

Becoming Friends on Online Social Networking Services

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Abstract. The internet has become an effective tool in communication, and SNS (Social Networking Service), such as Facebook or Twitter, that allows anyone to disclose a variety of specific personal information. The purpose of the present study is to identify which profile factors provided SNS users (or viewers) with a positive first impression. Results from study 1, the three factors - basic information, profile picture and interests - were derived according to priority. In study 2, we established three major profile factors extracted from surveys that are crucial factors in SNS settings. We can assumed that more self-disclosure SNS users have the more socially attractive they will be by viewers.

Keywords: Social Networking Service, Profile, First Impressions.

1 Introduction

Interacting on the Internet is similar in some respects to interacting in a darkened room, in that one cannot see one's interaction partner, nor can one be seen. First impressions thus are formed based upon the information provided by the other person and perhaps also by the positive effect of our own acts of self-disclosure [1]. Online Social Networking Service (SNS) enables users to present themselves in a number of ways. Users can voluntarily display pictures in their albums, describe their personal interests, political views, favorite music/movies/books/quotes, and hobbies, and list their friends. A function of SNS is to help the users connect with those they already know and extend that connection to those they do not yet know [2]. If a person were to view an SNS profile before physically meeting, how might that affect the relationship? Which profile factors are important at the initial stages of a virtual friendship? Viewers may seek to the part of physical information such as photo or objective information such as age, gender, and major. And the ability to sustain and manage complex personal relationships requires elaborate cognitive strategies, and there is good reason to believe that the impressive cognitive abilities of *homo sapiens* evolved largely to accomplish this task [3]. Modern industrialized mass societies, where interacting with strangers is common. That's why we choose additional condition - information openness to public status. The purpose of the present study is to identify which profile factors provided SNS users (or viewers) with a positive first impression. Study 1 was designed to assess the three most influential three profile factors and Study 2 was designed to identify the effects of

these factors, extracted from study 1. This study aims to be an exploratory investigation of whether profile factors influence online relationships.

2 Study 1: Questionnaire

Under initiating friendship in cyberspace, what information is considered important as a SNS profile factor? We have subdivided six factors.

2.1 Method

Participants. Thirteen students participated in Study 1. (5 males and 8 females).

Measures. The questionnaire was designed to rate the presented options in order of priority from actual 6 factors - basic information, profile picture, relationship status, education & work, interests and contact information - based on Facebook, a popular means of SNS.

Procedure. The owner of the profile was called ‘user’ and those viewing the profiles were called ‘viewer’. Participants acted as viewers and were asked to rank the profiles on preference and their reasoning for initiating a friendship with a stranger on a SNS.

2.2 Result

Results from study 1, the three factors - basic information, profile picture and interests - were derived according to priority (Fig. 1.).

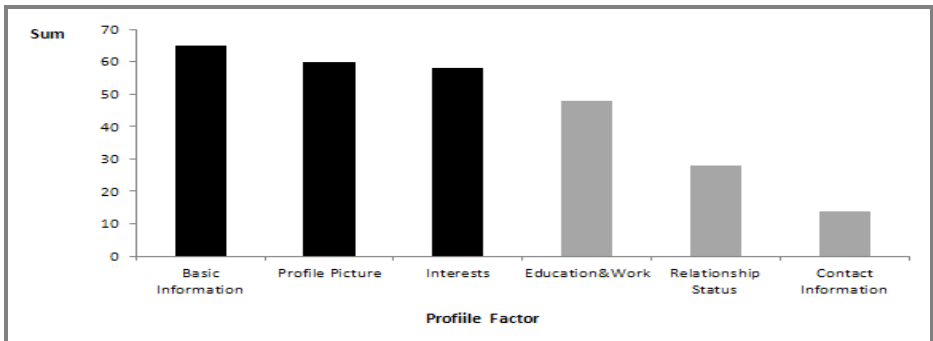


Fig. 1. Importance ranking on profile factors

The basic information was a cue for guessing the user’s basic things and personality, and when we initiate friendship in online, an important factor for building personal trust is personal information.

“Just reading basic information, I can guess who user is like life environment, and it helps to avoid suspicious stranger”

Visual cues are important during early stage interaction and profile picture was only visual cue in SNS.

“First impression is very important to make friends, especially good feeling of picture gives more curiosity about user”

The factor of interests shows user’s character. Having things in common creates a possibility for further intimacy. Besides, doing various social activities and interests is potential to have a good personality.

“User who have various interests maybe talk more fun”.

3 Study 2: Experiment

An experiment was performed in study 2 under the result of study 1.

3.1 Method

Participants. Twenty seven participants (16 males and 11 females, mean age = 22) from Yonsei University took part in the experiment for class credit.

Measures. Twelve profile prototypes appeared randomly twice for each participant. Prototype is composited with basic information, profile picture and interests (study 1 main factor) formed from Facebook. Independent variable is openness to the public about user’s information. A 2x2x2 within subjects design was conducted: 2(basic information conditions for public availability; private and public)x2(profile picture conditions for public availability: private and public)x2(cultural interesting conditions for public availability: private and public). The profile picture gender limited as a woman.

Procedure. Participants were given three questions about willingness to initiate to make friendship with on a 7-point Likert scale responses. Questions and profile prototypes are as follow (Fig. 2.).

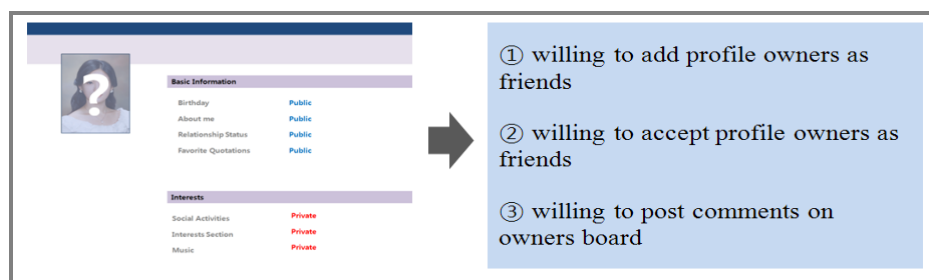


Fig. 2. Sample prepared profile prototype and question

3.2 Results

Willingness to become a friend (the average of 3 responses) was evaluated by repeated-measure ANOVAs and further analyzed by post hoc Bonferroni.

Profile information. The analysis indicated that profile information main effects were all significant. Under the ‘to public’ condition, viewers tend to initiate to make friends with user [Profile picture: $F(1, 26) = 30.330, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .538$; Basic information: $F(1, 26) = 20.922, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .446$; Interests : $F(1, 26) = 16.423, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .387$] (Fig. 3).

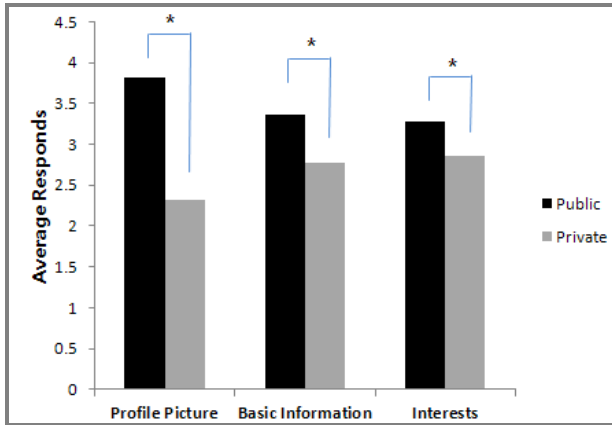


Fig. 3. Average responds each information status

Interaction between Profile picture and Basic information. The two-factor interaction of between profile picture and basic information was significant [$F(1,26) = 12.089, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .317$]. When picture and basic information are presented at the same time, willingness to initiate friendship markedly increases.

4 Discussion

Having access to personal information is a fundamental requirement when initiating friendships. The empirical findings of this study suggest important implications for the understanding of how people decide to make friends in the virtual world. First, we posited the essential factors - basic information, profile picture and personal interests - would influence the willingness to initiate friendship with zero-history partners. There is support that visual can play a critical role during social interaction online and offline alike [4]. Second, we established three major profile factors extracted from surveys that are crucial factors in SNS settings.

Social interaction through SNS has become the primary use of a home computer [5]. We can assume that more self-disclosure SNS users have the more socially attractive they will be by viewers.

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