

## Social Media Monitoring Behavior and Relationship Quality in Organizational Contents

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### Abstract

This quantitative study aims to investigate the dynamism of interpersonal relationship in workplace context in evolving environment of a social networking service (SNS), or social media, particularly Facebook. Therefore, the major research question was “What are the influences of Facebook monitoring on the partners’ activities on relationship quality at workplaces?”. Conceptual frameworks included (1) uncertainty reduction, (2) usage of Facebook, and (3) relationship quality. Selected by a snowball-sampling technique, samples were those who (1) were currently employed and operating in any workplace, (2) had a Facebook account with at least 5 or more of their colleagues in their friend list, and (3) lived in Bangkok. Questionnaires were distributed on-line, of which 213 were completed and returned, and the data were statistically analyzed—regression analysis. Results indicated that (1) monitoring Facebook activities of the romantic partners did not decrease satisfaction in their current relationship, (2) increased monitoring of Facebook activities of the partners did not lead to a greater uncertainty in their relationship, (3) greater uncertainty in a relationship adversely affected relationship quality, (4) greater satisfaction in a relationship correlated with greater relationship quality, and (5) increased monitoring of Facebook activities did not negatively correlate with relationship quality. Implications are that Facebook has enormous influences, positively and vice versa, in relationship quality at workplaces and needs to be further studied.

**Keywords:** Facebook, Facebook monitoring, relationship quality, interpersonal communication, social networking service (SNS), relational satisfaction, workplace, uncertainty reduction theory

## Introduction

For all humans, interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationship are considered a core of human experience according to the nature of humankind's social needs (Morgan, Salitsky, Stutzer, & Thomas, 2016). A social networking service (SNS), or social media, is a technological enhanced channel of communication widely used nowadays. SNSs have granted us an ability to communicate with others, wherever and whenever. Generally speaking, SNSs are a new medium reshaping how we communicate with one another, or our interpersonal relationship (Hawn, 2009). Several studies have explained how the SNS sites affected the interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationship. Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, and Walther (2008) stated that “too many friends” on Facebook could make Facebook users worried about their popularity and social desirability. Also, Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, and Lin ( 2007 ) suggested that relationship quality and satisfaction did not rely on media use but the status and role of the participants in their real-life relationship.

As commonly known, SNSs and interpersonal relationship are dynamic and ever-changing, which demands up-to-date studies on these two areas. Facebook in Thai context was chosen for this study because (1) Facebook was labelled as one of the most globally popular SNS sites with 1,712 million active users in 2016 (Statista, 2016) and (2) Bangkok was noted as a “biggest Facebook city” based on the number of Facebook accounts in Bangkok outnumbering the actual population of Bangkok in 2013 (Socialbakers, 2013).

At the same time, uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) has posited that people seek information about their relational partners in order to ensure their relationship quality, but information may not always enrich their relationship because sometimes information may increase uncertainty in their relationship. Combining this concept to that of usage of Facebook in different ways for different purposes Heino, 2006) should help investigate the issue in this study. The results of this study then may help understand the SNS process and its effects on social interactions and social learnings of humans.

## Literature Review

### Uncertainty Reduction and Interpersonal Relationships.

Uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) posited that people seek the information about their relational partners and/or potential partners to gain confidence in order to initiate the relationship, while the continual of the information-seeking process leads to disclosure of their relational partners and/or potential partners. Such a process creates and develops intimacy in interpersonal relationships. Theiss and Solomon (2008) also suggested that intimacy is a key to create a healthy relationship because it is a foundation for trust and conflict management which finally creates relational satisfaction.

Even if a positive effect on development of relationships is found, the information-seeking process may generate surveillance behavior toward current romantic partners, which is under intention to maintain relationship. In other words, uncertainty reduction process through information-seeking also play a role in relational maintenance, positively and negatively (Stewart, Dainton, & Goodboy, 2014). In conclusion, uncertainty reduction in information-seeking process leads to intimacy, relational development, and relational maintenance within an objective to pursue relational quality.

At the very first stage of disclosure (as part of information seeking process), especially in intimate relationship, obtained information is reportedly as possibly superficial and unreliable (Yang, Brown, & Braun, 2013). However, after time goes by, partners may seek further information about their counterparts with more intimate, personal, judgmental, and deeper questions (Ayres, 1979). With these “in-depth” questions, the couple is likely to share not only mere information but also their life experience and feeling for their own experience. In other words, a person reportedly seeks in-depth information of their intimate partners to reduce uncertainty by three tactics including (1) a passive tactic, (2) an active tactic and (3) an interactive tactic (Antheunis, Schouten, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2012; Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010; Theiss & Solomon, 2008). Passive tactics refer to observing inconspicuously while active tactics refer to interactive information-seeking activities including asking other people

for information about their relational partners. Interactive tactics refer to making a direct contact with a person of interest. In social media, all three tactics have been used for reducing uncertainty, especially the passive tactics which include observing the online profile and activities of intimate partners possibly done inconspicuously.

### **Social Media Use and Uncertainty Reduction in Intimate Relationships.**

Computer mediated communication (CMC) provides a very unique means of communication and a unique form of relationship differing from the traditional one or face-to-face communication (Rau, Gao, & Ding, 2008). SNSs as part of CMC include Facebook, Hi5, and MySpace; also, online dating sites like Tinder count. A special characteristic of SNSs is “profile” of the users illustrating their identity, personal life issues and, sometimes, opinions, which make the users value their own account (Rau et al., 2008; Sheldon., 2008). The “profile” feature of SNSs is seen as a source of information in uncertainty reduction process because it is the image of the relational partners.

People are motivated to use SNSs by some forces; they want to keep in touch with friends, family and significant others, broaden their social network for professional purpose and self-development, look for networking with common interests, and cure the loneliness (Antheunis et al., 2010; Sheldon., 2008; Yang et al., 2013). Furthermore, social media may serve other social functions, including (1) emotional release, (2) interpersonal relationship development and relationship maintenance, (3) personal identity reinforcement and (4) surveillance on other people (Sheldon, 2008). Therefore, SNS is a platform that people may use to seek and share one another’s information in order to make disclosure and reduce uncertainty in their relationships.

However, self-presentation in SNSs is different from that in real life experience. Gibbs et al. (2006) reported that people tend to be more dishonest about details such as physical appearance and conceal the flaw and negativity about themselves on dating sites in order to gain social desirability which leads to successful initiation of relationship in real life. Also,

Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) identified three tactics the SNS users employed to adjust their self-presentation online, including (1) leaving fewer cues, (2) balancing between accuracy and desirability, and (3) establishing credibility; all three tactics can be used in combination to create a selective self-presentation of an individual. In other words, the SNS users try to (2) balance the accuracy of information and their own ideal self which linked to social desirable traits they perceived from the social context and (2) adjust the information as they please upon available features of SNSs. This, hence, makes the difference between face-to-face communication and CMC.

The process of selective image is common, and usually people are likely to avoid sharing intimate information (including the flaws and negative information) in real life. Unfortunately, on top of that, nowadays with the SNSs as a new channel has allowed people to reconstruct and manipulate their online image more conveniently (Gonzales & Hancock, 2010). Because of frequent unreliability of online sources and information via SNSs; people are aware and then employ uncertainty reduction strategies to cross-check online sources and information (e.g. Google) with the profile of their significant others available or given by themselves (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2010). In other words, when on SNSs, people are likely to be more dishonest while trying to detect the dishonesty of others.

### **Social Media Use and Relationship Quality**

SNSs are connecting people and play a role as a tool of communication people use to build and sustain relationships. However, the connection between SNSs and human relationship is still in questions and needs to be investigated. Studies found the negative effects of Facebook on romantic relationships, especially as the source of jealousy and dissatisfaction; for example, Elphinston and Noller (2011) suggested that using Facebook can enhance psychological well-being for couple but at the same time can also increase the possibilities to jeopardize the relationship with jealousy from surveillance behavior. Facebook wall, profile and friend list not only were a source of information for self-disclosure but also appeared to be a potential source of unwanted data that led to jealousy and dissatisfaction. Also, some studies found partners were likely to perceive the past romantic or sexual partners as a potential threat of relationship (cf. Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009). On the other

hand, certain studies reported that Facebook did not halt relationship quality but actually dissatisfaction and an uneasy situation between partners, because of Facebook overuse behavior and low level of trust and intimacy in newly-engaged relationship situations (Clayton, Nagurney, & Smith, 2013; Hand, Thomas, Buboltz, Deemer, & Buyanjargal, 2012).

Thus, this study aims to study the effects of Facebook monitoring of romantic partners' activities on romantic relationships quality, and the hypotheses are as follows:

H1: People who monitor a romantic partner's Facebook activities will report feeling less satisfied in their current relationship.

H2: Increased monitoring of Facebook will correlate with greater uncertainty in romantic relationship.

H3: Greater uncertainty in a relationship will adversely affect relationship quality.

H4: Greater satisfaction in a relationship will correlate with greater relationship quality.

H5: Increased monitoring of Facebook activities will negatively correlate with relationship quality.

## Methodology

### Sample and data collection

This study employed the samples who were those currently engaging in any kind of romantic relationship, had a Facebook account with their partner in their friend list, and resided in Bangkok. Snowball and convenient sampling techniques were utilized in this study by asking the researcher's Facebook friends currently engaging in a romantic relationship to complete the survey and share to others with the same condition. The researcher obtained a total of 213 completed surveys for analysis. Descriptive characteristics of the samples was reported in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** Descriptive Characteristics of the Samples

Demographic factor	Descriptive statistics
Age	Mean: 24.47 Standard deviation: 4.8
Gender	Male: 96 (45.1%) Female: 117 (54.9%)

Frequency of Facebook use	Daily: 207 (97.2%) Not daily: 6 (2.8%)
Hours spent on Facebook/week.	1-2 hours/week: 16 (7.5%) 3-4 hours/week: 40 (18.8%) 5-6 hours/week: 21 (9.9%) 7-8 hours/week: 29 (13.6%) 9-10 hours/week: 23 (10.8%) More than 10 hours/week: 84 (39.4%)
Relationship status listed on Facebook.	Did not show: 93 (43.7%) Single: 41 (19.2%) In a relationship: 59 (27.7%) Engaged: 1 (0.5%) Married: 8 (3.8%) In an open relationship: 1 (0.5%) It's complicated: 9 (4.2%) Divorced: 1 (0.5%)
Length of current relationship	Less than 1 year: 74 (34.7%) 1-2 years: 63 (29.6%) 3-4 years: 40 (18.8%) 5-6 years: 12 (5.6%) 7-8 years: 4 (1.9%) 9-10 years: 9 (4.2%) More than: 10 years 11 (5.2%)

## Measures

The main independent variable was measured by asking respondents about their surveillance behavior on their relational partner via Facebook using *Facebook monitoring scale*. This scale was adapted from Farrugia (2013) partner surveillance scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ). The scale was altered for this research by changing some terms and cutting out some questions that were not found to be highly reliable in order to be used under the context of communication experience via Facebook. A Likert scale ranging from 1-5 (strongly disagree to

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strongly agree) was employed, and 14 questions were administered. Three main dependent variables, including (a) relationship satisfaction, (b) relational uncertainty, and (b) relationship quality were measured, and the details are below.

*Relationship satisfaction scale.* The scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ) was invented by Hendrick (1988) and used in this study to examine the satisfaction of individuals towards their relationship, while a Likert scale ranging from 1-5 but with different wording (highly unsatisfied to highly satisfied) was utilized. Three questions of this scale were administered.

*Relational uncertainty scale.* This scale was originally created by Knoblock and Solomon (1999) and later modified by Bevan (2004) in order to focus on examining relational uncertainty ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Also, a Likert scale ranging 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) was utilized while eight questions were administered.

*Relationship quality scale.* This scale was originally created as “Quality Marriage Index” by Norton (1983) and later modified by Goodboy, Myers, and Members of Investigating (2010) to be used to examine all forms of romantic relationships’ quality ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Also, a Likert scale ranging 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) was utilized while six questions were administered.

In addition to the main independent variables, other key factors that may affect relationship satisfaction, relational uncertainty, and relationship quality were also collected, including: (a) gender, (b) age, (c) frequency of checking Facebook accounts, (d) time spent on Facebook, (e) self-disclosure about relationship status on Facebook, and (f) length of current relationship. *Gender* was measured as a dummy variable (females=0; male=1); *Age* was measured in years; *frequency of checking Facebook account* was measured as a dummy variable (do not check every day=0; check every day = 1), *time spent on Facebook* was measured in seven ranges (0 hours, 1-2 hours/week, 3-4 hours/week, 5-6 hours/week, 7-8 hours/week, 9-10 hours/week and more than 10 hours/week); *self-disclosure about relationship status on Facebook* was measured as a nominal scale with 12 choices (according to the real 11 relationship statuses available on Facebook including: single, in a relationship,

engaged, married, in a civil union, in a domestic partnership, in an open relationship, it's complicated, separated, divorced, widowed, and did not show); and *length of current relationship* was measured in seven ranges (less than 1 year, 1-2 years, 3-4 years, 5-6 years, 7-8 years, 8-9 years and 10 years or more).

### Estimating technique

The researcher used Ordinal Least Squares (OLS) regression to analyze the data and estimate the relationship between variables. The IBM SPSS statistics version 20 was utilized to perform this analysis.

### RESULTS

Before the data analysis, reliability of each scale used in this study was tested by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results exceeded a widely acceptable value at 0.7 (as reported in Table 2). These scores were averaged to create summated scales for regression analysis.

**Table 2** Results from reliability test

Variables	Facebook monitoring	Relational satisfaction	Relational uncertainty	Relationship quality
Cronbach alphas				
( $\alpha$ ) coefficient	0.821	0.807	0.852	0.921

Bivariate correlation analysis was also conducted by using Pearson correlation coefficients in order to explore the relationships between variables. Results were reported in Table 3.

**Table 3** Correlation among variables

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Facebook monitoring	-.014	-.016	.040	.002	-.243**	.119	.257**	.073
2. Relationship satisfaction	1	.743**	-.558**	.069	.023	-.070	.044	-.021
3. Relationship quality		1	-.668**	-.015	.014	-.025	.124	-.038
4. Relational uncertainty			1	.031	-.102	-.051	.003	.029

5. Gender	1	.040	.041	-.097
	.130			
6. Age	1	-.179**	-.039	.125
7. Frequency of Facebook use	1	.217**	.011	
8. Time spent on Facebook	1	.045		
9. Relationship length	1			

Note \* p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

Results from the OLS regression analysis were employed in response to all the given hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 (People who monitor a romantic partner's Facebook activities will report feeling less satisfied in their current relationship) predicted a negative relationship between Facebook monitoring behavior and relational satisfaction. The result reported that the relationship between Facebook monitoring behavior and relational satisfaction was positive and it was not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.005$ ;  $p=.920$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 (Increased monitoring of Facebook will correlate with greater uncertainty in romantic relationship) predicted a positive relationship between Facebook monitoring behavior and relational uncertainty. The result reported the negative relationship and it was not statistically support ( $\beta=-0.009$ ;  $p=.862$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 (Greater uncertainty in a relationship will adversely affect relationship quality) predicted a negative relationship between relational uncertainty and relationship quality. The result indicated the positive relationship between the variables and it was highly statistically significant ( $\beta=-0.377$ ;  $p=.000$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 (Greater satisfaction in a relationship will correlate with greater relationship quality) predicted a positive relationship between relational satisfaction and relationship quality. The result reported relational satisfaction and relationship quality were positively

related and highly statistically significant ( $\beta=-0.530$ ;  $p=.000$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 4 was supported.

Hypothesis 5 (Increased monitoring of Facebook activities will negatively correlate with relationship quality) predicted a negative relationship between Facebook monitoring behavior and relationship quality. The result indicated a negative relationship between the variables but it was not statistically significant ( $\beta=-0.022$ ;  $p=.613$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 5 was not supported. Overall, the results from the OLS regression analysis are presented in Figure 1.

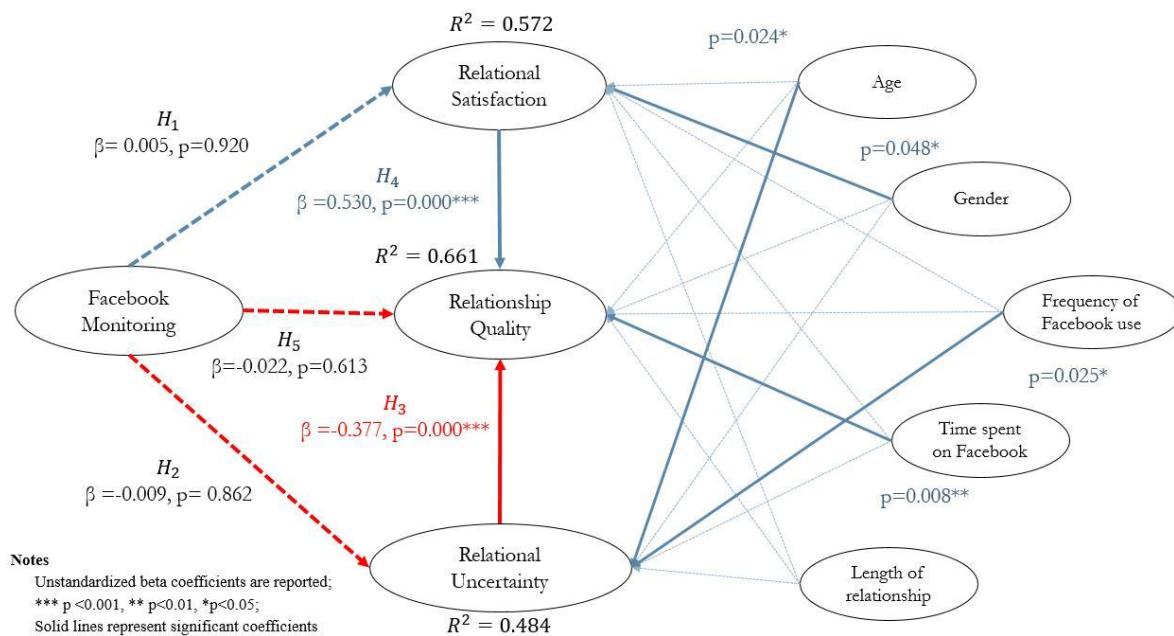


Figure 1 Regression results

In order to avoid questions about multicollinearity among all variables in each equation, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) statistics was evaluated. The VIF values ranged from 1.043 to 1.927, which was in an acceptable range.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to find, in particular, a negative relationship between Facebook monitoring behavior and relationship quality. However, the results from regression analysis indicated that Facebook was not found guilty. All hypotheses involving Facebook monitoring behavior (Hypothesis 1, 2 and 5) were not supported and statistical significance was not found. The results of this study were in accordance with those of the previous studies reporting no evidence of harm on relationship by Facebook monitoring behavior (Clayton et al., 2013; Hand et al., 2012). By the way, the result indicated that uncertainty reduction theory was reliable; that is, those with high relational certainty were likely to have high relational satisfaction, which may lead to high quality relationship. Therefore, with or without computer mediated communication context, the uncertainty reduction theory itself is considered practical and valid for explaining romantic relationship.

Weaknesses in this study exist. First, diversity of the samples was rare. The majority of the samples consisted of the young (mean: 24.47 years old; standard deviation: 4.8), the heavy-users of Facebook (97.2% of them checked Facebook daily and 39.4% spent more than ten hours a week on Facebook), and those who were engaged in an early stage of relationship (34.7% of them were in less than a year of relationship and 29.6% in 1-2 years of relationship). Thus, a larger sample size with higher diversity is recommended for future research. Second, data collection process in this study was fully self-administered and conducted completely via the online survey tool. This raises concerns about both authenticity of the respondents and trustworthiness of the data. Third, keep in mind that Facebook-monitoring behavior may not have played an important role as it was expected. Future research should consider other aspects of Facebook, such as Facebook addiction, positive effects of Facebook use on relationship.

Implications of this research should contribute to those who wish to enrich their relationship. That is, Facebook use by itself neither does harm nor benefits relationship directly, but relational satisfaction and relational uncertainty seem to be the keys. Also, the

nature of a communication medium to maintain your relationship quality may be important, but not as important as both quality and quantity of the information or messages that lead to “certainty” or the peace of mind of all involved parties.

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