

Factors Leading to Being Unfriended on Facebook Among Adults

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ABSTRACT

The social media is a popular mean to connects with friends and families. Studies shown that it provides social and emotional support to those connected, apart from acting as an information resources such as news, products, and services. This paper is interested to investigate the users' behaviour and aim to study the factors leading to being unfriended on Facebook among adults. Social networking sites such as Facebook are chosen as adults widely use them. This study used Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) as foundations theories for humans that create comfort or discomfort to one another. The minimum sample was collected using Google Form. The study involved 110 respondents aged 20 to 31 and above from men and women in Malaysia. A cross-sectional questionnaire was used for data collection. All variables were measured through data sum from the Google Form Gantt chart. The data stating a few factors that might lead to reasons being unfriended on Facebook. The results show that 54.5% of them agreed that the main reason for being unfriended on Facebook is due to people's personalities. Almost 75.5% of the respondents claimed to have ever experienced being unfriended, and 68.2% of it came from strangers. However, strangers or not, it is widely considered that being unfriended triggers an act of expectancy violations that could vary in terms of situations and the reasons behind it. Thus, studies suggest that being unfriended is negative and creates discomfort among the parties.

Keywords: Unfriend, Facebook, Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), negative, comfort, discomfort

INTRODUCTION

Social Network Sites are where Malaysians usually spend enormous time online. In Malaysia, social networking sites such as Facebook have 24 310 000 users. Most of them come from adults aged 20 and above. In terms of gender, there are 43.6% male respondents and 56.4% female respondents, and only 52.7% of them are active on Facebook. 65.5% of them often use Facebook for an hour and 32.7% of it for live streaming. As 75.5% responded that they had been unfriended on Facebook, we have listed some of the factors that might have contributed to them being unfriended. The leading cause is people's personalities, with 54.5% of respondents agreeing. The second factor, with 45.5%, is due to the inappropriate topics. The following top tier is due to the posting frequency, with 23.6% agreeing. However, most of them were getting unfriended by random people or strangers and only 31.8% by someone they knew. Unfriend was coined in 2005, and according to Oxford University Press, it was named word of the year in 2009. "To delete (someone) from a list of friends or contacts on a social networking website," according to the New Oxford American Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2009). Befriending requires permission, while unfriending is unilateral; no permission is required to unfriend another user. Because of the nature of Facebook interactions, once people accept a friend request or have their request approved by another Facebook user, they are likely to expect the friendship to last a long time. People do not often realize they have been unfriended by a former SNS friend, at least not right away. If they keep track of how many friends they have, they may note that the number has reduced. Individuals may also scan their friendship list for additions or absences but are unable to locate a past acquaintance (Sibona, 2014a). Finally, the user who sent the friend request is more likely to be unfriended than the individual who accepted it (Sibona & Walczak, 2011). However, if they track the numeral of friends they have, they may detect that digit has dropped. Alternatively, individuals may search their friendship list for additions or absences and do not find a former contact (Sibona, 2014). Finally, the user who formed the friend request has more potential to be unfriended than the one who received and accepted the friendship request (Sibona & Walczak, 2011).

According to Wellman and Gulia (1999) studies, Eyadat & Eyadat (2010) provide social and emotional support, information resources, and ties with other users. However, 81.5 percent of those polled were unconcerned about being unfriended because the unfriended was a stranger. This investigation examines the factors that influence offline and online causes for Facebook users to unfriend their friends, the emotional responses that users have after being unfriended, and the emotions they display when they unfriend others. In addition, we discovered the categories of friends who are more likely to be unfriended, for example, someone they know and random people or strangers.

Burgoon and Jones (1976) proposed Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) as a way of understanding how people perceive and interpret intrusions of their personal space. An expectation is a predictable behaviour pattern specific to a person, a situation, and a relationship (Burgoon, 1993). Humans use these expectations, according to EVT, to characterise and frame their interactions with others, as well as how they perceive the encounter, process information, and behave as a result (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon & Hale, 1988). When someone behaves differently from what is expected or customary, these expectations are broken (Afifi & Metts, 1998). When expectancy violations occur, EVT states that individuals pay more attention to that part of the encounter and then process and cope with these expectancy violations through

an interpretation and assessment sequence. The evaluation step allows the person to better understand the transgressor, the violation conduct, and how to proceed behaviorally (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). EVT's scope and utility have been successfully expanded to include both verbal and nonverbal messages, as well as a variety of relationship contexts such as romantic relationships and cross-sex friendships (e.g., Afifi & Metts, 1998; Bevan, 2003) and teacher-student relationships since its inception (Lannutti, Laliker, & Hale, 2001).

Unfriending on Facebook is a unique type of relationship termination that occurs only online (Bevan et al., 2012), and it is becoming a more popular option among Facebook users (Madden, 2012). For a Facebook user, clicking the unfriend button can be an impulsive decision or the result of considerable thought, and it is likely that one consideration when deciding to unfriend someone, even in a spur-of-the-moment decision, is how they will react if they discover they are no longer friends with the Facebook user. Previous EVT research suggests that being unfriended is akin to de-escalating a relationship or disassociating from someone; however, the unique aspects of being unfriended mean that we must explore the extent to which being unfriended on Facebook constitutes an expectancy violation.

Wright (1984) stated that people form friendships with other individuals because they are rewarding. Unfortunately, friendships on Facebook often represent weak ties between individuals. Strong ties are more likely to be formed in the physical world. Furthermore, young adult users tend to unfriend Facebook friends more frequently than old adult users. Many users consider unfriending to be a cruel act, and for this reason, they prefer to use the option of hiding others' posts from being displayed on the news wall rather than unfriending or blocking them (Gutierrez, Lopez, & Ovaska, 2013). The social etiquette of unfriending is uncertain and for this reason would some user rather hide others' posts from being displayed than unfriend them (Sibona, 2014); furthermore, users who initiated the friend request seem to be unfriended more often than those who accepted the request (Sibona, 2013).

Before two people become friends on Facebook, the initiator of the friendship sends a request that must be accepted by the person with whom the initiator wants to be connected. Most of the time the friend requests are granted as it is easier to say yes than no. However, this does not guarantee long-term friendships. The expectancy violation theory (EVT) of Burgoon and Jones, an interpersonal communication theory, states that people use their expectations about the behavioural pattern of interaction partners to determine their relationship with them. This means that when the behaviour of an interaction partner is not in line with the expectations that an adult has, like unexpected violations of the adolescent's norms and expectations, it may have consequences for the relationship with the interaction partner.

Users who have been unfriended tend to avoid contacting the person who unfriended them in the future (Sibona, 2013). Research distinguishes between unfriending reasons that arise in the digital environment (online reasons) and those that arise in the physical world (offline reasons). People's personalities, improper themes, and posting frequency are classed as online reasons (Gashi & Knautz, 2016). On the other hand, relationships, categorised as offline reasons, are the main initiators based on respondents' data unfriend someone on Facebook. Therefore, this study aims to examine factors that lead to unfriending people on Facebook among adults aged 20 years old and above. Other than that, this study aims to gain a more profound understanding of the factors that predict both offline and online reasons for Facebook users to unfriend their friends or some random people on Facebook.

People's Personalities

The personality of someone can bring a change to society. According to Allport (1961), personality is a dynamic organisation, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create the person's characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The continuities, consistencies, and stabilities of personality traits and dispositions over time define personality development. Due to the different personalities of people, this is one of the main factors that lead to being unfriended by friends on Facebook. A total of 60 respondents with 54.5% choose people's personalities as the main reason for being unfriended on Facebook. Plus, According to Sibona (2014), people often unfriend coworkers for their actions in the real world rather than anything they post on Facebook. They unfriended mean and arrogant people. Another commonly cited reason was someone's irritating behaviour. For instance, when someone was noisy, adolescents ended their friendship with this person on Facebook.

Inappropriate Topics

According to Gashi and Knautz (2016), The main initiators to unfriend someone on Facebook include posting about unimportant topics, categorised as online reasons. Over 45.5% of respondents chose to be unfriended because of inappropriate topics on Facebook. Most respondents find that different beliefs can trigger sensitivity in all races. Other than that, criticism on Facebook is one of the reasons why they always get unfriended on Facebook. According to Gutierrez, Lopez, and Ovaska (2013), Unfriending is considered harsh and impolite. Unfriending is defined as a difficult, unsociable action and a friendship failure due to inappropriate topics. Furthermore, when someone sends status updates threatening the receiver's concept of self and beliefs, the latter's intent to unfriend the sender grows stronger (Peña & Brody, 2014).

The most common online reasons for adolescents to unfriend were related to inappropriate or polarising posts (e.g., posts about politics or religions), uninteresting posts, seeking attention, bragging, or stalking, posting too much, and other irritating behaviours (e.g., using bad grammar and sending game request). These reasons are similar to the most common online reasons identified by adults.

Postings Frequency

Gashi and Knautz once stated that the main initiators to unfriend someone on Facebook include posting frequency about unimportant topics, categorised as online reasons. Adults often unfriend people because of the online reasons described previously related to their identity development and self-exploration. Facebook provides individuals, especially adults, with the opportunity to experiment with self-disclosure and self-presentation. However, these online self-presentations and their frequent posting about shared opinions will be judged by others, especially peers and adults highly influenced by them. When there are violations of their norms related to Expectancy Violation Theory, these judgments may lead to unfriending (EVT). About 23.6% with 26 respondents said that because of posting things every five minutes, unfriending people will happen. For example, when a friend posted things that did not appeal to others, they terminated the friendship. However, adults soon unfriended people when they posted too many things or when they sought too much attention, bragged, or stalked.

Relationship

There are different reasons for ending a relationship in the digital world than there are in the real world (Quercia, Bogaghi, & Crowcroft, 2012). SNS can give social and emotional support, knowledge resources, and connections to other individuals, according to Wellman and Gulia (1999) and Eyadat and Eyadat (2010). Communication gets more personalised and straightforward at this stage (Gudykunst and Nishida, 1984). Many people accept friendship invitations because it is easier to say "yes" than "no." This explains why most SNS connections are poor (Boyd, 2006). It is discovered that friendships between people from different social circles are more likely to break up if their ages are too far apart or if one of them is neurotic or introverted. Females are more likely than males to unfriend their social media buddies. Individuals who claimed to unfriend another user for offline reasons had gone through a change in their relationships, such as a move or the end of a romantic relationship.

Relationship endings are another type of interpersonal circumstance that can direct to ruminating. According to Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007, individuals who ruminate more due to relationship dissolution, for illustration, had a more negative adjustment. Individuals who were relationally invested and did not comprehend why their love partners stopped the relationship also suffered rumination, according to Collins and Clark (1989). Furthermore, Perilloux & Buss, 2007 stated that those abandoned in a romantic relationship breakup experienced more ruminating than rejectors. Rumination as an answer to a negative interpersonal experience, according to McCullough, Bono, and Root (2007), "prolongs and exacerbates psychological and interpersonal suffering" and is, ultimately, "counterproductive for psychosocial adjustment and interpersonal functioning." Overall, these findings imply that people who have been unfriended or rejected by one of their Facebook friends may ruminate. Thus, understanding rumination as a cognitive consequence in this online context may help alleviate rumination as a negative unfriending response.

In their three studies, Afifi and Metts (1998) discovered that relationship de-escalation was the second most relationally important expectancy violation. However, it was also one of the three most expected violations. Furthermore, this expectancy violation was significantly more negative than the scale midpoint in two of their three tests. Dissociation through breakup was seen as a more unpleasant expectancy violation than seven of the ten hurtful event categories studied by Bachman and Guerrero (2006). These researchers also discovered that negative valence was the most important factor in determining whether dating partners stayed together or not due to the traumatic incident. Unfriending someone on Facebook is thus likely to constitute a mediated expectancy violation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our survey uses a qualitative approach. This study shows Facebook users responded to the survey about their reason for being unfriended on Facebook. Unfriending is considered harsh and impolite (Gutierrez, Lopez, and Ovaska, 2013). We chose Facebook users because as the amount of users on Facebook grows, so does the advantage of gaining data created by Facebook users. The Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) is used to explain why people unfriend one other on Facebook. Conducting a Google form for Facebook users, on the other hand, necessitates the adaptation of research procedures applied for more qualitative data sources. Respondents also defined whether they had experienced their feelings and how they would

react to the Expectancy Violations. The expectation of roles can lead to conflict, resulting in various behavioural reactions (Fan et al., 2021). EVT can now be unfriended on Facebook, according to the research. However, research shows that observing incivility can still hurt individuals (Miner-Rubino and Corina, 2004). The survey was active between 18th January till 25th January 2022. In total, we collected 110 respondents who completed the survey, and all of them answered all of our obligatory questions regarding the main reason for being unfriended on Facebook, who they usually get unfriended by, and how they feel after being unfriended on Facebook.

RESULTS

Based on the results, table 1 shows why a person is being unfriended on Facebook based on the overall results. The results found that most respondents choose people's personalities as the main reasons, with a total of 60 respondents and a percentage of 54.5%. It shows that a person's personality greatly influences the people around them. For example, if they like to act recklessly, they will be hated by the public, and this will cause them to be unfriended by their friends on Facebook. As an example, adults like to display the luxuries of their lives and often talk about their friends on Facebook. This has indirectly hurt his friend on Facebook, and he has unfriended him.

Table 1. The main reasons of being unfriended on Facebook

| Variable | Frequency (n=110) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Relationship | 9 | 8.2 |
| Posting Frequency | 26 | 23.6 |
| Inappropriate topic | 50 | 45.5 |
| People's Personalities | 60 | 54.5 |
| Total | 110 | 100 |

In addition, inappropriate topics have also become one of the main factors for unfriended people on Facebook. The following is because the polls reached 50 respondents and 45.5%. As is well known, many topics are quite sensitive to talk about in public, but some people feel the matter is just subjective. As an example, Thomas loves to talk openly about his religion. However, some of his friends feel uncomfortable about it because matters involving religion are quite sensitive to be talked about widely on social media. Nevertheless, after being reprimanded, he still does not care about the matter, and this causes them to end up unfriending him.

The main reason for being unfriended to end a friendship is how often someone posts something. This is due to the votes given by 26 respondents and also a percentage of 23.6%. This is because most people feel that regularly posting something on Facebook is annoying. After all, every time you want to see the latest post, you must be looking at the same person's post all the time. Therefore, the easiest step to take by everyone who experiences this is to prefer to unfriend them so as not to see posts of people like this later on.

Next, the reason that a person can unfriend on Facebook is because of relationships and misdeeds. This is because, based on online polls made, a total of 9 people with a total

percentage of 8.2% have chosen relationship as their main reason to unfriend someone, and a total of 4 people with a percentage of 3.5% have chosen misdeeds as their reason to unfriend someone on their Facebook. This is because they feel people displaying their intimacy with a partner can cause others to feel uncomfortable. As is well known, not everyone has a good relationship with family, spouses, and friends. Therefore, a relationship can also cause a person to be unfriended on Facebook by friends or strangers.

Table 2: Feeling after being unfriended on Facebook.

| Variable | Frequency (n=110) | Percentage (%) |
|---|----------------------|-------------------|
| How do you feel after being unfriended on facebook | | |
| Neutral | 77 | 70 |
| Offended/ Sad | 20 | 18.2 |
| Angry | 1 | 1 |
| Surprised | 9 | 8.1 |
| Pleasant | 3 | 2.7 |
| Total | 110 | 100 |

Regarding the feelings of unfriended people on Facebook, the majority chose to feel neutral because most of them felt that this unfriendly thing did not have a big impact on them. With a total of 110 respondents, 70 people with a percentage of 70% have chosen neutral as their emotional response after finding out they are unfriend. They also do not feel so impressed because most of the unfriendly people have never known each other. In addition, most of the respondents chose offended/sad as an emotional response after being unfriended on Facebook, with a percentage of 18.2%. This is because some of them have felt unfriended by their friends, disturbing their feelings and making them feel sad. Furthermore, friendships forged in cyberspace can also affect their feelings after this happens. 9% of the respondent felt surprised, 3% pleasant and 1% angry of being unfriend.

DISCUSSIONS

This is the first analysis to examine reasons adults unfriend others on Facebook. The study's practical value is that it presents a typology of adult unfriending causes, both online and offline. This typology's findings can be used for further research or by practitioners to build awareness campaigns because it shows which behaviours/events are most likely to cause unfriending. Unfriending occurred primarily for online reasons, according to our qualitative analysis, which is consistent with previous adult research.

Our survey shows that most people lose interest and are unfriended because of their personalities and constant posting about inappropriate topics such as different beliefs, criticism, and threatening others. The impact of the violation is also a factor for how people respond to the expectancy violation. Unfriending was somewhat predicted, and 81% of respondents felt neutral afterward. The findings backed with Expectancy Violation Theory and added to our understanding of being unfriended on Facebook. Facebook users who were unfriended

responded to questions using our Google form. 56.4% of women tend to be unfriended. One of the reasons is people's personalities. In addition, "gender" was a significant predictor of how members reacted to infractions. Around 81.3% felt neutral after being unfriended on Facebook. Further, our analyses found that females were more likely to view Facebook unfriending more negatively than were males, and younger individuals perceived this act as a more expected expectancy violation than older individuals. These gender and age differences are consistent with Madden's (2012) finding that females and younger users were more likely to unfriend someone. Based on these findings, which now reflect the perspectives of the unfriended and the unfriended, these Facebook user demographic variables should be considered in future Facebook unfriending research.

Regarding the findings, practitioners could develop campaigns to make adults more aware of potential online behaviour that might be irritating for their Facebook connections and possibly lead to unfriending. Although viewing a post as inappropriate or polarizing might be subjective, general guidelines on how to respectfully address sensitive issues such as political, religious, or other societal issues can be given. On the contrary, these campaigns could raise awareness about the alternatives for unfriending, such as changing privacy settings to hide some posts.

CONCLUSION

Finally, this study examines the number of people who give their opinions on the factors and reasons for unfriended people on Facebook. The advantage of this study is that we can know adults' typology in the sense of unfriending someone. They can use this for further research in developing awareness campaigns as it indicates which behaviours or events mostly provoke unfriending. In collecting data on these factors and reasons, we prepared questions through an online form. A total of 110 respondents expressed their opinions. Most of them choose people's personalities, inappropriate topics like telling personal problems on Facebook, too often posting to be the main factors that make a person unfriendly to friends on Facebook. Qualitative analysis revealed that unfriending happened mainly for online reasons, which is in line with previous research. For example, a person's personality may be too proud of themselves on the Facebook page by showing their wealth to others. The matter is a bit offended and unfriended by their friends on Facebook. However, these judgments may lead to unfriending when violating their norms. Turning to the findings, practitioners could develop campaigns to make adults more aware of potential online behaviour that might irritate their Facebook connections and possibly lead to unfriending. While viewing posts about inappropriate or polarising topics can be subjective, we can still provide real guidance in respectfully addressing sensitive issues like politics or religion.

Adults appeared to be receptive to people's personalities and unpleasant habits when it came to offline causes. These explanations correspond to the most prevalent reasons given by adults. Furthermore, the end of a romantic relationship has an impact on adults' unfriending behaviour, but this is less typical among adolescents. A significant percentage of individuals unfriended people on Facebook for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they did not know them online or in person. This is noteworthy because prior research has shown that on SNSs, more than one out of every two respondents is connected with strangers, or persons they have never met in the offline world. As an outcome, it would be mesmerising to look into the

extent to which adolescents accept strangers' friend requests, as well as the situations under which they eventually unfriend these people and for what reasons. Furthermore, similar to a previous study among adults by Sibona and Walczak, our results indicate that adults' decision to unfriend someone on Facebook was mostly related to individuals from whom they received and accepted) the friend request. That is, adults appear to be much less likely to unfriend someone if they initiated the friendship themselves. This can be because of the fact that most of the time friend requests are granted, it is more straightforward to express yes than no. However, this does not guarantee long-term friendships if the initiator's behaviour is not in line with the receiver's expectations such as EVT. Possibly the initiator is more motivated to maintain the friendship. Furthermore, Halli states that the initiator of the friend request has lower status than the receiver. As the initiator of the friendship sends a request (i.e., lower status person) that must be accepted by the person with whom the initiator wants to be connected (i.e., higher status person), each response of the higher status person generates the next move in the friendship process. Nevertheless, it is advised for forthcoming research to examine the underlying mechanisms in more detail.

In addition, it would be interesting for future research to include questions about the last time an unfriending happened to the adults themselves. If possible, it would be recommended for future research to simultaneously conduct research among the person who makes the unfriending decisions and the unfriended parties.

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