YOU DON'T KNOW ME BUT CAN I BE YOUR FRIEND? ACCEPTING STRANGERS AS FRIENDS IN FACEBOOK

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Users in social networking sites, such as Facebook, are increasingly receiving friend requests from strangers and accepting strangers as friends. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the Big Five personality traits and strangers' gender in affecting Facebook users' decisions to accept the stranger's friend request by adopting a 2 (gender of the stranger: male vs. female) x 5 (stranger's personality: Neuroticism vs. Extraversion vs. Openness vs. Conscientiousness vs. Agreeableness) factorial design. Results revealed that participants were more likely to accept the stranger's friend request when the participant's and stranger's personalities matched. This effect was more pronounced when the stranger was a female. Participants accepted female stranger's friend request due to the inflated perception of stereotypical female characteristics, which supported the hyperpersonal effect. Majority of the participants accepted the stranger's friend request based on textual cues that were displayed in the friend request message, which supported social information processing theory, suggesting that impression formation of the stranger was not constrained to the lack of nonverbal cues setting.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sophos, an information technology security firm, created a fake Facebook user named Freddi to test and see how many members would accept this stranger as a friend. "Out of 200 members, 87 accepted „Freddi' as friends and 82 provided „Freddi' private information about themselves" (McCarthy, 2007, p. 1). The alarming number of users who accepted Freddi into their friends list seems to contradict the advice that parents provide to children, „Do not talk to strangers!' McCarthy expressed concern over the surprisingly high amount of Internet users who actually accepted strangers as friends or provided private information to the strangers in the virtual environment. Typically, people are reluctant to let strangers know details about themselves during the initial phases of meeting but do people view virtual environments similar to face-to-face settings?

Humans' desire to maintain relationships in society has influenced the functions of social networking sites. Parks and Floyd (1996) found that 60.7% of respondents formed an online personal relationship with individuals whom they have met for the first time in an Internet newsgroup. The desire to connect and build more relationships with other individuals can motivate people to join clubs or social networking sites that provide the support and functions of maintaining the relationships. Social networking sites offer an interactive setting for users to maintain relationships with other people (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). What influences users to accept strangers as friends in online social networking sites when they do not even talk to strangers in face-to-face (FtF) situations? Specifically, this study aims to (1) examine the effect of different personalities in strangers on Facebook users' decision to accept the stranger's friend requests and (2) analyze the relationship between personality traits and gender of strangers in affecting Facebook users' choices to accept friend requests from strangers.

Technology has heightened the development of globalization in today's society. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has created a new and convenient way for individuals to connect with other people globally. People are finding ways to connect with one another without leaving their homes. The Internet is one of the fastest growing technologies that have changed the dynamics of interpersonal communication (Flaherty, Pearce, & Rubin, 1998). In interpersonal communication, individuals use the Internet more than other forms of media to maintain social relationships (Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004) and fulfill entertainment needs (Flaherty et al., 1998). People perceive the Internet as more controllable and are able to maintain the depth of self-disclosure on particular topics about themselves (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). Peter and Valkenburg suggested that the breadth and depth of information through the Internet are important for people who have a strong need for affiliation. The desire to connect with others in society can be a motivator for online users to participate in social networking sites.

Individuals also choose to maintain relationships via computer-mediated communication based on the positive experiences and convenience that the Internet provides (Flaherty et al., 1998). Through the Internet, people are able to send greetings via e-mails by merely clicking the "send" button instead of having to seal the envelope and send off the letter with a stamp (Wallace, 1999). Hamburger (2005) claimed that the Internet creates a comprehensive and secure environment for individuals to express themselves or communicate effectively.

Technology has also made it convenient for individuals to retrieve information. Most individuals engage in exchanging, storing, editing, and broadcasting data through networks (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). The degree of media richness depends on communication situations with high or low equivocality (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). Data interpretation is subjected to individuals' perceptions. Daft et al. found that people

preferred media that were low in richness when communication was unequivocal. When information is ambiguous in text-based only settings, individuals face barriers in deriving accurate meaning of messages. However, online users can interpret and derive meanings in online environments when adequate amount of time and text-based cues are displayed (Walther, 1993).

The rapid development of computer technology, particularly Web 2.0, has impacted researchers' theoretical viewpoints about the influence of computer-mediated communication in various social networking groups. The boom of Web 2.0 has created much excitement as well as confusion (Lazar, 2007) in society. Since the creation of Web 2.0, organizations have used the Internet and social networking sites to assist in problem-solving and information management. The increase use of Web 2.0 has affected individuals and organizations around the world (Web 2.0 is big in Europe, 2007). Organizations have also aggressively added social networking sites for users to participate in social support groups within the same community or share feedback with others within the same group.

Major applications of Web 2.0 include blogs, Wikis, RSS (Really Simple Syndication), and community tools (Lazar, 2007). The functions of Web 2.0 also enable individuals to interact through voice, webcams, and even videoconferencing (Christensen & Hughes, 2007). Global enterprises experienced a paradigm shift when Web 2.0 introduced the new voice-enabled technology. Christensen and Hughes suggested that the changes through Web 2.0 could assist individuals in various problems, especially in the area of interpersonal communication.

However, some executives in organizations preferred using FtF communication to interact with their employees due to the lack of nonverbal cues in CMC (Daft et al., 1987). The existence of Web 2.0 eliminated the concern that researchers (Baym et al., 2004; Flaherty et al., 1998) had over the absence of nonverbal cues in CMC when individuals

interact with one another through text. Although Web 2.0 has changed the dynamics of CMC and interpersonal communication, the ability to conduct videoconferencing through voice or webcams has not been fully established in social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook.

Besides exchanging and sharing information, computer-mediated communication is commonly used for socializing. Online social networks consist of individuals who are interested in forming connections with other people through CMC (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007). Networks are complex technology structures but they are socially constructed (Rafaeli, Raban, & Kalman, 2005). Technology is a common tool for individuals to engage in social networking as well as connecting with other people for the purpose of establishing and maintaining relationships.

McKenna and Seidman (2005) noted that people's motivations and goals can influence their online behavior and online activity engagement. Individuals' motives may vary according to similar interests or potential differences (gender, age, appearance, etc.) among people in the social networks (Tanis, 2007). Facebook allows individuals to search for people who have common interests or social groups, which attracts users to explore and use the networking site to create or maintain more relationships with other individuals.

Higher levels of relational development are occurring in online settings than before (Chidambaram, 1996; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996). Researchers have examined individuals' Internet usage in several aspects, which included language (e.g., Adkins & Brashers, 1995; Jessmer & Anderson, 2001), impression formation and management (e.g., Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008; Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001), motives of users for engaging in online activities (Flaherty et al., 1998), and the effects of attractiveness through the use of online medium (Walther et al., 2001; Walther et al., 2008). Online users engage in different levels of

self-disclosure to maintain relationships that sprout from FtF or online environments.

In online relational development, users may feel the need for affiliation with other groups (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006) and Facebook provides users with the option to migrate FtF relationships to the online virtual setting. Facebook users may search for long lost contacts and add the contacts into their friends list. However, users may also search for individuals that they do not know and add those strangers into their friends list. Haythornthwaite (2007) claimed that ties are strong when individuals engage in many relations, self-disclosure, or support whereas weak ties do not include frequent contact with other online individuals. Thus, Facebook allows users to maintain strong and weak ties.

The field of CMC has also attracted researchers' attention in relating different users' personalities to Internet usage. Different personalities can also shape users' preferences in online interaction (Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002). Hamburger (2005) proposed that the Internet's unique features can fit different users' personality types. Researchers (Hamburger, 2002; Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000, 2003; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006) have mainly focused on the use of the Internet and different users' personality traits. For example, people who are socially anxious and lonely may seek out online communities for support because of the less assertive interaction with the lack of nonverbal cues compared to FtF settings (Hamburger, 2002). Although researchers have examined the connection between users' personalities and Internet usage, they have neglected to examine the effects of strangers' personalities in relation to users' personalities in social networking sites such as Facebook.

The goal of this study is to experiment the effects of stranger's solicitation based on the Big Five personality traits and stranger's gender in affecting users' perceptions as well as decisions to accept or decline the stranger's friend request in Facebook. This article first reviewed empirical literatures on Facebook, nonverbal cues in CMC, social information processing theory, impression formation and self presentation in CMC, and the Big Five

personality traits in the CMC context. Next, an experiment was designed to test the research questions that addressed the causes of strangers' friend request solicitations and hypotheses on strangers with Big Five personality traits in affecting users' decisions to accept or decline them as friends in Facebook. Lastly, the results of the experiment were reported and discussed.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Online social networking sites allow individuals to connect and communicate with people whom they may or may not know. People can engage in online conversations with other individuals through chat rooms or by accepting friend requests from other people. Numerous social networks such as Friendster, MySpace, and Multiply have emerged within the last few decades.

Facebook: The New Tool

The most prominent social networking site that has influenced relationship development in the virtual environment is Facebook (Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Tong et al., 2008; Walther et al., 2008). Facebook is an online network that allows people to post messages, search for friends, maintain relationships, and provide personal information on users' accounts. Facebook was initially created in 2004 by a student from Harvard University, Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook Factsheet, 2009). The interactive features in Facebook have attracted many people to maintain past, present, and future relationships by utilizing this particular networking site.

The number of users in Facebook has increased from 21 million in 2007 (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) to 175 million in 2009 (Facebook Factsheet, 2009). Most users in Facebook are college students (DiMicco & Millen, 2007). Many college students choose to continue using the site even after graduating from college. Students also use Facebook to keep in touch with high school friends or alleviate the feeling of loneliness after leaving home for college (Ellison et al., 2007).

The effect of Facebook has not only impacted individuals but also organizations in society (Lampe et al., 2007). Employees in business organizations use Facebook for workplace socializing (DiMicco & Millen, 2007). Baym (1998) claimed that the temporal

aspect of online communities allow users to maintain synchronous or asynchronous communication, which enhances the relationship in both FtF as well as offline settings. DiMicco and Millen found that employees who engaged in frequent Facebook interaction with their peers encountered more meaningful relationships at work. The possibility of enhancing interpersonal relationships through Facebook may increase, as more people are attracted to the convenience that it provides.

According to Lampe et al. (2007), Facebook users create profiles and maintain the connection of their social networks through "friend" requests, which can come from friends, acquaintances, or strangers. Users are able to accept, ignore, or send a message to the solicitor. If the request is approved, the person shows up in users' friends list. Accepting strangers into the friends list also allows strangers to gain access into the private information that users display in their account (Govani & Pashley, 2005). Individuals who are accepted may also be allowed to view the user's entire social network, post comments on the user's page, and view the user's profile.

In Facebook, users display information about themselves according to personal preferences and they are the gatekeepers of their personal information. Facebook provides various functions for users to create and display personal information such as name, addresses, phone numbers, and photos on their profile pages. The availability of users' personal information or photos assist individuals in their search for existing acquaintances or just to bridge weak ties (Ellison et al., 2007), which influences the intensity of using Facebook as a means to connect with other individuals. Users are engaging in more online activity in Facebook since it proposes a more convenient way for people to connect with others.

The most common function of Facebook is to search for friends or acquaintances, add them into the friends' list, and receive updates about them through their Facebook webpage.

Lampe et al. (2007) found that the primary goal of online communities is to form connections between users. Facebook users also share information and find other user's information through the network (Kolek & Saunders, 2008). Lampe et al. stated that Facebook's function of allowing users to search for other people's profiles reduces the costs of connection in that the transaction costs between individuals are not high. Facebook users can utilize the search tool to look for long lost friends or even browse through their friends' social network.

Besides searching for common friends, users may also search for strangers or individuals who appear in their suggested social network. Since CMC is often anonymous, strangers or individuals who appear in users' suggested social networks may be people with fake identities. Baym (1998) claimed that people create online identities and have the choice of revealing their true or fake identities in virtual settings. For example, *Sophos* created a fake user named Freddi and solicited other users randomly in Facebook. The information technology security company found that more people accepted rather than ignored Freddi's solicitation through the friend request (McCarthy, 2007). However, the experiment did not include personality traits as a possible factor that may have influenced Facebook users' decisions to accept Freddi as a friend. Previous literatures in CMC have neglected to focus on the issue of users randomly adding strangers as friends through social networking sites.

Researchers (Govani & Pashley, 2005; Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Livingstone, 2008) in the recent years have focused on the effects of self-disclosure that has affected privacy boundaries among various age groups, specifically among students. Although Facebook can be a convenient way to connect with other people, it may also bring about harmful consequences if users do not set privacy boundaries in revealing personal information on their profile pages. McCarthy (2007) found that 82 out of 200 individuals accepted strangers as their friends in Facebook, which allowed the strangers to view the users' private information and broke the privacy boundaries. Most Facebook users revealed and provided

contact information to strangers even though users were aware of the privacy functions in the website (Govani & Pashley, 2005). The researchers stated that users were aware of their privacy settings but did not take the initiative to reset the settings. Thus, Govani and Pashley proposed that there are risks in sharing information to the public via Facebook. Facebook allows individuals to request others as friends, be it strangers or acquaintances. Individuals should seek to protect instead of exploit their private information in social networking sites.

According to Livingstone (2008), teenagers are prone to display their narcissistic self to their peers and forget that strangers may be secretly observing the private information that teenagers reveal in social networking sites. Facebook serves as an outlet for teenagers to express themselves, which may be a factor in the lack of attention on privacy issues. Andrare, Kaltcheva, and Weitz (2002) studied the effects of company reputation on people's willingness to self disclose private information to the company and found that the willingness to disclose personal information on the web is based on users' interpretation of the cost and benefits of self-disclosure. When individuals feel that the self-disclosure does not entail a great personal cost or risk, they are more willing to participate. In Facebook, teenagers tend to expose extensive amount of information to their social network when their profile is set as private. Teenagers may perceive the cost or risk of self-disclosure as less serious, as most teenagers' primary purpose is not to ward off strangers but to share their experiences with other users and connect with friends (Livingstone, 2008).

Besides teenagers, Kolek and Saunders (2008) noted that college students were also one of the most vulnerable age groups that engaged in excessive self-disclosures in Facebook. The extent of harm that may incur on students through their extensive online self-disclosure is alarming but individuals still felt comfortable in revealing their private information to the public through online social networks (Govani & Pashley, 2005). The Internet may be revolutionary and draw people closer to one another but it has muddled individuals'

understanding on setting clear privacy boundaries (Andrare et al., 2002; Govani & Pashley, 2005; Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Livingstone, 2008). Since the Internet is always on and Facebook allows users to update their profile or private information any time, individuals have become de-sensitized to the fact that there are third parties who may obtain their personal information through social networking sites.

The need to create a sense of presence and form identities online has encouraged people to establish an online „self' to maintain their connection with other users (Lampe et al., 2007), especially in social networking sites that allow users to update or change any amount of private information with no limitations. Individuals establish their „self' when they communicate with others and self-actualization is a social process that will influence users' self-display on the Internet (Livingstone, 2008). The virtual environment provides a way to conceal physical imperfections, which allow users to conceal their true identity or appearance and engage in an idealized online „self' through the online medium (Rafaeli et al., 2005). Since teenagers and college students are the primary users in Facebook, Kolek and Saunders (2008) suggested that universities or educational institutions should help educate students in maintaining privacy in Facebook to avoid any negative repercussions, such as creating negative self-presentations that may affect their chances of obtaining careers in the future.

Nonverbal Cues and Social Information Processing Theory

Carter (2003) claimed that the emergence of emoticons and typewritten „clues' have changed people's viewpoints on getting to know their acquaintances or strangers. People are driven to develop social relationships and be acquainted to others in society (Walther, 1996). Individuals also acknowledge the possibility of getting to know another person through CMC, even if they have not met. When Facebook users receive a friend request, they will typically see the photo image and/or message of the solicitor. The request will also contain functions for users to accept, decline, or send a message to the solicitor. Friend requests lack

personal information of the solicitor but people often make decisions based on the impression that they derive from the limited information in friend requests.

One of the theories that may explain the bizarre notion of accepting strangers' friend requests without having the detailed information about the stranger is social information processing theory. Social information processing theory (SIP) focuses on how individuals in the virtual setting "form simple impressions through textually conveyed information" (Walther, 1996, p.10). People adapt to the linguistic codes and use it as a channel to form impressions of other users through messages that are displayed in their information. The absence of physical nonverbal cues such as facial expressions or eye contact may not have an effect in users' decision to decide on friend requests that they receive from either friends or strangers. CMC users choose other forms of medium to adapt and respond to social messages with the absence of nonverbal cues (Fagan & Desai, 2003; Walther, Loh, & Granka, 2005).

SIP theory provides a framework that explains how individuals perceive CMC to be as personal as FtF interactions, if given sufficient time (Tanis, 2007; Walther, 1996). The absence of nonverbal cues provides an opportunity for online users to shape their identity to a more presentable, friendly, or even empathic way through messages or texts. Koh (2002) stated that online users do not need to worry about monitoring their physical appearances in the virtual setting. Instead, users are more concern with typed utterance or the text. The textual function of CMC allows individuals to gradually form impressions of others compared to FtF settings. Online users have more time to reflect on the textual content and change the way that they want to present themselves in the online social world. Although studies have discovered that CMC users are influenced by textual messages with the absence of nonverbal cues, few studies have examined the phenomenon of accepting strangers as friends in social networking sites based on the inadequate textual information that solicitors provide though friend request. Although friend requests lack stranger's personal information,

Facebook users may still be motivated to accept the stranger's friend request based on limited textual cues and the need to connect with others in CMC.

According to Walther's SIP theory (1993), individuals can experience increased levels of affiliation and develop relationships with other people when they do not face temporal constraints in online environments. Although CMC has temporal constraints compared to FtF interaction, the asynchronous effect of Facebook's friend requests provides sufficient time and linguistic cues for individuals to form impressions of the solicitor. In Facebook, users are able to derive information through friend requests if the solicitor includes a personal message in the request. Messages in Facebook's friend requests provide the most salient information where impression is directly derived by users, which affects users' decision to accept or ignore the solicitation. Walther argued that nonverbal cues do not significantly impact the interpersonal nature of CMC if text cues are present, which justifies that Facebook users are still able to judge the solicitor's appearance and behaviors based on the limited text cues from each friend request.

Guadagno and Cialdini (2005) suggested that individuals can also be influenced by online persuasion based on contents of messages. This study will examine the effects of text cues in influencing Facebook users' perception and willingness to accept strangers as friends through the function of friend requests. One of the factors that persuaded individuals to accept Freddi as a friend in Sophos' testing in Facebook may be the context of the message in friend requests. The information that strangers provide in Facebook's friend requests are manageable, which influences user's impression of the stranger. Although text cues travel slower than oral speech in CMC, Walther (1996) argued that interpersonal impressions in CMC would eventually be on par with FtF communication because impressions grow gradually over time. Under unique circumstances when the level of affection is parallel with FtF situations, users may even view strangers as more positive. Walther named this

phenomenon as “hyperpersonal communication” (p. 17).

Walther (1996) noted that the hyperpersonal effect occurs when message receivers inflate their perceptions about their partners under common circumstances. In situations that are ambiguous or with limited cues, individuals rely on their perceptions on the information available in the CMC environment to form impressions of their partners (Barak, 2007). Barak suggested that individuals may project through their personal repertoire when they try to clarify absent or unclear details in the online environment. In Facebook, users who receive friend requests from strangers may experience lack of information or ambiguity based on the limited information portrayed in the friend requests. Users may perceive the stranger’s personality positively or negatively based on the available message and photo image posted in the friend request. Researchers (Walther et al., 2001; Walther et al., 2005; Walther et al., 2008) have examined Facebook from various perspectives but neglected to examine effects of strangers’ invitations to users’ relational development in Facebook. The inflated impression that users perceive while interpreting friend requests may motivate users to accept strangers as friends and develop interpersonal relationships with strangers.

Impression Formation and Self-presentation

Individuals engage in impression formation and management as they create an online identity to interact with other users in CMC environments. According to Chester and Bretherton (2007), impression management is the process of managing and maintaining self-image before others. Online users engage in impression management through the use of language, pictures, messages received or sent, and nonverbal cues such as emoticons (Adkins & Brashers, 1995; Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Walther et al., 2005; Walther et al., 2001). Although researchers (Tong et al., 2008; Walther et al., 2008; Lampe et al., 2007) have focused on the effects of friends in affecting the self-representation of users in Facebook, not many studies have examined the self-representation of strangers who solicit users to be their

friends through friend requests in Facebook. In Facebook, friend requests contain three options that include accepting, ignoring, or sending a message to the solicitor. Solicitors are able to engage in impression management in friend requests by monitoring the message and picture that they display.

Facebook users may occasionally receive requests to "friend" people whom they may or may not know. In other words, friend requests generally come from individuals who are interested in seeking permission from users to add them into users' list of friends or online social network. Senders may manage their self-presentation through a picture and message that is displayed in the friend request. On the other hand, users who receive friend requests engage in impression formation of the solicitor based on the information that is provided by the sender. Several factors may influence users' decision to add the solicitor as friends based on the impression that solicitors create through the friend requests.

Tong et al. (2008) found that the number of friends in Facebook can portray users' popularity in their social networks. The researchers examined Facebook users' attractiveness based on the number of friends users have in their Facebook accounts and found that Facebook users' desirability and popularity can be closely linked to the number of friends displayed in their accounts. Although too many friendship connections can become too much of a good thing, Tong et al. claimed that having "an optimally large number of friends" in Facebook depicts users in a positive way (p. 545). Thus, self-presentation through social capital can be one of the factors that may influence Facebook users' decisions to accept solicitation from anyone who send them friend requests. In other words, the number of friends that is displayed in a stranger's profile may affect users' decisions to accept the stranger's friend request solicitation.

Besides the number of friends, Adkins and Brashers (1995) found that messages can relay powerful or powerless positions for individuals who are interacting with one another in

the CMC environment. The use of powerful and powerless language creates individuals' identities in online environments. Jessmer and Anderson (2001) conducted a study on politeness and usage of grammar via electronic mail and found that impolite messages were often associated with individuals of higher power or status.

The ability to spell and use correct grammar also affects individuals' images in terms of their competency. Jessmer and Anderson (2001) claimed that individuals often associate females to grammatical messages whereas males were often using ungrammatical messages. Therefore, language can depict individuals' self-representation through the use of grammar and spelling in online messages. In Facebook, individuals can create favorable and positive messages to solicit friends through friend requests. Facebook users can form impressions of strangers based on the linguistic cues that they receive from messages in friend requests. The text-based solicitations and use of language in messages can significantly affect users to accept strangers' requests to be added into users' friend lists. On the other hand, messages in friend requests that portray negative impressions or contain grammatical errors may be rejected.

In Facebook, profiles and wall postings reflect users' identities and social networks. Facebook users maintain and manage personal impressions through their friends or messages that posted on their walls (Walther et al., 2008). Users may censor the messages that are posted on their Facebook websites. Managing profiles and messages in Facebook websites are important because users are aware of the individuals who will be viewing their profile pages. Hancock and Dunham (2001) claimed that the CMC environment can cause individuals to intentionally derive positive text-based cues from messages while paying lesser attention to behavioral cues that are not within their control. Facebook users may want to be cautious about accepting strangers as friends because strangers will appear in their friends list and have the potential of posting wall messages that may affect users' self-representation.

Messages can reflect a positive or negative self-representation of the users. Thus, this study will also examine the effects of different messages on users' willingness to accept strangers as friends.

Besides using textual messages to manage self-impressions online, individuals' can also utilize profile pictures or avatars to engage in positive impression formation and self-representation. Yee and Bailenson (2007) conducted a study on avatars that individuals used to communicate with other people in CMC settings and found that participants were more willing to self disclose personal information after seeing an attractive avatar, even though the opposite party was a stranger. Therefore, pictures play an important role in affecting individuals' decisions to accept or decline strangers' requests as friend in social networking sites. Facebook users are more likely to accept strangers as friends if their pictures and messages create a positive impression on the users.

Hancock and Dunham (2001) found that people formed impressions or exaggerated personal identities of other users to create positive images of themselves in CMC environments. Individuals also made extreme attributions of others based on the impression that they obtained from online interactions. Walther (1996) coined the term "hyperpersonal effect", which explains the inflated perception and impression that online users form about other people in CMC environments due to lack of nonverbal cues. In CMC, text-based messages or images compensate for the lack of nonverbal cues that people experience in FtF communication. Online users may exaggerate or inflate their positive impressions of others in CMC settings when they engage in selective impression formation of the other person based on textual cues (Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

Online social networks provide users space and opportunities to engage in social interaction without meeting FtF. Successful self-presentations require users to update personal accounts regularly. Users may change profile photos or modify profile messages to

pose positive self-representations in Facebook. Physical attractiveness is significantly linked to the success of an individual's self-presentation (Walther et al., 2001). Strangers who can create positive self-representations using pictures and personal messages may be more likely to receive acceptance from Facebook users and be added as friends.

Walther et al. (2008) also found that friends' physical attractiveness in Facebook users' websites will influence viewers' perception of the user. Users with attractive friends and positive wall messages were perceived to be more task-attractive, especially females. The physical attractiveness of users' friends also significantly impacted the perception that viewers had on the users' physical attractiveness. Messages in wall postings also depicted negative or positive perception on users' attractiveness. Individuals used information provided in online settings to make judgments about others (Walther et al., 2008).

Walther et al.'s (2008) study examined a third party involvement through the reflection of Facebook users' friends on the users. However, the researchers examined Facebook users as a passive role whereas this study will examine users taking on the active role of controlling their self-representations. In this study, Facebook users take on the active role of a stranger who will solicit other users through friend requests. The present study proposed to examine stranger's effect on Facebook users through self-representations in friend requests. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What factors prompt users to accept strangers' friend requests in Facebook?

The Big Five Traits

Social psychologists have routinely focused on examining the connection of human behavior in the process of socializing with one another. McCrae and Costa (1996) claimed that the five-factor model (FFM), or the Big Five personality traits, provides a comprehensive and manageable guide to study individuals' personalities in different contexts. The researchers claimed that individuals vary in terms of personal traits. However, the common

traits in FFM can create a clearer structure and understanding for individuals' differences. McCrae and Costa also claimed that FFM carries the implication that humans are rational. Personality traits construct people's experiences and thoughts. The FFM captured most personality traits when McCrae and Costa asked individuals "Who am I?" (p. 58). Through the FFM, Costa and McCrae (1992) constructed the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI), which is commonly used by psychologists to distinguish abnormal behaviors or changes in individuals' personality traits.

The field of psychology often adopted NEO-PI to assess individuals' personality traits as all NEO inventories assess the Big-Five Factors (Costa & McCrae, 2008; Srivastava, 2008). Costa and McCrae (1992) claimed that clinical psychologists often use psychological assessment to help with diagnoses. Individuals require matching treatments according to their personality traits. The NEO-PI provides several facets to analyze individuals' personality and items include a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The Big Five's facets that are applicable globally include Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 2008).

Guadagno, Okdie, and Eno (2008) claimed that individuals generally fall into one of the Big Five categories of Neuroticism, Openness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, or Conscientiousness (NEOAC). The Big Five traits have appeared in several different languages and can be generalized across cultures (Digman, 1990). Throughout the years, researchers (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990; Goldberg, 1992; Mount & Barrick, 1998) have modified and analyzed the Big-Five Factor structure. However, the NEO-PI is commonly used to assess clinical psychology in the field of abnormal psychology.

Big Five Traits in CMC

The effects of different personality types may influence individuals' decisions to accept solicitors, who may be strangers, as friends in social networking sites. Hamburger

(2007) claimed that different personalities impact users' Internet behaviors. Understanding users' motivations to engage in different online activities can explain the various factors that influence users to accept strangers' friend requests. Therefore, this study proposes the following research question:

RQ2: How does each personality trait in the Big Five category influence participants' decisions to accept strangers' friend requests in Facebook?

Researchers (e.g., Caplan, 2003; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006) have examined the relationship between different personality traits among Internet users and their preferences to use the Internet as a means for socializing with others. Most researchers (Guadagno et al., 2007; Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000, 2003; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006; Oberlander & Gill, 2006) focused on the distinction between the Internet usage of individuals with Neuroticism and Extraversion traits. Researchers (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2002; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006) agreed that the Internet can assist in the psychological well being of individuals who are lonely or Neurotic.

Individuals who are high in Neuroticism tend to be emotionally unstable, anxious, and insecure (Hamburger, 2007). Psychologists diagnosed individuals with high levels of Neuroticism in psychiatric conditions (Costa & McCrae, 1992). On the other hand, individuals who fall into the category of Extraversion engage in fun or sociable activities. They are more willing to take risks and desire excitement (Hamburger, 2005). Hamburger, Wainapel, and Fox (2002) found that individuals who were high in Neuroticism identified with their true self through the Internet whereas individuals who were high in Extraversion related to their "real me" through face-to-face interaction. People who are high in Neuroticism are more likely to participate in online social services compared to individuals with Extraversion trait (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000).

Peter and Valkenburg (2006) studied Internet users' personality traits and found that the Internet can be a tool to escape social discomfort for socially anxious and lonely individuals, which exemplifies the trait of Neuroticism. People perceive individuals who experience loneliness or anxiety as high in Neuroticism because of their need for belonging (Hamburger, 2007; Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000). Individuals who are shy or introverts often use the Internet to establish virtual friendships, relief stress, and escape from loneliness or depression (Witte, Frank, & Lester, 2007). Individuals who have high levels of Neuroticism traits are positively linked to loneliness and tend to seek different types of services via the Internet. People perceive individuals who are high in Neuroticism as lonely individuals because of their general negative bias (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000, 2003).

Another end of the continuum is that individuals with high Extraversion traits seek to use the Internet for leisure purposes (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003). Extraversion is a trait that involves positive emotions of enjoying and seeking pleasurable activities. The level of Extraversion influences individuals' needs to socialize with others via CMC. People may perceive others who exemplify more Extraversion traits as individuals who are optimistic or sociable because of their interest in voicing their opinion (Hamburger, 2002, 2007). Many researchers (Barak, 2007; Guadagno et al., 2008; Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000, 2003; Hamburger et al., 2002) have placed the focus of examining Neuroticism and Extraversion traits on individuals' preferences in Internet usage but have neglected to examine the perceptions of Facebook users toward strangers with these traits.

According to Korzaan and Boswell (2008), individuals who possess a specific trait will exhibit certain types of behavior associated with the trait. Oberlander and Gill (2006) found that individuals who were high in Extraversion preferred using first-person pronouns and adjectives in e-mails, which portrayed that they were more outgoing. People with high Neuroticism traits were more likely to use more adverbs, which showed that they prefer to be

more expressive and open about their emotions. Although grammar portrays certain personality traits, the broad use of messages also reflects personality traits. The researchers have neglected to examine how strangers' personality traits, displayed in the messages that they send, affect users' impression and decision to accept strangers as friends in social networking sites. When strangers with negative traits solicit other users to be friends in Facebook, users will most likely ignore than accept the stranger's friend request. However, when strangers display positive messages or personality traits, users may be more likely to accept the stranger's friend request.

Since Extraversion and Neuroticism traits have a vast difference in providing other users a positive or negative impression of the individual, friend request messages with Extraversion traits may be more likely to receive acceptance from other users whereas messages that reflect Neuroticism may be more likely to be rejected. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Participants will accept friend requests from strangers displaying Extraversion traits more than Neuroticism traits.

People who exhibit Agreeableness personality trait often have an optimistic approach to the world and have the need to get along with others (Hamburger, 2007). Individuals who are Agreeable tend to compromise in favor of others to maintain a harmonious relationship. Landers and Lounsbury (2006) found that individuals who have lower levels of Agreeableness will engage in more Internet usage than individuals with higher levels of Agreeableness trait. Social network users with high Agreeableness traits exemplify supportive behaviors toward other users compared to individuals with other traits (Swickert, Hittner, Herring, & Harris, 2002). Although individuals who are high in Agreeableness trait portray positive behaviors toward other online users, the extent of positive impression that users form may be different compared to individuals with Extraversion trait. Since

Agreeableness trait reflects a positive on individuals, strangers with Agreeableness trait may influence Facebook users to more likely accept than ignore their friend requests.

Thus, the impression that Facebook users form towards strangers with Agreeableness trait may be more positive compared to individuals with Extraversion trait, which also exemplifies positive self-presentations on other users. Strangers with Agreeableness trait may receive more acceptances through friend requests because they have the tendency to comply in order to build social harmony, whereas strangers with Extraversion trait may be less likely to receive acceptance from friend requests because they are more interested in stating their opinion rather than accepting other people's opinion (Hamburger, 2007). Although both Extraversion and Agreeableness traits portray positive impressions, strangers with Agreeableness trait may reflect a harmonious individual compared to strangers with Extraversion trait. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Participants are more likely to accept friend requests from strangers displaying Agreeableness traits than Extraversion traits.

Individuals who have high levels of Conscientiousness trait tend to be more organized, careful, and disciplined. People who prefer conventional ways of doing things score higher in Conscientiousness and abide by the systemic order (Hamburger, 2007; Korzaan & Boswell, 2008). Landers and Lounsbury (2006) found that students who were high in Conscientiousness trait utilized the Internet lesser than students with other traits. The Internet's unstructured environment with absence of rules and policies may have been less appealing to individuals with high Conscientiousness trait.

On the other hand, the trait of Openness (intellectual) describes individuals who are imaginative, receptive to new ideas, and prefer variety (Guadagno et al., 2008). Individuals who score higher in Openness tend to adapt quickly to change and are nonconformists who prefer diversity (Barbaranelli & Caprara, 2002). People may perceive these individuals as

high in imagination and curiosity. Guadagno et al. claimed that individuals who were high in Openness trait tend to be bloggers. Also, individuals with Openness trait were more likely to engage in self-enhancement when maintaining personal images online (Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2007). Vazire and Gosling (2004) claimed that an easy way to identify people with Openness trait in virtual environments is through their identity claims in personal information. In Facebook, identity claims or personal information in friend requests' messages can affect users' decision to accept the stranger as friends. Users' perceptions toward individuals with Openness trait may be different than other personality traits in the context of strangers in online settings.

Studies have focused on users' personality traits and preferences of Internet usage but neglected to examine users as third parties in soliciting others to accept them as friends in social networking sites. Although researchers (Guadagno et al., 2008; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006; Swickert et al., 2002; Vazire & Gosling, 2004) have studied and bridged the relationship between users' personalities and Internet usage, past research have not clearly distinguished the difference between perceptions of users toward strangers with Openness and Conscientiousness traits in affecting users' decisions to accept or ignore friend requests from strangers with these traits.

Strangers with high Openness trait may present an intellectual and individualistic image (Costa & McCrae, 1992), which may influence users to perceive them more positively and accept them as friends. On the other hand, strangers with high Conscientiousness trait reflect a rigid self-presentation because of their preference for structure and organization (Hamburger, 2007), which may influence users to view them as unsociable or inflexible to change. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Participants are more likely to accept friend requests from strangers displaying Openness trait than Conscientious trait.

Researchers (Guadagno et al., 2008; Hamburger & Artzi, 2000, 2003; Magnuson & Dundes, 2008) claimed that gender can be a factor that influences users' preferences in Internet usage and reflection of users' identities. Magnuson and Dundes (2008) claimed that females were more likely to construct their identities through the influence of other users whereas males were more likely to distinguish their individuality from others. Male and female users may perceive strangers' friend requests differently if gender is a factor that influence their interpretation of who can be their friends in social networking sites.

Peter and Valkenburg (2008) found that adolescent males perceived the Internet to be more reciprocal compared to adolescent females. Researchers (Hamburger and Ben-Artzi, 2000) also noted significant differences between males and females with Neuroticism and Extraversion traits in Internet usage. For men, Extraversion was associated to leisure activities whereas for women, Extraversion was associated to social services.

Guadagno et al. (2008) conducted a study on the connection between personality types and blogging and found that women who were high in the Neuroticism trait were more likely to maintain blogs compared to women who were low in Neuroticism trait. However, there were no significant results in men. Women with high Neuroticism traits were more likely to continue blogging to avoid loneliness and form social connections with other individuals online. The findings suggested that gender differences exist in terms of users' personalities and choice of Internet activities.

Hamburger and Ben-Artzi (2000) argued that women are more self-conscious because they are more attentive. Gender and personality traits may affect users' responses towards strangers' solicitations through friend requests. Strangers with Neurotic personalities may trigger female online users' emotional aspects terms of accept the Neurotic stranger as friends compared to male users who may be less attentive. Therefore, this study proposes the following research question and hypothesis:

RQ3: How does the stranger's gender influence participants' decisions to accept the stranger's friend request?

H4: Female participants are more likely to accept friend request from strangers with Neurotic trait than male participants.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Research Design

A 2 (gender of the stranger: male vs. female) x 5 (stranger's personality: Neuroticism vs. Extraversion vs. Openness vs. Conscientiousness vs. Agreeableness) factorial design was conducted to assess the effects of gender and personality traits of the strangers on Facebook users through friend requests.

Participants

Participants (N=235) were recruited from a Southwestern university in exchange for extra credit or satisfaction of a research requirement in undergraduate communication courses. Participants were required to have a Facebook account that is set up for all users to search and add them as friends. Forty-three percent of the participants were male (n=101), 57% female (n=134). The sample of participants consisted of 55% Caucasian (n=129), 18% African American (n=42), 14% Hispanic (n=33), 10% Asian American (n=24), and 3% from other ethnicities (n=7). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 52 (M=20.78, SD= 4.01).

Procedures

Prior to the study, participants were required to contact the researcher to reserve a time slot and provide their email addresses that they used to log into their Facebook accounts. The researcher validated each participant's eligibility to participate in the study by searching for the participants in Facebook through their email addresses. Upon arrival, participants signed in at the front desk and were given a case ID. The researcher then assigned participants to an available computer station in the lab. Participants were asked to read the online informed consent form and begin after agreeing to participate in the study. Participants first answered a 25-item online personality questionnaire. "Friend" requests were sent out while participants read the informed consent form and completed the personality

questionnaires. Each participant was randomly assigned to receive one of the ten versions of friend request mock-ups from Facebook strangers named Tyler (male) or Nancy (female).

After participants have completed the online personality questionnaire, they were instructed to log onto their Facebook accounts. First, participants were directed to check their wall postings. Then, participants were asked to check for friend requests and respond to the latest friend request from either Tyler or Nancy by accepting, ignoring, or sending a message to the solicitor. Upon completion of the task, participants were asked to complete the online questionnaires about the stranger and demographic information about themselves. Participants were asked to log off from their Facebook accounts after they have completed all of the online questionnaires (See Appendix A).

Stimuli

Ten sets of conditions were included as stimuli for this study (See Appendix B). Differences in stimuli reflected variations in (a) male or female mock up Facebook stranger and (b) Big Five traits of the stranger: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Each condition reflected a friend request, which included a photo of the stranger (male or female versions) and a message that portrayed one of the Big Five traits. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the ten conditions: condition 1, male stranger with Neuroticism trait (n=25); condition 2, male stranger with Extraversion trait (n=24); condition 3, male stranger with Openness trait (n=24); condition 4, male stranger with Agreeableness trait (n=24); condition 5, male stranger with Conscientiousness trait (n=24); condition 6, female stranger with Neuroticism trait (n=23); condition 7, female stranger with Extraversion trait (n=23); condition 8, female stranger with Openness trait (n=23); condition 9, female stranger with Agreeableness trait (n=23); and condition 10, female stranger with Conscientiousness trait (n=22).

Photo of Stimuli

Since physical attraction was not the focus of this study, the strangers' attractiveness were kept constant and acquired from a photo-rating Website (i.e. hotornot.com). The male and female versions of stimuli presented neutral photo images. The photo-rating website is opened for the public to view photo images of individuals who were rated on a scale of 1 to 10 by their social network or users of the website. The photo images that fell between the neutral ratings of 5 or 6 were obtained.

Message

Messages that reflected the Big Five traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) were created. The message for Neuroticism trait displayed a desperate individual with mood swings and in need of a friend. The message for Extraversion trait reflected an individual's love for socializing, outdoor activities, and excitement. For the Openness trait, the message depicted a creative individual who loved art and adapted to new situations quickly. The message in Agreeableness trait reflected an individual who loved people for who they were and tried to reciprocate the liking of others to conform. Lastly, the message for Conscientiousness trait reflected a person who was well-planned, organized, and appreciated structure. Messages for each Big Five traits remained the same for both male and female versions of the stimuli (See Appendix B).

Manipulation Check

The validity of the stranger's "friend" solicitation that contained the Big Five traits was tested using IPIP scale prior to the beginning of the study. In order to test whether messages constructed for the friend requests were perceived appropriately with each personality trait (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness), a group of 82 students from two undergraduate communication class were given screen shots of the stimuli and asked to rate the stimuli (See Appendix B).

Students rated a 25-item scale for one of the ten stimuli that they received. The 5-point Likert scale ranged from 1(*accurate*) and 5 (*inaccurate*) in the IPIP scoring [1] (see Appendix C). Each trait consisted of 5 items that described the characteristics of the specific trait. If the manipulation was successful, students who received the "friend" message from Neurotic stranger would rate the stranger as more Neurotic compared to other traits. Regardless of the strangers' gender, the same validation applied for all other conditions.

First, the reliability check was conducted on the 25-items assessing the perception of strangers' messages according to each of the Big Five traits. The scale measuring Neuroticism achieved Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$, Extraversion achieved $\alpha = .90$, Openness achieved $\alpha = .72$, Agreeableness achieved $\alpha = .86$, and Conscientiousness achieved $\alpha = .83$. Since all the scales were reliable, the index scores for each trait were computed taking the mean score of the items. Table 1 showed the mean and standard deviation of the students' perceptions of strangers with different traits.

Successful manipulation check showed that students who received the "friend" message from the stranger who displayed Neuroticism trait rated that stranger as significantly lower on Neuroticism than any other trait (since 1 was *accurate* and 5 was *inaccurate* in the scale). A series of paired sample *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean differences between the targeted trait of participant's perception of the stranger and the other trait perception of the stranger that scored the closest to the targeted trait. For example, students who received the "friend" message from Neurotic stranger, 2.26 was the mean score for their rating of the stranger on Neuroticism, and the other trait that was closest to the mean score of Neuroticism was Agreeableness (M=3.08, SD=.91). Paired-sample *t*-test showed that this mean difference between these two perceptions (Neuroticism vs. Agreeableness) was significant $t(16)= -2.91$, $p= .01$. This means that participants who received the friend request from Neurotic stranger did perceive that stranger as Neurotic, rather than any other traits.

Similarly, for students who received "friend" message from strangers who were Extraverted provided 2.31 as the mean score for their Extraversion perception and Agreeableness was the closest rating to Extraversion (M=2.66, SD=.60). Paired sample t-test showed that mean difference between perceptions of Extraversion vs. Agreeableness was significant, $t(12)$=-2.22, p= .05. Students who received "friend" message from Openness strangers provided the mean score of 2.34, and Agreeableness was the closest rating to Openness (M=2.56, SD=1.03).

Paired-sample t-test showed that the mean difference between these two perceptions (Openness vs. Agreeableness) was significant, as $t(16)$=-2.06, p=.06. Students who received "friend" message from strangers who were Agreeable provided the mean score of 2.21 for their Agreeableness perception, and Openness was the closest rating to Agreeableness (M=2.94, SD=.65). Paired sample t-test showed that this mean difference between perceptions of Agreeableness and Openness was significant, $t(15)$= -3.43, p<.01. Lastly, for students who received "friend" message from strangers with Conscientiousness trait provided the mean score of 2.00, and Neuroticism was the closest rating (M=3.00, SD=.81). Paired-sample t-test showed that the perceptions between these two traits (Conscientiousness vs. Neuroticism) as significant, $t(15)$= -3.96, p<.01.

Measures

Big Five traits. In this study, participants were asked to rate their personalities based on the 25-items of Big Five traits from the IPIP scale (See Appendix D). The researcher conducted a reliability assessment on the scale. Cronbach's alpha for Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were α= .77, α= .84, α= .71, and α= .82, respectively. The original α for Openness was α= .68. After deleting item 3 "I tend to vote for liberal political candidates," α improved to .70. The researcher then computed index scores for participants' self-reported personality traits and picked the highest score that each

participant belonged in the Big 5 traits as participant's personality trait. Sixteen percent of the participants belonged to Extraversion (*n*=38), 31% were Openness (*n*=73), 40% were Agreeableness (*n*=94), and 14% were Conscientiousness (*n*=33). No participants fell into the category of Neuroticism.

Attraction. Besides the IPIP scale, participants also answered 8 questionnaires on a 7-point Likert scale that measured the task and social attractiveness of the strangers (adapted from McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Four items from social attractiveness scale included questions such as "I think he/she could be my friend," "It would be difficult to talk to him/ her," "We could never establish a personal friendship with each other," and "I would like to have a friendly chat with him/her." Item 2 "It would be difficult to talk to him/ her" and item 3 "We could never establish a personal friendship with each other" were recoded for consistency. The 4-item social attractiveness scale achieved the reliability of α = .73 (*M*= 4.33, *SD*=1.23).

The task attractiveness scale included questions such as "He/ she is a typical goof-off when assigned a job to do," "I have confidence in his/ her ability to get the job done," "If I wanted to get things done, I would probably depend on him/ her," and "He/ she would be a poor problem solver." Item 1 "He/ she is a typical goof-off when assigned a job to do" and item 4 "He/ she would be a poor problem solver" were recoded to be consistent with the rest of the items. The original reliability for task attractiveness scale was α= .59 (*M*= .42, *SD*= .86). After deleting item 1 "He/ She is a typical goof-off when assigned a job to do," α = .67.

Homophily. Homophily scale (adapted from McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975) included "He/ she doesn't think like me," "He/ she is similar to me," "He/ she has problems like my own," and "He/ she has experiences like me."

Item 1 "He/ she doesn't think like me" was recoded to be consistent with the other items in the scale. The original reliability for the 4-item homophily scale scored α= .66

(*M*= 3.73, *SD*= 1.02). After deleting item 1 “He/ She doesn’t think like me,” α = .74. Besides the scales listed, participants answered their familiarity with Facebook, number of friends in Facebook, response to stranger's friend request, and demographic information about themselves (See Appendix D).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Results showed that overall, 70% (n= 159) participants accepted the stranger's friend request while 30% (n= 65) ignored the stranger's friend request. Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants will accept friend requests from strangers with Extraversion trait more than strangers with Neuroticism trait. The dependent variable was dichotomous (the participants either accepted or ignored the stranger's friend request ^{2}). Therefore, logistic regression was used to test the likelihood of participants accepting friend request from strangers with Extraversion trait than Neuroticism trait. The result supported this hypothesis, as shown in Table 2.

Logistic regression was used to test the hypotheses and research question because the dependent variable, participant's response to the friend request, was dichotomous. Other factors (e.g. number of friends) that were anticipated to affect the dependent variable were controlled. Based on that, logistic regression was conducted to test the hypotheses with the number of friends entered as covariate.

Participants significantly were more likely to accept strangers with Extraversion trait than Neuroticism trait (p= .05). The odds ratio, Exp(B), for participants who accepted strangers with Extraversion trait was .36. This indicates when the stranger's trait increases by one unit, that is, from Extraversion to Neuroticism, the estimated odds of accepting the stranger's friend request multiply by .36. Participants were more likely to accept Extravert stranger's friend request than Neurotic stranger.

Hypothesis 2 stated that participants are more likely to accept friend requests from strangers with Agreeableness trait than strangers with Extraversion trait. As shown in Table 2, the result for this hypothesis was not supported. Participants did not differ greatly in

accepting stranger's friend request who were either Agreeable or Extraverted (p=.80).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that participants are more likely to accept friend requests from strangers with Openness trait than Conscientious trait. This prediction was not supported, as shown in Table 2. There was no significant difference between participants' likelihood to accept strangers with Openness and Conscientiousness trait (p= .65).

Hypothesis 4 stated that female participants are more likely to accept friend request from strangers with Neurotic trait than male participants. This prediction was supported with logistic regression testing, as shown in Table 3. The result was significant for female participants' willingness to accept Neurotic strangers' friend requests compared to male participants (p= .04). The odds ratio for participants' gender is .09. This indicates when participants' gender changed from female to male, the estimated odds of ignoring Neurotic stranger's friend request multiply by .09. Females were more likely to accept Neurotic stranger's friend request compared to males.

Additional analyses were conducted to test the effects of other traits in affecting participants' likelihood to accept the stranger's friend request. The result was significant in participants' likelihood to accept strangers with Openness than Neuroticism trait (p= .05). As shown in Table 2, participants were more likely to accept strangers with Openness trait than Neuroticism trait. The odds ratio for stranger with Openness trait is .36. This indicates when stranger's trait changed from Openness to Neuroticism, the estimated odds of accepting the stranger's friend request multiply by .36. Participants were more likely to accept the friend request from strangers with Openness than Neuroticism trait.

However, participants' likelihood to accept friend request from strangers with Extraversion vs. Conscientiousness trait was not significant. The result in Table 2 did not show significant findings in participants' likelihood to accept stranger's friend request when strangers were either Extraverted or Conscientious (p= .44).

In order to explore the possible factors that affected participants' decisions to accept the stranger's friend request, the main effects of the following variables: gender of the stranger, gender of the participant, participant's personality, stranger's personality, whether participant and stranger have a personality match, were entered into logistic regression as independent variables, as well as all the possible interaction effects among those variables. Meanwhile, number of friends was controlled as a covariate in the logistic regression. Interaction terms that were not significant were dropped (See Table 4).

Results showed the main effect of whether participant's personality matched with the stranger's personality was significant (p=.05). The odds ratio for participant's personality that matched with the stranger's personality is .28. This indicates that when participants' traits changed from match to not match with the stranger's trait, the estimated odds of accepting the stranger's friend request multiply by .28. That is, the estimated odds of acceptance actually decreased. Participants were more likely to accept the stranger's friend request when their personality matched with the stranger's personality.

The result (as shown in Table 4) also indicated a significant interaction effect between whether participant and stranger have a personality match and stranger's gender on affecting participant's decision to accept the stranger's friend request when their personalities matched (p=.01). The odds ratio for personality match and stranger's gender is 9.36. This indicates when participant and stranger had a personality match if stranger's gender increase by one unit, that is, the stranger changed from male to female. The estimated odds of accepting the friend request multiply by 9.36. Participants were more likely to accept the stranger's friend request when their personality matched with the stranger's personality and the stranger was a female, compared to when the personality matched and the stranger was a male. These results answered RQ1 which asked what factors prompt users to accept strangers' friend requests in Facebook.

The result (as shown in Table 4) showed no significant effects of stranger's Big Five traits in influencing participants' decisions to accept or ignore the stranger's friend request (p=.29). The main effect of Big Five traits of the stranger did not provide significant effect in participant's decision to accept stranger's friend request. This result answered RQ2, which addressed how each personality trait in the Big Five category influences participants' decisions to accept strangers' friend requests in Facebook.

Research Question 3 explored the effects of stranger's gender in affecting participants' decisions to accept the stranger's friend request. The result in Table 4 showed no significant effects of stranger's gender in affecting participant's decision to accept the stranger's friend request (p=.52). Participants did not differ in terms of accepting or ignoring the stranger's friend request based on stranger's gender.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Participants' Perception of Stranger's Personality Trait

Condition	*N*	Neuroticism		Extraversion		Openness		Agreeableness		Conscientiousness	
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Neurotic stranger	17	2.26	.55	4.20	.68	3.19	.66	3.08	.91	3.27	.70
Extrovert stranger	13	4.00	.72	2.31	.77	3.12	.44	2.66	.59	3.06	.59
Openness stranger	17	3.65	.93	3.00	1.14	2.34	.89	2.60	1.03	2.90	.57
Agreeableness stranger	16	3.41	1.04	3.11	.96	2.94	.50	2.21	.65	3.00	.56
Conscientiousness stranger	16	3.00	.81	3.26	.68	3.24	.69	3.03	.66	2.00	.84

Table 2

Logistic Regression (Binary) to Compare Strangers' Traits

Variable (Stranger's trait)	*n*	B	S.E.	Sig(*p*)	Exp(B)	Nagelkerke R Square (R^2)
Extraversion vs. Neuroticism	90	-.1.02	.53	.05	.36	.07
Extraversion vs. Agreeableness	89	-.12	.46	.80	1.13	.02
Openness vs. Conscientiousness	91	-.22	.48	.65	1.24	.11
Openness vs. Neuroticism	91	-1.01	.52	.05	.36	.09
Extraversion vs. Conscientiousness	90	-.37	.48	.44	1.44	.07

Table 3

Logistic Regression (Binary) For Male and Female Participants Who Accepted Strangers with Neuroticism Trait (N =91)

Variable	B	S.E.	Sig(*p*)	Exp(B)
Gender (female vs. male)	-2.40	1.15	.04	.09
Constant	-.85	.49	.08	.43

Note. Nagelkerke R Square, $R^2 = .23$

Table 4

Logistic Regression (Binary) For Main Effects and Interactions (N = 187)

Main Effect	B	S.E.	Sig(*p*)	Exp(B)
Stranger's gender(1)	-.26	.40	.52	.77
Participant-stranger personality match(1)	-1.28	.65	**.05**	.28
Participant's personality			.62	
Stranger's personality			.29	
Participant's gender(1)	-.70	.37	.06	.50
Number of friends	.00	.00	.07	1.00
Interaction effect: personality match(1) by stranger's gender(1)	2.24	.88	**.01**	9.36

Note. Nagelkerke R Square, $R^2 = .16$

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The focus of this study was to examine the effects of gender and Big Five traits on Facebook users' decisions to accept or decline strangers' friend requests. Researchers (Carter, 2003; Granka, 2005; Tanis, 2007; Walther, 1993, 1996) have proposed that the lack of nonverbal cues in CMC causes online users to pursue other means to derive information in virtual settings. In addition, Walther's (1993) Social Information Processing (SIP) theory explained that without temporal constraints, individuals experience increased levels of affiliation and develop relationships with other people in online environments. The results of this study supported the researchers' predictions on users' seeking other means, besides nonverbal cues, to fulfill their need for information in CMC. According to the results of this study, the text-based friend requests from strangers did not intimidate Facebook users to decline strangers' invitation, even when users had ample time to form impressions and make decisions based on the stranger's picture and message.

In this study, the researcher intentionally created messages that portrayed Neurotic and Extravert strangers to examine the connection between participants' impression formation on the stranger and the likelihood of accepting the stranger's friend request. Participants were more likely to accept strangers with Extraversion trait as friends compared to strangers with Neuroticism traits. Users are generally influenced by online persuasion through text-based messages and they form impressions of others through the textual contents (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2005).

Impression formation and impression management played a role in affecting participants' responses to the stranger's friend request. The impression that participants' formed based on the constructed message and photo of the mock-up Facebook stranger consisted of the messages that portrayed five different personality traits and photos with

neutral ratings. Participants responded to the stranger's friend request without knowing if their personalities matched with the stranger's personality. Thus, the self-representation of the stranger based on textual cues influenced participants' impression formation. In CMC, asynchronous communication allows individuals to make impressions of other users (Walther, 1993). Participants were given ample time to respond to the stranger's friend request, which provided them the opportunity to form impressions based on the selective self-presentation of the stranger through a message and photo.

Past research (e.g., Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000, 2003) noted that Neurotic individuals provided a negative self-presentation compared to Extravert individuals, which may be the reason that caused participants to ignore strangers with Neurotic traits as friends in Facebook. The impression that Facebook users formed toward the Neurotic stranger's message influenced them to decline the stranger's friend request, even though the level of attractiveness of the stranger's photo was rated as neutral.

Another reason for declining the Neurotic stranger's friend request may be because Neurotic individuals are often associated with loneliness, social anxiety, and lack social networks (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000, 2003; Hamburger et al., 2002). Users rely on textual descriptions and photo of the stranger to make decisions with the absences of nonverbal cues (Ellison et al., 2006). In the Neurotic stranger's message, terms such as "lonely" and "sorrows" displayed an individual with emotional problems. Thus, Facebook users are less likely to accept a stranger that presents Neuroticism personality trait compared to strangers who display a more positive self-presentation such as Extraversion and Openness traits, which support that language styles and word choice affects an individual's self-representation in CMC (Adkins & Brashers, 1995).

Hamburger (2007) claimed that Extraverts often display themselves as friendly individuals who seek company, desire excitement, seek pleasure, and take risks. The

language style that Extravert strangers displayed in the friend request message included words such as "exciting" and "outdoor activities." People are more likely to accept a stranger's friend request when the stranger provides a positive and normal personality that conforms to social norms compared to Neurotic individuals who are on the negative end of the continuum and display emotional disturbances. Adkins and Brashers (1995) claimed that the use of language influences online users' behaviors. Monitoring self-presentations in can influence relational development in CMC settings (Bortree, 2005). Users may cultivate more or less relationships online, depending on the impression that others form based on users' self-presentation. The stranger's self-representation through the friend request message influenced participants' decisions in accepting strangers with Extraversion more than Neuroticism trait.

Besides the fact that messages influence Facebook users' impression of the stranger, the stranger's personality and the user's personality also affected Facebook users' decisions to accept or decline the stranger's friend request. The findings of this study showed that users were more willing to accept the stranger's friend request when users' personalities matched with the stranger's personality. In this study, the perceived similarity of personalities in CMC may be the reason that attracted participants to accept the stranger's friend request. Tanis (2007) claimed that individuals tend to find others who are similar with themselves. The researcher also argued that the absence of cues can increase individuals' perceived similarity of other people to themselves, which creates a bonding effect between the two individuals who may not know one another.

Individuals' social attraction toward others will increase when group identity is salient (Walther et al., 2001), which may also explain participants' likelihood to accept the stranger's friend request when participants' traits matched with the stranger's trait. Researchers (Johnson & Gormly, 1975; Levine, 2000; Sassenberg, 2002; Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner,

2008) have examined attraction in relational development and found that individuals are more likely to be attracted to others who are similar to themselves and bond with groups of people with common interests. Johnson and Gormly (1975) claimed that people are more likely to be attracted to individuals who agree rather than disagree with themselves, even when the individual is a stranger. Perceived similarity causes individuals to see others as similar to themselves based on their inflated perspective (Montoya et al., 2008). The perceived similarity of stranger's personality trait that matched with participant's personality trait influenced higher levels of attraction toward the stranger, as participants may have viewed the stranger as more agreeable to themselves.

McKenna et al. (2002) claimed that Internet attraction exists, depending on the self-disclosure and form of interaction. Individuals tend to like others who reciprocate their liking or attraction towards the other individuals (Collins & Miller, 1994). Participants may have viewed themselves as belonging to the same personality trait category when their traits matched with the stranger's traits, which in return, influenced them to be more accepting towards the stranger. McKenna et al. stated that people tend to like others in CMC based on the information that others disclose, even before meeting FtF. Thus, individuals form judge others in CMC based on their perceived impression of the other person. The perceived similarity in terms of personalities may have led the participants to let down their guard against the stranger, which influenced them to accept the stranger as a friend.

An interesting finding in this study was the interaction effect between gender and the participant-stranger personality match, even after controlling for the number of friends. Participants were more likely to accept female than male stranger's friend request when their personalities matched with the stranger's personality, regardless of the number of friends that participants had in their Facebook contacts. One possible reason is the impression that participants have formed towards the stranger based on traditional characterization of

women's attentiveness and nurturing nature. People perceive women as more attentive and have higher levels of self-consciousness, which also directs females to use the Internet for different reasons and services (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000).

On the other hand, this study did not find any significant impact of the Big Five traits on participants' decisions to accept or ignore the friend requests. Neuroticism and Extraversion were two distinct traits that stood out to the participants in this study. The traits of Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness did not differ greatly in affecting participants' impression formation toward strangers with these traits. Although the manipulation check showed that participants were able to distinguish strangers with the traits of Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness as individuals with different characteristics, the impressions that participants formed toward strangers with these traits may have been less intense.

Theoretical Implications

Researchers (Chidambaram, 1996; Levine, 2000; Walther, 1996) proposed that if given enough time, users can form impressions on others in virtual environments based on the information provided in textual cues. User's impression of others gradually expands in CMC, if given sufficient time (Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Walther, 1996). Biased perceptions of gender differences (i.e. females are more sensitive, gentle, and accepting of others than males) could be a factor that influenced the hyperpersonal effect on participants in accepting the female stranger's friend request when both the participant's and stranger's personalities matched with one another. The idealized and stereotypical perception that participants formed toward female strangers may have been influenced by users' hyperpersonal effect in CMC. Walther (1996) proposed that the hyperpersonal effect occurs when users inflate their perceptions of other individuals in CMC with the absence of cues.

Information provided by users over CMC is more controllable and selective, which

influences the impression formation through selective self-representations of the users (Hancock & Dunham, 2001). In this study, the female stranger's self-representation was controlled in the friend request message based on characteristics of each Big Five traits and a photo rated neutral in attractiveness. However, participants may have inflated their biased perceptions of female characteristics according to social norms, which motivated them to accept the female stranger as friends when their personalities matched with the stranger's personality compared to male strangers.

Hancock and Dunham (2001) claimed that in the hyperpersonal effect, the intensity of participants' exaggerated and stereotypic views increase and "tend to cluster toward the extreme ranges of the Likert scale" (p. 330). Even though the messages and personality traits assigned to the strangers were the same for both genders, participants were more likely to accept the female stranger's friend request rather than the male stranger because of their biased perceptions on female's characteristics according to social norms.

The asynchronous format of this study may be another factor that enhanced participants' hyperpersonal effect on female stranger's friend request. When users have more time to contemplate on the stranger's friend request, the impression that they form toward the stranger become more developed, which support's Walther's SIP theory since users have more time to decode textual cues (Walther, Anderson, & Park, 1994). Hancock and Dunham (2001) argued that besides the lack of social and nonverbal cues, individuals' cognitive processes also contribute to the hyperpersonal effect in CMC. Thus, stereotypes of gender differences can be a factor that influences the hyperpersonal effect on users in CMC environments. Participants' impressions of the stranger may have been more inflated since they were not given a time limit to decide on the friend request.

Findings in this study were also consistent with SIP theory, which posits that online users will adopt other forms of medium to form impressions of others in CMC (Walther,

1993). Lack of nonverbal cues may not seem to be a challenge because online users develop strategies to inquire information about other users through other cues that are available online (Walther et al., 2005). In this study, participants were not able to interact or meet the stranger in the friend request but participants still responded to the stranger's solicitation through the message that was displayed in the friend request. Results showed that participants were more likely to accept than ignore the stranger's friend request. When textual cues are salient, the lack of nonverbal cues and direct interpersonal interactions did not hinder participants to make a decision to the stranger's friend request.

Perceived similarity and attraction can influence online users' perception and impression of other individuals in CMC (Lea & Spears, 1995; McKenna et al., 2002; O'Sullivan, 2000; Turner, Grube, & Meyers, 2001). In CMC, users are not able to easily detect nonverbal cues through physical characteristics in order to make judgments of other users (Lea & Spears, 1995). However, the perceived similarity that exists between users may influence users to engage in higher levels of attraction in CMC. In this case, textual cues acted as a motivator in participants' decisions to accept strangers who have the same personalities. Participants may have formed positive impressions or perceived similarity toward the stranger with similar personality and hyperpersonal effect reinforced participants' perceived similarity when participant's perceptions were inflated through the extended time that they were given to make a decision in the friend request.

The results of this study were consistent with McCarthy's (2007) findings on more users who accepted rather than ignored the stranger named Freddi as a friend in Facebook. The issues of privacy management are connected to participants' likelihood to accept rather than decline the friend request from the mock-up strangers in Facebook. Kolek and Saunders (2008) claimed that Facebook users are often unaware of the level of self-disclosure that they

engage when using social networking sites. Activities that involve self-disclosure may include posting private information such as address, phone number, and photos (Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Livingstone, 2008). In this study, self-disclosure may be viewed as accepting the stranger's friend request, since users' information and profile will be disclosed to the stranger after the stranger becomes their friend.

Participants did not have additional information of the stranger in the friend request besides a photo and a message from the stranger. However, participants still accepted the stranger's friend request when they perceived higher levels of similarity (personality traits) with the stranger through messages displayed in the friend requests. Thus, results in this study suggested that participants' level of privacy management decreased when perceived similarity existed. The concept of who can be the user's friend is based on the individual's interpretation (Livingstone, 2008). When participants perceived the stranger as similar to themselves, the tendency to accept the stranger's friend request was higher. Montoya et al. (2008) stated that perceived similarity can lead to cognitive biases. In this case, participants whose personalities matched with the stranger's personalities accepted the stranger's friend request because participants may have viewed the stranger as similar to them and less threatening to their privacy.

Privacy management is influenced by user's interpretation on the level of self-disclosure (Livingstone, 2008). Thus, participants in this study may have accepted the friend request from strangers because they perceived the stranger as non-threatening to their privacy. Online users are more likely to self-disclose when they perceive lower personal costs or risks (Andrare et al., 2002). Similarly, participants in this study may have perceived lesser risks in accepting a friend request while participating in a study compared to random strangers who send out friend requests in other settings. Researchers (Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Livingstone, 2008) proposed that social networking sites can be used in a positive

rather than negative purpose. Individuals construct their „self' through interaction (Livingstone, 2008), which may also be one of the reasons why participants would accept rather than ignore the stranger's friend request.

Future Research and Limitations

This study presents several limitations and directions for future research. First, the researcher required participants to set their Facebook accounts to open for all to search and add them as friends while recruiting. The recruitment process may have influenced participants to have a bias perception of the stranger in the experiment, since the researcher was also the recruiter. Future research should seek to obtain participants from a natural setting, such as randomly recruiting from the Facebook network. Participants will more likely have a neutral perception of the stranger if they did not encounter the researcher prior to the study.

Second, the setting of this study may have influenced participants to accept the stranger's friend request. Participants may have felt pressured to accept the stranger's friend request, since they were required to be physically present in the computer laboratory to complete the experiment. The notion of receiving extra credit for completing the study may also be a factor that influenced participant's likelihood to accept the stranger's friend request. Future research could assess the likelihood of Facebook users' decisions to accept or ignore strangers' friend requests by sending random friend requests through the social network and allowing participants to respond in their comfort settings.

This study only seeks to examine the effects of stranger's personality trait and gender in affecting Facebook users' decisions to accept or ignore random friend requests. Other factors such as stranger's physical attractiveness, and users' differential inclination level of self-disclosure may have affected their decisions to accept the stranger as a friend. Future research could examine the effects of personality traits on users' privacy management to

determine the factors that influence them to self-disclose in social networking sites (i.e. self-disclosing private information by accepting strangers as friends).

Besides self-disclosure and privacy levels, the number of mutual friends may be another factor that motivates users to accept strangers as friends. Users' perceptions or interpretations of strangers may differ depending on the mutual network in the stranger's profile. Thus, researchers could also examine the effects of mutual friends on users' decisions to self-disclose through social networking sites.

Lastly, culture shapes participants' perceptions on privacy and impression formation of the stranger. This study was conducted in a Southwestern university, where the sample consisted of college students. Since Facebook is becoming more prevalent across other countries and throughout different age groups, future research could examine the effects of stranger's solicitation in cross-cultural dimensions and on different age groups to determine the influence of culture and age on individuals' perceptions of stranger's solicitation.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine the effects of personality traits and gender of the stranger on Facebook user's decision to accept or decline the stranger's friend request. In general, participants were more likely to accept than ignore the stranger's friend request. Participants were more likely to accept the stranger's friend request when participant's personality matched with the stranger's personality. Additionally, participants were also more likely to accept female stranger's friend request when their personalities matched. Strangers with personality traits of Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness did not have significant effects on participants' decisions to accept the stranger's friend request. Future research should continue to examine other aspects of social networking sites in CMC and further explore the effects of impression formation, as well as privacy management through strangers' solicitations in the online environment.

ENDNOTES

[1] The International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) scale consists of approximately 300 scales to measure various constructs (Goldberg et al., 2006). Items in the IPIP scale include the NEO personality inventory scales for researchers to examine personalities on a surface level, which can also be used to measure the Big-Five traits in a 5-point Likert scale (Srivastava, 2008). Goldberg et al. claimed that the IPIP scale is more concise and the format of measurement is shorter in terms of verbal phrases. Besides, researchers (Goldberg et al., 2006; Korzaan & Boswell, 2008) claimed that the IPIP scale is convenient to obtain and has an online version, which speeds up the assessment procedure. Participants were required to rate each questionnaire online. Thus, this study adopted the IPIP scale instead of NEO personality inventory scale to assess the accuracy of the stimuli.

[2] A small portion of the participants (4.3%, n=10) of the participants sent a message instead of accepting or ignoring the stranger's friend request. They were excluded from the data.

APPENDIX A

INSTRUCTIONS

Instructions A

1. Please read the online informed consent form and you may begin after agreeing to participate in this study by signing your name and the date at the bottom of the page.
2. Answer the questionnaires in the survey window and STOP when you see the **STOP** sign!

CALL for the researcher for further instructions.

Instructions B

Click on the new window to log into your FACEBOOK account.

You will begin by logging into your *Facebook* account and following the steps listed below:-

1. **CLICK** on your **USERNAME** (first tab on the top right corner of the page).
2. Check postings on your wall.
3. **CLICK** on **HOME** (first tab on the top left corner of the page).
4. Respond to the most recent friend request from Tyler or Nancy.

Click on the survey window and continue rating your answers in the survey.

You may log off FACEBOOK as soon as you have completed the experiment.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION! ☺

APPENDIX B

TEN VERSIONS OF STIMULI/ FRIEND REQUESTS

Neuroticism

I'm a lonely person. No one cares about me. I'm pretty shy around people. People around me just don't understand me. I want to meet someone who can share my joys and sorrows. Add me as your friend, make me your buddy!

NM

Extraversion

Hi. I'm new to Facebook and it's so exciting to be here! I love outdoor activities, parties, any type of music except for classical & blues, & um…can't think of anything else. Just add me as your friend & find out more exciting things abt me!

Openness

Hi! I'm interested in photography and I love taking pictures of buildings and sceneries. I've learnt to adapt to new situations pretty quickly because my hobby has helped me view things from different perspectives. Be my friend and I'd like to be yours!

Agreeableness

Hi! I saw your pic & thought we could be friends. I'm a pretty easy-going person. I love people for who they are & most like me for who I am too. I think it would be great to be your friend!

Conscientiousness

Hi! I'd like to add you as my friend. I'm a planner & a routine-type of person. I've planned out my life & hopefully nothing changes or I'll go nuts!haha!Anyway, hope that you'll add me as your friend & let me know you better.

Neurotic

I'm a lonely person from the Midwest. I'm always alone, no one cares about me. I'm pretty shy around people. People around me just don't understand me. I want to meet someone who can share my joys and sorrows. Add me as your friend, make me your buddy!

Extraversion

Hi, I'm interested in photography and I love taking pictures of buildings and sceneries. I've learnt to be thankful and trusting always, despite terrible circumstances, because my hobby has helped me to view things in different perspectives. Be my friend!

Openness

Hi. I'm new to Facebook and it's so exciting to be here! I love outdoor activities, parties, any type of music except for classical and blues, & um…can't think of anything else. Just add me as your friend & you'll find out more exciting things abt me!

Agreeableness

Hi! I saw your pic & thought we could be friends. I'm a pretty easy-going person. I love people for who they are & most like me for who I am too. I think it would be great to be your friend!

Conscientiousness

Hi! I'd like to add you as my friend. I'm a planner & a routine-type of person. I've planned out my life & hopefully nothing changes or I'll go nuts!haha!Anyway, hope that you'll add me as your friend & let me know you better.

APPENDIX C

RATING STIMULI

(Adapted from the International Personality Item Pool, http://ipip.ori.org)

Please use the scale below to assess how accurate each statement describes the individual that you have just seen. Circle the numbers on the scale according to:

1=Accurate 2=Moderately accurate 3=Neutral 4=Moderately inaccurate 5=Inaccurate

1. This person often feels blue.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

2. This person dislikes himself / herself.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

3. This person is often down in the dumps.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

4. This person has frequent mood swings.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

5. This person panics easily.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

6. This person feels comfortable around people.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

7. This person makes friends easily.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

8. This person is skilled in handling social situations.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

9. This person is the life of the party.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

10. This person knows how to captivate people.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

11. This person believes in the importance of art.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

12. This person has a vivid imagination.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

13. This person tends to vote for liberal political candidates.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

14. This person carries the conversation to a higher level.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

15. This person enjoys hearing new ideas.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

16. This person as a good word for everyone.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

17. This person believes that others have good intentions.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

18. This person respects others.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

19. This person accepts people for who they are.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

20. This person makes people feel at ease.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

21. This person is always prepared.

1 2 3 4 5

Accurate **Inaccurate**

22. This person pays attention to details.

1	2	3	4	5
Accurate				**Inaccurate**

23. This person gets chores done right away.

1	2	3	4	5
Accurate				**Inaccurate**

24. This person carries out my plans.

1	2	3	4	5
Accurate				**Inaccurate**

25. This person makes plans and sticks to them.

1	2	3	4	5
Accurate				**Inaccurate**

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRES

Participants' personalities

Please use the rating scale below to describe how accurately each statement describes ***you***. Describe yourself as you generally are NOW, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself, in relation to other people you know of the same sex as you are, and roughly your same age. So that you can describe yourself in an honest manner, your responses will be kept in absolute confidence. Please read each statement carefully, and then circle the number on the scale.

1=Accurate 2=Moderately accurate 3=Neutral 4=Moderately inaccurate 5=Inaccurate

1. I often feel blue.

   1 2 3 4 5

2. I dislike myself.

   1 2 3 4 5

3. I am often down in the dumps.

   1 2 3 4 5

4. I have frequent mood swings.

   1 2 3 4 5

5. I panic easily.

   1 2 3 4 5

6. I feel comfortable around people.

   1 2 3 4 5

7. I make friends easily.

   1 2 3 4 5

8. I am skilled in handling social situations.

   1 2 3 4 5

9. I am the life of the party.

   1 2 3 4 5

10. I know how to captivate people.

    1 2 3 4 5

11. I believe in the importance of art.

    1 2 3 4 5

12. I have a vivid imagination.

    1 2 3 4 5

13. I tend to vote for liberal political candidates.

    1 2 3 4 5

14. I carry the conversation to a higher level.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I enjoy hearing new ideas.

1 2 3 4 5

16. I have a good word for everyone.

1 2 3 4 5

17. I believe that others have good intentions.

1 2 3 4 5

18. I respect others.

1 2 3 4 5

19. I accept people for who they are.

1 2 3 4 5

20. I make people feel at ease.

1 2 3 4 5

21. I am always prepared.

1 2 3 4 5

22. I pay attention to details.

1 2 3 4 5

23. I get chores done right away.

1 2 3 4 5

24. I carry out my plans.

1 2 3 4 5

25. I make plans and stick to them.

1 2 3 4 5

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Use the following scale and circle one number after each statement to indicate your feelings towards your online partner.

7 = Strongly agree

6 = Moderately agree

5 = Slightly agree

4 = Undecided

3 = Slightly disagree

2 = Moderately disagree

1 = Strongly disagree

1. I think he/she could be a friend of mine.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. It would be difficult to meet and talk with him/her.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. We could never establish a personal friendship with each other.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I would like to have a friendly chat with him/her.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. He/she is a typical goof-off when assigned to a job to do.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I have confidence in his/her ability to get the job done.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. If I wanted to get things done, I could probably depend on him/her.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. He/she would be a poor problem solver.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. He/ she doesn't think like me.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. He/she is similar to me

    1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. He/she has problems like my own.

    1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. He/ she has experiences like me.

    1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please answer the following questions:

1. How familiar were you with Facebook?
   - ⌗ Very much
   - ⌗ Average
   - ⌗ Not so much

2. Did you _____ Tyler's/ Nancy's friend request?

   - ⌗ Confirm
   - ⌗ Ignore
   - ⌗ Send a message to

3. How many friends do you have on Facebook? _____

4. What is your age? _____

5. What is your gender?

   - ⌗ Female
   - ⌗ Male

6. What is your ethnicity?
   - ⌗ Hispanic
   - ⌗ African American/ African/ Black
   - ⌗ Caucasian/ White
   - ⌗ Asian American/ Asian
   - ⌗ Native American
   - ⌗ Other

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