. Her research supports the contention that while ongoing maintenance is critical to a relationship, the communication channel of

choice is less important than the content which is being communicated (Dainton, 2013). This research aimed to investigate if Facebook stands apart from other communication channels in its importance in relationship maintenance strategies.

One of the primary methods that people use today to stay in touch with widely dispersed friends is social networking, which may include Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and a host of other sites. Facebook is the most dominant social networking service, having launched in 2004, and by June 2012, had over one billion users around the world (Farooqi, Patel, Aslam, Ansari, Khan, Iqbal, Rasheed, Jabbar, Khan, Khalid, Anum Nadeem, Afroz, Shafiq, Mustafa, & Asad, 2013). By 2015, Facebook had over 1.44 billion monthly active users (Protalinski, 2015), continuing its steady rise and adoption by people around the world, and in June 2017, Facebook announced it had reached the milestone of two billion active users worldwide, over a quarter of the total global population (Ingraham, 2017). By December 31, 2017, Facebook had 1.4 billion daily active users on average, and 2.13 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2018).

Facebook provides an ideal platform for users to manage their friends' and acquaintances' impressions of them. Chou and Edge (2012) have argued that people who are more actively involved in Facebook have different perceptions of their friends than those users who are less active and who post and comment less frequently. They also discovered that users often come to assign positive content posted by their friends to those friends' personalities instead of situational factors (Chou & Edge, 2012). In their study on friends' appearances and behaviors of individuals on Facebook, Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, and Tong (2008) found that over 90 percent of Facebook users used the social networking site to

keep in touch with long-term friends, such as those from high school or university, and that more than half discovered something notable or newsworthy about a friend's life from a Facebook post or timeline activity.

Prior research in this area has investigated communications via different online channels, phone calls, and in-person meetings. A study by Pollet, Roberts, and Dunbar (2011) found that using social networking sites did not lead to emotionally closer relationships offline and another study by Wiese, Kelley, Cranor, Dabbish, Hong, and Zimmerman (2011) focused on how friends devote their attention to a small set of close friends versus those who allocate their attention to a wider circle of people.

In their research on the quality of interpersonal relationships and media use, Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, and Lin (2007) found that media use was not predictive of relational closeness or satisfaction, while Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao, and Swafford (2010) found that interaction between what people disclose and their social connection could indirectly predict the closeness of friends.

People will employ different relationship maintenance strategies for different types of friends, as individuals will usually have a number of different types of friendships, of varying levels of closeness, including relationships with family members, very close friends, and a romantic partner. As part of relationship maintenance, these close relationships require frequent interaction and sufficient levels of self-disclosure, intimacy, involvement, and interdependence. Past studies that explored various methods of measuring tie strength found that people usually classify friends into one of three categories: acquaintance, good friend, and very close friend (Marsden & Campbell, 1983).

In his writings in the 4th century BCE, Aristotle described three kinds of friendship: friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure, and friendships of the good. Friendships of utility are one's acquaintances, including colleagues and neighbors; friendships of pleasure are one's good friends, those with whom one enjoys spending time; and friendships of the good are one's very close friends, often spanning many years, and having taken a long time to develop (Kelly, 2010). Each of these types of friends requires varying degrees of relationship maintenance, and each has a different level of closeness.

All types of friendships need to be maintained, and Facebook provides a practical, useful tool to use as part of relationship management strategies. Each friendship type, acquaintance, good friend, and very close friend, requires a different level of relationship maintenance and different types of strategies. The question to be explored was how individuals use social media, namely Facebook, as part of their strategies.

Hsu, Wang, and Tai (2011) did a study of communication of Taiwanese users that showed that Facebook use helped new friends to become closer, rather than already close friends enhancing their perceptions of closeness. Furthermore, Steijn and Schouten (2013) looked at how the perceptions of closeness changed through use of Facebook as a communication channel. Research by Pollet, Roberts, and Dunbar (2011) showed that users of social media did not report enhanced emotional closeness to offline friends as a result of online communication while Wiese, Kelley, Cranor, Dabbish, Hong, and Zimmerman (2011) found that Facebook use helped new friends to become closer, but that already close friends did not appreciably increase their perceptions of closeness.

With the usage of Facebook continuing its inexorable rise as part of the fabric of our lives, it is beneficial to continue an exploration into how individuals use Facebook for their different types of friends as part of their relationship maintenance strategies. As the dominant social network becomes ever more embedded into our daily lives, investigation continues to be warranted as to whether Facebook interaction as part of friendship maintenance strategies, consisting of all those interactions between two relationship partners, has any association with users' perceptions of closeness or their perceived tie strength.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project was exploration and description. The objective of this study was to investigate how Facebook is used as a friendship maintenance platform with different friendship types, and to investigate if Facebook interaction as part of friendship maintenance strategies is associated with users' perceived tie strength.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study investigated how Facebook is used in friendship maintenance strategies, and how interaction via Facebook as part of friendship management is associated with users' perceptions of tie strength between friends. The researcher explored how Facebook use with different friendship types affects the aspects and characteristics of relationship maintenance strategies.

The interactive communication construct was investigated by various behaviors regarding interactions friends have on Facebook as part of their friendship

maintenance strategies, including sharing information in posts and/or photos; commenting or interacting with another friend's posts, status updates, and photos; and leaving birthday greetings, amongst other actions, while the tie strength construct will be investigated by questions such as, 'How often do you talk about shared experiences in the past with this friend?', 'How important is your friend's opinion to you?', and 'Would you lend this friend money?', amongst other questions.

The target population of this study was composed of individuals who regularly engage in interactive communication via Facebook as part of their friendship maintenance strategies. Comparison of Facebook interactive communication was made between individuals' different friendship types. Informants were selected based on their regular use of Facebook as a friendship maintenance platform and as a regular part of their relationship maintenance strategies.

The research was qualitative, with in-depth semi-structured interviews of purposively selected informants that investigated emerging themes in terms of their friendship maintenance strategies and perceived tie strength discovered through the interviews.

1.4 Research Questions

The study aimed to explore how Facebook is used by individuals for different friendship types as part of relationship maintenance strategies and its association with perceived tie strength. Therefore, the following two research questions were proposed for the study.

Research Question #1: How is Facebook used as a friendship maintenance platform by individual users for different friendship types?

Research Question #2: How does an individual's Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies correspond with their perception of tie strength?

1.5 Significance of the Study

There are many studies exploring how social networking sites affect relationships. As social networking becomes inextricably linked to our modern way of living, it continues to be significant to examine how these networks are associated with tie strength and closeness in relationships, especially if friends are separated by great distances and have infrequent face-to-face contact.

If Facebook is used as a medium with which friends stay in touch with those who may live a great distance away, is this use associated with increased tie strength? Are face-to-face interactions still necessary to build social capital, as suggested by social information processing theory? Despite the prodigious amount of prior study, there continues to be a lack of research into how friends who have formed a deep offline relationship manage their Facebook interactions and if there are techniques that these friends use to maintain a certain level of closeness with different types of friends. This research focused on how individuals interact with different friendship types via Facebook as part of their friendship management strategies, and examined if such Facebook interaction is associated with greater perceived tie strength, even with a lack of regular face-to-face contact.

Further significance of the study was to be found in providing social media developers with additional tools to enhance the efficacy of their applications. There might also be value for private business and governmental organizations as many

have moved to workplace communication tools such as Workplace by Facebook and Slack, which mimic many of the tools inherent in social media networks. This study contributes to the growing body of research that investigates how people use social media as part of relationship management, be it friends, colleagues, or potentially the general public insofar as a private company interacts with customers.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Interactive communication: Two-way communication between one or more people via an Internet-based channel.

Facebook: Social networking site that allows users to post comments, share photos, and post links with news or any other interesting content, chat live, and watch short videos. Users can set their content to public, or share only with a selected group of friends or family (Nations, 2019).

Facebook interaction: Communication conducted between two or more people on the online platform and may consist of wall posts, tagging photos, leaving comments on others' posts, sharing personal information, sharing opinions or feelings, sending private messages, liking, and other aspects of interaction.

Face-to-face contact: Communication conducted between one or more people without the use of an electronic solution to facilitate that communication. Face-to-face communication has the benefit of providing other communication clues, like body language and unspoken cues.

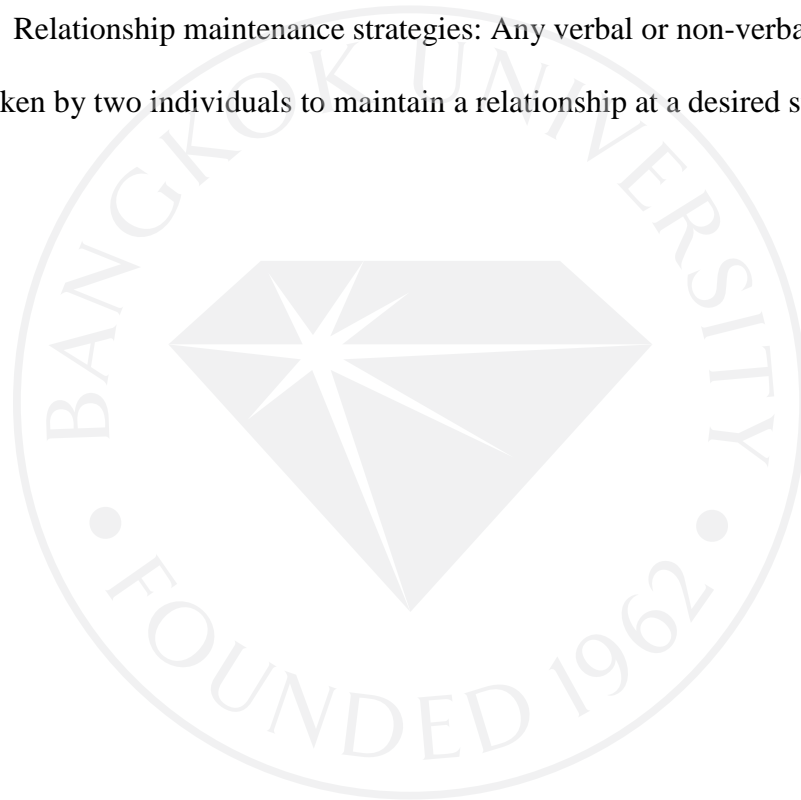
Friendship: A friendship between two people is the most common type of social relationship, providing benefits to people including a sense of support, care,

companionship, emotional acceptance, connectedness, inclusion, satisfaction, and belonging.

Friendship Types: A way of categorizing a relationship with varying levels of closeness, be it an acquaintance, close friend, or very close friend.

Perceived tie strength: A general sense of closeness one feels for another person. When that sense is strong, it's a 'strong tie' and when weak, a 'weak tie'.

Relationship maintenance strategies: Any verbal or non-verbal actions undertaken by two individuals to maintain a relationship at a desired state.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviewed literature and past research findings regarding Facebook interaction, friendship types, relationship management strategies, and users' perceived tie strength. It also discusses three related theories – Social Information Processing Theory, Social Penetration Theory, and Relational Dialectic Theory – that provided a theoretical framework for developing the research questions of this study. The following components are included in this chapter:

2.1 Facebook Interaction

2.1.1 Conceptual Definition of Facebook Interaction

2.1.2 Past Studies Examining Online Communication

2.2 Friendship Types

2.2.1 Conceptual Definition of Friendship Types

2.2.2 Past Studies Examining Friendship Types

2.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies

2.3.1 Conceptual Definition of Relationship Maintenance Strategies

2.3.2 Characteristics of Relationship Maintenance Strategies

2.3.3 Aspects of Relationship Maintenance Strategies

2.4 Perceived Tie Strength

2.4.1 Conceptual Definition of Tie Strength

2.4.2 Past Studies Examining Tie Strength and Closeness

2.5 Related Theories

2.5.1 Social Information Processing Theory

2.5.2 Social Penetration Theory

2.5.3 Relational Dialectics Theory

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Facebook Interaction

2.1.1 Conceptual Definition of Facebook Interaction

The conceptual definition of online communication via Facebook begins with the definition of communication itself, which is any exchange of messages, information, ideas, suggestions, or opinions via speech, signals, or writing. Online communication is communication which is exchanged via an electronic medium and can occur in a variety of channels including email, instant messages, video calls, online journals, social networks, and others. Online communication began with the widespread proliferation and adoption of the Internet, and has advanced even further due to the rapid adoption of smartphones and subsequent newer methods of maintaining communication over long distances that were never previously possible. Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and others have become dominant electronic communication channels that people around the globe currently use for their online interactions. Accordingly, Facebook interaction refers to communication conducted between two or more people on the proprietary online platform and may consist of wall posts, tagging photos, leaving comments on others' posts, sending private messages, or communicating via private groups.

Wall posts mean that a user visits a friend's timeline and writes a message

to him or her. A common example of this are birthday greetings. Facebook gives users a daily reminder of friends' birthdays and provides an easy way to write a greeting to a friend. Photos are tagged when someone posts a picture that will then show up in all of his or her friend's newsfeeds, and each user controls how he or she can be tagged. Leaving comments on posts is one of the most commonly used actions on Facebook, and means that when a friend posts a photo, a link to an article, or any other content, Facebook provides multiple methods of interacting with that post. One can click a reactions button, of which there are five (like, love, wow, sad, angry), and/or leave a comment. Comments are stacked, so conversations can happen within the comments section of a post. One can use a live link for a person's name to send that person a notification and serves as a prod for furthering the online conversation. Aside from the public or semi-public nature of Facebook posts, photos, etc., there is also Messenger, now a standalone app owned by Facebook, which allows for one-to-one or one-to-many conversations, in an almost simultaneous transfer of messages. Facebook groups are also a large and growing phenomenon. Facebook allows for three main types of group: Open, Closed, or Secret. Open groups are searchable and allow anyone to belong. Closed groups require administrator approval before joining and Secret groups are only discovered directly, by word-of-mouth and do not show up in any searches.

2.1.2 Past Studies Examining Online Communication

For much of human history, people were primarily only in contact with those in their immediate vicinity. In the pre-modern era, people kept in touch through letter writing and then phone calls. Long distance relationships were much more difficult to maintain, when the time between communication was usually longer. With the advent

and spread of the Internet, relationship maintenance over a long distance became easier, with many more channels of communication available. The subsequent popularity and adoption of social networking sites makes staying in touch with people who are separated by great distances easier than older methods such as email. Thusly, friends who have had a long-term offline relationship have more relationship maintenance tools from which to choose to keep the relationship at a desired level. The use of online communication, especially social networking, changes the cost of communication, how many people one is easily able to stay in regular contact with, and what the nature of that contact is (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011).

Over the past 20 years, there has been much research concerning the effect online communication has on interpersonal relationships. Early research found that mediated communication, that is, media with a lower quality or absence of non-verbal cues, weakens online relationships. However, subsequent research and theoretical development posits that because human beings are profoundly creative and resourceful, online communication can be equal to or even greater than the quality of face-to-face communication (Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao, & Swafford, 2010). Additional research has shown that heavy Internet users are better integrated socially, have more frequent contact with friends and relatives, and that university students who use Facebook heavily have higher levels of social capital (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011).

Some prior research has shown that technology can lessen the level of emotional closeness between friends if the relationship was based mainly on past experiences. That is, if the friendship is not replenished with new experiences and exchanges of ideas and opinions and if friends do not take advantage of the tools that

make it easy to stay in touch with long distance friends, emotional closeness may lessen and the friendship end (Johnson, Haigh, Craig, & Becker, 2009).

One of the primary methods that people use today to stay in touch with widely dispersed friends is social networking, which may include Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, and a host of other sites. Facebook is the dominant social networking service, having launched in 2004, and by December 31, 2017, having over one billion daily active users, and over two billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2018).

Facebook provides an ideal platform for users to manage their friends' and acquaintances' impressions of them. According to Burke, Kraut, and Marlow (2011), there are different types of behavior that users engage in on social networking sites. The first is direct communication with friends, which Facebook easily provides via targeted communication like wall posts, messages, and group memberships. There are also lightweight mechanisms such as the reactions button, which includes 'like', 'love', 'wow', 'sad', and 'angry'; comments on posts; and tags in photos. By taking part in these actions, one friend signals to another friend that he or she considers the friendship to be worthy of attention. Facebook also offers tools that allow a user to categorize their friends into different groupings, including the preset close friend and acquaintance, and allows for the user to create unlimited custom friendship types.

The other two types of social activities that Burke, Kraut, and Marlow (2011) discuss are the passive consumption of social news, via the Facebook newsfeed, and broadcasting, which is when an individual posts something without targeting anyone in particular. These behaviors are less likely to have an effect on relationship maintenance because they are not directed to a particular friend. However, Burke,

Kraut, and Marlow (2011, p. 3) say that while “the content of undirected messages may be less intimate than that of directed communication, they may still be valuable for relationship growth and maintenance”.

Therefore, a heavy Facebook user who both consumes news passively and actively posts undirected comments may still benefit from increased tie strength with those friends who comment on posts made by the individual or otherwise interact because of the Facebook activity. Burke, Kraut, and Marlow (2011, p. 3). Also state that it is “plausible that creating and consuming undirected messages, allowing users to keep in touch, will lead to increases in social capital”. These passive Facebook users, who never or very rarely interact online, are often labeled lurkers, much like an individual may attend a party, but sit on the sidelines observing the activities. On Facebook, these low-usage individuals might still be clicking through on friends’ posts and seeing birth announcements and other notifications of events, but they don’t publicly interact (Little, 2015). Still, though, they are being passively exposed to content that is created by their friends.

In her research, Vitak (2012b) concurs with Burke, Kraut, and Marlow (2011), stating that the ability of friends to passively consume content posted by their Facebook friends without having to interact may serve an important relationship maintenance purpose. This type of passive consumption allows friends to stay up-to-date with important milestones in a person’s life, such as marriage, a new job, births, deaths, and other events that used to be shared via more time-consuming methods like a phone call, letter, or in a face-to-face conversation.

Chou and Edge (2012) have argued that people who are more actively involved in Facebook have different perceptions of their friends than those individuals

who are less active and who post and comment less frequently. They also discovered that individuals often come to assign positive content posted by their friends to those friends' personalities instead of situational factors (Chou & Edge, 2012). In their study on friends' appearances and behaviors of individuals on Facebook, Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, and Tong (2008), found that over 90 percent of Facebook users used the social networking site to keep in touch with long-term friends, such as those from high school or university, and that more than half discovered something notable or newsworthy about a friend's life from a Facebook post or timeline activity.

In a study of Taiwanese Facebook users, Hsu, Wang, and Tai (2011) showed that Facebook was more a tool for new friends to get acquainted and get to know one another than to enhance their emotional closeness. Their study showed that the "frequency of interacting with friends on Facebook is not the most important factor in predicting users' perceptions of the degree of their acquaintanceships when interacting with their closer friends" (Hsu, Wang, & Tai, 2011, p. 476) and they concluded that Facebook was best used to get to know new friends, and that intimate activities "are not enough to increase perceived acquaintanceships of closer friends" (Hsu, Wang, & Tai, 2011, p. 476).

The uses and gratifications theory holds that individuals use the Internet to achieve different goals based on their personal disposition. The theory, as it relates to connectedness and social media, does not yet specify what the resulting social outcomes would be from the dispositions and motives of Facebook users, and has been raised as a potential theoretical limitation of this theory. The use of Facebook as a communication tool is usually seen as an additional or supplemental form of

communication, and research has not yet addressed whether the social networking site may do more than just “fill in the gap” when other forms of communication are either undesirable or unavailable. Researchers have yet to address whether specific uses of Facebook improve relationship quality and if it does, it has not been determined where those improvements are most likely to occur (Vitak, 2014).

Increased attention is now being paid to social networking sites by communication researchers, although a theoretical understanding of how social networking sites contribute to perceptions of closeness and tie strength is still in its early stages. Facebook, as the largest and most widely used social networking site, continues to warrant study, as the site says in its slogan that it will help “you connect and share with the people in your life” (Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao, & Swafford, 2010, p. 28). By virtue of its features, Facebook may be contributing to increased perceptions of closeness between individuals where once frequent face-to-face contact would have been necessary to achieve the same level of intimacy.

The use of Facebook also helps an individual to build social capital. Social capital is defined as the network of relationships that people in a society maintain, the “social and emotional support people receive through interactions with their network” (Vitak, 2012a, p. 49). Because Facebook helps to build social capital, the interactions that people have online do not have to remove them from their offline world, but may “be used to support relationships and keep people in contact, even when life changes move them away from each other” (Ellison, 2007, p. 1165). It used to be thought that an individual had an online persona and an offline persona, and that they were often different. However, with a continually increasing amount of our lives spent online, it may be that there is only one persona, and that the online version is a specific

presentation of one's true personality, which is then exposed to communication partners via various relationship maintenance strategies.

Self-disclosure is very important for increased perceptions of closeness in a relationship and Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao, and Swafford (2010), argue that one's motivation "to self-disclose online may produce beneficial outcomes" as it may provide those individuals who are "socially anxious with opportunities to build social skills and meaningful relationships".

2.2 Friendship Types

In the 4th century BCE, Aristotle described friends as being one of three different types: friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure, and friendships of the good, with each type requiring varying degrees of relationship maintenance, and each having a different level of closeness. But all types of friendships need to be maintained, and Facebook provides a practical, useful tool to use as part of relationship management strategies. Because social connectedness is so important to emotional and physical well-being, social networking sites provide valuable tools to maintain that connectedness. Since Facebook provides tools that allow a user to assign friends to different groups, he or she can then focus on different relationship maintenance strategies for different friendship types.

2.2.1 Conceptual Definition of Friendship Types

Social relationships are an important and fundamental aspect of the human condition and they serve many different functions. Friendships are the most common type of social relationship and are important for healthy emotional and social development (Bryant & Marmo, 2009). Friendships provide many benefits to people,

including a sense of support, care, companionship, emotional acceptance, connectedness, inclusion, affiliation, satisfaction, and belonging (Burleson & Sumter, 1994). They also provide intangible benefits such as helping each other to achieve goals and identify affirmation. It is a critical component of a well-rounded individual to maintain a variety of relationships.

2.2.2 Past Studies Examining Friendship Types

People have a number of different types of friendships, of varying levels of closeness, including close relationships with members of one's family, with very close friends, and with one's romantic partner. As part of relationship maintenance, these close relationships require frequent interaction and sufficient levels of self-disclosure, intimacy, involvement, and interdependence. People report gaining more emotional benefits from close friends than from those considered just casual friends (Bryant & Marmo, 2009). Past studies that explored various methods of measuring tie strength found that people usually classify friends into one of three categories: acquaintance, good friend, and very close friend (Marsden & Campbell, 1983).

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle described three kinds of friendship: friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure, and friendships of the good. Friendships of utility are one's acquaintances, including colleagues and neighbors. These include friends one has in one's life because they are useful in some way. Friendships of pleasure are one's good friends, those with whom one enjoys spending time. These might include people with whom one shares an activity, like working out, playing football, or going to the same book club. Lastly there are friendships of the good, or one's very close friends. These friendships are based on admiration and mutual respect, and these friendships often span many years, usually taking a long time to

develop. Friends of the good will share similar values and life goals (Kelly, 2010). Each of these types of friends requires varying degrees of relationship maintenance, and each has a different level of closeness.

Marsden and Campbell (1983) say that there are various aspects of relationships that serve as predictors for the closeness of a relationship. The number of joint activities organized within a common social element is one aspect used to predict tie strength between two people, as are overlapping organization memberships and kinship/neighbor/colleague statuses. Other aspects that vary between friendship types are frequency of contact and duration.

Two other aspects that differ for friendship types are the breadth of discussions that occur between two friends and the level of mutual confiding. Tie strength generally increases as the relationship moves from acquaintance to very close friend, and this is due to greater levels of mutual confiding across a wider breadth of subject areas.

Even very close friends, or friendships of the good, need to be maintained, and Facebook provides a practical, useful tool with which to conduct relationship management strategies. Each friendship type, acquaintance, good friend, and very close friend, each requires a different level of relationship maintenance and different types of strategies. Robinson, Callahan, Boyle, Rivera, and Cho (2017) found that there were four different types of Facebook user, in how they experience the social networking site. They categorized users into four broad types: Relationship Builders, Window Shoppers, Town Criers, and Selfies. The Facebook users who were deemed Relationship Builders use the site in much the way people have used email or the telephone. This type of user treats Facebook as an extension of their real lives, and

they use the site to share photos and videos and to comment and interact with friends. The next type, Window Shoppers, consider Facebook a part of their lives, but very infrequently share personal information and do not readily disclose anything about themselves. They will observe and check in with the site, but do not comment or otherwise interact with friends. This type of user has also been called lurkers, as they like to watch afar and not necessarily interact. The third type of Facebook user, Town Criers, are often professional journalists, writers, activists, or event organizers and like to share information widely and broadly. This information is not necessarily personal information about the individual, but will often be about politics or other news items that reflect the user's personal interests (MacLellan, 2017). The final group of users is called Selfies, and are the ones who use social media most like that which it is often perceived by the media, consisting of the users who share a large number of photos, videos, and status updates, and who actively seek out high numbers of interactions from his or her friends.

When Carson (2007) discusses Aristotle's three friendship types, friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure, and friendships of the good, he says the first two types are relatively fragile and that if the purpose for which the relationship was created changes, the relationship could end. If one person dissolves a business partnership or graduates from university, it is quite likely that ties will not be maintained with a friend of utility, and if a love affair ends or a friend gives up a shared hobby, a friendship of pleasure may end. He says that friendships of the good tend to be life-long friendships, often forged in childhood or early adulthood and will remain constant as long as they continue to be held in high esteem by each other.

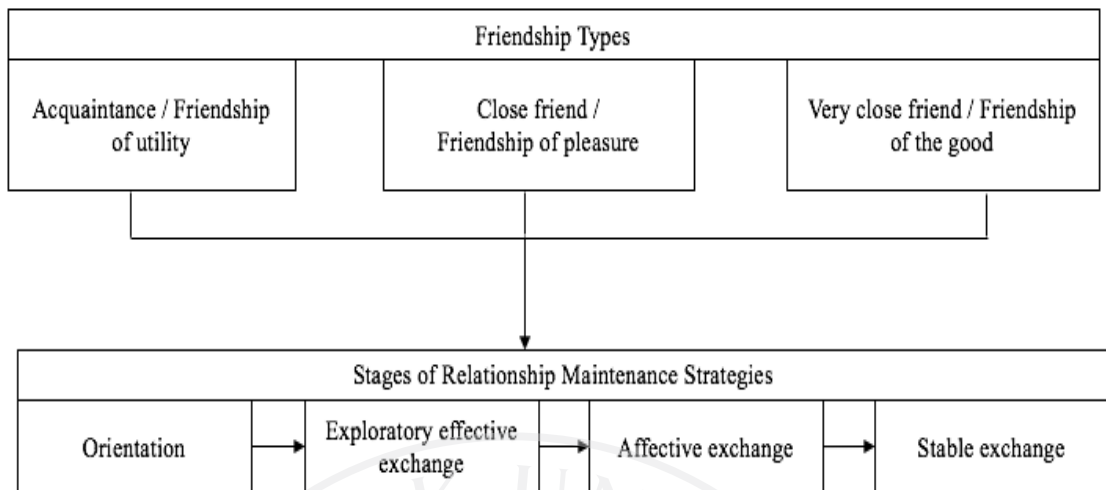


Figure 2.1: Friendship Types

Source: Bartlett, R. C., & Collins, S. D. (2011). *Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

In order to investigate how users communicate via Facebook with individuals of different friendship types, the following first research question was proposed for this study.

Research Question #1: How is Facebook used as a friendship maintenance platform by individual users with different friendship types?

2.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies

Relationships go through a series of steps which allow two individuals to move along a path from acquaintance to very close friend. Research has shown that there are four stages of relationship development. The first is orientation, which

entails sharing basic information about oneself. Next is exploratory affective exchange in which two people gain a better understanding of the personality of their communication partner. Information exchanged between two people becomes more detailed and involved during this stage. The following stage is affective exchange whereby the relationship becomes more intimate and the information exchanged includes more personal information. The last stage is stable exchange where the relationship is the strongest, and two people have complete openness to discuss anything. Two individuals will often develop a shorthand that makes discussion more personal (Farrugia, 2013).

The movement through these stages is usually systematic and sequential and it may move forward or backward and fast or slow (Vitak, 2012b). Baxter and Bullis (1986) have argued for a less linear approach in that relationships develop and deepen based on critical moments that help to dictate the forward or backward movement of a relationship. In order to keep a relationship at the same stage without risk of it regressing, relationship maintenance strategies are necessary. There are four aspects of relationship maintenance strategies, each of which reflect different stages communication partners pass through in order to attain relational satisfaction.

2.3.1 Conceptual Definition of Relationship Maintenance Strategies

In their research, Dindia and Canary (1993) have discussed the four aspects of relationship maintenance. The first is to keep a relationship alive, while the second is to keep the relationship in a specified state or condition, which is to maintain a level of intimacy between partners. The third aspect is to keep the relationship in a satisfactory condition and the final aspect is to keep a relationship in repair, which entails both partners agreeing to fix problems that may arise in the relationship.

These definitions are useful when examining the relationship maintenance strategies that partners undertake. Two individuals in a relationship will perform maintenance required to keep a level of relational satisfaction, suggesting that maintenance is primarily used to keep the relationship at the same level, rather than increasing perceptions of closeness or satisfaction (Vitak, 2012a).

Any interaction between two relationship partners can be construed as maintenance, and these behaviors usually occupy the greatest proportion of the life of the relationship. Dindia (2003, p. 1) says that to maintain a relationship, “partners must communicate with one another” and “as long as people communicate, they have a relationship”, but the “end of a relationship occurs when people stop communicating”. This relationship maintenance may include verbal and non-verbal actions or behaviors, and the quantity and quality of communication will vary based on the type of relationship and the strength of the tie, as noted by Granovetter (1983).

2.3.2 Characteristics of Relationship Maintenance Strategies

Stafford and Canary (1991) identified four characteristics of relationship maintenance processes: control mutuality, or how much the two relationship partners agree on decision-making with regard to routines, goals, and behaviors in the relationship; commitment to the other partner, linked to relational satisfaction; mutual liking, linked to relational longevity and intimacy; and relational satisfaction, one of the most common relationship maintenance constructs as studied by Dindia and Canary (1993). Relational satisfaction on the part of each communication partner means the relationship is satisfying each person’s emotional needs, including the positive feelings each has for the other and the desire to continue the relationship.

2.3.3 Aspects of Relationship Maintenance Strategies

Stafford and Canary (1991) detailed five aspects of relationship maintenance strategies: positivity, or being agreeable, polite, and engaging; openness, which reflects the desire to self-disclose, especially as the relationship is concerned; assurances, or telling the relationship partner that the relationship is important to you; shared tasks, the assistance in completing shared responsibilities; and networks, which means interacting with the relationship partner's other friends and family.

In a study, Stafford, Dainton, and Haas (2000) showed that there were seven relationship maintenance strategies that may be strategic or routine in a particular interaction: advice, assurances, conflict management, openness, positivity, task sharing, and social networks. In later studies, Stafford (2011) discussed new categories of relationship maintenance behaviors including positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, relationship talks, assurances, tasks, and networks.

Vitak (2012b) discussed how computer-mediated communication, especially via social networking sites, has affected relationship maintenance strategies, with email and instant messaging being the first communication channels to be widely adopted as part of relationship maintenance, especially when long distances prohibit more frequent face-to-face contact. These two channels are private and one-on-one, while Facebook, the leading social networking site, is a more public, one-to-many communication tool.

While it seems clear that Facebook interaction is a component of an individual's different relationship maintenance strategies, it is uncertain how behaviors on the social networking site are related to overall maintenance strategies

of relationship partners. In her research, Dainton (2013) discussed how the specific relationship between Facebook maintenance efforts and general relationship maintenance is not yet known. The results of her research suggest that the primary motive for Facebook use is to maintain relationships, but that the use of Facebook maintenance behaviors does not seem to impact a relationship much more beyond general maintenance activity. Her research supports the contention that while ongoing maintenance is critical to a relationship, the communication channel of choice is less important than the content which is being communicated (Dainton, 2013).

Further, Dainton's (2013) research concluded that if individuals are using social media for relationship maintenance purposes, an inductive approach might be necessary in future research to identify the ways that the maintenance is achieved. She also concluded that while the relationship between self-reported maintenance behaviors and satisfaction was strong, a stronger relationship might be expected between a partner's use of maintenance and the individual's satisfaction. Dainton (2013, p. 115) suggested that future research should seek to study if "partner-enacted Facebook maintenance might play a stronger role in sustaining desired relationship satisfaction than an individual's own maintenance activity".

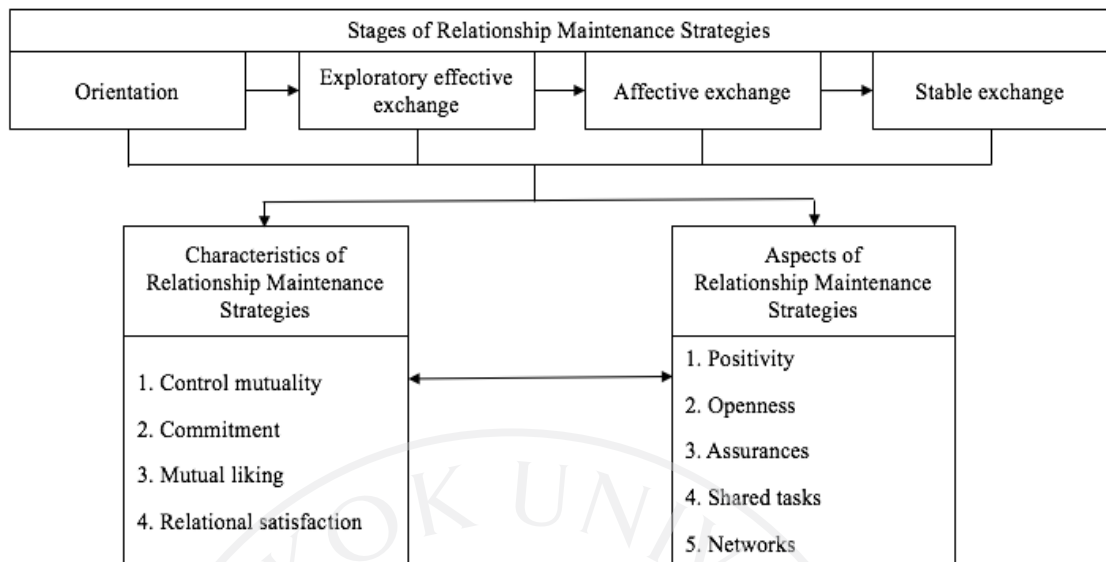


Figure 2.2: Relationship Maintenance Strategies

In order to investigate the friendship maintenance strategies that individuals employ and how those strategies apply to the perceived closeness of a relationship, the following second research question was proposed for this study.

Research Question #2: How does an individual's Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies correspond with their perception of tie strength?

2.4 Perceived Tie Strength

Perceived tie strength is the general sense of closeness one feels for another person. When that sense is strong, it's a 'strong tie' and when weak, a 'weak tie'. Greater tie strength is achieved in a relationship by attaining a greater level of intimacy, which can be achieved through different methods of self-disclosure.

2.4.1 Conceptual Definition of Tie Strength

When exploring relationship maintenance strategies, it is useful to look at tie strength, and how it differs for different friendship types. The closer the friend, the stronger the tie, and strong ties have higher levels of intimacy or closeness. Closeness, or ‘intimacy’, as they are interchangeably referred, “represent an overlap of identities or inclusion of the other in the self” (Aron, Mashek, & Aron, 2004, p. 28). Intimacy usually satisfies three criteria: "self-revealing behavior, positive involvement, and shared understanding” (Prager & Roberts, 2004, p. 50). Two relationship partners who have established a certain level of intimacy will share information with one another, through various methods of self-disclosure that help to build increasing levels of intimacy. Intimate partners will be positively involved with each other by being attentive to communication from the partner and being open to various cues. These partners will also understand each other in a specific, intimate way allowing them to comprehend, and even predict, the other person’s habits, preferences, and experiences.

Tie strength is used in the social sciences to quantitatively measure differential closeness with friends and acquaintances. It refers to a general sense of closeness one feels for another person. When those feelings are strong, it’s a ‘strong tie’ and when those feelings are weak, it’s called a ‘weak tie’ (Gilbert, 2012). Tie strength was first introduced by Mark Granovetter in a 1973 paper entitled “The Strength of Weak Ties”, where he defined tie strength as a “combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). Much

research has been conducted on aspects of tie strength as it relates to job searching, and how effective weak ties are in job search efforts (Marsden & Campbell, 1983).

Granovetter originally suggested there were four dimensions of tie strength: amount of time, intimacy, intensity, and reciprocal services. Additional researchers have proposed further dimensions, including how structural factors shape tie strength; how providing emotional support indicates a stronger tie; and how social distance, typified by economic status, education, political viewpoints, race, and gender, influences tie strength (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009).

It has been presumed that close friends will have “strong” ties and acquaintances will have “weak” ties. Further indicators include the frequency of contact, with those friends with strong ties assumed to be more frequent; the duration of the relationship, as strong ties should correlate with longevity (Marsden & Campbell, 1983).

2.4.2 Past Studies Examining Tie Strength and Closeness

To achieve intimacy, two relationship partners will be responsive and sensitive to the other person’s feelings, thus enabling one individual to express a range of responses that are relevant and meaningful for a current situation (Laurenceau, Rivera, Schaffer, & Pietromonaco, 2004). Closeness and intimacy are related to other positive aspects of relationships such as love, support, commitment, satisfaction, and high positive regard. To have strong ties and to feel that someone is a very close friend is to be concerned about their well-being; it’s to think about the person spontaneously; to ‘let one’s guard down’ and present the truest conception of yourself; to give your partner the space and encouragement to do the same. Closeness results from a bond that two people form through the exchange of knowledge about

the person and shared experiences, and is considered a subjective experience consisting of intimacy, emotional affinity, and psychological bonding (Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao, & Swafford, 2010).

Because relationships are dynamic, they require maintenance to survive and thrive. If no effort is put into them, they start to decay over time. A key component of this maintenance is frequent communication between relationship partners (Roberts & Dunbar, 2011). This frequency in communication is often used as a barometer of the strength of the relationship, as one feels closer to someone if there is regular communication of some sort. Tie strength is related to the emotional intensity of the relationship and how likely one person is to receive emotional assistance from the other person in a time of need (Roberts & Dunbar, 2011).

Furthermore, one might expect a relationship between emotional closeness and the time since relationship partners last made contact. Indeed, in their research, Roberts and Dunbar (2011, p. 439) found that “the effect of distance on time to last contact was greater for friends than for kin”. They also found that “the effect of distance on time to last contact was greater for strong ties at higher levels of emotional closeness, as compared to weak ties at low levels of emotional closeness” (Roberts & Dunbar, 2011, p. 442). In their research study, Roberts and Dunbar (2011, pp. 445-446) supported their hypothesis that the participants “with network members who lived further away had a shorter time to last contact than participants with network members who lived close by”.

Traditionally, when analyzing closeness between friends, measures related to face-to-face contact were used. These measures, based on interdependence theory, hold that relationships in closer proximity have a greater emotional closeness, and

predict lower scores for long distance relationships, saying that face-to-face contact is a necessary condition for closeness (Johnson, Haigh, Craig, & Becker, 2009).

However, these measures do not prove useful when looking at emotional closeness in long distance relationships, nor do they take into account the ever-increasing importance of social networking sites in our lives. The rise and integration into our lives of social networking reduces the opportunity costs related to friendship maintenance, thereby potentially increasing the perception of closeness by users of these sites.

Additional research by Wiese, Kelley, Cranor, Dabbish, Hong, & Zimmerman (2011, p. 1) stated that “frequency of communication predicts both closeness and willingness to share better than frequency of collocation”. Their findings showed that “self-reported closeness is the strongest indicator of willingness to share” and that “individuals are more likely to share in scenarios with common information” (Wiese, Kelley, Cranor, Dabbish, Hong, & Zimmerman, 2011, pp. 5-6). However, the researchers note there has not been much study to understand the different characteristics of relationships that influence sharing between friends. Their study looked at associations between relationship context and closeness, and the subsequent willingness to share (Wiese, Kelley, Cranor, Dabbish, Hong, & Zimmerman, 2011). They also looked at tie strength, proposing four dimensions: amount of time; intimacy; intensity; and reciprocal services, and noted that many studies have shown that the “vast majority of interaction on social networking sites is with small numbers of strong ties” (Wiese, Kelley, Cranor, Dabbish, Hong, & Zimmerman, 2011, pp. 5-6).

Vitak (2014) proposes that measuring tie strength between friends and how Facebook might lead to increased tie strength is worth considering, as this may be of special interest because some users may rely on Facebook as a primary source of communication to keep in touch with friends who are more geographically distant and with potentially weaker ties. It is worth exploring to see if the various tools Facebook offers to foster interpersonal communication, when taken full advantage of both relationship partners, are associated with an increased perception of closeness and greater tie strength. Future research should also employ quantitative methods to measure tie strength and its relationship to Facebook interaction, to see if there is a correlation between high social media use and greater perceptions of tie strength.

Standing apart in the research reviewed is a study by Pollet, Roberts, and Dunbar (2011, p. 253) that showed that “time spent using social media was not associated with larger offline networks, or feeling emotionally closer to offline network members”. Their study found that there was no difference in emotional closeness between users and non-users of social media, and that neither the “use nor the intensity... was associated with a greater number of offline relationships or the emotional closeness of these relationships” (Pollet, Roberts, & Dunbar, 2011, p. 256). Their findings were different than those of previous studies that showed a positive impact on social relationships of using social media. Several years have also passed since this study was conducted, and with every passing year, the power and reach of social networking sites grows, so it is worth continually investigating the effects online communication have on relationships. This is especially true in Thailand, where the country had 47 million Facebook users as of May 2017 (Coconuts

Bangkok, 2017) which had risen to 51 million users as of January 2019, ranking it eighth in the world in the number of Facebook users (Clement, 2019).

There is a gap in the research as many studies have investigated how individuals use Facebook as part of relationship maintenance strategies, but the impact of Facebook interaction on relationship maintenance has not been adequately assessed (Dainton, 2013). This research aimed to explore Facebook use as part of relationship maintenance strategies, and if the manner of Facebook usage with different friendship types had any direct bearing on the perceived closeness of relationships.

Dainton (2013) further describes that because there have been such rapid changes in mediated communication technologies, scholars struggle to keep up with the effects these technologies have on relationships. There has been much prior research into relationship maintenance activities like the telephone, email, and instant messaging, but “relatively few studies to date have specifically examined the use of social networking sites such as Facebook in the maintenance process” (Dainton, 2013, p. 113).

There is also a gap in the research concerning the impact Facebook interactions may have on greater perceptions of tie strength. According to Vitak (2012a), researchers continue to call for study into how Facebook actions such as mass content broadcasting, interactivity, and managing hundreds of connections impact relationship maintenance. Facebook may be important for a person’s weak ties, for whom Facebook may be the only communication channel. Social networking sites allow quick and easy connections to a larger group of friends than would otherwise be possible, but “the true impact these sites have on users’ ability to

maintain satisfactory relationships with a variety of relational ties requires further examination” (Vitak, 2012a, p. 3). This study therefore aimed to fill a gap in the research concerning Facebook interaction as part of relationship management strategies, and also to contribute to the current research into the effects of frequent Facebook usage on perceived tie strength.

2.5 Related Theories

2.5.1 Social Information Processing Theory

When looking at the interactions between friends on a social networking site like Facebook, and then considering their tie strength or perception of closeness, one might potentially see a relationship between the two. This research aimed to explore how friends use Facebook in their relationship management strategies, and if higher levels of engagement and more frequent use leads to a perception of greater tie strength. To establish a conceptual framework around which the research was conducted, one theory that was considered is social information processing theory.

Social information processing theory was first developed in 1992 by Joseph Walther to explain how people develop relationships in the absence of non-verbal cues. It is possible to reach the same level of intimacy as with face-to-face contact, but more time is required (Walther, 1992). Social information processing theory states that “social information accrues slowly across cue-limited...media, such as many online channels” and that “with enough time, relational outcomes of online relationships should equal those that can be reached through face-to-face communication” (Keating, 2012, p. 8).

A follow-up to social information processing theory is the hyper-personal perspective, which states that “individuals become more intimate with others across online communication than they would when face-to-face” (Keating, 2012, p. 8). This theory advocates that computer-mediated communication, such as that on social networking sites, actually increases intimacy. However, because online interactions do not have the same media richness as can be attained in face-to-face communication, other cues are needed to gauge a person’s character, interest, or intentions.

The hyper-personal perspective states that there are four media effects with respect to distance between communication partners: how the sender self-presents; the over-attribution of commonality by the receiver; the fact that SNS is an asynchronous channel; and self-fulfilling feedback (Griffin, 2012). When people meet online, they have the opportunity to present the best version of themselves, thereby controlling their self-presentation and hiding any potentially negative personality traits. As for the over-attribution of commonality, without non-verbal cues that happen naturally in face-to-face communication, the receiver has a natural tendency to think he or she has more in common with the sender than might be the case. Self-fulfilling feedback means that the expectation of what another has for you will cause you to act in a certain way in order to meet that expectation (Griffin, 2012). Because SNS are asynchronous channels of communication, messages between sender and receiver need not be sent at the same time, and can be edited before sending, something not done in face-to-face communication. The receiver can read and respond to the message at his or her convenience. However, with the rise of instant messaging, including WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, communication is becoming more

similar to face-to-face communication in its spontaneity, although still lacking in visible non-verbal cues. While video calls are a feature in both Messenger and WhatsApp (both owned by Facebook), this research only focused on text-based communication and its attendant lack of non-verbal cues.

2.5.2 Social Penetration Theory

Another theory relevant to this research was social penetration theory, which holds that relationships develop through an ongoing process of “reciprocal self-disclosure resulting in intimacy and a close interpersonal bond” (Schiffrin, Edelman, Falkenstern, & Stewart, 2010, p. 299). Self-disclosure is an important foundational element in a relationship. This self-disclosure happens when one friend shares or discloses information about him or herself to another person, and is critical to interpersonal communication that forms the basis for the development and maintenance of friendships (Schiffrin, Edelman, Falkenstern, & Stewart, 2010).

Social penetration theory says that there are a number of stages that happen in the process of developing a relationship, including orientation, exploratory affective stage, affective stage, stable stage, and depenetration. This process starts with small talk and chit-chat, moving on to more substantive information on potentially sensitive topics, including beliefs and values. In the disclosure of personal and private topics, there may be disagreements or quarrels, and emotional reactions can be predicted. If a lack of mutual beneficence develops, and the relationship starts to breakdown, there is a withdrawal of disclosure, leading to the dissolution of the relationship (Straker, 2002).

McKenna and Bargh (2000) found that the characteristics of the Internet, which in early research were thought to inhibit perceptions of closeness, (e.g.,

anonymity, no barriers because of physical distance, lack of visual cues, more control over self-presentation), actually yield more self-disclosure, better representation of the true self, and more positive perceptions of the communication partner online than in person. Their research shows that the higher level of self-disclosure on the Internet indicates “that it may be a viable medium for developing intimate relationships and increasing well-being” (Schiffrin, Edelman, Falkenstern, & Stewart, 2010, p. 300).

On Facebook, the way an individual self-discloses, via creating and/or commenting on posts, private messages, and photos may encourage their friends to disclose by posting his or her own material, thereby further encouraging the first person to post again. Greater intimacy might then develop as a result of this mutual self-disclosure (Park, Jin, & Jin, 2011).

2.5.3 Relational Dialectics Theory

The final theory that was considered for this research was relational dialectics theory, which is described as “a knot of contradictions in personal relationships or an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies” (Baxter & Montgomery, 2011, p. 153-167).

The four main assumptions of relational dialectics are: relationships are not linear; relationships are characterized by change; contradiction is one of the fundamental facts of life in relationships; and communication is essential to organizing and negotiating relational contradictions (West & Turner, 2010).

Along with these four main assumptions, there are four main concepts in relational dialectics: contradiction; totality, process, and praxis. It is in this notion of contradiction, and contained in the original relational dialectic model, that there are core tensions in a relationship. These core tensions include autonomy and

connectedness; favoritism and impartiality; openness and closedness; novelty and predictability; instrumentality and affection; and quality and inequality (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2011).

Relational dialectic theory argues that closeness in relationships occurs not because a pre-conceived notion of ourselves is put forward, but the selves are given shape by the relationship. Two partners in a relationship experience various markers in their relationship including continuity between past and present, how whole the relationship is, and a sense of oneness with the immediate conversation (Baxter, 2004).

The central facet of relational dialectics on which this study focused is that of openness and closedness. These concepts refer to the desire to share information versus the wish to be private and not share more intimate details of your life with a relationship partner. This often occurs in a relationship with differences in power distance. An employee may not fully share what he or she did on the weekend, leaving out more personal details due to the context and nature of the relationship. The type of friend with whom this may be true would be an acquaintance or a friend of utility. One might not fully self-disclose certain experiences to a colleague or a supervisor, especially if there are differences in values, beliefs, or life experiences.

There are three general types of communication where openness is expressed: sharing personal information; sharing opinions or feelings; and information about the relationship itself. Further within openness is attentiveness and responsiveness to the relationship partner's communication. In contrast, closedness is often described as 'small talk' or communication that is primarily superficial. Conversations of this sort do not require any personal self-disclosure, thereby allowing for a greater degree of

privacy (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The relational dialectic theory states that while most of us strive for varying degrees of openness in our relationships, the communication methods we employ usually do not always lead in a straight path towards our goal (Griffin, 2003).

A large amount of research has explored how dialectical tensions are played out in relationships, with research being conducted on romantic relationships, friendships, and long-distance relationships. In long-distance relationships, the most common dialectic was certainty versus uncertainty. Prior to the advent of social networking sites, it took much more effort to keep in touch with friends who lived far away. Less frequent communication between long-distance friends can increase the uncertainty of a relationship, often leading to less frequent relational maintenance, and ultimately hastening the decay of the relationship. Social networking sites can ameliorate this by making it much easier to perform relational maintenance strategies that serve to increase closeness between friends who live far from each other and who may not have face-to-face communication very often.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the openness / closedness aspect of relational dialectics and the reciprocity of self-disclosure resulting in intimacy as described in social penetration theory, while occurring in an online environment where non-verbal methods are the primary means of communication. Because social information processing theory states that with enough time, an online relationship can be as close as one that also has face-to-face communication, and since Facebook fosters and simplifies interactive communication,

it could serve an important function in building higher perceived tie strength between friends.

The theoretical framework thus proposed for this study was based on how the characteristics and aspects of relationship management strategies employed by individuals for different friendship types corresponded with Facebook interactions and perceptions of tie strength as illustrated in the following model.

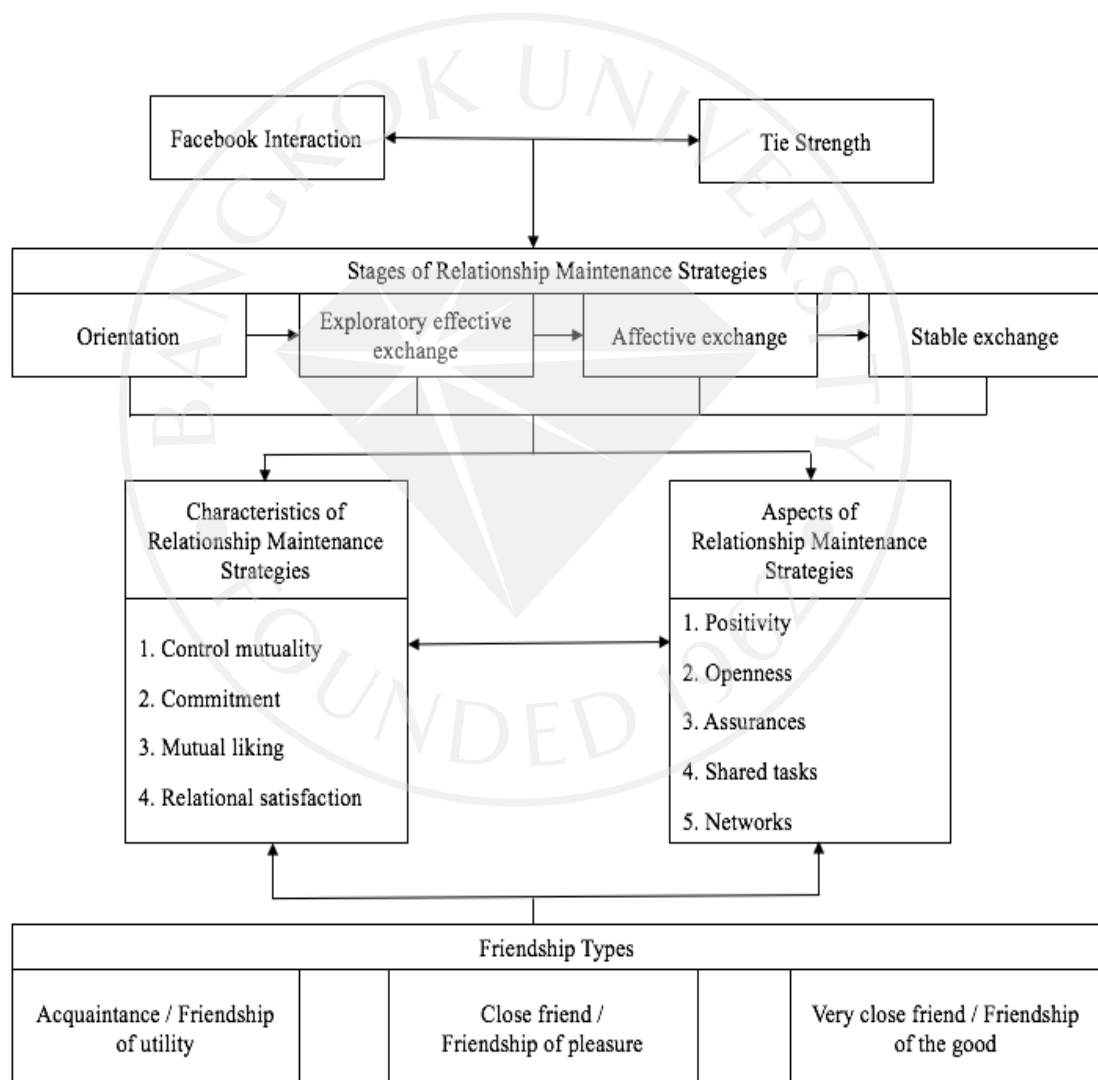
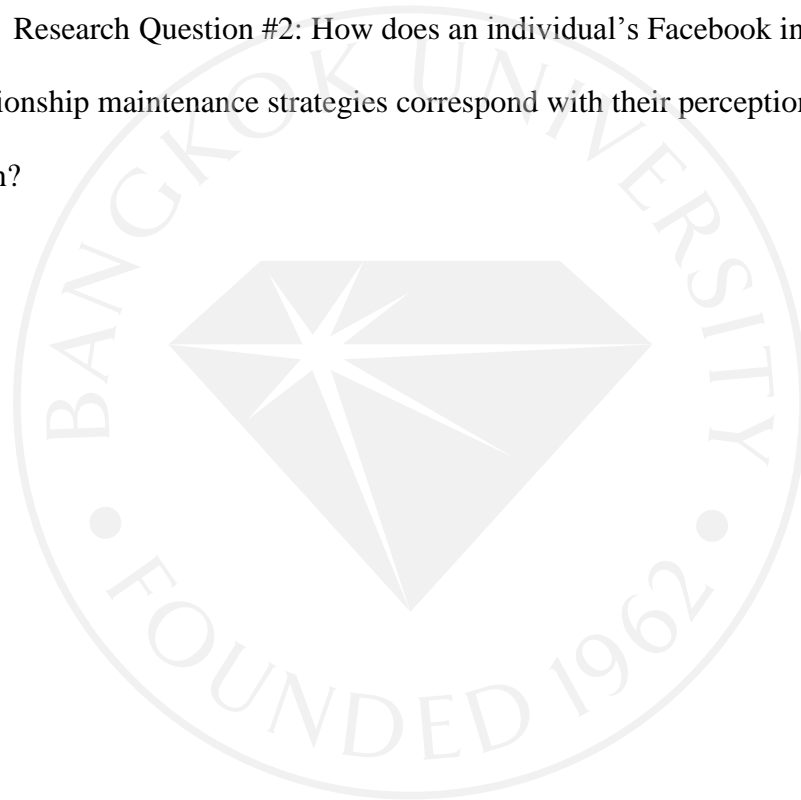


Figure 2.3: Theoretical Framework

As this study aimed to explore how Facebook is used by individuals for different types of friends as part of their relationship maintenance strategies and the possible association with perceived tie strength, the following two research questions were answered.

Research Question #1: How is Facebook used as a friendship maintenance platform by individual users for different friendship types?

Research Question #2: How does an individual's Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies correspond with their perception of tie strength?



CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design that was used in this study, who the participants were, the sample selection and the sampling method, and the types of research instruments that were used. The following components are included in this chapter:

- 3.1 Research Design
- 3.2 Population and Sample Selection
- 3.3 Research Instrument
 - 3.3.1 Thematic Questions
 - 3.3.1.1 Facebook Interaction
 - 3.3.1.2 Friendship Types
 - 3.3.1.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies
 - 3.3.1.4 Perceived Tie Strength
- 3.4 Validity
- 3.5 Reliability
- 3.6 Data Collection Procedure
- 3.7 Data Coding Scheme
- 3.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

3.1 Research Design

The qualitative research approach was used in this research. The research method employed was in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected informants

who regularly use Facebook, followed by an analysis of the interview transcriptions using the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to discover and analyze emerging themes.

A research project has several phases, beginning with the selection of a topic and ends with the dissemination of the research findings. Each step within a research project contains the opportunity to influence the research output, so it's essential for a researcher to avoid errors during all phases of the research so as to increase the credibility of the results. In order for credibility to be attained, the entire research process must be valid and reliable, which is a major challenge when the methodology is based on semi-structured interviews (Barriball & While, 1999).

There were multiple advantages to using personal interviews for data collection with respect to the research questions that were posed for this study. This method has the potential to overcome the poor response rates of a questionnaire survey; it was well suited to an exploration of values, motives, beliefs, and attitudes; it facilitated comparability of data by ensuring that all questions are answered by the informants; and personal interviews ensured that the informant was unable to receive assistance from others while formulating a response (Barriball & While, 1999).

Further, semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method of data collection for this research study because they were ideal for the exploration of perceptions and opinions of informants, enabled probing for additional information, and because the varied personal histories of the sample group precluded the use of a standardized interview schedule (Barriball & While, 1999).

In a standardized interview, the wording and sequence of all interview questions are the same for each informant so that any differences in the answers are

due to differences among the informants rather than in the questions asked (Barriball & While, 1999). However, the semi-structured interview gave the interview more latitude in the wording of questions, and also provided for the use of probes. Probing was a valuable tool for ensuring data reliability as it allowed for the interview to clarify any interesting or relevant issues that were raised by the informants; it allowed for opportunities to explore sensitive issues; and it elicited valuable and complete information (Barriball & While, 1999).

Semi-structured interviews were a particularly useful way for informants to have the freedom to express their views in their own terms, and provided reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In the semi-structured interviews, the research and informants participated in a formal interview, with the researcher having developed an interview guide, which was a specific, pre-determined list of questions and topics that were to be covered during the interview. The interview guide provided a clear set of instructions and was instrumental in helping to provide reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Since the semi-structured interviews contained open-ended questions, with discussions diverging into new areas, the interviews were recorded and then the transcriptions analyzed to uncover relevant emerging themes that arose during the interview sessions.

The semi-structured interview questions explored how the informants use Facebook as part of their relationship management strategies with different friendship types, and examined the different ways the informants use Facebook to interact with friends. The study did not seek generalization, but aimed to identify descriptive information from the informants about how they use Facebook, if any commonalities

emerged from the way Facebook is used for different friendship types, and whether interactive communication via Facebook corresponded with perceptions of greater tie strength. Additional questions explored the different communication channels that are used by the informants, if indeed there were additional methods used, or if Facebook satisfactorily served as the sole communication channel and still contributed to increased perceptions of closeness in a friendship.

3.2 Population and Sample Selection

The sampling method used for this research was the non-probability purposive sampling method, specifically critical case sampling, a sampling technique that was selected based on the desire for specific characteristics of the population and the objectives of this research. This type of sampling is also referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling (Crossman, 2017). One of the main goals of purposive sampling was to focus on specific and particular characteristics of the population of interest that best enabled the researcher to answer the research questions. There was no claim to representation of the entire population.

Critical case sampling is frequently used in exploratory, qualitative research so the researcher can assess whether the phenomenon in question exists and critical case sampling works well when one case is appropriate for the study as the researcher expects that insights can be revealed that could be applied to other cases (Crossman, 2017).

The participant selection for this study began with the entire population of the researcher's Facebook friends, numbering approximately 1,200, as well as graduate or undergraduate communications students from a local university in Bangkok,

Thailand. Half the sample was to have been drawn from the researcher's Facebook friends and the other half from a graduate-level communications class.

A typical informant profile was defined with the following attributes:

- 1) Men or women; aimed for equal numbers of each
- 2) Facebook account owner; any frequency of user
- 3) Had been a Facebook user for at least one year
- 4) Had at least 100-200 Facebook friends, to allow for a broader sample

of usage actions

- 5) Used Facebook to any degree as part of current relationship

management strategies

Once the informant profile was set, the researcher posted a undirected and untagged message to his Facebook friends, asking for assistance with a research project and to contact the researcher via Messenger. No contact to individuals was made with encouragement to participate so as not to introduce bias into the selection process. The pool of prospective informants was only those who made contact, signifying their interest in participating in the study.

While the sample was necessarily self-selecting, as the researcher only began with the pool of his current Facebook friends, there were no additional measures taken to recruit people who may not use Facebook very frequently, so as not to skew the sample in search of a pre-determined outcome. While one of the research questions aimed to explore the frequency dimension of tie strength, the informants need not to have had used Facebook for a certain amount of time in a recent period. The researcher asked the informants questions about the variance of frequency in Facebook use, and if it varied as part of relationship management strategies.

The researcher also worked closely with his academic advisors to solicit volunteers for the research study for which they were to potentially receive extra credit for participating. Efforts were made to ensure that not any one particular country was over-represented in the population that was to be studied.

The researcher issued a broad invitation to his Facebook friends and accepted the first 10 people who responded, and then asked three others to participate. Seven additional informants were recruited by the investigator's supervisor, so the total sample of 20 informants consists of 13 of the researcher's friends and seven non-friends. Please see Table 3.1 for the samples' profile.

Table 3.1: Samples' Profile

	Gender	Age	Nationality	Profession	Local or Out-of-town
Informant #1	Female	26	Vietnamese	Student	Local
Informant #2	Male	33	Thai	Student	Local
Informant #3	Female	46	Thai	Educator	Local
Informant #4	Male	49	American	Writer/Editor	Out-of-town
Informant #5	Male	52	American	Businessman	Out-of-town
Informant #6	Male	53	American	Educator	Out-of-town
Informant #7	Male	48	American	Vice-President	Out-of-town
Informant #8	Male	46	American	Businessman	Out-of-town

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued): Samples' Profile

	Gender	Age	Nationality	Profession	Local or Out-of-town
Informant #9	Male	31	British	Educator	Out-of-town
Informant #10	Female	38	Thai	Educator	Local
Informant #11	Male	52	American	Manager	Out-of-town
Informant #12	Female	43	Thai	Educator	Local
Informant #13	Male	50	American	Educator	Out-of-town
Informant #14	Female	34	Thai	Businesswoman	Local
Informant #15	Female	48	Thai	Filmmaker	Local
Informant #16	Male	44	Thai	Administrator	Local
Informant #17	Male	40	Thai	Businessman	Local
Informant #18	Male	36	Thai	Filmmaker	Local
Informant #19	Female	54	British	Businesswoman	Out-of-town
Informant #20	Female	32	Thai	Educator	Local

3.3 Research Instrument

This research aimed to investigate how informants use Facebook as part of their friendship maintenance strategies. In particular, this research study was intended to interpret how Facebook interaction between friends corresponds with their perception of tie strength. The research instrument that was employed were in-depth semi-structured interviews with each informant, with various topics explored, including the different ways individuals use Facebook with their friend groups.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth discussion, and for probing questions to be asked.

In order to address the research questions, this research looked at the use of Facebook as part of relationship management strategies, and explored the various ways informants use the different tools within Facebook. Questions were asked during the interviews about closeness they experienced with their Facebook friends as a measure of the intensity of a relationship, as well as investigative questions about the duration or the length of the time of the relationship, and looked at a breadth of topics to discuss and the extent of mutual confiding to represent intimacy (Marsden & Campbell, 1983).

The researcher prepared a 38-question interview guide (Appendix A) which helped keep the interview focused, while still allowing for open discussion. The researcher also gave each informant an infosheet (Appendix B) with relevant information about the research project, and had each informant sign a consent form (Appendix C). The interviews were all recorded on a portable digital audio recorder, an indispensable tool to capture the entire conversation, in addition to the researcher's handwritten notes.

3.3.1 Thematic Questions

Semi-structured interviews were a useful tool for data collection for this research, as they provided a way for informants to have the freedom to express their views in their own terms. This has been shown to provide reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The respondents participated in a formal interview, with the researcher having developed an interview guide of specific,

pre-determined questions and topics to be covered during the interview. This interview guide provided a clear set of instructions and was instrumental in helping to provide the researcher with reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The questions were designed to elicit free-ranging answers from the informant, and since the semi-structured interviews contained primarily open-ended questions, discussions diverged into new areas, identifying new themes of examination and exploration in how the informant used Facebook as part of his or her relationship maintenance strategies.

The interview guide consisted of 38 questions divided into four main areas of exploration: Facebook usage and interaction; friendship types; relationship maintenance strategies; and the perceived tie strength of relationship partners. The interview began with grand tour questions to put the informant at ease and provide a positive environment for an open and free-wheeling discussion.

3.3.1.1 Facebook Interaction

The researcher investigated Facebook interaction as part of informants' relationship maintenance strategies. Facebook interaction consists of any communication conducted between two or more people on the online platform and could consist of wall posts, tagging photos, leaving comments on others' posts, sharing personal information, sharing opinions or feelings, sending private messages, liking, and other aspects of interaction.

The interview guide consisted of 14 questions which served to investigate the Facebook usage and interaction of the informant, and asked questions about minutes per day of usage; devices used; and specific questions about different types of

interactions, including questions about the informant's self-presentation on Facebook and/or other social media.

3.3.1.2 Friendship Types

Friendships are one of the most common social relationships that we have, and are important for healthy emotional and social development. Aristotle (Kelly, 2010) originally described three types of friendship: friendships of utility, or acquaintances; friendships of pleasure, or close friends; and friendships of the good, or very close friends.

Those friendships of utility are one's acquaintances, including colleagues and neighbors, or friends one has in one's life because they are useful in some way or otherwise provide value to the individual. Friendships of pleasure are one's good friends, those one enjoys spending time with, often people with whom one shares an activity, like working out, playing football, or going to the same book club. Lastly are the friendships of the good, or one's very close friends. These friendships are based on admiration and mutual respect, often spanning many years and taking a long time to develop.

This section of the interview guide consisted of eight questions about the different types of friendship of the informant. The guide began with a short description to the informant about the different types of friendships people generally have, and then the questions in this section explored the informant's personal division of friends into different types and examined the different strategies used for relationship maintenance. The questions sought to gauge the different types of tools the informant might use for very close friends versus acquaintances, and also if the

informant used any of the native tools on Facebook with which a user can divide his or her friends on the platform.

3.3.1.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies

Relationships go through a series of steps which generally allows for individuals to move along a path from acquaintance to very close friend. The movement through these stages is usually systematic and sequential, but it may move forward or backward and either fast or slow. In order for an individual to keep a relationship alive, which means at a desired stage without risk of regression, relationship maintenance strategies are necessary, which include keeping the relationship alive; keeping the relationship in a specified state or condition; keeping the relationship satisfactory overall for both individuals in the dyad; and keeping the relationship in repair, which entails the cooperation of both partners to fix problems that may arise in the relationship. Any interaction between a dyad could be construed maintenance, and these behaviors and actions usually constitute the greatest proportion of the life of the relationship.

This section of the interview guide consisted of eight questions about different relationship maintenance strategies the informant may employ. The guide began with a short description to the informant about relationship maintenance, and then the questions aimed to explore the importance of Facebook in the informant's maintenance strategies; what communication channels the informant uses; and the importance of face-to-face communication for maintenance of a relationship.

3.3.1.4 Perceived Tie Strength

Tie strength is the general sense of closeness one feels for another person. When that sense is strong, it's called a 'strong tie' and when weak, it's a 'weak tie'.

Greater tie strength is generally achieved in a relationship by attaining a greater level of intimacy, which is usually done through different methods of self-disclosure. The closer the friend, the stronger the tie, with stronger ties resulting in a concomitant higher level of closeness or intimacy.

Closeness, or more specifically, 'intimacy', as they are often referred to interchangeably, satisfies three main criteria: "self-revealing behavior, positive involvement, and shared understanding" (Prager & Roberts, 2004). Two relationship partners who have established a certain level of intimacy will share information with each other, through different methods of self-disclosure that help to build increasing levels of intimacy. Intimate partners are more positively involved with each other by being attentive to communication from the partner and more open to various cues. These partners understand each other in a specific, intimate way, often allowing them to comprehend, and occasionally predict, the other person's habits, preferences, and experiences.

This section of the interview guide consisted of eight questions about tie strength and the perceptions of the informant of the closeness of his or her relationships. The guide began with a short description to the informant about tie strength, and then explored attitudes of the informant towards his or her very close friends versus acquaintances.

3.4 Validity

In a qualitative research study, validity helps determine that the researcher is really measuring that which was intended to be measured. While some may posit that

validity is not applicable to qualitative research, they also realize that there need be some type of qualifying check or measure for their research (Golafshani, 2003).

It is important that a researcher is careful to watch for “researcher bias”, where the researcher finds what he or she wants to find, and then write up the results. This bias tends to be a result of selective observation and selective recording of information, and also by allowing one’s own personal views to affect how the data are interpreted (Johnson, 1997).

To ensure the content validity of this study, the interview questions were developed based on a careful review of literature of important concepts that formed the foundation of this research including Facebook interaction, friendship types, relationship maintenance strategies, and tie strength. In addition, relevant theories such as Social Information Processing Theory, Social Penetration Theory, and Relational Dialectics Theory were applied when developing the interview guide and thematic questions. This assures a certain degree of construct validity.

3.5 Reliability

Reliability in a research study refers to the extent to which results obtained from the study are consistent over time and represent accurately the population under study, and if the results can be reproduced using a similar methodology. To ensure reliability in a qualitative study, the examination of trustworthiness is critical.

Although the analyses of all interview transcriptions were done by the investigator, they were based on the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is a widely accepted method of analyzing qualitative research. However,

due to time limitations, the reliability of the data analysis may be a factor in that a second coder did not validate the findings of the researcher.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Once the sample was selected, the process of collecting data began. The researcher first sought permission from the informants to participate in this research study, and had each informant sign an informed consent form (Appendix C).

Via in-depth semi-structured interviews, the data collection procedure explored the informant's relationship maintenance strategies with regard to different friendship types and the resulting perceptions of closeness in their relationships. These interviews were conducted live, either in-person or via Skype, and consisted of a variety of questions designed to elucidate free-ranging answers from the informant on how he or she uses Facebook as part of relationship management strategies.

The data consists of 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews, totaling 484 minutes, 14 seconds (8.06 hours) over a 5-month period from November 10, 2018 to April 4, 2019, the transcriptions of which were then coded according to 38 different themes. The sample is composed of 12 men and 8 women, of which 12 were local to the researcher in Bangkok, Thailand, and eight live abroad. Of the sample population, 10 were Thai nationality and 10 were other nationalities, including American, British, and Vietnamese. The average age of the participants is 43 years old.

3.7 Data Coding Scheme

All interviews were recorded by the researcher on a Sony PX470 Digital Voice Recorder PX Series. After the interview was completed, the researcher

submitted the digital files to Rev.com, an online transcription service. A text file was returned to the researcher, who added the transcripts to the interview notes, and continued a constant comparison of the data from one interview to the next, providing insights into emerging themes, and raising new questions to ask and areas to discuss in subsequent interviews. There was a total of 484 minutes of interviews, resulting in 213 pages of transcriptions.

The researcher developed a series of 39 codes which were entered as headers into an Excel spreadsheet, and interview notes and transcriptions were coded according to this scheme. The codes were divided into seven thematic areas:

- (i) Facebook usage and interaction
- (ii) Friendship types
- (iii) Relationship maintenance strategies
- (iv) Perceived tie strength
- (v) Facebook user type
- (vi) Other communications channels/social media
- (vii) Other questions

All of the data entered under the seven thematic areas were resolved into six constructs:

- (i) Facebook Usage (FBU)
- (ii) Facebook Interaction (FBI)
- (iii) Friendship Types (FTY)
- (iv) Relationship Maintenance Strategies (RMS)
- (v) Perceived Tie Strength (PTS)
- (vi) Type of Facebook User (TFU)

From the six constructs, a total of 33 emerging themes were identified. Due to the constant comparison of data as it was received, some codes were combined into others, and some were moved to a different construct. Table 3.2 below reports the number of emerging themes for each construct that were examined in this study:

Table 3.2: Emerging Themes for Each Construct

Construct	Code	Emerging Themes
Facebook Usage (6)	FBU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Number of Facebook friends b. How many are friends in real life c. Access with what device d. Primary method of getting news e. Minutes spent on Facebook f. Usage affected by Facebook privacy scandals
Facebook interaction (10)	FBI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Facebook usage b. Why usage has risen/fallen c. Posting frequency d. Birthday greetings e. Unfriending/unfollowing f. Negative Facebook experiences g. Facebook reactions and comments

(Continued)

Table 3.2 (Continued): Emerging Themes for Each Construct

Construct	Code	Emerging Themes
Facebook interaction (10)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. Facebook interaction with close friends i. Use Facebook with friends who live far away j. Other social media usage and intensity
Friendship types (5)	FTY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Definition of a close friend b. Facebook self-presentation c. Uses Facebook friend categories d. Facebook groups e. Daily memories on Facebook
Relationship maintenance strategies (7)	RMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Would fall out of touch with friends without Facebook b. Keeping in touch with far away close friends c. Relationship maintenance strategies in lieu of Facebook d. Best quality of Facebook e. Different communication channels with different friend types f. Impact of Facebook on friendships g. Other communication platforms used

(Continued)

Table 3.2 (Continued): Emerging Themes for Each Construct

Construct	Code	Emerging Themes
Perceived tie strength (4)	PTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Level of relationship satisfaction b. Talking about personal things with close friends c. Value opinions of close friends d. Close friends mainly live near or far
Type of Facebook user (1)	TFU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Type of Facebook user

3.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze and interpret the research data. Constant comparative analysis is a part of grounded theory, which strives to develop new theories based on the actual experience of people. A grounded theorist will develop a set of questions that he or she wants answers to, and then conduct interviews with informants with open-ended questions. The transcribed interviews are then analyzed for patterns, themes, and different categories so that predictable patterns emerge.

If the researcher wants to test a hypothesis, he or she can convert the qualitative data into a rough quantitative format, by systematically coding and analyzing the data, but if new theories are to be generated or new ideas explored, the researcher cannot be forced to code first and then analyze, since he or she is constantly redesigning and reintegrating theoretical concepts as the text is reviewed

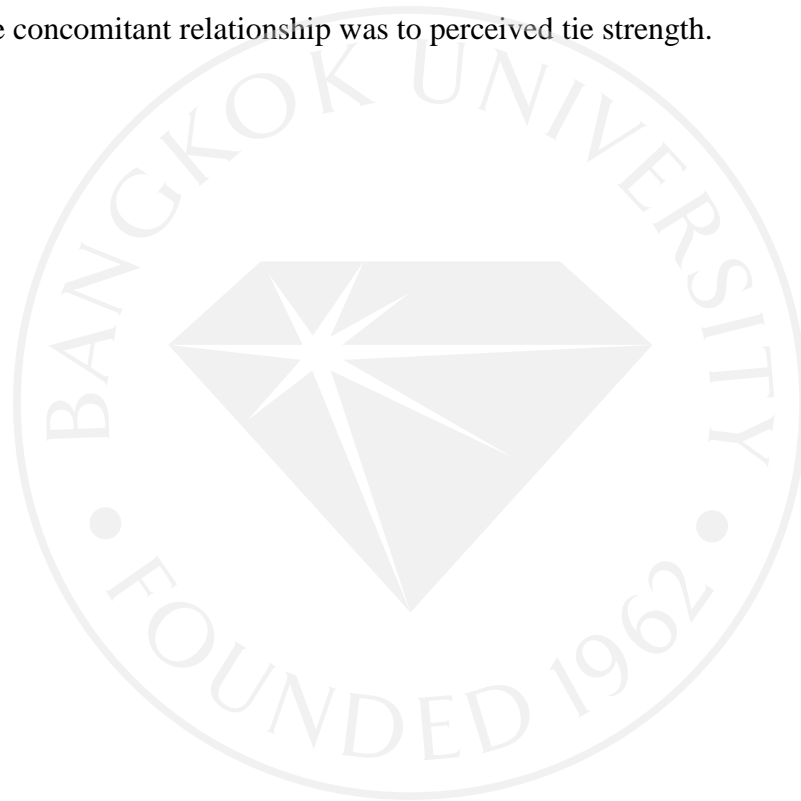
(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allows for both the explicit coding of data as well as theory development, by allowing joint coding and analysis. Constant comparison is effective for generating and suggesting many different properties, categories, and hypotheses about general social issues.

With constant comparison, a phenomenon, event, or object is identified, and then a few concepts, principles, or features of the phenomenon of interest are identified. The researcher then makes decisions concerning the collection of data based on his or her initial understanding of the phenomenon. Further data collection cannot be defined in ahead of analysis and emerging theories, and the rationale for the selection of comparison groups is how relevant they are to foster the development of emerging categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

By comparing incidents and actions in the data the researcher is forced to think analytically about them. When the researcher picks up experiences or events and codes them as such, it does little to provide information about the informant's meaning or actions, so the researcher should make the codes fit the data (Charmaz, 2006). As Glaser and Strauss (1967) describes, constant comparison allows for analytic distinctions. If your established codes define another view of a process, belief, or action than what your informant holds as it emerges in an interview, then the researcher should take note. The researcher should not dismiss ideas and observations if they do not necessarily mirror the data. Such ideas may arise from covert meanings and actions that may not have yet surfaced. These intuitions form the basis of new ideas to explore. Careful coding, though, will prevent the researcher from inputting his or her own fears, motives, or personal issues into the collected data. Coding allows

the researcher to think about the collected material in ways that might be different from those of the informants (Charmaz, 2006).

The interview transcriptions from the in-depth interviews were analyzed, and the researcher used the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in an attempt to tease out the different ways that informants used Facebook as part of their friendship management strategies with their different friendship types and what, if any, the concomitant relationship was to perceived tie strength.



CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this research that explored the role that Facebook plays in users' relationship maintenance strategies for different types of friends, and investigated if Facebook is a reliable communication channel to achieve higher levels of perceived tie strength between relationship partners. The data consists of 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews, totaling 484 minutes, 14 seconds (8.06 hours) over a 5-month period from November 10, 2018 to April 4, 2019, the transcriptions of which were then analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The following components are included in this chapter:

4.1 Results of Data Analysis

4.1.1 Emerging Themes on Facebook Usage (FBU)

4.1.2 Emerging Themes on Facebook Interaction (FBI)

4.1.3 Emerging Themes on Friendship Types (FTY)

4.1.4 Emerging Themes on Relationship Maintenance Strategies (RMS)

4.1.5 Emerging Themes on Perceived Tie-Strength (PTS)

4.1.6 Emerging Themes on Type of Facebook User (TFU)

4.2 Findings on Research Question #1

4.3 Findings on Research Question #2

4.1 Results of Data Analysis

4.1.1 Emerging Themes on Facebook Usage (FBU)

The questions in the interviews investigated the Facebook of the informant, and asked questions about minutes per day of usage; devices used; and specific questions about different types of interactions, including questions about the informant's self-presentation on Facebook and/or other social media.

The first set of questions in the interview guide first aimed to gather quantitative measurements of the informant's Facebook profile, including the number of friends, the number of minutes spent per day, and a self-described usage range, from very heavy to very low. Also queried were the informants' perception of what percentage they would classify their Facebook friends as friends in real life.

1) Number of Friends on Facebook

The number of friends amongst the informants ran from a low of 119 to a high of 3,000. The average number of friends for the sample was 692. In 2014, the average Facebook user globally had 338 friends (Mazie, 2014), while in 2016, a survey of Facebook users in the United States showed that 40% of users had between 0 and 200 friends, and 38% had between 200 and 500 friends (Statista Research Department, 2016). According to recent research, students in the United States reported an average of 670 Facebook friends, while students in Thailand claimed an average of 970 Facebook friends (Magpanthong & McDaniel, 2018).

Thus the average friend size of 692 for the informants in this sample ranked them above average compared to the entire Facebook user base, while the 10 Thai informants reported an average of 881 Facebook friends, placing them slightly under the average reported by Magpanthong and McDaniel (2018).

2) Facebook Friends Considered Friends in Real Life

When queried as to how many of their total Facebook connections they would consider to be friends in real life, three informants said a high percentage or more than 75%, while three said a medium percentage, ranging from 35-65%, and the majority, 14 informants, said a low percentage, which was less than 30%. One informant self-stated it was a very low percentage, at 5%, as he used his Facebook account purely for public relations purposes. On the other end, one informant rated her percentage of friends in real life as very high, at greater than 90%, as she specifically stated she only accepted friend requests from those she considered to be “real friends” and that she has met in person, saying that she would never accept a request from someone she had never met face to face.

Table 4.1: Number of Facebook Friends in Real Life

Level of FB Friends	Number of Informants
High (> 75%)	3
Medium (35-60%)	3
Low (< 30%)	14

3) Device Usage

As of January 2019, the device usage worldwide of Facebook users and how they access their accounts was a total of 96% on mobile phones and tablets, while the rest access Facebook via a computer (Clement, 2019). This was represented similarly in the data, with 13 of the 20 informants stating the primarily accessed

Facebook via a mobile phone, three informants stating they used both their mobile phones and a computer, and two informants saying they accessed Facebook via a mobile phone, computer, and tablet, meaning 90% accessed Facebook via a mobile device. Of the sample, two informants said they only accessed Facebook from a computer, and they both stated specifically they had deleted the Facebook app from their phones. Informant #6 said that he had removed the app from his mobile phone a few months ago, and that this was to enforce some self-discipline, since it was easy for Facebook to draw him back in. Similarly, Informant #9 said he only accessed Facebook via a computer, and that he had also deleted the app from his mobile phone. When asked what caused him to delete the app from his phone, he said it was also to enforce self-discipline and to get away from social media.

“I felt like I was spending too much time on social media apps on my phone. I just needed a break, I guess. It was actually quite cathartic to get it away from my phone and only have it when I’m on the computer. It’s actually quite nice to be away from it”
(Informant #9, personal communication, December 18, 2018).

Table 4.2: What Devices Informants Use to Access Facebook

Devices	Number of Informants
Mostly mobile phone (P)	13
Mobile phone + computer (PC)	3
Mobile phone + computer + Tablet (PCT)	2
Computer only (C)	2

4) Primary Method for News Gathering and Staying Informed

As the topic of conversation in several interviews included discussions of specific behaviors employed by the informant while using Facebook, one theme that emerged was how the informants kept up with current affairs and how they obtained their news. Of the total informants, seven discussed this topic, with six informants describing how their primary method of gathering news about current events was from Facebook and posts from friends in their news feeds. Two informants said they specifically followed news publishers' Facebook pages so their posts appeared in the informant's newsfeed, while one informant said Snapchat was where he gleaned all his news and kept up with current events by following the accounts of his preferred news providers.

5) Duration of Time Spent Daily on Facebook

According to statistics in January 2019, users spent an average of 20 minutes per day on the site (Smith, 2019). More than half of the sample would thus be considered above average Facebook users, as 13 informants said they were on Facebook between 30-60 minutes per day. Of the four informants who were well

above average, three informants said they spent over two hours a day on the site and one informant he could not count the number of minutes because it was so high. The responses of the four informants who had low levels of Facebook minutes ranged from less than 10 minutes per day to 30 minutes a week.

Table 4.3: Estimated Duration of Time Spent Daily on Facebook

Duration of Time Spent	Number of Informants
High (2+ hours/day)	4
Medium (30-60 minutes/day)	13
Low (10 minutes/day or less)	3

6) Impact of Data Use/Misuse on Usage Patterns

Concomitant to any discussion of Facebook would be the privacy issues that have been in the headlines the second half of this decade, including with Cambridge Analytica, where Facebook was accused of allowing this outside data firm to collect data on millions of users without their knowledge, which violated an agreement with the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) where Facebook agreed to ask for users' permission before sharing their data more broadly than their privacy settings specified. The FTC is now planning to fine Facebook up to \$5 billion, with news organizations reporting that “Facebook's costs jumped by \$3 billion in the first three months of the year as the company deals with an ongoing Federal Trade Commission investigation into the social network's privacy practices”, while its “operating costs rose to \$11.7 billion in the three months ending March 31” and that

the company was to “set aside \$3 billion to deal with the (Cambridge Analytica) issue...noting that the final loss from any government fines could be as much as \$5 billion” (Ivanova, 2019).

In five interviews, informants discussed whether they knew how Facebook used their data and if they had heard any news about the misuse of users’ data and what, if any, bearing that had on their usage patterns.

All five informants who discussed this issue said that they were aware of the various public scandals over the past few years concerning Facebook and the use and misuse of user data, but all five also said that it had not affected their usage at all. Two informants specifically said they had always been aware of how Facebook used their data, but that such knowledge had governed how they used the system from the beginning.

One informant said that he was aware of the privacy issues with Facebook, but that it had no bearing on his usage, saying he was confident of what he is doing and is not under impression that anything he posts is safe, secure, or private. When asked how he formulated his personal outlook on using Facebook, he said:

“Here’s the thing. My position has always been that if you’re going to be on a social platform that’s provided to you for free, and you’re willing post things on there anyway, it’s your doing. Regardless on if my data is being farmed out for other purposes, you’re putting it there yourself. It’s really my decision to stop if I wanted to stop...I have no control over

what I post as it's already out there.” (Informant #11,
personal communication, January 31, 2019)

He went on to describe how some might consider him naïve, but he thinks he understands pretty well how it works and what adverse effects of loose privacy policies might entail, but he said he has long been aware of what could happen to his posts.

4.1.2 Emerging Themes on Facebook Interaction (FBI)

For the purpose of this research, Facebook interaction was defined as communication conducted between two or more people on the social networking site and consists of wall posts, tagging photos, leaving comments on others' posts, sharing personal information, sharing opinions or feelings, sending private messages, liking, and other aspects of interaction. The interview guide contained 14 questions about the informant's Facebook interaction, which resulted in 11 themes identified and analyzed in the coding chart.

The first set of questions in the interview guide first aimed to gather quantitative measurements of the informant's Facebook profile, including the number of friends, the number of minutes spent per day, and a self-described usage range, from very heavy to very low. Also queried were the informants' perception of what percentage they would classify their Facebook friends as friends in real life.

Level of Self-Described Facebook Usage

According to surveys conducted by Pew Research Center in late 2018, 42% of Facebook users had reduced their usage, signing in less than daily, compared to March 2018 when 74% of users responded they visited Facebook daily. The same

research also showed that 26% of respondents said they had deleted the Facebook app from their phone, where this research showed 10% of the informants had taken the same action. Facebook’s own daily active user metrics showed that usage was flat in North America and had declined in Europe (Sterling, 2018).

Just over half of the informants were self-described medium Facebook users, with nearly all of the medium users saying they usually checked a few to several times a day, and six informants stated they were heavy users, with all saying they signed on multiple times per day. One heavy user specifically called himself a “super active user” (Informant #16, personal communication, March 9, 2019), with the total amount of time he spent on the site unknowable to him since it was so high. Of the four informants who identified as light users, all said they only checked a few times a week, with two of these light users also two of the informants who had deleted the Facebook app from their mobile phones.

Table 4.4: Level of Self-Described Facebook Usage

Usage Level	Number of Informants
Super Heavy	1
Heavy	5
Medium	11
Light	4

1) Facebook Usage Rising or Falling

As Facebook burrows into ever more remote corners of the world, the company is finding slower growth in more developed markets, and also reporting less engagement by users. Surveys by Pew Research Center in late 2018 showed that 42% of Facebook users had reduced their usage, this compared to March 2018 when 74% of users responded they visited Facebook daily. Facebook's own daily active user metrics showed that usage was flat in North America and had declined in Europe (Sterling, 2018).

This correlates to this research that shows that of the 16 informants with whom this theme emerged, 10 informants reported their usage has fallen over the last six months to two years. Six informants said their usage had stayed the same, and they expected it to remain where it was.

Table 4.5: Change in Facebook Usage

Frequency of Usage	Number of Informants
Risen (R)	0
Fallen (F)	10
Stayed the Same (S)	6

2) Posting Frequency

After getting a sense of the amount of time the informant spent on Facebook, the discussion addressed posting frequency, or how often he or she posted something on Facebook. Over half of the informants said they were posting less to

much less than two years ago, with eight informants stating they posted regularly and/or frequently.

Of those who identified as having noticeably reduced his or her postings over the past two years, one said he was busy focusing on other things and was not “as interested in other people’s lives right now” (Informant #2, personal communication, November 15, 2019). Another informant said that she recently started working full-time after completing her Ph.D. and that since she was much busier, the amount of time she posted had declined. The two informants who had removed the Facebook app from their mobile phones and had reported their overall usage had noticeably fallen over the past six months to two years also said the amount of posts had been dramatically reduced. One of those informants said he had been a prolific poster, but by removing the app from his mobile phone, he posted much less frequently now.

3) Appreciation and Use of Birthday Greetings Function

The interview guide had several questions about the birthday greetings function on Facebook, which gives the user a daily reminder of their friends’ birthday and provides an easy, lightweight way to wish that friend a happy birthday. The questions asked were: How much importance do you place on receiving Facebook birthday greetings from your friends? Do you always write birthday greetings on your friends’ timelines for their birthdays? Do you leave greetings for every single friend, or do you make decisions about whom to wish a happy birthday? (Appendix A).

Over half of the sample said they both happily received and gave birthday greetings, while three informants said they liked the idea and will sometimes leave greetings, and that birthday greetings are okay to receive. For three informants, the

question did not arise in discussion, and for two informants, they did not list their birthday and did not leave greetings for any friend.

The informants who said they actively wished their Facebook friends a happy birthday expressed the belief that this served an important relationship maintenance function, in that it was a lightweight method of telling the other person that he or she was thinking about the person. One informant made sure to leave a greeting for nearly all of her friends, and said that she often thought of how they met and were first connected. She also said she will make a point of leaving a private birthday message on Messenger for her very close friends. (Informant #15, personal communication, February 2, 2019).

Table 4.6: Appreciation and Use of Birthday Greetings Function

Give/Receive Birthday Greetings	Number of Informants
Yes (received and/or gave)	12
Some (maybe give)	3
No (neither received nor gave)	2
Did not ask question	3

4) Unfriending or Unfollowing on Facebook

The act of unfriending on Facebook, severing the connection between two people, is a relatively straightforward process, although the recipient of the unfriending will not be notified, and may only realize that he or she was unfriended is by scanning his or her friends list. Questions were asked of the informants about

whether or not they had unfriended anyone and/or unfollowed someone, as well as what led them to take the action and whether or not that individual had been a close friend. The vast majority of the sample have taken this action, with 17 informants saying they had both unfriended and/or unfollowed someone, and of those 17, three informants saying they had not unfriended anyone, but had unfollowed friends. The informants reported that they had unfriended and/or unfollowed friends for a wide variety of reasons. See the next section on the emerging theme of negative experiences on Facebook for some examples of why informants may have unfriended someone.

Saying that she had never unfollowed anyone, one informant said she had also never unfriended anyone, since she thought severing that connection was so severe.

“I just feel like if you unfriend someone, it’s just like you’re killing them from all my social media life. It just kind of eliminates them” (Informant #15, personal communication, February 2, 2019).

Informant #17 said that he had pruned nearly 400 friends, nearly 40% of his friends a few months ago, and he was the only informant had done any type of mass culling of friends. The question did not come up in two interviews.

5) Negative Experiences on Facebook

A user may unfriend a Facebook friend and sever their digital connection due to any number of reasons, but often because of a negative experience of some

kind. Twelve informants reported a negative experience, with five informants saying they had not had any notable negative experience on the site. The question did not arise in three interviews. The most common type of negative experiences reported were being tagged in inappropriate photos (2); political disagreements (4); falling victim to fake news (1); and accessing account by someone else leading to a police report (1).

Table 4.7: Negative Experiences on Facebook

Type of Negative Experience	Number of Informants
Tagging in inappropriate photos	2
Political disagreements	4
Falling victim to fake news	1
Someone else accessed account	1

Concurrent with the emerging theme of negative experiences on Facebook, in four interviews, informants discussed what they thought was the worst quality of Facebook, specifically things about it that bothered the informant. One informant said he was tired of the games and the game notifications, and he also discussed a general “overload of information” that he was having trouble navigating. Another informant said the worst thing to him was that “people are dumb” and going on to relate various negative episodes he had encountered on Facebook over friends’ political posts.

One informant described the irrelevant advertisements being served to him as the single worst quality of his Facebook experience. A second informant also said she was bothered that the algorithms Facebook used to deliver advertisements to her were not working very well, as she saw so many totally irrelevant ads. She also said another bad quality to her was how people presented themselves in one way online, but were in fact quite different in real life, saying she “sees through the excessive curation of some people’s lives and doesn’t like when they present a fake self” (Informant #12, personal communication, February 10, 2019).

6) Facebook Reactions and Comments

Social media in general provides a large number of ways for users to communicate, via public postings and comments; direct messages; and public and private groups. For instance, on Facebook, a user can interact with a friend’s post by clicking a reactions button, which includes ‘love’, ‘like’, ‘funny’, ‘wow’, and ‘angry’, or by leaving a comment on the post.

The interview guide contained questions for the informant about the importance of attracting interactions and engagement on his or her posts, as well as how inclined the informant might be to interact or engage with a friend’s post and if there were certain friends the informant might always engage with on Facebook.

With regard to this research, two informants said they used Facebook for marketing purposes, so they kept track of likes or reactions and comments on their posts and one informant said that he used to keep track of likes and comments, as a sort of personal validation, but that he has since disengaged and does not really care much anymore. One informant said that she used to also keep close track of her reactions and comments, but since stopped due to a negative experience.

When asked a question concerning whether Facebook has positively or negatively impacted her relationships, Informant #10 said yes and no, and explained how she had a negative experience with her husband having to do with keeping track of Facebook interactions.

“For example, my husband. Every time that I post, he never clicks like. And at the very beginning, we had some argument. He asked, ‘Why do I have to click like? It doesn’t mean I don’t love you or anything’, so I understood he was just not very active” (Informant #10, personal communication, March 6, 2019).

Informant #10 said that because of that experience with her husband, she no longer cared whether people interacted with her posts and that it had no bearing on her relationships. In addition, six informants said they often or regularly interacted with friends’ posts and/or also left comments. The reasons why they regularly interacted with their friends’ posts ranged from letting them know he or she was thinking about them; finding the material or content posted interesting or eliciting some type of reaction. All informants who said they regularly interacted with their friends’ content said they were more likely to interact with links, photos, or other posts that were positive or made them feel good.

7) Facebook Interaction with Close Friends

In 10 interviews, informants discussed their Facebook interaction with close or very close friends and how they used Facebook with different types of

friends. Of the interviews where this was a topic of discussion, three informants said they primarily only interacted with close friends on Facebook, and one informant was unsure as she had never really thought about the different ways she communicated with her different types of friends. The rest of the informants said they primarily used LINE to communicate with close friends, and that they more often used Facebook to stay in touch with acquaintances and friends who lived far away, versus using it primarily to communicate with close friends.

8) Facebook Interaction with Friends Who Live Out-of-Town

On the emerging theme of Facebook interaction with friends who live out-of-town, nearly all said the primary reason they use Facebook is to stay connected to friends who do not live near and with whom an in-person visit is not practicable. Of the 12 informants with whom this was discussed, 10 said this was a fundamental reason why they engaged with friends on Facebook, while two informants disagreed. One informant said she only used Facebook for her very closest friends, nearly all of which were local to her, and another informant said that he uses LINE mainly for non-local friends.

One informant discussed how since he was an active user of Facebook, both posting content and interacting regularly with his friends' content, he thought he had maintained closeness with several friends, enjoying following their lives and knowing what they were doing, and without that Facebook interaction, thinks he would have drifted apart from those friends (Informant #13, personal communication, January 30, 2019).

9) Social Media Sites Used Frequently by Informants

Aside from different direct messaging possibilities, today's digital landscape is also heavily populated by social networking sites and social media applications. In 18 interviews, informants stated which social media applications they used aside from Facebook. The leading other social media account stated was Instagram with 14 informants stating they had an account, with the next mentioned social media networks consisting of Twitter (5), YouTube (1), LinkedIn (1), Snapchat (2), with one informant who lives in Vietnam saying that his primary other social media outlet was Zalo, which is the leading application in that country.

Table 4.8: Other Social Media Sites Where Informants Have an Account

Social Media Site	Number of Informants
Instagram	14
Twitter	5
YouTube	1
LinkedIn	1
Snapchat	2
Zalo	1

While nearly all of the informants stated they were at least somewhat active on other social media sites, most also stated that their primary outlet for social media was still Facebook, irrespective of how much their usage had declined over the

past few years. A few did state that they were primarily using other social media sites more than Facebook, often for specific business or personal reasons.

In six interviews, informants discussed reasons why Facebook is important to them as a communication channel and as part of their relationship maintenance strategies. One woman who recently moved to Bangkok from Vietnam described how Facebook has helped her to learn more about new friends she's made since moving to Thailand, and also helps keep her informed on big events in her friends' lives. Another man who lives outside Thailand said that he thought it was a super easy low cost and low effort way to let people know you are thinking about them. One woman currently living in London has found Facebook particularly useful to her to discover things happening around town since she just returned there after living abroad for many years. All informants with whom this was discussed were all either ambivalent or positive about their experiences using Facebook.

In summary, exploring informants' Facebook interaction as part of their relationship maintenance strategies for their different friendship types found that just over half of the informants report they are generally using the site less, and posting less than they had from six months to two years ago. The informants primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with acquaintances or those friends with whom there is a weak tie, and consider it a useful platform to maintain weak ties. All informants said that Facebook was an important part of their relationship maintenance strategies.

4.1.3 Emerging Themes on Friendship Types (FTY)

Friendships are the most common social relationship for most people, and they are important for healthy emotional and social development. There are three generally accepted friendship types: 1) acquaintances, 2) close friends, and 3) very

close friends. Each of these types of friend warrants maintenance of varying degrees, and different communication channels may be used in different ways for different friendship types.

The interview guide contained eight questions about the friendship types of the informant's different friends, which resulted in eight themes identified and analyzed in the coding chart.

This set of questions aimed to investigate the different ways informants communicate with their different friendship types. The researcher probed the informants' usage of Facebook tools to categorize friends in order to target or limit posts, and explored what, if any, impact Facebook has had on the informants' friendships.

1) Definition of a Close Friend

In nine of the 20 interviews, the researcher asked the informant how he or she would define a close friend. Subjective answers generally ran the gamut from someone one has known a long time, someone who is there in good times and bad times, or someone with whom one has a shared history. Informants generally expressed the importance of having close friends and sharing experiences with them. One informant in particular stated clearly how she differentiated between types of friends:

“A friend is someone with a shared social experience and a very close friend is someone with whom I have had a very personal experience or with whom I have shared personal

feelings.” (Informant #14, personal communication, February 14, 2019)

2) Reflection of Self-Presentation

A two-part question from the interview guide asked if the informants shared a lot about him or herself, and how well did the informant think his or her Facebook presentation reflected who he or she was in real life. Of the nine informants with whom the researcher discussed this topic, six said that they believed the person he or she presented on Facebook accurately reflected who he or she was in real life, and two informants said yes, but with caution. One informant said that she had always been aware of her self-presentation on social media, and another said that his self-presentation used to be an accurate portrayal of himself, but not so much anymore since he has greatly reduced his Facebook usage. One informant said that due to the political situation in her country, she has had to self-censor herself and reduce the types of content she shared, but that she also has long been aware that everything that ends up on social media is usually curated by the user to present the best possible image.

“I’ve always been cognizant of my self-presentation on social media, inasmuch as the curated and filtered persona really is who I am.” (Informant #15, personal communication, February 2, 2019)

Of the nine interviews where this was a topic, one informant said that he was an active user of Instagram Stories and that he took good advantage of this channel to share an unexpurgated image of himself with his followers. He said it presented an authentic and accurate version of himself, since he usually sets and styles his regular Instagram posts. When delving further, the informant said he had once been a more active user of Facebook, but that over the past several years, he had reduced his usage of Facebook while simultaneously increasing his engagement with Instagram (Informant #18, personal communication, February 8, 2019).

3) Tools for Categorizing Friends

In order to target different content to different friends, or to keep embarrassing photos of oneself from appearing on a work colleague or manager's newsfeed, Facebook offers tools that allow a user to categorize their friends into different groupings, including the preset close friend and acquaintance, and allows for the user to create unlimited custom friendship types.

Of 12 informants with whom this was a topic of discussion, the responses were evenly split. Four informants said that they actively employed the tools provided by Facebook to segment their friends into different groups; four informants said they did not use the tools and/or did not know they existed; and four informants said that they used to use these tools in the past, but now they do not. One informant thought these tools provided an easy way to keep up with a smaller subset of her friends:

“Yes, I use the tools that Facebook provides in order to keep track of close friends mainly.” (Informant #2, personal communication, November 15, 2019)

Of the informants, one-third said they had once used these Facebook tools, but now they did not. One informant said that setting it all up took a lot of time, deciding on each friend and into which group she should place them.

“I used those tools twice in the past after some drama with my posts, but then it just became too difficult to think about each time I shared something.” (Informant #15, personal communication, February 2, 2019)

4) Facebook Groups

Facebook groups are an increasing area of popularity for the social networking sites users. There are many groups on Facebook, both public and private, representing nearly every imaginable topic or area of interest. In announcing a site redesign in May 2019, Facebook is now placing more emphasis on these groups. News media reported that Facebook was unveiling a “redesign that focuses on the Groups feature of its main social network...and another sign that Facebook is moving toward more private, intimate communication” (Wagner & Wang, 2019).

The researcher thought it was a notable area of exploration, so it was a topic of discussion in 15 interviews, and of these, six informants were a member of and active in multiple Facebook groups, while eight informants said they were a member of at least one Facebook group, but none of these informants were very active in these groups. One informant said he was not a member of any groups on Facebook. One informant said she was an active member of several business-related

Facebook groups in the London area where she lives and that her participation in these groups has helped her career.

5) Daily Memories

Facebook provides a summary of daily memories of everything that you posted or in which you were tagged on the same day since you joined the social networking site. Launched in June 2018, Facebook announced that they were creating a single place to “reflect on the moments you’ve shared with family and friends, including posts and photos, friends you’ve made, and major life events” (Facebook, 2018). This visual diary of sorts provides an easy way for users to reminisce on their past experiences, and research “suggests this kind of reflection can have a positive impact on people’s mood and overall well-being” (Facebook, 2018).

Of the 10 interviews in which this topic was discussed, five informants said they do not check their daily memories at all; one informant said she sometimes checks; and four informants they said they checked regularly. One informant said that she does not check herself, but that she really enjoys seeing friends’ memories that they might share. One informant said that Facebook has become a type of diary for her, and being reminded of past memories helps her to relive some memories she might have otherwise forgotten. She also noted how she prints out photos much less often than she used to, and that Facebook in particular has become an important photo album for her and her family.

In summary, the informants stated they generally used more than one communication channel to maintain close friendships, and that Facebook was not their primary method of communication with their closest friends. All informants also used different messaging services in addition to Facebook to stay connected to their closest

friends. In Thailand, the popularity of the LINE application means it is important to informants' relationship maintenance strategies. It is the most commonly used messaging app in the sample, ranking more highly than Messenger, which was the leading messaging app for informants who lived outside Thailand.

Informants discussed how their Facebook interaction differs between acquaintances, close friends, and very close friends. Three informants said they primarily only interacted with close friends on Facebook, seeing their Facebook friends as an extension of their friends in real life. One informant said she never really thought about the ways she communicated with her friends, while the remainder of the sample reported that Facebook was their primary platform for relationship maintenance for their acquaintances, the weak ties in their lives, and for those friends of different types who live far away.

4.1.4 Emerging Themes on Relationship Maintenance Strategies (RMS)

Relationships generally go through a series of steps that allow two relationship partners to move along a path from acquaintance to very close friend. This movement through these steps is generally systematic and sequential, and may move forward or backward and fast or slow. So that an individual can keep a relationship at the same stage without risk of regression, different relationship maintenance strategies are necessary.

These different strategies consist of keeping the relationship alive; keeping the relationship in a specified state or condition; keeping the relationship in a satisfactory condition, and keeping the relationship in repair, which means both partners have to commit to fixing problems that may have arisen in the relationship.

Any interaction between two relationship partners can be considered maintenance and usually occupies the greatest proportion of the life of the relationship.

The interview guide contained eight questions about different relationship maintenance strategies employed by the informant, which resulted in five themes identified and analyzed in the coding chart.

These questions aimed to explore different strategies that the informant employed to keep their relationships at the desired levels. The researcher examined areas of inquiry such as if the informant would fall out of touch with a friend without using Facebook; how they kept in touch with close friends who were not on Facebook; and the different ways they communicated with his or her acquaintances, close friends, and very close friends.

1) Falling out of touch with some friends without using Facebook

With regard to the question of the informant falling out of touch with some friends if he or she were to stop using Facebook, of the 15 informants in which this theme arose, 10 concurred that they would definitely fall out of touch with some friends if they were to stop using Facebook, while two informants said it would have no impact, and they would find other ways to maintain those relationships. Lastly, three informants said that there would be no impact without using Facebook, and three said that it might have some impact. One informant described how due to his decreased Facebook usage, he has already witnessed this happening and that he has drifted apart from childhood friends in England, where he grew up.

Another informant said that he thought it was “absurd” that he might grow apart from friends if he were to stop using Facebook. He said he would compensate with other communication channels and that Facebook only makes easier

what is already possible in other ways (Informant #8, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

The researcher discussed this emerging theme with three-fourths of the informants, and all agreed that Facebook played an important part in their relationship maintenance strategies, due to its lightweight mechanisms that allow a user to easily let someone know one was thinking about him or her.

When queried about the result if the informant were to stop using Facebook completely, of the eight informants where the researcher identified this theme, five informants said it would be negative for them to stop using Facebook and that they would sacrifice connections to people. One informant said that he would not like not knowing what's going in his hometown with his childhood friends, and one informant said he would feel more isolated and unaware of what his friends were doing in their lives. Of the total, three informants said that there would be no appreciable difference in their lives if they were to stop using Facebook. Those three same informants were generally ambivalent about the social media application for a variety of reasons, each individual to the informant, but all shared similar viewpoints and usage patterns.

One informant said that she really enjoyed reading what other people in her social circle shared and learning how they think. She said she had learned lots of new things and has gained inspiration from many of her friends' posts. The informant had an overall very positive opinion of Facebook, and said it had helped her in many ways. She also noted that this is probably because she only accepted friend requests from those she really considered friends, and that she had met in real life on more than one occasion (Informant #12, personal communication, February 10, 2019).

2) Keeping in Touch with Friends Who Live Far away

The next section of the interview guide aimed to explore how the informant communicated with his or her close and very close friends. Questions were posed to the informant about how he or she communicated with his or her close and very close friends; whether it would be an acquaintance or very close friend who would interact with the informant's posts; and how often the informant communicated with his or her friends on various communication channels. The identified theme was a result of an investigation into how the informants used Facebook to keep in touch with different types of friends and with friends who lived far away from the informant.

All nine of the informants with whom this was discussed said that their primary reason for using Facebook was to keep in touch with friends who live far away and with whom they were unable to see very often in person. All of the informants recognized and acknowledged the ease with which Facebook allowed them to maintain connections with friends who lived far from them, and with whom in-person visits were not often feasible.

3) Relationship maintenance strategies in lieu of using Facebook

The next area of investigation was how the informants kept in touch with close or very close friends who are not on Facebook or did not use Facebook very much. Also discussed were other social media applications or general communication strategies use in relationship maintenance strategies in lieu of using Facebook. This emerging theme was identified in seven informant interviews. One informant said he makes a point of reaching out to very close friends via text message or a face-to-face visit whenever possible, while another informant said he often felt less closeness

between him and his friends who do not use Facebook, and that using Facebook frequently with very close friends allow greater perceptions of closeness between him and his relationship partners. One informant said that she did not really notice a difference in closeness, and when queried about the applicability and usefulness of Facebook interaction in moving a friend along the relationship path from acquaintance to very close friend, she did not believe that increased Facebook usage led to greater perceptions of closeness.

4) Best Quality of Facebook

A total of nine informants discussed the question posed to them as to what they thought was the best quality of Facebook, in the way that they use Facebook as part of their relationship maintenance strategies. Of the total of nine informants, seven specifically stated that “staying connected” or “staying in touch” with friends was the best quality of the social networking site. One informant said that the way he used Facebook took the place of sending birthday and Christmas cards, which had been part of his relationship maintenance strategies for many years. Another informant said that it helps her to stay current on the big events in friends’ lives, and that when they met up in person, they both already knew what had been going on, so they could jump into weightier matters.

5) Different Communication Channels with Different Friend Types

The next theme identified from this section of the interview guide was derived from an exploration of how the informant interacted with his or her very close friends and acquaintances on Facebook. Of the two informants in which this theme arose, one informant discussed how she had pulled away from some friendships because of her interactions on Facebook. She described how she had had some very

close friends reveal aspects of their personalities on social media that she had not realized existed and that it was different than how they were in person. She felt herself consciously pulling away from them, thereby lessening their perceptions of closeness to her.

“You see friends less and less and we become different people, with different interests, and different views of the world. Somehow meeting face to face you don’t find that out, but you do find it out on social media.” (Informant #15, personal communication, February 2, 2019)

6) Impact of Facebook Interaction on Friendships

This research explored how Facebook is used as part of an individual’s relationship maintenance strategies, and is investigating whether increased Facebook interaction between friends might lead to perceptions of higher tie strength, or the feeling of closeness between two people. To that end, the interview guide contained questions about whether the informant considered Facebook an important tool to maintain relational closeness. Further probing during 10 interviews led to an emerging theme about the impact of Facebook interaction on the individual’s friendships, with six informants saying that Facebook has had a positive impact on their relationships, three informants stating it had had a neutral impact, and one saying it had had a negative impact on his relationships.

One informant described how social media was an important tool for her to maintain friendships from different points in her life, and especially so now since she is living abroad and away from her home country.

“In the past, I lost touch with all my friends in secondary school when I didn’t have Facebook, I didn’t have any social media and I can’t easily keep in touch with people. But then after university, I have been able to stay in touch with friends and we can easily talk again. I know about their lives and can ask how they are doing. I think it’s had a very good impact on my friendships.” (Informant #1, personal communication, November 10, 2018)

7) Other Communication Platforms Used by Informants

In nearly all of the interviews, the topic of other electronic communication platforms arose in discussions, and 18 informants shared all the different communication platforms they employed to keep in touch with friends and family near and far. By far, the largest percentage of informants used LINE (15), followed by Messenger (10), iMessage/Text Messaging (6), WhatsApp (6), and WeChat (1).

Table 4.9: Other Communication Platforms Used by Informants

Communication Platforms	Number of Informants
LINE	15
Messenger	10
iMessage/Text Messaging	6
WhatsApp	6
WeChat	1

Of the 20 informants, 12 were local to the researcher and eight were from out-of-town, and of the 18 informants with whom this was discussed, 15 said they used LINE, which corresponds to figures that confirm LINE is very popular in Thailand. As of 2018, there are 44 million Thais with a LINE account, over two-thirds of the population, and it is far and away the most popular messaging service in the country (Thaitrakulpanich, 2019). This shows up in the data with every informant resident in Thailand using LINE, and none of those who lived outside Thailand using LINE as frequently, thus depending on other text messaging applications.

In nearly all 20 interviews, the discussion dove deeper into how the informant used different messaging applications as part of their relationship maintenance strategies. Of the 18 informants with whom this was discussed, 14 said that LINE is their primary messaging application, and nearly all expressed significant passion for it. A total of 11 informants said they used Messenger, while other messaging applications discussed were iMessage/Text Messaging (11), WhatsApp (6), Zalo (1), Viber (1), and WeChat (1). Informants who used LINE were the most

passionate about describing their usage, while those who used Messenger were somewhat passionate or ambivalent. WhatsApp was primarily used by those informants who lived local to the researcher, and who used it for friends in specific geographic locations. Similarly, one informant each mentioned three other social networking sites which have specific geographic popularity, which were Zalo (Vietnam), Viber (Philippines), and WeChat (China).

Table 4.10: Messaging Applications Used by Informants

Messaging Application	Number of Informants
LINE	14
Messenger	11
iMessage/Text Messaging	4
WhatsApp	6
Zalo	1
Viber	1
WeChat	1

With the preponderance of many different electronic messaging applications available today, nearly all informants were at least moderately to very passionate about at least one messaging application. Other methods of communication were also discussed in the interviews, with nearly all informants stating they used email very infrequently and much less than just five years ago. Social networking and lightweight messaging applications have greatly supplanted email, let alone postal

mail, with zero informants having mailed any type of physical mail in the past three years.

In summary, as prior research has shown, two individuals in a relationship will perform maintenance required to keep the relationship at the same level (Vitak, 2012a), and any interaction between relationship partners can be maintenance, and usually occupies the greatest proportion of the life of the relationship. This relationship maintenance may include verbal and non-verbal actions or behaviors, and the quantity and quality of communication will vary based on the type of relationship and the strength of the tie, as noted by Granovetter (1983). As Dainton (2013) discussed in her research, the primary motive for Facebook use is to maintain relationships, but that the use of Facebook maintenance behaviors does not seem to impact a relationship much more beyond general maintenance activity. Her research supports the contention that while ongoing maintenance is critical to a relationship, the communication channel of choice is less important than the content which is being communicated (Dainton, 2013).

The informants in this study employ Facebook as a relationship maintenance platform for their acquaintances or weak ties, and those friends who live far away. The informants in this sample population primarily use Facebook as a communications platform in their relationship maintenance strategies with their acquaintances and weak ties. They use more than one communications platform with their close and very close friends, and over half use the architecture and tools provided by Facebook as a vital part of their relationship maintenance strategies.

4.1.5 Emerging Themes on Perceived Tie Strength (PTS)

Tie strength differs for different friendship types. The closer the friend,

the stronger the tie, and strong ties have higher levels of intimacy or closeness.

Two relationship partners who have established a certain level of intimacy will share information with one another, through various methods of self-disclosure that help to build increasing levels of intimacy. Tie strength refers to a general sense of closeness one feels for another person. When those feelings are strong, it's a 'strong tie' and when those feelings are weak, it's called a 'weak tie' (Gilbert, 2012). Mark Granovetter (1973) defined tie strength as a "combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (Granovetter, 1973). Because relationships are dynamic, they require maintenance to survive and thrive. If no effort is put into them, they start to decay over time. Frequency in communication is often used as a barometer of the strength of the relationship, as one feels closer to someone if there is regular communication of some sort. Tie strength is related to the emotional intensity of the relationship and how likely one person is to receive emotional assistance from the other person in a time of need (Roberts & Dunbar, 2011).

Measures based on interdependence theory hold that relationships in closer proximity have a greater emotional closeness, and predict lower scores for long distance relationships, saying that face-to-face contact is a necessary condition for closeness (Johnson, Haigh, Craig, & Becker, 2009). However, the rise and integration into our lives of social networking reduces the opportunity costs related to friendship maintenance, thereby potentially increasing the perception of closeness by users of these sites.

The interview guide contained eight questions about the perceived tie strength of the informant with different friends, which resulted in four themes

identified and analyzed in the coding chart. The researcher inquired about the level of relational satisfaction the informant had with his or her friends; if the majority of the informant's friends lived near or far; and if he or she talked about personal things with friends, and what value the informant placed on close friends' personal opinions.

These questions inquired about the informant's communication with very close friends and how they might differ from acquaintances, and what role Facebook and other social media played. Emerging themes were discovered around the informants' level of relationship satisfaction with friends; how much the informant talked about personal things with friends; if the informant valued the opinions of close friends; and the geographic dispersion of their close and very close friends.

1) Level of Relationship Satisfaction with Friends

In nearly all of the interviews, the theme of relational satisfaction arose. Of 17 informants with whom this was discussed, six informants said they were very satisfied with their friends, while 10 informants said they were generally satisfied or pretty satisfied with their close and very close friends. One informant said she was currently unsatisfied and that she had let many of her friendships wither and die due to lack of effort on her part.

“So, this is a good one. I've been too distant the past few years and I will take full responsibility for that. I've not always maintained friendships to the extent I wish I had done and I've left some people in my life out. I really wish I had made more of an effort.” (Informant #19, personal communication, April 4, 2019)

Several informants expressed a wish that they could spend more face-to-face time with their closest friends, but that distance prohibited it. Nearly all informants concurred with the importance of satisfaction in their relationships, and felt they had solid friendships.

2) Self-Disclosure

In order to investigate the different ways the informants used Facebook as part of their relationship maintenance strategies with different friendship types, the interview guide contained questions that aimed to probe at how the informants expressed themselves to their closest friends. The aim was to see if they used the semi-public Facebook platform to communicate important issues, or did they pass along important news via other channels.

Therefore, the next emerging theme identified was whether or not the informants talked about personal things with close friends. Talking about personal things and increasing one's level of self-disclosure is an important method of increasing tie strength and perceptions of closeness in a dyad. Of the 12 informants who discussed this, nine informants said that yes, they definitely talked about personal things with their friends, while three informants said they either used to more often when they were younger, or that they sometimes talked about personal things with close friends. One informant said he was still re-establishing friendships after being away for several years, and so he did not discuss personal matters as much as he used to.

3) Valuing the Personal Opinions of Close Friends

While probing into how the informants use Facebook, and how they might accumulate social capital from their Facebook interaction, the theme of self-presentation arose, including how some informants used Facebook as a medium to garner opinions and feedback from their circle of friends, and then further, how the informants measured the impact of opinions from their different types of friends.

Therefore, the next set of questions revealed a theme as to how much the informants value the personal opinions of close friends, and if he or she sought out the counsel of his or her close and very close friends. This emerging theme arose in 10 interviews, with five informants saying they highly or very highly valued the opinions of close friends and stated that their close friends' opinions were very important, with another four informants saying that is either important to a degree or sometimes important. Of those four, one informant said she primarily depended on her husband and family for advice and counsel; one informant said he took their opinions into account; and one informant said that while close friends' opinions are important, he also thought an acquaintance might have an equally valuable opinion to offer, depending on context and area of expertise.

“It depends on the situation for me and depends on their expertise. Like if it's about a certain topic that I need, I would take the advice of an acquaintance if I knew they were an expert in that area. But if it's a life issue, then yes, most definitely, I would take the advice of my friend before an acquaintance, like how I wouldn't ask for cooking advice from

someone who doesn't know how to cook." (Informant #7, personal communication, December 19, 2018)

Lastly, one informant said that he used to value close friends' opinions, but that he now no longer did, due to some unfortunate situations that have occurred. This informant said he had been disappointed by some close friends with whom he had been involved in negative Facebook experiences, and he had subsequently begun to distrust the opinions of many close friends (Informant #17, personal communication, April 1, 2019).

4) Geographic Dispersion of Friends

In most of human existence, the people in one's life, friends, family, and other loved ones, almost always lived very close, in the same town or village. As humanity settled down into bigger and bigger conurbations and then started moving around the globe with the advent of jet travel, it became easier to see friends and family who may have relocated to the other side of the world. It has only been in the past 100 years that the planet has seen an astronomical increase in the ability to keep in touch, from the telegraph to the land-line telephones of yore, then to fax machines, personal computers, and finally, mobile phones.

With many different possibilities available to more easily keep in touch with close and very close friends who might live far away, it becomes easier to have relationship maintenance strategies that keep a relationship at a desired level even if the members of the dyad live far apart. This emerging theme was a result of examining where the majority of the informants' close and very close friends lived.

The theme arose in 10 interviews, with one informant stating that nearly all her closest friends lived near her, and four informants saying that their closest friends mainly lived far away from where the informant was currently living. Half of the informants with whom this was discussed said that there was an equal split between those who lived near and those who lived far amongst their closest friends. This is notable in that the majority of informants said they used Facebook as part of their relationship maintenance strategies for their acquaintances or their weak ties.

In summary, while this research aimed to explore at the relationship between Facebook interaction and tie strength, and whether increased Facebook interaction might lead to greater perceptions of closeness, the opposite might also be true, in that greater Facebook interaction could potentially lead to weaker tie strength in a dyad, or even lead to the decay or dissolution of the relationship. Of the informants in this study, six thought that Facebook contributed to the closeness in their relationships, while three said it was neutral and one said it was negative. Ten informants reported that they would fall out of touch with some friends if they stopped using Facebook, and all informants who said that they used Facebook to communicate with their closest friends also reported that they used more than one channel. Nine informants said that they talked about personal things with their friends, and all of the informants who said they definitely talked about personal things with friends either did so in person or via messaging.

4.1.6 Emerging Themes on Type of Facebook User (TFU)

Each friendship type, acquaintance, good friend, and very close friend, requires a different level of relationship maintenance and different types of strategies. Robinson, Callahan, Boyle, Rivera, and Cho (2017) found that there were four

different types of Facebook user, in how they experience the social networking site. They categorized users into four broad types: Relationship Builders, Window Shoppers, Town Criers, and Selfies. The Facebook users who were deemed Relationship Builders use the site in much the way people have used email or the telephone. This type of user treats Facebook as an extension of their real lives, and they use the site to share photos and videos and to comment and interact with friends. The next type, Window Shoppers, consider Facebook a part of their lives, but very infrequently share personal information and do not readily disclose anything about themselves. They will observe and check in with the site, but do not comment or otherwise interact with friends. This type of user has also been called lurkers, as they like to watch afar and not necessarily interact. The third type of Facebook user, Town Criers, are often professional journalists, writers, activists, or event organizers and like to share information widely and broadly. This information is not necessarily personal information about the individual, but will often be about politics or other news items that reflect the user's personal interests (MacLellan, 2017). The final group of users is called Selfies, and are the ones who use social media most like that which it is often perceived by the media, consisting of the users who share a large number of photos, videos, and status updates, and who actively seek out high numbers of interactions from his or her friends.

In their research, Robinson, Callahan, Boyle, Rivera, and Cho (2017) used Q methodology to identify individuals in their study who shared similar attitudes and who thought similarly. A factor analysis in their research yielded four significant factors, characterizing “general perceptual typologies and not necessarily demographic identifiers of individual responses” (p. 52). Using the results of their

study as a guide, the researcher subjectively assigned each informant to one of the four Facebook user types.

As each interview was being conducted, the researcher took notes of the different aspects of the aforementioned user types, and subjectively assigned each informant a tentative user type. After evaluating the interview transcript and the researcher's own notes, a final determination was made as to the subjective evaluation of the user type. The researcher used these Facebook user types as identified by Robinson, Callahan, Boyle, Rivera, and Cho (2017) as a basis for categorization to determine how different informants used Facebook in their relationship maintenance strategies.

Of the 20 informants, over half, 13 informants, were Relationship Builders, broken down further by strong, medium, or weak. The strength of user type was an arbitrary decision on the part of the researcher, and was intended to serve as a sorting mechanism to tease out the emerging themes behind the informants relationship maintenances strategies. The informants were ranked as a division of intensity with the behaviors they exhibited that warranted being classified a Relationship Builder, to see if any further theme emerged about tie strength and Facebook usage. This type of person used Facebook and its communication tools much as they had previously used email or the telephone. They looked at Facebook as an extension of their real lives, and those who were strongest in this type were happy to use the site to share photos and videos and to comment and interact with friends.

Of the remaining seven informants, six informants were Window Shoppers, broken down further as either medium or weak, with the intensity determined by the researcher as described above. This type of user infrequently shares personal

information and they do not readily disclose very much about themselves. They will observe from afar and check in with the site to keep up with their friends' activities and life events, but they do not comment very much or otherwise interact with friends.

Only one informant was a Town Crier, the type most often composed of professional journalists, writers, activists, or event organizers, ones who like to share information widely and broadly, and to use Facebook as a tool of self-promotion. The only informant evaluated as a Town Crier was also the one who actively used Facebook as part of her public relations efforts to promote her talks on finance to Thai youth, primarily through her YouTube channel where she promoted her talks.

None of the informants were a Selfies type, described as the ones who use social media like it is often perceived by the media, consisting of the users who share a large number of photos, videos, and status updates, and who actively seek out high numbers of interactions from his or her friends. Only one informant said she had ever paid much attention to the likes and comments on her posts, but that she had learned a valuable lesson when she became angry at her husband for not interacting with all her posts.

Table 4.11: Type of Facebook User

Informants	Type of Facebook User						
	Relationship Builders (13)			Window Shoppers (6)		Town Criers (1)	Selfies (0)
	Strong	Medium	Weak	Medium	Weak		
Informant # 1		X					
Informant # 2			X				
Informant # 3						X	
Informant # 4	X						
Informant # 5		X					
Informant # 6			X				
Informant # 7		X					
Informant # 8	X						
Informant # 9				X			
Informant # 10	X						
Informant # 11	X						
Informant # 12				X			
Informant # 13	X						
Informant # 14				X			
Informant # 15			X				

(Continued)

Table 4.11 (Continued): Type of Facebook User

Informants	Type of Facebook User						
	Relationship Builders (13)			Window Shoppers (6)		Town Criers (1)	Selfies (0)
	Strong	Medium	Weak	Medium	Weak		
Informant # 16	X						
Informant # 17			X				
Informant # 18				X			
Informant # 19				X			
Informant # 20					X		

In summary, the informants were subjectively ascribed as one of four Facebook user types, first described by Robinson, Callahan, Boyle, Rivera, and Cho (2017), and of the 20 informants, over half were Relationship Builders using Facebook and its communication tools much as they had used email or the telephone. They looked at Facebook as an extension of their real lives, and those who were strongest in this type were happy to use the site to share photos and videos and to comment and interact with friends. Six informants were Window Shoppers, infrequently sharing personal information and they do not readily disclose very much about themselves. They will observe from afar and check in with the site to keep up with their friends' activities and life events, but they do not comment very much or otherwise interact with friends.

4.2 Findings on Research Question # 1

RQ #1: How is Facebook used as a friendship maintenance platform by individual users for different friendship types?

In her research, Vitak (2012a; 2014) has been instrumental in examining the different ways that Facebook is used in relationship maintenance strategies with different friendship types, including close friends, family members, and casual acquaintances, having looked closely at the differences between those who communicate frequently outside of Facebook and those who use it as a primary method of communication. She has shown that when users post about bad news, look for support from friends, or ask for help or advice, they are sharing social capital. Vitak has shown there is great benefit to maintaining weak ties, and that social networks provide a lot of information that our closest friends and family may lack (Urist, 2015).

This research explored informants' Facebook interaction as part of their relationship maintenance strategies for their different friendship types. Overall, just over half of the informants report they are generally using the site less, and posting less than they had from six months to two years ago. The informants primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with acquaintances or those friends with whom there is a weak tie, and consider it a useful platform to maintain those weak ties, including friends from high school and university, and others with whom there may not be the kind of shared experiences and self-disclosure which are the foundations of close friends and strong ties.

Nearly all the informants reported that the primary reason they use Facebook is to keep in touch and stay connected to friends who do not live near them, with 10

informants stating this was a fundamental reason why they use the site. All informants said that Facebook was an important part of their relationship maintenance strategies, which one noting the birthday greetings function serving as a particularly useful way of maintaining her friendships.

Media multiplexity theory states that tie strength is positively correlated with the number of communication channels that a dyad employs in relationship maintenance strategies. Findings in previous research show that while dyads with strong ties may employ Facebook for relationship maintenance, it is unlikely those ties would weaken without using Facebook, since they usually employ other communication channels. For weaker ties, and sometimes close relationships separated by distance, Facebook occupies a similar, but more robust, tool than email was at the beginning of the technological revolution at the beginning of this millennium (Vitak, 2014).

The informants in this study support the findings of Vitak's research, in that they stated they used more than one communication channel to maintain close friendships, and that Facebook was not their primary method of communication with their closest friends. All informants also used different messaging services in addition to Facebook to stay connected to their closest friends. In Thailand, where over half of the sample population lives, the popularity of the LINE application means it is extremely important to informants' relationship maintenance strategies. It is the most commonly used messaging app in the sample, ranking more highly than Messenger, which was the leading messaging app for informants who lived outside Thailand.

In several interviews, informants discussed how their Facebook interaction differs between acquaintances, close friends, and very close friends. Three informants

said they primarily only interacted with close friends on Facebook. These informants also had a smaller number of friends, and kept a tighter grip on who they accepted as friends, seeing their Facebook friends as an extension of their friends in real life. One informant said she never really thought about the ways she communicated with her friends, while the remainder of the sample reported that Facebook was their primary platform for relationship maintenance for their acquaintances, the weak ties in their lives, and for those friends of different types who live far away.

Research has shown that the more weak ties a person has, the happier they feel. These connections with people in your life who may not be close friends positively impact our well-being by making us feel more connected, by offering recommendations, and can affect job prospects (Volpe, 2019). The informants in this study support this conclusion, and consider Facebook an ideal platform with which to maintain the weak ties in their lives. Research has found that Facebook users value the lightweight interactions on the site, including responding to a friend's status or wishing someone a happy birthday, and that both sides of the dyad consider these interactions a relational investment on both sides (Urist, 2015).

Context collapse is a social science construct which describes how multiple distinct audiences in one's social network become flattened out, so that people from different contexts end up as a part of a single group of friends. Due to this context collapse, users can quickly send information across their network and easily facilitate communication across a group of individuals who would ordinarily not communicate with one another. Research has shown how an individual's self-presentation will differ based on their audience, in that an individual will most likely communicate differently to a close friend than to a supervisor or formal business contact. The idea

of context collapse has led researchers to explore if users take a “lowest common denominator” approach to sharing on a social networking site, and if that leads to a decrease in engagement and an increase in conscious engagement (Vitak, 2012a, p. 465). In a research study on the impact of context collapse on social media disclosure, Vitak (2012b) found that intended disclosure was positively correlated with the audience, but contrary to the study’s hypothesis, the increased diversity and size of an audience led to more disclosure by users.

In this research, over half of the informants discussed the different tools that Facebook provides that allow content creators to target posts to different audiences, thereby forestalling context collapse. Four informants said they actively used these tools to segment their friends into different lists, while four informants said they did not know these tools existed, and four informants said they used to use the tools in the past, but now they do not. One informant said that she uses “the tools that Facebook provides in order to keep track of close friends mainly” (Informant # 2, personal communication, November 15, 2018).

One informant described how she thought it was a nice idea, but that setting it up and thinking about where each friend should go took up a lot of time, and did not seem to offer much benefit to her, saying that she “used those tools twice in the past after some drama with my posts, but then it just became too difficult to think about each time I shared something” (Informant # 15, personal communication, February 2, 2019).

The informants primarily employ Facebook as a relationship maintenance platform for their acquaintances or weak ties, and those friends who live far away. One informant said he uses Facebook much like he used to send Christmas and

birthday cards in the past, which had been part of his relationship maintenance strategies for many years. Another informant said that Facebook helps her to stay current on the big events in friends' lives, so that when they meet in person, they both already knew what is going on and so could jump right into weightier matters.

The informants in this sample population primarily use Facebook as a communications platform as part of their relationship maintenance strategies with acquaintances and weak ties. They use more than one platform with their close and very close friends, reinforcing media multiplexity theory, and over half of the informants were subjectively coded as Relationship Builders, using the tools provided by Facebook as a vital part of their relationship maintenance strategies.

4.3 Findings on Research Question # 2

RQ#2: How does an individual's Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies correspond with their perception of tie strength?

In today's hyper-saturated electronic communications environment, the possibilities for staying in touch are limitless. There is also less of a distinction between an online and an offline self than is commonly believed. To think of a social network as someone you go totally divorced by physical reality is a "forced demarcation" (Urist, 2015). The dynamics of communication and online interaction in the 21st century are not adequately captured by such a demarcation. It used to be thought that an individual had an online and an offline persona, and that they were often different. However, with an ever-increasing amount of our lives spent online, it may be that there is only one persona, and that the online version is a specific presentation of one's true personality, which is then exposed to communication

partners via various relationship maintenance strategies. To interact with one friend on Facebook and write a note to another are more equivalent ways of communicating than has customarily been noted. As has been noted in this research, the informants overwhelmingly used Facebook as a platform to perform relationship maintenance strategies with acquaintances and weak ties.

With the preponderance of usage of Facebook by large majorities in nearly every developed country, the question arises as to whether this regular Facebook interaction by a dyad with a weak tie could increase the strength of their tie by virtue of these interactions on Facebook. Of the informants in this study, six thought that Facebook contributed to the closeness in their relationships, while three said it was neutral and one said it was negative. When queried directly about any correlation between Facebook interaction and the perceptions of closeness in a dyad, one informant said that she noticed no difference in closeness and that she was not of the opinion that it was possible to become closer friends or increase tie strength solely by virtue of using Facebook. On the opposite end was another informant who reported that he does feel closer to those he interacts with more frequently on Facebook, and that he has drifted apart from some friends who do not use Facebook and with whom he used to be close.

Ten informants reported that they would assuredly fall out of touch with some friends if either of the dyad stopped using Facebook. All of the informants who said that they used Facebook to communicate with their closest friends also reported that they used more than one channel, which is highlighted by media multiplexity theory.

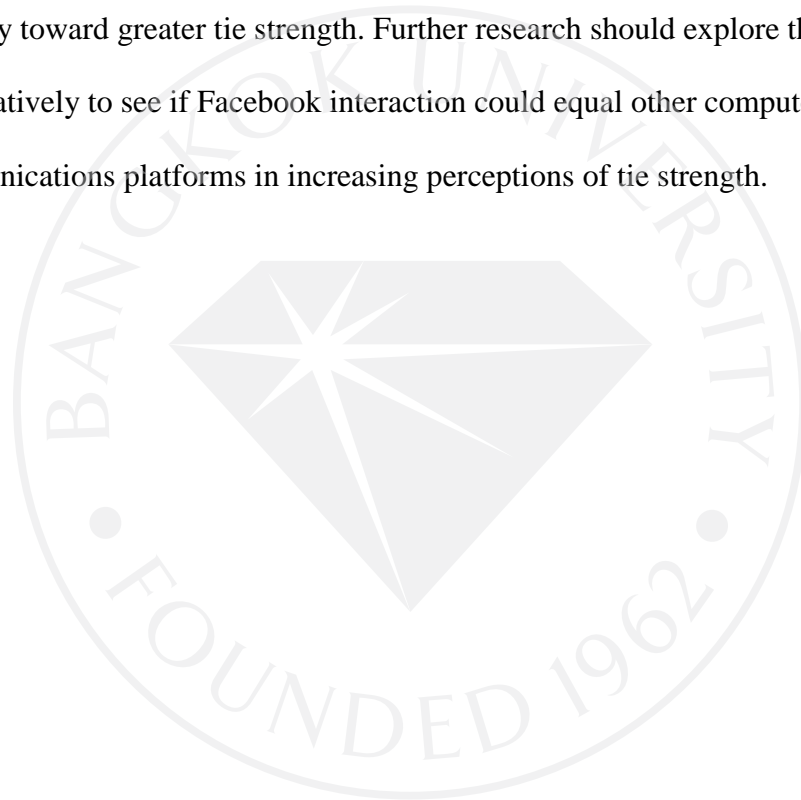
While this research aimed to explore at the relationship between Facebook interaction and tie strength, and whether increased Facebook interaction might lead to greater perceptions of closeness, the opposite might also be true, in that greater Facebook interaction could potentially lead to weaker tie strength in a dyad, or even lead to the decay or dissolution of the relationship.

One informant discussed how she had pulled away from some friendships because of their interactions on Facebook. She described several very close friends of hers who had revealed aspects of their personalities on Facebook that she did not realize had even existed, and that it was drastically different than how they were in person. She said she had felt herself consciously pulling away from them, thereby weakening the tie. She ascribed this to perhaps the standard deviations that life often causes to friends, saying that she sees “friends less and less and we become different people, with different interests, and different views of the world. Somehow meeting face-to-face you don’t find that out, but you do find it out on social media” (Informant # 15, personal communication, February 2, 2019).

One way of increasing tie strength is through greater self-disclosure on the part of both parties in a dyad. Greater self-disclosure leads to increased intimacy, and then a greater perception of closeness. This self-disclosure needs not be in person or face-to-face, and may even be enhanced when done in a computer-mediated environment. When queried about self-disclosure and whether they discussed personal things with close friends, nine informants concurred and said that they definitely talked about personal things with their friends, while three said they used to more when they were younger, or that they sometimes talked about personal things. All of

the informants who said they definitely talked about personal things with friends either did so in person or via messaging.

This research does not offer any proof that increased Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies will lead to greater tie strength without other concomitant relationship maintenance strategies, nor does it offer support to the idea that a high level of Facebook interaction can move a friend along the relationship pathway toward greater tie strength. Further research should explore this notion quantitatively to see if Facebook interaction could equal other computer-mediated communications platforms in increasing perceptions of tie strength.



CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a summary and discussion of the findings of this study, including findings related to previous research, to theory, and to the researcher's expectations. Also included are limitations of the study and recommendations for further applications and for further research. Listed below are the following sub-sections of this chapter:

5.1 Summary of Findings

5.1.1 Facebook Interaction

5.1.2 Friendship Types

5.1.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies

5.1.4 Perceived Tie Strength

5.2 Discussion of Findings

5.2.1 Findings in Relation to Previous Research

5.2.2 Findings in Relation to Theories

5.2.3 Findings in Relation to Researcher's Expectations

5.3 Limitations of the Study

5.4 Recommendations for Further Application

5.4.1 Social Media Developers

5.4.2 Public Relations Practitioners

5.4.3 Policymakers

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

5.1 Summary of Findings

This research explored how informants use Facebook in their relationship maintenance strategies with their different types of friends, and if Facebook interaction corresponds to tie strength. Specifically, this research investigated how Facebook is used as a friendship maintenance platform with different friendship types, and investigated how Facebook interaction as part of friendship maintenance strategies is associated with users' perceived tie strength. The researcher explored Facebook usage with different friendship types and how those interactions affect the aspects and characteristics of relationship maintenance strategies.

As of mid-2019, Facebook is still far and away the most popular social media site in the world. Facebook also owns WhatsApp and Instagram, both of which showed fairly high usage from the informants in this study. After Facebook bought WhatsApp, it then added features and benefits to their original messaging product, Facebook Messenger. Facebook then bought Instagram, in order to vanquish a threat by conquering a competitor.

The data in the research are similar to many other studies which have looked at the outsize role Facebook plays in our communications and much of our online presence. Even though the samples in this research showed signs of declining usage and engagement with Facebook, they still kept one foot in the cyberworld, and used Facebook an above-average amount, as defined by the social media giant's own metrics. The informants in this study continue to use Facebook as a lightweight mechanism and an easy tool in their arsenal in order to keep relationships at a desired state.

The informants in this study were most likely to use Facebook as a way of performing relationship maintenance with acquaintances and weak ties than as a primary method of communication with their closest friends.

The two research questions this study aimed to answer are:

RQ #1: How is Facebook used as a friendship maintenance platform by individual users for different friendship types?

RQ #2: How does an individual's Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies correspond with their perception of tie strength?

This research first explored how Facebook is used as a platform for relationship maintenance strategies for different friendship types. The way that each informant uses Facebook mirrors the Facebook user type elucidated by Robinson, Callahan, Boyle, Rivera, and Cho (2017) in a recent research paper, which used Q methodology to subjectively observe why users are drawn to Facebook. They found that there were four different types of Facebook user: 1) Relationship Builders, 2) Window Shoppers, 3) Town Criers, and 4) Selfies.

The Relationship Builders use the site in much the way people have used email or the telephone, treating Facebook as an extension of their real lives and using the site to share photos and videos and to comment and interact with friends. The next type, Window Shoppers, consider Facebook a part of their lives, but very infrequently share personal information and do not readily disclose anything about themselves. They observe and check in with the site, but do not comment or otherwise interact with friends. The third type, Town Criers, like to share information widely and broadly, and the final type, the Selfies, are users who share a large number of photos,

videos, and status updates, and who actively seek out high numbers of interactions from his or her friends.

Of the 20 informants in this study, 13 were a Relationship Builder. They looked at Facebook as an extension of their real lives, and those who were strongest in this type were happy to use the site to share photos and videos and to comment and interact with friends. Six informants were window shoppers. They infrequently share personal information and they do not readily disclose very much about themselves. They will observe from afar and check in with the site to keep up with their friends' activities and life events, but they do not comment very much or otherwise interact with friends. One informant was a town crier, the one who actively used Facebook as part of her public relations efforts to promote her talks on finance to Thai youth, primarily through her YouTube channel where she promoted her talks, dovetailing with the findings of Robinson and colleagues (Robinson, Callahan, Boyle, Rivera & Cho, 2017). None of the informants were a selfies type, the users who share a large number of photos, videos, and status updates. Only one informant said she had ever paid much attention to the likes and comments on her posts, but that she had learned a valuable lesson when she became angry at her husband for not interacting with all her posts.

Exploring how the different Facebook user types employed Facebook as part of their relationship maintenance strategies, the findings indicate that informants primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with acquaintances, and consider it a useful platform to maintain weak ties. Nearly all reported that the primary reason they use Facebook is to keep in touch and stay connected to friends who do not live near them, and all informants said that Facebook was an important part of their relationship

maintenance strategies. The informants stated that used more than one communication channel to maintain close friendships, and that Facebook was not their primary method of communication with their closest friends. All informants also used different messaging services in addition to Facebook to stay connected to their closest friends. Informants reported that Facebook was their primary platform for relationship maintenance for their acquaintances and their weak ties, and for those friends of different types who live far away.

As to whether regular Facebook interaction by a dyad with a weak tie could increase the strength of their tie by virtue of these interactions on Facebook, six informants thought that Facebook contributed to their perceptions of closeness in their relationships. When queried directly about any correlation between Facebook interaction and the perceptions of closeness in a dyad, one informant said that she noticed not difference in closeness and that she was not of the opinion that it was possible to become closer friends or increase tie strength solely by virtue of using Facebook. On the opposite end was another informant who reported that he does feel closer to those he interacts with more frequently on Facebook, and that he has drifted apart from some friends who do not use Facebook and with whom he used to be close. With regard to Facebook interaction leading to decreased tie strength, one informant discussed how she had pulled away from some friendships because of their interactions on Facebook.

This research does not offer any evidence that increased Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies will lead to greater tie strength without other concomitant relationship maintenance strategies, nor does it offer support to the idea that a high level of Facebook interaction can move a friend along the relationship

pathway toward greater tie strength. Further research should explore this notion more carefully, and quantitatively investigate if Facebook interaction could equal other computer-mediated platforms in increasing perceptions of tie strength.

5.1.1 Facebook Interaction

In this research, Facebook interaction consists of any communication conducted between two or more people on the online platform and could consist of wall posts, tagging photos, leaving comments on others' posts, sharing personal information, sharing opinions or feelings, sending private messages, liking, and other aspects of interaction. The informants discussed their Facebook usage and interaction, including minutes per day of usage; devices used; and specific questions about different types of interactions, including questions about self-presentation on Facebook and/or other social media.

Nearly three-fourths of the sample population said the total percentage of their Facebook friends who they would consider friends in real life was low. All of the informants said they accessed Facebook on their mobile phones, and a large majority said that was their primary or sole way to access the social networking site. Over half of the informants are above-average Facebook users, and 50 percent of them were medium users within this sample population. The informants used Facebook interactions as part of their relationship maintenance strategies, especially as it pertains to friends with weak ties. One informant said that social media, and Facebook in particular, has "given oxygen to relationships that previously would have just died out" (Informant #7, personal communication, December 19, 2018).

This discovery of how Facebook is used by the informants in this study dovetails with recent research that demonstrates the positive aspects of those weak

ties, with a recent article describing the importance of a “network of low-stakes, casual friendships” (Volpe, 2019). Those acquaintances in one’s life, that large circle of Facebook friends most of the informants had, are the ones with whom one has a weak tie, but contribute greatly to overall social and personal satisfaction.

5.1.2 Friendship Types

Friendships are one of the most common social relationships that we have and are important for healthy emotional and social development. Friendships can usually be ascribed to one of three types: acquaintances, including colleagues and neighbors, or friends one has because they provide value to the individual; good friends, including with whom one shares an activity, like working out, playing football, or going to the same book club; and very close friends, those friendships based on admiration and mutual respect, often spanning many years and taking a long time to develop.

The informants discussed their personal division of friends into different types and examined the different strategies used for relationship maintenance, gauging the different types of tools the informant used for very close friends versus acquaintances.

Informants primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with acquaintances and weak ties. Nearly half said that the primary reason that they use Facebook is to keep in touch and stay connected with friends who don’t live nearby, with 50 percent saying it was the fundamental reason. Complementary to this conclusion is that half of the informants said of their closest friends, they were split evenly between those who lived near and those who lived far. The informants in this sample population will use other communication channels, especially text messaging to reach out and stay in

touch with close and very close friends. The informants communicate with their closest friends on more than one channel, echoing the findings in media multiplexity theory.

Weak ties, generally represented by those acquaintances in one's life, are generally important to people as they provide value. This was reflected in the samples, as several informants expressed concern that if they were to lose access to Facebook, they would lose out on connections to important weak ties in their lives.

5.1.3 Relationship Maintenance Strategies

Relationships go through a series of steps which generally allow for individuals to move along a path from acquaintance to very close friend, and in order for an individual to keep a relationship alive, or at a desired stage without risk of regression, relationship maintenance strategies are necessary. Any interaction between two people can be construed maintenance, and these behaviors and actions usually constitute the greatest proportion of the life of the relationship.

The informants in this sample discussed the importance of Facebook in their relationship maintenance strategies, including all the different communication channels the informant used. The sample population primarily uses Facebook to keep in touch with acquaintances and weak ties, with all informants agreeing that Facebook is an important part of their relationship maintenance strategies. The informants will use other communication channels to reach out to close and very close friends.

One aspect of relationship maintenance strategies occurs with the informants who are local to the researcher, with 60 percent of informants living in the same city as the researcher. All of the local informants spoke to the importance of LINE in their relationship maintenance strategies, over competing message services like iMessage,

Messenger, WhatsApp, or regular text messaging. The popularity of Line in Thailand, where it is the leading messaging app, means that it is also ubiquitous in the data.

As media multiplexity theory explains, the informants in this study use multiple communication channels in their relationship maintenance strategies with their very closest friends. In addition to many different direct messaging possibilities, there are many social networking sites and social media applications. Aside from Facebook, the leading social media application used by the sample population was Instagram with nearly 75 percent having an account, but with varying levels of usage. Other social networks mentioned include Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and a few regional varieties specific to certain countries.

Although nearly all informants were present on other social media sites, they still considered Facebook their primary outlet for social media. Informants are using Facebook less frequently, with over half said they are posting and interacting less. However, this declining usage that shows up in the data has not been taken up by increased usage in other social media. The informants report lower Facebook usage, and Facebook is reporting that since April 2018, different actions on Facebook like shares, likes, and user posts have dropped by nearly 20 percent, mirroring the data (Hern, 2019).

Every informant used multiple direct messaging services, with 75 percent, and all informants who live in Thailand, reporting that their primary messaging application is LINE. The next most popular messaging application was Messenger, with 50 percent of informants actively using Messenger. Other messaging services mentioned were iMessage or regular text messaging, WhatsApp, and WeChat.

5.1.4 Perceived Tie Strength

Tie strength is the general sense of closeness one feels for another person. When that sense is strong, it's called a 'strong tie' and when weak, it's a 'weak tie'. Greater tie strength is generally achieved in a relationship by attaining a greater level of intimacy, which is usually done through self-disclosure. The closer the friend, the stronger the tie, with stronger ties resulting in greater closeness or intimacy. Two relationship partners who have established a certain level of intimacy share information, through self-disclosure that helps build increasing levels of intimacy. Intimate partners are more positively involved with each other by being attentive to communication from the partner and more open to various cues. These partners understand each other in a specific, intimate way, often allowing them to comprehend, and occasionally predict, the other person's habits, preferences, and experiences.

The informants discussed their attitudes towards their very close friends versus acquaintances, and varying levels of self-disclosure the informants participated in with different friendship types. The informants primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with acquaintances, those relationships considered weak ties. Reflecting this, 50 percent of the informants said they would fall out of touch with some friends if they were to stop using Facebook. Several informants said if they were stop using Facebook, they would sacrifice connections to those weak ties.

With regard to the second research question, examining how Facebook interaction corresponds with tie strength, and if there is an increase in perceived tie strength due to increased Facebook interaction, one informant said she noticed no difference in closeness and that she did not think it was possible to become closer friends to someone with greater tie strength by solely using Facebook. One informant

said that he does feel closer to people with whom he communicates on Facebook, and that he has drifted apart from some friends who do not use Facebook and with whom he used to be close.

The data do not offer evidence for the claim that increased Facebook interaction necessarily leads to a greater perception of tie strength. The informants primarily use Facebook as a way to maintain connections to weak ties. Six informants thought their Facebook usage added to the closeness of their relationships, and the data do not support any conclusions that increased Facebook interaction leads to greater perceptions of tie strength without other concomitant relationship maintenance strategies. It is highly likely that Facebook interaction alone is not enough to lead to stronger ties.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

This research investigated how Facebook is used by informants as part of their relationship maintenance strategies with different types of friends, and if this Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies corresponds in any way with perceptions of increased tie strength.

With regard to the first research question, over half of informants report less Facebook interaction, having reduced their posting and interacting with friends' posts less. The informants primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with their acquaintances and weak ties, with nearly all informants saying they use Facebook to keep in touch and stay connected to friends who do not live nearby. All informants said Facebook was an important part of their relationship maintenance strategies, but they will use other communication channels to keep in touch with close and very close friends.

Overall, just over half of the informants report they are generally using the site less, and posting less than they had from six months to two years ago. The informants primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with acquaintances or those friends with whom there is a weak tie. Nearly all the informants reported that the primary reason they use Facebook is to keep in touch and stay connected to friends who do not live near them. All informants said that Facebook was an important part of their relationship maintenance strategies.

Media multiplexity theory states that tie strength is positively correlated with the number of communication channels that a dyad employs in relationship maintenance strategies. The informants in this study support the findings of previous research, and support media multiplexity theory, stating that they used more than one communication channel to maintain close friendships, and that Facebook was not their primary method of communication with their closest friends. All informants also used different messaging services in addition to Facebook to stay connected to their closest friends. In Thailand, where over half of the sample population lives, the popularity of the Line application means it is extremely important to informants' relationship maintenance strategies.

Research has shown that the more weak ties a person has, the happier they feel. These connections with people in your life who may not be close friends positively impact our well-being by making us feel more connected, by offering recommendations, and can affect job prospects (Volpe, 2019). The informants in this study support this conclusion, and consider Facebook an ideal platform with which to maintain the weak ties in their lives. Research has found that Facebook users value the lightweight interactions on the site, including responding to a friend's status or

wishing someone a happy birthday, and that both sides of the dyad consider these interactions a relational investment on both sides (Urist, 2015).

The informants in this sample population primarily use Facebook as a communications platform as part of their relationship maintenance strategies with acquaintances and weak ties. They use more than one platform with their close and very close friends, reinforcing media multiplexity theory, and over half of the informants used the tools provided by Facebook as a vital part of their relationship maintenance strategies.

With regard to the second research question which was an inquiry into Facebook interaction and any potential impact on greater perceptions of tie strength, just over 25 percent of informants thought Facebook contributed to the closeness of their relationships. Half of the informants stated they would fall out of touch with friends if one of the dyad stopped using Facebook, and the informants stressed the importance of maintaining weak ties which they felt without Facebook would ultimately decay.

As has been noted in this research, the informants use Facebook as a platform to perform relationship maintenance strategies with acquaintances and weak ties.

Thirty percent of the informants thought that Facebook contributed to the closeness in their relationships, while three said it was neutral and one said it was negative.

When queried directly about any correlation between Facebook interaction and the perceptions of closeness in a dyad, one informant said that she noticed no difference in closeness and that she was not of the opinion that it was possible to become closer friends or increase tie strength solely by virtue of using Facebook, while another informant reported that he does feel closer to those he interacts with more frequently

on Facebook, and that he has drifted apart from some friends who do not use Facebook and with whom he used to be close. Fifty percent of the informants reported that they would fall out of touch with some friends if either of the dyad stopped using Facebook, and all informants who said that they used Facebook to communicate with their closest friends also reported that they used more than one channel, which is highlighted by media multiplexity theory.

This research explored a potential relationship between Facebook interaction and tie strength, and whether increased Facebook interaction might lead to greater perceptions of closeness, but the opposite might also be true, in that greater Facebook interaction could potentially lead to weaker tie strength in a dyad, or even lead to the decay or dissolution of the relationship. One informant said she had pulled away from some friendships because of their interactions on Facebook, describing negative perceptions of some friends that she had developed from their Facebook interactions.

One way of increasing tie strength is through greater self-disclosure on the part of both parties in a dyad. Greater self-disclosure leads to increased intimacy, and then a greater perception of closeness. Nearly 50 percent of the informants said that they definitely talked about personal things with their friends, and all of the informants who said they definitely talked about personal things with friends either did so in person or via messaging.

This research does not offer any evidence that increased Facebook interaction as part of relationship maintenance strategies will lead to greater tie strength without other concomitant relationship maintenance strategies, nor does it offer evidence for the idea that a high level of Facebook interaction can move a friend along the relationship pathway toward greater tie strength. Further research should explore this

notion quantitatively to see if Facebook interaction could equal other computer-mediated communications platforms in increasing perceptions of tie strength.

5.2.1 Findings in Relation to Previous Research

The findings in this research partially reach similar conclusions concerning the use of Facebook to maintain connections with weak ties, as seen in much social science research over the past 10 years. Vitak (2014) examined relationship maintenance strategies among geographically-dispersed populations with communications-restricted connections, where she wondered if social networking sites like Facebook could do more than slow down relational decay. Prior to her research, the prevailing opinion reflected that of social scientist Robin Dunbar who had generally been dismissive of social networking sites as a significant part of relationship maintenance strategies and serving as any type of meaningful interaction, but did concede that sites like Facebook had slowed down the rate of relationship decay by allowing people to keep in touch with friends over long distances (Vitak, 2014).

Vitak (2014) also wondered if sites like Facebook that connected people and facilitated communication could benefit relationship maintenance processes, and for some dyads, improve relational quality. Her results showed that while “engagement in ... Facebook-based maintenance strategies is generally correlated with relational closeness, findings... suggest that one’s closest relationships do not benefit the most from being connected on the site; rather, those who primarily rely on Facebook as their source of communication and those who live at a greater physical distance from each other see the site as having the greatest positive impact on the quality of their relationship” (Vitak, 2014, p. 864-868).

Further, her findings reinforced Dunbar's conclusions, noted above, suggesting "the site may actually serve to enhance the quality of weaker relationships and prevent those connections from fading away completely" (Vitak, 2014). She noted that Facebook provided an easy tool for relationship maintenance strategies since it serves as a "virtual, networked rolodex that auto-updates every time a user enters new information" (Vitak, 2014), echoing what one informant described when he discussed how Facebook had taken the place of his custom of sending birthday and Christmas cards to his entire friends population. This informant had once maintained an Excel spreadsheet with every friend's birthday, cross-referenced with an address book and he physically mailed these greeting cards many times a month, a process that was cumbersome and time-consuming. For users like him, Facebook provides a much faster and easier method of that particular relationship maintenance strategy.

The findings in this research study also reflect Vitak's work (2014) in relation to media multiplexity, a construct which says that tie strength is positively correlated with the number of communication channels a dyad employs. Her findings suggest that while "Facebook may be important for some close-tie dyads, it is unlikely those ties would see their relationship fall apart if they lost access to the site" (Vitak, 2014). The informants in this study mirror her findings, in that they all used Facebook as just one platform of many, including other communication channels and messaging services in their relationship maintenance strategies for their very closest friends.

Vitak's findings (2014) also provided evidence of the important role Facebook plays in maintaining a wide range of weak connections that comprise the majority of most users' friend networks, which was reflected in this research as well. The features contained within Facebook, most notably the direct manner in which a

relationship is presented, the “simple presentation of content in reverse chronological order and the ease of communicating with other users through a wide range of behaviors representing various degrees of engagement and time commitment” (Vitak, 2014), all serve to not only serve as a repository to store contacts, but also as an “interactive forum that improves the quality of relationships, and specifically benefits weaker and more distant ties” (Vitak, 2014). These findings are reflected in this study which shows that the informants primarily use Facebook as part of their relationship maintenance strategies with acquaintances and weak ties.

Prior research (Dainton, 2013) has shown how the relationship between Facebook maintenance efforts and general relationship maintenance has not yet been quantified. Findings from Dainton suggest that the primary motive for Facebook use is to maintain relationships, but that these maintenance efforts don't seem to impact a relationship beyond general maintenance activity. Her research also finds that while ongoing maintenance is critical to a relationship, the communication channel of choice is less important than the content which is being communicated (Dainton, 2013). This is similar to findings in this research, which shows that informants use Facebook primarily as a relationship maintenance platform for their acquaintances and weak ties, while using more than one other communications channel to maintain the relationships with their closest friends.

Dainton's (2013) research also concluded that while a relationship between maintenance behaviors and satisfaction was strong, a stronger relationship might be expected between a partner's use of maintenance and the individual's satisfaction, and suggesting that future research should seek to study if Facebook maintenance from a partner might play a stronger role in maintaining a required level of relationship

satisfaction. This research only examined the Facebook relationship maintenance habits of the informants, but future research could explore the dynamics between a dyad, and the perspective of each with regard to Facebook usage and interaction in their relationship.

The results of this study showing declining usage and engagement on Facebook by the samples is also reflected in other research, although the samples in this research had not specifically been affected by the privacy and data issues that have dominated the news headlines in the latter half of this decade. A non-scientific survey conducted by a journalist for The Atlantic, and analyzed by social scientists at the University of Michigan, tried to determine how much people censored themselves on social media, and whether the privacy issues around selling and sharing data had caused behavior changes and reductions in engagement with Facebook (Beck, 2018).

Nearly 80 percent of respondents to the survey said they were very or somewhat concerned about the privacy of their information on social media. The respondents trusted Facebook the least of all social media platforms, and said that overall, the information they were sharing was less personal than it had been five years prior. Sixty percent of the samples said they posted less, while 25 percent said their engagement had remained the same. The majority of the users in the survey said that without Facebook, their social lives would suffer from a little to greatly, but concurrent with the results of this survey, the majority of people did not change their behavior on social media due to any of the privacy issues concerning Facebook.

Prior research (Park, Jin, & Jin, 2011) has found that because the manner in which an individual self-discloses on Facebook may encourage their friends to in turn disclose by posting his or her own material, thereby further encouraging the first

person to post again, greater intimacy then perhaps might further develop as a result of this mutual self-disclosure. Moreover, McKenna, and Bargh (2000) found that the characteristics of the Internet, originally thought to inhibit perceptions of closeness, actually yield more self-disclosure and a better representation of the true self, online than in person, demonstrating that the Internet might indeed be a viable platform to develop intimate relationships and increased well-being.

The findings of this study offer some support to research by Pollet, Roberts, and Dunbar (2011) that showed the spending more time on social media with friends did not lead to larger off-line friend networks or feeling emotionally closer to those off-line friends. They found that there was no different in emotional closeness between users and non-users of social media, nor was the intensity of usage associated with greater emotional closeness in their relationships.

However, additional research by Wiese, Kelley, Cranor, Dabbish, Hong, and Zimmerman (2011) found that increased frequency of communication is correlated with closeness and willingness to share, and that the majority of interactions on social media sites was with small numbers of strong ties. This research is now almost a decade old, and as social media, and Facebook in particular, have matured, so has the relationship between the platform and its users.

While the informants in this study did not offer support to the second research question in this study, and since current research is still inconclusive, it is still a worthwhile avenue to explore if more frequent Facebook interaction can lead to increased perceptions of tie strength. A research study with a rigorously designed methodology, more careful attention paid to the sample, and a quantitative

examination of tie strength, could potentially lend some support to the second research question.

5.2.2 Findings in Relation to Theory

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the openness / closedness aspect of relational dialectics and the reciprocity of self-disclosure resulting in intimacy as described in social penetration theory, while occurring in an online environment where non-verbal methods are the primary means of communication. Because social information processing theory states that with enough time, an online relationship can be as close as one that also has face-to-face communication, and since Facebook fosters and simplifies interactive communication, it could serve an important function in building higher perceived tie strength between friends. This research studied the characteristics and aspects of relationship management strategies employed by individuals for different friendship types and how those strategies corresponded with Facebook interactions and their perceptions of tie strength.

One theory considered for this research study was social information processing theory, which states that with enough time, an online relationship can be as close as one that also has face-to-face communication. The second research question in this study explored if Facebook was a reliable platform on which to increase tie strength.

McKenna and Bargh (2000) found that the characteristics of the Internet can yield more self-disclosure, better representation of the true self, and more positive perceptions of the communication partner online than in person, showing that the higher level of self-disclosure on the Internet indicates “that it may be a viable

medium for developing intimate relationships and increasing well-being” (Schiffrin, Edelman, Falkenstern, & Stewart, 2010). On Facebook, the way individuals self-disclose may encourage their friends to disclose by posting his or her own material, thereby further encouraging the first person to post again, with greater intimacy then developing as a result of this mutual self-disclosure (Park, Jin, & Jin, 2011).

Since Facebook fosters and simplifies interactive communication, it should serve an important function in building higher perceived tie strength between friends. However, the data in this study do not unequivocally support the assertion that Facebook alone as a communication platform can increase tie strength or result in higher perceptions of closeness or intimacy. In order to more fully examine this phenomenon, it would be worthwhile to examine Facebook and social information processing theory quantitatively, to see if the potential exists for Facebook as the sole communication platform in a dyad to increase tie strength in that dyad.

While not discussed as part of this study, the theory of social capital is an important consideration that arose from the data analysis. Social capital is a social science construct that is the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships” (Bourdieu, 1986). In a study, Williams (2006) looked at the increasing popularity of computer-mediated communication platforms as a separate outlet where social capital could be created and exchanged. Social capital is also divided into two types, “bridging” capital and “bonding” capital. Weak ties or acquaintances are likely to be bridging ties and can provide access to important or useful information, such as potential job opportunities. Strong ties or very close friends have higher levels of trust and intimacy and are considered bonding ties. Facebook friend networks contain both

strong and weak ties, and individuals use multiple channels to communicate with strong ties, as shown by media multiplexity theory (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Research has subsequently found that Facebook can have an impact on bridging social capital by enabling greater access to resources with weaker ties that may not be available via other platforms or communication channels (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014).

The rapid growth of social networking sites might suggest that individuals have created a virtual-network consisting of both bonding and bridging social capital. People are able to instantly connect with their friends, both strong and weak ties, based on their interests and backgrounds. Facebook often serves as a social lubricant for individuals who may have difficulties forming and maintaining strong and weak ties with individuals (Steinfeld, DiMicco, Ellison, & Lampe, 2009).

Some research has suggested that computer-based interactions may have a negative relationship with social capital by removing more in-person contact, but the consensus of recent research shows that those who spend more time online together also have increased amounts of in-person contact, which positively enhances social capital (Cummings, Butler, & Kraut, 2002) and with most evidence showing positive associations between the Internet and the building and exchanging of social capital, running counter to those critics who say that the Internet helps to replace offline strong ties with online weaker ties (Nie, 2001).

In their research, Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe (2007) have suggested that online social capital is often a result of relationships first formed offline, and where bridging social capital is exercised in relational maintenance. Research has shown that bonding social capital may be possible solely through social media, but that it is less likely (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). This corresponds to the conclusions

reached in this study, in that it cannot be asserted that using Facebook as the sole communications platform between a dyad will necessarily lead to greater tie strength.

This majority of informants in this study used Facebook as an integral part of their relationship maintenance strategies and enjoyed the increased bridging capital that accrued to them. Furthermore, the results of this study concur with other social capital research that shows Facebook is an ideal platform for relationship maintenance with a broader set of acquaintances or weak ties than would otherwise be feasible with regular communication channels, thereby increasing the individual's bridging social capital.

5.2.3 Findings in Relation to Researcher's Expectations

With regard to the first research question which explored how Facebook is used in relationship maintenance strategies, the findings of this research broadly confirmed the researcher's expectations. The majority of informants in this study used Facebook as a platform to conduct lightweight maintenance strategies with primarily their acquaintances and weaker ties.

Over half of the informants are Relationship Builders, those individuals who used Facebook and its communication tools much as they had previously used email or the telephone. This type of user looked at Facebook as an extension of their real lives, using the site to share photos and videos and to comment and interact with friends. Nearly all the rest of the informants were Window Shoppers, the type of user who very infrequently shares personal information and do not readily disclose much about themselves. They like to observe from afar and check in with the site to keep up with friends' activities and life events, but they do not comment very much or otherwise interact in public with friends.

All of the informants used Facebook as a platform to perform relationship maintenance strategies with a broad circle of acquaintances or weaker ties, which corresponds to the researcher's expectations. Nearly all of the informants said the primary reason they use Facebook is to stay connected to friends who do not live near and with whom an in-person visit is not practicable, with all the informants recognizing and appreciating the ease with which Facebook allowed them to maintain connections with friends who lived far from them. One informant said that the way he used Facebook took the place of sending birthday and Christmas cards, which had been part of his relationship maintenance strategies for many years. As previous research has shown, Facebook serves for the informants in this study as a virtual rolodex of varying types of friends, and serves as a useful platform for their relationship maintenance strategies.

It is with the second research question regarding the effect of Facebook interaction on the perceived closeness of a dyad that the expectations of the researcher have not been met, and which should warrant further study. A quantitative analysis exploring tie strength and any potential relationship to social media interactions might lend better support to the theory that Facebook interaction leads to increased perceptions of tie strength.

One informant said that because he is an active user of Facebook, both posting content and interacting regularly with his friends' content, he thought he had maintained closeness with several friends, and without that Facebook interaction, thinks he would have drifted apart from those friends, while another informant said that she did not really notice a difference in closeness with her Facebook friends, and

that she did not believe that increased Facebook usage led to greater perceptions of closeness.

With regard to the impact of Facebook interaction on the informants' friendships, less than 40 percent of informants said that Facebook has had a positive impact on their relationships, with the rest saying either neutral or negative. The expectations of the researcher were such that it was expected that increased Facebook interaction with even weaker ties might lead to a measurable increase in tie strength or perceptions of closeness. Since tie strength is a social science construct best measured quantitatively, it is suggested that further research should examine the intersectionality of increased tie strength and bridging social capital, that which is created and exchanged amongst weaker ties.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

In terms of sample selection, there was a lack of diversity in the samples with too many informants having the same profile. More diversity in the informant sample may have led to different results. The average age of the informants was 43, and nearly all had been Facebook users for a long time. Exploring social media usage in a different age cohort, with a younger average age, may lead to different results.

As for research methodology, this study was done qualitatively, and so depended upon the researcher's skill and expertise at identifying emerging themes from the data. A quantitative study may have better success in answering the second research question, as relational closeness and tie strength are social sciences constructs best examined quantitatively.

With regard to data collection, this study examined only a short period of Facebook interactions. As strong ties among close and very close friends usually take a long period of time to develop and require some degree of in-person contacts, when asked about the correspondence between the Facebook interactions and perceived tie strength, the informants did not view Facebook as a major relationship maintenance platform with close friends.

In addition, reliability of the data analysis may be a factor in that a second coder did not validate the findings of the researcher.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Application

Based on the findings of this research, which shows that despite a broad-based decline in Facebook usage in many developed markets, and which also shows up in this research, people generally still consider Facebook a practical and effective platform on which to conduct relationship maintenance strategies.

The findings of this study provide some practical suggestions for social media developers, public relations practitioners, and policymakers.

5.4.1 Social Media Developers

The results of this study may provide social media developers with additional tools to enhance the efficacy of their applications. There may also be value for private business and governmental organizations as many have moved to workplace communication tools such as Workplace by Facebook and Slack, which mimic many of the tools inherent in social media networks. This research contributes to the growing body of research that explores how people use social media as part of

relationship management strategies amongst friends, colleagues, and potentially the general public insofar as a private company interacts with customers.

5.4.2 Public Relations Practitioners

The results of this study, which shows that individuals take wide advantage of the tools and services provided by Facebook in order to conduct relationship maintenance strategies with a large circle of acquaintances and weaker ties, could potentially be employed by public relations practitioners, those communications professional who work to raise the profile of goods and services. By engaging a person's outer circle of friends, those acquaintances and weak ties who provide bridging capital to an individual, a public relations professional could identify other avenues into better propagating whatever consumer-focused or public service announcement messaging that is currently underway.

5.4.3 Policymakers

Another group of individuals for whom the findings of this research may have some applicability are policymakers and national legislators around the globe, especially as privacy and data issues involving Facebook and other technology companies continue to proliferate.

While the results of this research showed that the majority of informants queried about data issues and privacy did not change their usage due to these issues, there could be concerns from policymakers that they have let the regulation of users' private data get away from them, with resulting continued decreases in engagement on social media platforms. While the informants in this study felt they were sophisticated enough to know the ramifications of sharing content on Facebook, this may not be the case for a different sample or for the population at large.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Vitak (2014) has proposed that measuring tie strength between friends and how Facebook might lead to increased tie strength is worth considering, since some users may rely on Facebook as a primary source of communication to keep in touch with friends who are more geographically distant and with weaker ties. It is worth further exploration to see if Facebook as a communications platform fosters interpersonal communication that leads to an increased perception of closeness and greater tie strength. Future research should employ quantitative methods to measure tie strength and its relationship to Facebook interaction, to see if there is a correlation between high social media use and greater perceptions of tie strength.

Additional further research should be undertaken that looks anew at media multiplexity theory, which states that tie strength is positively correlated with the total number of communication channels two partners use in their relationship maintenance (Vitak, 2014). While this research did not sufficiently find evidence that using Facebook as the sole communication platform by an individual leads to greater tie strength, future research should consider different methodological approaches, and perhaps consider other social networking sites aside from only Facebook, to explore more thoroughly whether or not social media can have a measurable impact on tie strength, and if tie strength will increase based on the number of communications channels a dyad employs.

Another area that warrants additional examination is the cultural specificity of social media use and if a culturally-specific context has any bearing on or relationship to users' experience with social networking sites. While this research did not focus on an intercultural examination of Facebook usage or its relationship to tie

strength, additional research could explore how different populations of people use Facebook.

There is a research gap which should also be explored, as found in this study, as to why people are engaging less with Facebook, especially as it relates to those who have been on the site for a long time. As social media is still relatively new, a gap in the research exists and an interesting area of further exploration will be to investigate how people's relationships to Facebook and other social networking sites changes over time, and if any relationship exists between number of years of usage and slower engagement.

Future research could also explore social capital theory, and validate prior research findings that show that contribute to the understanding of the social capital implications of social network site use by identifying relationship maintenance behaviors that predict bridging social capital gains (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014). Additional areas of exploration include how Facebook has eliminated various pain points that may have hindered relationship maintenance efforts in the past, and provides a ubiquitous platform for actively managing, grooming, and maintaining one's network. It is these small but meaningful efforts that users undertake that build social capital, especially bridging social capital. Additional research could focus on what effect, if any, Facebook interaction has with regard to bonding capital, those connections an individual has with close and very close friends (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014).

Lastly, additional research should contribute to the continually growing body of scholarship that seeks to understand relationship maintenance activities on social networking sites and how these electronic connections between friends may

contribute to an environment in which meaningful communication leads to social capital benefits (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aron, A., Mashek, D., & Aron, E. (2004). Closeness as including other in the self. In D. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy* (pp. 27-41). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Barriball, K. L., & While, A. (1994). Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: A discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19(2), 328-335.
- Bartlett, R. C., & Collins, S. D. (2011). *Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Baxter, L., & Montgomery, B. (2011). Relational dialectics. In E. M. Griffin, *First look at communication theory* (8th ed., pp. 153-167). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Baxter, L. A. (2004). Relationships as dialogues. *Personal Relationships*, 11(1), 1-22.
- Baxter, L. A., & Bullis, C. (1986). Turning points in developing romantic relationships. *Human Communication Research*, 12(4), 469-493.
- Baxter, L. A., & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York: Guilford.
- Baym, N. K., Zhang, Y. B., Kunkel, A., Ledbetter, A., & Lin, M.-C. (2007). Relational quality and media use in interpersonal relationships. *New Media & Society*, 9(5), 735-752.
- Beck, J. (2018). *People are changing the way they use social media*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/06/did-cambridge-analytica-actually-change-facebook-users-behavior/562154/>.

- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.
- Bryant, E. M., & Marmo, J. (2009). Relational maintenance strategies on Facebook. *The Kentucky Journal of Communication, 28*(2), 129-150.
- Burke, M., Kraut, R. E., & Marlow, C. (2011). Social capital on Facebook: Differentiating uses and users. In *CHI '11 Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 571-580). Vancouver, Canada: ACM. Retrieved from http://www.thoughtcrumbs.com/publications/burke_chi2011_socialcapitalonfacebook.pdf.
- Burleson, B. R., & Samter, W. (1994). A social skills approach to relationship maintenance. In D. J. Canary & L. Stafford (Eds.), *Communication and relational maintenance* (pp. 61-90). San Diego, CA: Academic.
- Carson, T. (2007). Friends: You have three types. *Carsons Posts*. Retrieved from <https://carsonspost.wordpress.com/2007/07/26/friends-you-have-three-types/>.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Cheney, G., Christensen, L. T., Zorn, T. E., Jr., & Ganesh, S. (2011). *Organizational communication in an age of globalization: Issues, reflections, practices* (2nd ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland.
- Chou, H. T., & Edge, N. (2012). They are happier and having better lives than I am: The impact of using Facebook on perceptions of others' lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 15*(2), 117-121.

- Clement, J. (2019). *Device usage of Facebook users worldwide as of January 2019*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/377808/distribution-of-facebook-users-by-device/>.
- Coconuts Bangkok. (2017). *Thailand remains in top countries for social media*. Retrieved from <https://coconuts.co/bangkok/news/thailand-remains-top-countries-social-media/>.
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). *Qualitative research guidelines project*. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/index.html>.
- Crossman, A. (2017). *An overview of qualitative research methods*. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/qualitative-research-methods-3026555>.
- Cummings, J. N., Butler, B., & Kraut, R. (2002). The quality of online social relationships. *Communications of the ACM*, 45(7), 103-108.
- Dainton, M. (2013). Relationship maintenance on Facebook: Development of a measure, relationship to general maintenance, and relationship satisfaction. *College Student Journal*, 47(1), 113-121.
- Dindia, K. (2003). Definitions and perspectives on relational maintenance communication. In D. J. Canary & M. Dainton (Eds.), *Maintaining relationships through communication: Relational, contextual, and cultural variations* (pp. 51-77). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Dindia, K., & Canary, D. J. (1993). Definitions and theoretical perspectives on relational maintenance. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 10(2), 163-173.

- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143-1168.
- Ellison, N. B., Vitak, J., Gray, R., & Lampe, C. (2014). Cultivating social resources on social network sites: Facebook relationship maintenance behaviors and their role in social capital processes. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(4), 855-870.
- Facebook. (2018). *Facebook stats*. Retrieved from <https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>.
- Farooqi, H., Patel, H., Aslam, H. M., Ansari, I. Q., Khan, M., Iqbal, N., Rasheed, H., Jabbar, Q., Khan, S. R., Khalid, B., Anum Nadeem, A., Afroz, R., Shafiq, S., Mustafa, A., & Asad, N. (2013). Effect of Facebook on the life of medical university students. *International Archives of Medicine*, 6(40), 1-8.
- Farrugia, R. C. (2013). *Facebook and relationships: A study of how social media use is affecting long-term relationships*. Unpublished master’s thesis, Rochester Institute of Technology.
- Gilbert, E. (2012). *Predicting tie strength in a new medium*. Retrieved from <http://comp.social.gatech.edu/papers/cscw12.tie.gilbert.pdf>.
- Gilbert, E., & Karahalios, K. (2009). *Predicting tie strength with social media*. Retrieved from <http://social.cs.uiuc.edu/people/gilbert/pub/chi09-tie-gilbert.pdf>.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research.

The Qualitative Report, 8(4), 597-606.

Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380.

Granovetter, M. (1983). The strength of weak ties: A network theory revisited.

Sociological Theory, 1, 201-233.

Griffin, E. A. (2003). *A first look at communication theory*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Griffin, E. A. (2012). *Social information processing theory of Joseph Walther: A first look at communication theory* (8th ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.

Haythornthwaite, C. (2005). Social networks and Internet connectivity effects.

Information, Communication & Society, 8(2), 125-147.

Hern, A. (2019). *Facebook usage falling after privacy scandals, data suggests*.

Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jun/20/facebook-usage-collapsed-since-scandal-data-shows>.

Hsu, C. W., Wang, C. C., & Tai, Y. T. (2011). The closer the relationship, the more the interaction on Facebook? Investigating the case of Taiwan users.

Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 14(7-8), 473-476.

Ingraham, C. (2017). If Facebook were a religion, it would be the second largest in the world. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/06/30/if-facebook-were-a-religion-it-would-be-the-second-largest-in-the-world/>.

- Ivanova, I. (2019). Facebook expects to pay up to \$5 billion over Cambridge analytica scandal. *CBS News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/facebook-ftc-fine-facebook-could-pay-5-billion-over-cambridge-analytica/>.
- Johnson, A. J., Haigh, M. M., Craig, E. A., & Becker, J. A. H. (2009). Relational closeness: Comparing undergraduate college students' geographically close and long-distance friendships. *Personal Relationships, 16*(4), 631-646.
- Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education, 118*(2), 282-292.
- Keating, A. T. (2012). *How do we keep in touch? Facebook, everyday talk, and friends' geographic distance*. Master's thesis, Texas Christian University, Texas.
- Kelly, M. (2010). The 3 kinds of friendship. *Marie Claire*. Retrieved from <http://www.marieclaire.com/sex-love/a4028/friendships-aristotle-utility-ethics-lifestyles/>.
- Laurenceau, J. P., Rivera, L. M., Schaffer, A. R., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (2004). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: Current status and future directions. In D. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy* (pp. 41-78). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Ledbetter, A. M., Mazer, J. P., DeGroot, J. M., Meyer, K. R., Mao, Y., & Swafford, B. (2010). Attitudes toward online social connection and self-disclosure as predictors of Facebook communication and relational closeness. *Communication Research, 38*(1), 27-53.

- Little, J. (2015). *Do you know who's lurking? 90% of social media users don't publicly interact*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/do-you-know-whos-lurking-90-social-media-users-lurkers-joeey-little>.
- MacLellan, L. (2017). *There are only four types of Facebook users, researchers have found*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/1026914/the-four-types-of-facebook-users-relationship-builders-window-shoppers-town-criers-and-selfies/>.
- McKenna, K. Y. A., & Bargh, J. A. (2000). Plan 9 from cyberspace: The implications of the Internet for personality and social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4(1), 57-75.
- Magpanthong, C., & McDaniel, D. (2018). What do they think of me? A comparison of US and Thai students' beliefs about others' perception of their Facebook life. *BU Academic Review*, 17(2), 45-61.
- Marsden, P. V., & Campbell, K. E. (1983). Measuring tie strength. *Social Forces*, 63(2), 482-501.
- Mazie, S. (2014). *Do you have too many facebook friends?* Retrieved from https://bigthink.com/praxis/do-you-have-too-many-facebook-friends_
- Nations, D. (2019). *What is Facebook?* Retrieved from <https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-facebook-3486391>.
- Nie, N. H. (2001). Sociability, interpersonal relations, and the internet: Reconciling conflicting findings. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(3), 420-35.
- Park, N., Jin, B., & Jin, S. A. (2011). Effects of self-disclosure on relationship intimacy in Facebook. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(5), 1974-1983

- Pollet, T. V., Roberts, S. G. B., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (2011). Use of social network sites and instant messaging does not lead to increased offline social network size, or to emotionally closer relationships with offline network members. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 14*(4), 253-257.
- Prager, K. J., & Roberts, L. J. (2004). Deep intimate connections: Self and intimacy in couple relationships. In D. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy* (pp. 43-60). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Protalinski, E. (2015). *Facebook passes 1.44B monthly active users and 1.25B mobile users; 65% are now daily users*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1GnEQ7a>.
- Roberts, S. G. B., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (2011). Communication in social networks: Effects of kinship, network size, and emotional closeness. *Personal Relationships, 18*(3), 439-452.
- Robinson, T., Callahan, C., Boyle, K., Rivera, E., & Cho, J. K. (2017). I ♥ FB: A Q-methodology analysis of why people 'like' Facebook. *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking, 9*(2), 46-61.
- Schiffrin, H., Edelman, A., Falkenstein, M., & Stewart, C. (2010). The association among computer-mediated communication, Relationships, and well-being. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 13*(3), 299-306,
- Smith, K. (2019). *53 incredible Facebook statistics and facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/facebook-statistics/>.
- Stafford, L. (2011). Measuring relationship maintenance behaviors: Critique and development of the revised relationship maintenance behavior scale. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 28*(2), 278-303.

- Stafford, L., & Canary, D. J. (1991). Maintenance strategies and romantic relationship type, gender and relational characteristics. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 8(2), 217-242.
- Stafford, L., Dainton, M., & Haas, S. (2000). Measuring routine and strategic relational maintenance: Scale revision, sex versus gender roles, and the prediction of relational characteristics. *Communication Monographs*, 67(3), 306-323.
- Statista Research Department. (2016). *Average number of Facebook friends of users in the United States in 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/398532/us-facebook-user-network-size/>.
- Steijn, W. M. P., & Schouten, A. P. (2013). Information sharing and relationships on social network sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, & Social Networking*, 16(8), 582-587.
- Steinfeld, C., DiMicco, J. M., Ellison, N. B., & Lampe, C. (2009). Bowling online: Social networking and social capital within the organization. In *C&T '09 Proceedings of the fourth international conference on Communities and technologies* (pp. 245-254). Pennsylvania: University Park.
- Sterling, G. (2018). *Pew survey finds marked decline in Facebook user engagement since March*. Retrieved from <https://marketingland.com/pew-survey-finds-marked-decline-in-facebook-user-engagement-since-march-247469>.
- Straker, D. (2002). *Social penetration theory*. Retrieved from http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/social_penetration.htm.

- Thaitrakulpanich, A. (2019). *Piske and Usagi Charm on Kanahei's first visit to Thailand*. Retrieved from <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/life/arts/2019/05/10/piske-and-usagi-charm-on-kanaheis-first-visit-to-thailand/>.
- Urist, J. (2015). *How real are Facebook friendships?*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/02/how-real-are-facebook-friendships/384780/>.
- Vitak, J. (2012a). *Keeping connected in the Facebook age: The relationship between Facebook use, relationship maintenance strategies, and relationship outcomes*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, Michigan.
- Vitak, J. (2012b). The impact of context collapse and privacy on social network site disclosures. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 56(4), 451-470.
- Vitak, J. (2014). Facebook makes the heart grow fonder: Relationship maintenance strategies among geographically dispersed and communication-restricted connections. In *CSCW '14 Proceedings of the 17th ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work & social computing* (pp. 842-853). Baltimore, MD: ACM.
- Volpe, A. (2019). Why you need a network of low-stakes, casual friendships. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/06/smarter-living/why-you-need-a-network-of-low-stakes-casual-friendships.html>.

- Wagner, K., & Wang, S. (2019). Facebook unveils major app redesign with focus on groups. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-30/facebook-leans-harder-into-groups-with-redesign-of-big-blue-app>.
- Walther, J. B. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction: A relational perspective. *Communication Research*, 19(1), 52–90.
- Walther, J. B., & Burgoon, J. K. (1992). Relational communication in computer-mediated interaction. *Human Communication Research*, 19(1), 50-88.
- Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Kim, S. Y., Westerman, D., & Tong, S. T. (2008). the role of friends' appearance and behavior on evaluations of individuals on acebook: Are we known by the company we keep? *Human Communication Research*, 34(1), 28-49.
- West, R., & Turner, L. (2010). *Introducing communication theory: Analysis and application*. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Wiese, J., Kelley, P. G., Cranor, L. F., Dabbish, L, Hong, J. I., & Zimmerman, J. (2011). Are you close with me? Are you nearby?: Investigating social groups, closeness, and willingness to share. In *UbiComp 11 proceedings of the 13th international conference on Ubiquitous computing* (pp. 197-206). Beijing, China: ACM.
- Williams, D. (2006). On and off the 'net: Scales for social capital in an online era. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 593-628.

Zwier, S., Araujo, T., Boukes, M., & Willemsen, L. (2011). Boundaries to the articulation of possible selves through social networking sites: The case of Facebook profilers' social connectedness. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(10), 571-576.





APPENDIX A
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Opening script

Hello, I am Michael Wykoff, a graduate student in the Master's Degree Program in Global Communication at Bangkok University. I am conducting a qualitative research regarding Facebook interaction and friendship maintenance. This research is a significant part of my thesis and is required for fulfilling my study requirements. I am giving you a consent form. Please sign it and answer all interview questions in the fullest details as possible.

A. Grand tour questions

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? It can be anything like your nickname, your age, your area of study or career, your family, and your passion or hobbies.

B. Facebook usage and interaction

1. How often do you use Facebook?
 - a. Several times a day
 - b. Once a day
 - c. A few times a week
 - d. Once a month
 - e. Less than once a month
2. On what devices do you access Facebook most often?
 - a. Personal computer (desktop or laptop)
 - b. Personal mobile phone

- c. Work computer
 - d. Work mobile phone
 - e. Tablet
3. Approximately how many minutes per day do you spend on Facebook?
 4. How many Facebook friends do you have? Of your Facebook friends, how many do you consider to be your friends IRL (in real life)?
 5. Do you often post things to Facebook? If yes, what types of things do you post? How important is it for you to attract a lot of interactions on what you post on Facebook? Do you keep track of the number of likes and comments? Does this have any effect on how often or what you post?
 6. Do you go to any particular friends' Facebook timelines to see what they've posted in case you missed something in your news feed? Are there some friends you go out of your way to keep track of?
 7. How much importance do you place on receiving Facebook birthday greetings from your friends? Do you always write birthday greetings on your friends' timelines for their birthdays? Do you leave greetings for every single friend, or do you make decisions about whom to wish a happy birthday?
 8. Have you ever unfriended someone? If yes, how close was this person? Did you have many mutual friends? Have you re-friended anyone? Have you ever blocked someone? If yes, how close was this person? What caused you to block him or her?
 9. Have you ever or do you regularly hide posts from any friends in your newsfeed? Do you ever snooze friends so you don't see their posts for 30 days? Do you tag any friends in articles you post to Facebook?

10. Have you had any negative experiences on Facebook? Possibilities include receiving inappropriate messages from another user; your account information being compromised; personal information becoming inadvertently available; being tagged in a photo you didn't want linked to your account; your account being hacked; unwanted contact from another user.
11. Do you think you will increase or decrease your Facebook usage in the next six months?
12. Do you interact with certain friends' posts all the time? Do you have some friends with whom you will always engage even if it doesn't particularly interest you? Do you have any friends for whom you will always click 'like' on something like a profile picture change?
13. Do you check your daily memories on Facebook? How does seeing past memories make you feel? Do you ever share memories of any particular friends?
14. Do you think you share a lot about yourself on Facebook, or very little? How well do you think your Facebook presentation reflects who you are in real life?

C. Friendship types

Friendships are the most common social relationship for most people, and are important for healthy emotional and social development. Aristotle described three types of friendship: friendships of utility, or an acquaintance; friendships of pleasure, or close friends; and friendships of the good, or very close friends.

- a) Friendships of utility are one's acquaintances, including colleagues and neighbors, friends that you have in your life because they are useful in some way.
- b) Friendships of pleasure are your good friends, those you enjoy spending time with, including people with whom you share an activity, like working out, playing football, or going to the same book club.
- c) Friendships of the good are your very close friends, friendships based on admiration and mutual respect, often spanning many years and usually taking a long time to develop.

All friendship types require maintenance and different strategies and Facebook provides a practical, useful tool to use as part of relationship management strategies.

1. Considering your Facebook friends, do you usually categorize who are in each type of friendship, and then communicate to each of them accordingly?
2. How do you differentiate your Facebook friends in terms of "close friend" versus "very close friend"?
3. When you think about your closest friends, how often do you do the following on Facebook?
 - a. Write on your friend's timeline.
 - b. Send your friend a private message.
 - c. Communicate through Facebook chat.
 - d. Comment on articles, posts, or photos that your friend posts to Facebook.

4. Thinking of your Facebook friends, do you think your close friends are more likely to interact with something that you post?
5. Do you think Facebook has positively impacted your closest relationships?
6. Are you in any private Facebook groups with those you consider your closest friends?
7. Do you use the features on Facebook that allow you to create customized lists? Do you have any “Close Friends” lists? Do you categorize or organize your friends in any manner on Facebook? If yes, how much does that categorization reflect how you see your friends in real life?
8. When you think about your closest friends, how often do you communicate with them via the following communication channels? What is your single favorite channel overall?
 - a. Face to face
 - b. Telephone call
 - c. Text messaging
 - d. Email
 - e. Instant messaging
 - f. Social networking (Facebook, Instagram, LINE, etc.)
 - g. Postal mail

D. Relationship maintenance strategies

Relationships go through a series of steps which allow two individuals to move along a path from acquaintance to very close friend. The movement through these stages is usually systematic and sequential and it may move forward or

backward and fast or slow. In order to keep a relationship at the same stage without risk of it regressing, relationship maintenance strategies are necessary, which include: keeping the relationship alive; keeping the relationship in a specified state or condition; keeping the relationship in a satisfactory condition; and keeping the relationship in repair, which entails both partners agreeing to fix problems that may arise in the relationship. Any interaction between two relationship partners can be considered maintenance, and these behaviors usually occupy the greatest proportion of the life of the relationship.

1. Do you think you would fall out of touch with some friends if you did not use Facebook?
2. Do you consider Facebook to be an important part of how you communicate with your friends?
3. How do you think your life might be different without the ability to use Facebook? How important is Facebook to you for keeping in touch with friends who live far away?
4. Do you think you would communicate with friends less if you didn't use Facebook? If you stopped using Facebook, how would you communicate with your friends?
5. Do you use Facebook more to keep in touch with friends who live in the same city as you or more for friends who live far apart? What's your primary method of communication with your local friends?
6. Where do the majority of your very close friends live? Local or far away? What do you do to ensure your relationship stays at the same level?

7. What is it like when you see a friend in person with whom you have regular contact on Facebook? What's the level of comfort you have with that person compared to seeing someone in person with whom you have no contact on Facebook?
8. What are your experiences with friends who are not on Facebook at all, or who may not use it in any manner? Thinking about those same friends who may not be on Facebook, or use it very infrequently, do you make it a point to keep in touch with them in a different way?

E. Perceived tie strength

Tie strength is the general sense of closeness one feels for another person. When that sense is strong, it's a 'strong tie' and when weak, a 'weak tie'. Greater tie strength is achieved in a relationship by attaining a greater level of intimacy, which can be achieved through different methods of self-disclosure. The closer the friend, the stronger the tie, and strong ties have higher levels of intimacy or closeness.

Closeness, or 'intimacy', as they are interchangeably referred, satisfies three criteria: "self-revealing behavior, positive involvement, and shared understanding". Two relationship partners who have established a certain level of intimacy will share information with one another, through various methods of self-disclosure that help to build increasing levels of intimacy. Intimate partners will be positively involved with each other by being attentive to communication from the partner and being open to various cues. These partners will also understand each other in a specific, intimate way allowing them to comprehend, and even predict, the other person's habits, preferences, and experiences.

1. When you think about your Facebook friends, how often do you communicate with each of the following types of friend on Facebook?
 - a. Acquaintances
 - b. Close friends
 - c. Very close friends
2. When you think about your “very close friends,” how often do you talk about personal things with them? Do you talk about personal things in person only or do you use an online communication channel?
3. How satisfied are you with your relationships with the following types of friend?
 - a. Acquaintances
 - b. Close friends
 - c. Very close friends
4. How important are your friends’ opinions to you? Do you value the opinion of a very close friend over that of acquaintances? How do you feel when your close friends interact with you on Facebook?
5. How much do you enjoy face-to-face time with your closest friends? How important is it to see your very close friends in person?
6. Do you have any very close friends with whom you have fallen out of touch because he or she is not on Facebook? If you have a very close friend who is not on Facebook, what do you do to stay in touch and keep the relationship at the same level of intimacy?
7. For those close or very close friends you have who do not use Facebook, do you make a point of staying in touch with them in another manner? What other communications channels do you use to stay in touch? Have you let friendships

wither with friends who are not on Facebook? Do you see any difference in whether or not a friend is on Facebook? If yes, what is your reaction on this difference?

8. Do you consider Facebook an important tool for you to maintain closeness in your relationships? How much of your relationship maintenance strategies consist of Facebook? How about other social media such as LINE or Instagram?

Ending script

This is the end of the interview. Is there anything I didn't ask, but you think it is important for my study? If so, please feel free to tell me.

Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate your kindness to share your stories with me.

APPENDIX B
INFORMATION SHEET

1. Research title

Facebook as Relationship Maintenance Platform and Users' Perceived Tie Strength: Comparison between Friendship Types

2. Research objectives & methodology

This research is qualitative and the method to be used is semi-structured in-depth interviews with informants who regularly use Facebook. The purpose of this research is exploration and description, and the objectives are to investigate how Facebook is used as a friendship maintenance platform with different friendship types, and how Facebook interaction as part of friendship maintenance strategies is associated with perceived tie strength.

3. Rationale for conducting this research

Social media has become common a communication channel in people's daily lives and it is significant to study how popular social networking sites are associated with relational closeness. There is also a lack of qualitative research in how long-term friends who may be separated by distance use Facebook as part of relationship maintenance strategies.

4. Setting/location and timeline in which the research will be conducted with the participants

The data will be collected in semi-structured in-depth interviews of approximately two hours each, live, either in-person or via Skype. The timeline for informant interviews is November and December 2018.

5. Details regarding how to handle the sample or respondents

The population from which the sample will be drawn include all the researcher's Facebook friends (1200) and one class of graduate or undergraduate communications students (24) at a Bangkok university. The sample size will be 15-20, with the potential to increase to 25 should it become necessary. The sampling method is purposive sampling, specifically critical case sampling.

6. Benefits to occur with volunteers and others

Informants who participate in the research study will not receive any monetary compensation, but will hopefully receive the satisfaction of contribution to communications and social science research.

7. Risks or harmful side effects to occur to participants, of which the predetermined measures to correct the said harm shall be identified

There are no risks or harmful side effects to the informants from participating. If the interview steers into an uncomfortable area for the informant, the topic can quickly be changed.

8. Realm to protect privacy and personal information of the participants

All data will be anonymized and no personal details will be associated with any informant.

9. Rights of the participants to withdraw from the research project once deemed necessary

Any informant can cancel the interview up to the start of the meeting, and can withdraw during the process should he or she so desire.

10. Ethical considerations

There are no known ethical considerations with regard to this research.

11. Name, address, & telephone number of the principal researcher.

Michael D. Wykoff Principal Researcher

77/79 Ratchathewi Tower Phaya Thai Road Ratchathewi,

Bangkok 10400, Thailand

mwykoff@gmail.com

+66 87 790 1562

12. Name, address, & telephone number of the Institutional Review Board.

Bangkok University Ethics Committee for Human Research

Research and Creative Activity Support Office, Building A7-106,

Rangsit Campus 9/1 Phahonyothin Rd, Khlong Nueng, Khlong Luang

Pathum Thani 12120

+66 2407-3888 ext. 2818, 2819

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Date _____

I _____ Age _____ hereby

submit the consent form to verify the following statements:

1. I agree to voluntarily and willingly participate in Michael Wykoff's research study entitled: Facebook as Relationship Maintenance Platform and Users' Perceived Tie Strength: Comparison between Friendship Types
2. I confirm that I have clearly been notified by the principal researcher, via the information sheet, regarding research objectives, methods, potential harms, protection measures, and benefits to receive from the said research study.
3. I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity. Study findings will be presented only in summary form with my name not revealed in any report.
4. I understand that I am free to refrain from providing any information, and to withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time before or during the study.
5. I understand that there is no risk to me from participating in this interview and that I have received no compensation for this interview.

I have thoroughly read and clearly understand the statements in this consent form.

Name of person giving consent	Date	Signature

Principal researcher	Date	Signature

BIODATA

Name: Michael D. Wykoff

Date of Birth: 26 May 1970

Nationality: American

Phone: +66-87-790-1562

Email: mwykoff@gmail.com

Education:

2014-2019: Master of Communication Arts, Bangkok University, Bangkok, Thailand

April 2011: Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults, Cambridge University, Bangkok

1993: Bachelor of Arts, English Language and Literature, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

Working Experience:

October 2018-present: Director of Operations, Abt Associates, Bangkok

August 2016-October 2018: Communications Manager, Abt Associates, Bangkok

March 2015-August 2016: Communications Manager, Winrock International, Bangkok

June 2011- March 2015: English & Writing Instructor, Saint John's University, Bangkok

January 2004-April 2011: Director of Development Operations, The Trust
for Public Land, San Francisco, California, USA

March 1997- March 2002: Sales Operations Manager, WebMD
Corporation, Santa Clara, California, USA



Bangkok University

License Agreement of Dissertation/Thesis/ Report of Senior Project

Day 20 Month November Year 2019

Mr. / Mrs. / Ms Michael Wykoff now living at 77/79 Ratchathewi
Soi _____ Street Phaya Thai Road Tower
Sub-district _____ District Ratchathewi
Province Bangkok Postal Code 10400 being a Bangkok
University student, student ID 7620301759
Degree level Bachelor Master Doctorate
Program Global Communications Department _____ School Graduate School

hereafter referred to as "the licensor"

Bangkok University 119 Rama 4 Road, Klong-Toey, Bangkok 10110 hereafter referred to as "the licensee"

Both parties have agreed on the following terms and conditions:

1. The licensor certifies that he/she is the author and possesses the exclusive rights of dissertation/thesis/report of senior project entitled

Facebook as Relationship Maintenance
Platform and Users' Perceived Tie Strength:
Comparison between Friendship Types

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Master of Comm. Arts of Bangkok University (hereafter referred to as "dissertation/thesis/ report of senior project").

2. The licensor grants to the licensee an indefinite and royalty free license of his/her dissertation/thesis/report of senior project to reproduce, adapt, distribute, rent out the original or copy of the manuscript.

3. In case of any dispute in the copyright of the dissertation/thesis/report of senior project between the licensor and others, or between the licensee and others, or any other inconveniences in regard to the copyright that prevent the licensee from reproducing, adapting or distributing the manuscript, the licensor agrees to indemnify the licensee against any damage incurred.

This agreement is prepared in duplicate identical wording for two copies. Both parties have read and fully understand its contents and agree to comply with the above terms and conditions. Each party shall retain one signed copy of the agreement.

Licensor

(_____)
Licensee
(Director, Library and Learning Space)

Witness
(Dean, Graduate School)

Witness
(Program Director)

