

# Of Course I Don't Post Too Much: Preferences and Perceptions of Relational Maintenance Online

SAGE Open  
April-June 2013: 1–9  
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DOI: 10.1177/2158244013487539  
sgo.sagepub.com  


Kristie Holmes<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This study explored participant perception regarding the ease of relationship maintenance online, honesty in information sharing, and whether people were more, less, or similarly concerned about their online image over their in-person image given the prevalence and preference for electronic communication in most relationship forms. Most of the 296 participants were consistently honest in their online information sharing. Women were more likely to worry about maintaining their in-person image than men and found it easier to maintain friendships online. Participants aged 30 to 45 years were the least likely to post misleading information about themselves or their interests. Participants seemed to equate “post a lot” of information online as equated to “post too much” as not a single participant revealed that they “post a lot.”

## Keywords

communication, social sciences, new media, communication technologies, mass communication, communication studies, nonverbal, interpersonal communication, human communication

The human personality is a sacred thing; one dare not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others.

Durkheim (1915, p. 299) as cited in  
Brown and Levinson (1987)

## Introduction

Attitudes toward electronic communication have changed dramatically in a brief period of time. Just 3 years ago, Holmes, Moroney, and Holder (2009) found that the number one electronic communication preference was email, a form of communication that hardly existed a decade prior (Stepanikova, Nie, & He, 2010). In this same short time span, words such as “friend” have changed their meaning (Ledbetter et al., 2011), and words such as “friended,” “texting,” and “texted” became words either used colloquially or have entered the Webster dictionary. These most recent words reflect the actual and now the most generally used current communication method across genders and age groups, as reflected in this study.

Whether social networking or electronic communication has been a positive or negative influence on relationships has been much debated (Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004; Caplan, 2007; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009; Spitzberg, 2006) in the past decade and is still explored in

more recent research, with foundational research reflected in quite old studies. Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch (2011) pointed to the two extreme views (online communication being either positive or negative) but contend that the reality is more nuanced.

## Online Support System

Social networking can provide support among people who already have an in-person network in place. However, one can find specific support networks for everything from infertility, surrogacy, rare genetic disorders, addictions, and other specific groups in increasing frequency. Such groups of support do not require that people have a face-to-face relationship to be a part of their support. Among Facebook “friends,” Moreno et al. (2011) found that when users displayed depressive posts, they found support through their friend network, and others were more likely to support them through discussions of their own similar feelings. Whether Forest and Wood’s (2012) finding that people spend time with only 24% of their Facebook friend network is interpreted in a positive,

<sup>1</sup>University of Southern California School of Social Work, CA, USA.

## Corresponding Author:

Kristie Holmes, 8152 Kirkwood Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90046, USA.  
Email: kristieholmes@gmail.com

neutral, or negative light, it is certainly likely to affect relationships, depending on how time is allocated to online versus face-to-face primary relationships.

*Hypothesis 1:* Men will rate the ease of online relationship maintenance as easier than their female counterparts.

### Seeking Romantic Partners

Permanent partnerships such as marriage as a result of meeting online are no longer a rarity. The dating website *eHarmony* boasts an average of 100,000 marriages per year through their service alone. A small-scale study by Young, Dutta, and Dommety (2009) explored extracting psychological information from Facebook user profiles, for instance, that an assumption could be made about users who posted a religious affiliation. Such users were more likely to be single, and this was seen as an important factor in looking for a potential mate as opposed to users who did not post a religious affiliation, as is making one's profile public (inviting communication from outside their "network").

Wang et al. (2011) explored the regrets that social networking users feel about past information sharing and found that regrettable postings were not unusual for users, and they centered around sensitive topics, emotions, and unintended viewers of their posts. Results demonstrated real-life ramifications for users in terms of relationships and careers that are indeed negative. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe's (2007) findings from an earlier time found that psychological well-being was enhanced for participants who were experiencing low self-esteem or life satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 2:* Disclosure of personal information will be positively correlated with in-person disclosure and negatively associated with online disclosure.

### Diagnosable Internet Addiction

Sheldon et al.'s (2011) study opened with, "Facebooking has become near-epidemic in college populations" (p. 1), and questioned whether it was actually an obsession that disrupts or consumes lives. Meerkerk, Van Den Eijnden, Vermulst, and Garretsen (2009) even developed an instrument to assess the severity of compulsive online use and found that "internet addiction" is increasingly recognized as a valid construct (p. 5). Kim, LaRose, and Peng (2009) found that those who were already lonely or felt depressed or lacked social skills could in fact develop compulsive Internet usage, increasing symptom severity rather than relieving it through online connections. They also found that undergraduate students frequently underestimated how their peers were feeling as a result of what they viewed on Facebook, resulting in more negative feelings about themselves after logging off (Jordan et al., 2011). Furthermore, it was found that even when users with low self-esteem used social networking as a less

frightening way to express themselves, the items posted were generally not well received by others, making it difficult to connect through this medium in the desired way (Forest & Wood, 2012).

*Hypothesis 3:* With increasing age, the amount of time spent on online will decrease.

However, similar questions could have been asked of historical participants who began using the telephone "compulsively" or "multiple times in the span of one day." An argument could be made that one was "addicted" to any new gadget that had entered one's life before the novelty wore off. Easy access and the lack of cost deterrent for those who already have Internet access may make reining in compulsive actions more difficult, and the potential for "stalking" in relationships (or just a potential romantic interest) can also more easily run amok in this climate given the access one has to information on just about anyone through a quick Google search.

Whereas someone in the past may not have made a physical "drive by" of an ex-partner's home, they may be far more likely to check their social networking information, or ask a mutual friend to pull their information. Tokunaga (2011) called this "interpersonal electronic surveillance." This type of access could bring an onslaught of information that in the past would have been unlikely (i.e., vacation photos with the new partner, what their children look like and where they work, as well as what they had for breakfast that morning) but are all possibilities at this time and could cause psychological stress and jealousy when it would have not been possible before, especially for those who are anxiously attached to their partners (Elphinston & Noller, 2011). Marshall, Bejanyan, Di Castro, and Lee (2012) found that anxiety related to relationship status was positively related with Facebook surveillance.

### Oversharing and Safety Concerns

Back et al. (2010) supported the theory that most people are fairly honest in their portrayal of themselves and are not using profiles to promote an idealized virtual identity as many had feared in the past would happen, reflecting on the anonymity of the Internet. Fernandez, Levinson, and Rodebaugh (2012) suggested that social anxiety is indeed recognizable in objective criteria posted on Facebook as well as raters' impressions. It seems that people are even more willing to put more "out there" in many cases (especially in younger demographics) than they would say or do in a physical or face-to-face capacity. For younger adults, it seems that they may be more willing to reveal information that could place them at risk with regard to personal safety. Nosko, Wood, and Molema (2010) found that as age increased, the amount of disclosure regarding personal information in their profiles decreased.

*Hypothesis 4:* Male anxiety scores related to image (online and offline) will be lower than that of their female counterparts.

*Hypothesis 5:* Younger adult anxiety scores related to image (including online and offline concerns) will be lower than that of middle- and older age participants.

### ***Social Networking's Historical Context***

This researcher was interested in exploring the more nuanced features of the online relationship in all relational forms: strangers, casual questioning, friendships, and romantic relationships. Sheldon et al. (2011) went on to state that during their literature review, they found that the studies to date had revealed that with greater social networking use, there was a greater sense of relationship satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction and bipolar feelings of connectedness. The extreme language employed by researchers to describe social networking use could be seen as overwrought at this time.

Studies such as Ledbetter et al. (2011) reviewed literature that connected poor social skills as a reason to prefer to use electronic forms of communication. This may have well been true when the use of Facebook to communicate was not ubiquitous, as it is today. In today's relationships, even acquaintanceships, it is not uncommon to state or even assume in the beginning of a face-to-face conversation that the parties involved already know certain information "because I already saw it on Facebook" or may start a conversation by saying something like, "Did you see what Mary posted on her wall?"

Using social networking is more often than not an expected part of interpersonal communication that fills in many blanks in a way that perhaps a phone conversation would have in the past, bridging the gap until the next face-to-face meeting. Also, if one states in a conversation, "I talked with Mary about such and such last week," it would not necessarily mean that she actually "spoke" with her in person or on the phone, but could have been involved in a text message "conversation" or another form of electronic communication. Similarly, speaking to someone about one's "Facebook friend" and what someone "said" or "did" may not actually mean that a person has had any face-to-face contact with the sharer. At this point with social networking's infusion with face-to-face life, it can now be taken as a social slight if someone has missed an important milestone or announcement made on one's social networking site and if one is considered "close" to this sharer.

### ***Social Networking As a Romantic Antagonist***

More recently, Facebook has been a great antagonist to romantic relationships, with a 2010 study by American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML) having found that "four out of five lawyers reported an increasing number of divorce cases citing evidence derived from social

networking sites in the past 5 years, with Facebook being the market leader." Furthermore, "Two-thirds of the lawyers surveyed said that Facebook was the 'primary source' of evidence in divorce proceedings" (Adams, 2011).

Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) stated that the open nature of social networking gives couples access to information they would have not had otherwise, and the lack of context often showed the reader how their partner knows a certain person or what sort of conversation they are having. Given the permanent nature of items posted on the Internet, it may be that in the future, answers will evolve and change in studies with regard to the perceived positive or negative effect of social networking on relationships. Young adults are building a longer and more permanent history of actions, opinions, photos, activities, and relationships with more information available to potential friends, spouses, and employers that can affect their present relationships and future opportunities.

### ***Social Network Analysis Theory***

Social network analysis is grounded in the systematic analysis of empirical data, although it was once seen as a method of inquiry rather than a stand-alone theory. People now actively think of their social networks (how and who they are connected to in real life) the way sociologists have for many decades because of the influence of online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. These networks have long been researched by sociologists as an acknowledged way to maintain relationships (Keller, 1968), share information, and fit in with those surrounding oneself in a community (Freeman, 2004). The biggest difference in then and now is the ease with which one is included in or isolated from particular networks and the easier tracking by researchers with an eye for electronic data mining that is now available in numbers that would have been incomprehensible 30 years ago (Butts, 2009). Wellman (2004) stated, "Thirty years ago, I could not even sell the term 'social network' to sociologists" (p. 2).

Granovetter (1973) defined a tie and its strength as related to an investment of time, emotional intensity, mutual confidence, and reciprocity. Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) simplified the idea of propinquity by showing that the term meant that, in the simplest terms, people befriend their neighbors. Festinger's (1950) social comparison theory ties in further with how people view themselves (and the contents of one's social networking profile) with regard to their felt perceptions about how others are superior or inferior to themselves.

Still, however, even with all of the data available, it seems that people's networks, although globally available in a way never before imagined, still generally support very localized relationships (within driving distance). Rather than "the end of geography" (Graham, 1998) as we know it, at this point, it appears that while the availability helps one

forge new connections, at its core, electronic social networking in many ways continues to reflect the way things have historically been, with relationships online reflecting the connections one has face to face. People continue to make comparisons of themselves in relationship with others in the community. This study explores what this researcher views as simply a newer mode of communication and how participants perceive its role in supporting or taking away from relationships. How close ties are to begin with may play a role, as Gilbert (2012) suggested, in that the perceived ease or difficulty may depend on the intimacy of the relationship in the first place. It was suspected by this researcher that, in the end, while technology changes at a rapid pace as do the options available to communicate, the more intimate the relationship, the more likely the desire to prefer face-to-face interaction. Takhteyev, Gruzd, and Wellman (2012) stated simply, "Social contacts benefit from physical proximity" (p. 1).

## Method

An online survey was distributed through Facebook via a web-based platform, targeting ages 18 and above. Participants of this age range were chosen because the researcher was interested in exploring adult communicative styles through the use of technology and how the independent variables of age, gender, geographical location, and marital history affect how one perceives the effect of technology on relationships whether they be strangers, platonic friendships, or romantic partnerships. Participants were from 38 states in the United States, while 24 participants resided outside of the United States, with a 92% response rate. This sample was heavily Caucasian and well educated. The survey consisted primarily of closed-ended quantitative questions.

Of the 296 participants, 81 identified as male, 209 identified as female, 1 identified as "other," and 5 declined to answer the question. During analysis, the researcher decided to eliminate the responses from the participant who identified with the "other" category to restrict the research analysis to two sexes as opposed to three when exploring gender.

Participants were asked to respond to 28 multiple-choice questions by selecting a single answer they felt best reflected their opinion and 1 open-ended question where they could describe their opinion in their own words with regard to how they view the positive, neutral, or negative effects of technology on their relationships. The survey was designed with a nonoptional informed consent agreement, which stated that participants must be above the age of 18 to take the survey. It also made it clear that the survey was completely voluntary and anonymous, and included contact information for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as for the researchers so that participants were able to pose questions, comments, or complaints if needed. IP addresses were not collected, and with the exception of the informed consent agreement, every item was voluntary and could be skipped

without interrupting the rest of the survey. The snowball sampling technique was used to encourage Facebook users to repost the survey link on their pages to further distribute the survey.

Twitter was used to further disseminate the survey as well as professional contact emails that went out to the researcher's network as a separate collector of data. Statistical tests used were independent *t* tests, ANOVA, least significant difference (LSD), and Bonferonni post hoc tests (including Pplot graphs), as well as descriptive statistics and chi-square to analyze results, using (SPSS) IBM 19.0 software. Significance was set at  $p \geq .05$ . However, there were many instances when there were levels of  $p = .06$  or  $.07$  levels of significance, which this researcher considered as borderline significance in these findings and therefore reportable.

## Results

### *"I Do Not Post Too Much Personal Information"*

One of the most stunning findings in this study, without having run a single statistical analysis, was the glaringly obvious lack of responses to one question option in particular regardless of gender, age, or marital status. When participants were asked to rate their level of posting information about themselves online (options were that they post no personal information, post a little, post moderately, or post a lot), with  $N = 296$ , not one single participant chose "post a lot." The majority of participants (60%) stated that they post "a little," while 30% stated that they post a moderate amount. Those who claimed to post no personal information about themselves came in at 17%.

## Gender Differences

### *Ease of Maintaining Friendships Online*

When participants were asked about the ease of maintaining friendships online, men found it more difficult to do so ( $n = 74$ ,  $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) than women ( $n = 199$ ,  $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = .85$ ). This difference was statistically significant,  $t(271) = 0.22$ ,  $p = .05$ .

### *Concern Level of Offline Image*

When participants were questioned about the level of concern they have for their offline image, men were less concerned with how their image appears to others in the "real world" ( $n = 74$ ,  $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) than women ( $n = 193$ ,  $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = .83$ ). This difference was statistically significant,  $t(265) = -0.29$ ,  $p = .01$ . When questioned about their level of concern with constantly trying to present and maintain an image of themselves online, there was not a statistically significant difference among genders.



### ***Distrust of What Others Post Online***

When participants were asked how often they trusted the honesty of others who posted personal information online, men were less trusting ( $n = 74$ ,  $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) than women ( $n = 194$ ,  $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .61$ ). This mean difference had borderline significance,  $t(266) = -0.163$ ,  $p = .06$ .

### **Age Differences**

#### ***Posted Misleading Information***

Age categories were coded into three groups: 18 to 29 years, 30 to 45 years, and 46 years and older. ANOVA was run along with LSD and Bonferonni post hoc tests,  $F(2, 264) = 6.38$ ,  $p = .00$ , and found that there were significant differences between the youngest group aged 18 to 29 and the middle group aged 30 to 45 ( $M$  difference = 0.31,  $p = .004$ ) as well as the oldest group aged 46 and older ( $M$  difference = 0.18,  $p = .03$ ) when asked about the level of posting misleading personal information about themselves online. The range of misleading posting was 1 (never) to 4 (frequently). The eldest group mean was 1.28, the middle group mean was 1.15 (making them the least likely group to post misleading information about themselves online), and the youngest group was the most likely group to mislead others with a mean of 1.46.

#### ***Level of Concern With Offline Versus Online Image***

When participants were questioned about the level of concern they have for their offline image, age was a deciding variable in determining how concerned they were. The older the participant, the less concerned they were with how their image appeared to others in the "real world."

When questioned about their level of concern with constantly trying to present and maintain an image of themselves online, ANOVA, LSD, and Bonferonni post hoc tests,  $F(2, 265) = 9.11$ ,  $p = .00$ , were run and it was found that there were no significant differences between the youngest group aged 18 to 29 and the middle group aged 30 to 45 ( $M$  difference = 0.31,  $p = .004$ ), but there was a significant difference between the youngest and the oldest group aged 46 and older ( $M$  difference = 0.52,  $p = .00$ ) of concern levels regarding their offline image. There was also a significant difference between the middle group (30-45 years) and the older group (above the age of 46;  $M$  difference = 0.32,  $p = .01$ ).

The range of concern in trying to present and maintain one's offline image was 1 (not at all concerned) to 4 (extremely concerned). The oldest group's mean was 2.21, the middle group's mean was 2.53, and the youngest group had the highest level of concern with a mean of 2.73. It seems that the older the participants, the less was their level of concern about the maintenance of their offline (in-person) image.

This was expected. However, there was no statistically significant difference when online image alone was analyzed.

### ***Level of Personal Disclosure***

When age categories were coded into three age groups, the researcher ran ANOVA, LSD, and Bonferonni post hoc tests,  $F(2, 267) = 5.45$ ,  $p = .00$ , and found that there were no significant differences between the youngest group aged 18 to 29 years and the middle group aged 30 to 45 years when looking at levels of personal disclosure posts online.

There was a statistically significant difference between the youngest group (18-29 years) and the oldest group (above the age of 46) when rating the level of personal information they post about themselves online ( $M$  difference = 0.29,  $p = .001$ ). There was also a statistically significant difference between the middle group (aged 30-45 years) and the oldest group (above the age of 46) and their rated level of disclosure ( $M$  difference = 0.18,  $p = .04$ ). The oldest group also had a statistically significant difference between both of the other groups (18-29 years;  $M$  difference = -0.29,  $p = .001$ ) and 30 to 45 age group ( $M$  difference = -0.18,  $p = .04$ ).

The range of misleading posting was 1 (never post) to 4 (post a lot). The eldest group's mean was 1.91, the middle group's mean was 2.09, and the youngest group was the most likely group of frequent posters with a mean of 2.21.

### ***Time Spent on Social Networking Sites***

After running ANOVA, LSD, and Bonferonni post hoc tests,  $F(2, 284) = 13.73$ ,  $p = .00$ , it was found that there were significant differences between the youngest group aged 18 to 29, and the middle group aged 30 to 45 ( $M$  difference = 0.53,  $p = .001$ ), as well as the oldest group aged 46 and older ( $M$  difference = 0.73,  $p = .00$ ) when accounting for time spent on social networking sites. The range of hours spent was 1 (less than an hour per day) to 6 (more than 8 hr per day). The eldest group's mean was 1.58, the middle group's mean was 1.79, and the youngest group, with a mean of 2.32, was the group that spent the most time on social networking sites. This was expected.

### ***Image Maintenance: Combined Offline and Online***

This researcher explored the possibility of a statistical significance between age groups (ANOVA), marital status ( $t$  test), and gender ( $t$  test) on a combined image maintenance variable, combining online and offline variables related to image maintenance. An ANOVA,  $F(2, 265) = 4.34$ ,  $p = .014$ , found that there were significant differences between the youngest group aged 18 to 29 years and the oldest group aged 56 and older ( $M$  difference = 0.64,  $p = .004$ ). The range of image maintenance was 8 to 2. The oldest group's mean

was 4.76, the middle group's mean was 4.5, and the youngest group was the least concerned about image maintenance at 4.12. This was as expected.

Marital status was recoded into (ever) been married and never married (single). The never married (single) group ( $M = 4.25$ ) was more concerned about image maintenance in general than the group that had a marriage history. This was statistically significant ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $t$  test = 2.41,  $p = .012$ ). There was no significant statistical difference between men and women concerning image maintenance, which was not expected.

### Posting Most Misleading Information

When exploring factors of honesty in online relationships, an ANOVA,  $F(3, 263) = 5.50$ ,  $p = .001$ , was run to determine whether there was a relationship between the posting of misleading information about oneself online and the ability to trust what others post online. There was no statistical significance for the group who "never" posted misleading information about themselves online.

### "I'm Rarely Dishonest"

The researcher found that there was a borderline significant difference between the group that "rarely" posts misleading information about themselves ( $M$  difference = 0.18,  $p = .07$ ) and their level of trust in others' posts. Statistical significance increased in this group when the researcher looked at an increased level of trust ("frequently" trusted others online when they rarely posted misleading information;  $M$  difference = 0.42,  $p = .000$ ). The range of trust was 4 to 1.

### "I'm Sometimes Dishonest"

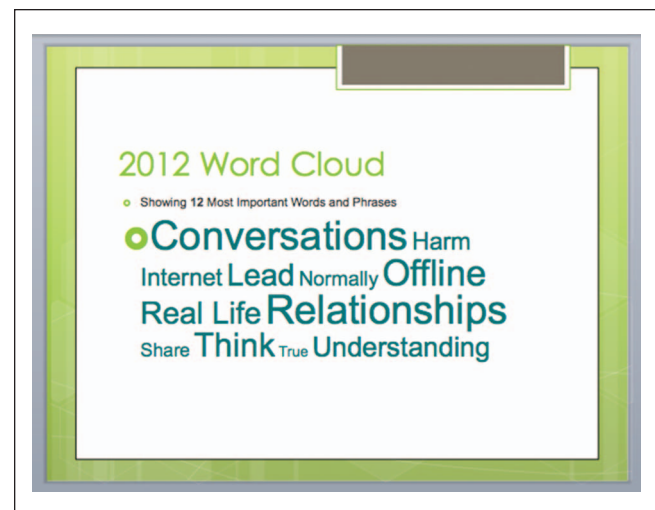
Statistical significance increased in the group that admitted to "sometimes" posting misleading information about themselves (Level 3) when the researcher looked at an increased level of trust ("frequently" trusted others online when they sometimes posted misleading information;  $M$  difference = 0.24,  $p = .003$ ). The range of trust was 4 to 1. Not a single participant reported being frequently dishonest. The high-level trust group's mean was 1.10, the moderate-level trust group's mean was 1.34, the rarely trusting group mean was 1.52, and the never trust others online group mean was 1.00. This was not expected.

### Limitations and Future Research

Future studies should aim to gather a more diverse, random racial sample, as this study reflects that of well-educated Caucasians albeit those with varying age levels rather than a simple undergraduate convenience sample. It seems that qualitative answers on this subject matter yield more of a negative theme related to the relationship effect of electronic relationship maintenance than do quantitative



**Figure 1.** (2009) Most frequently used words to describe the effect of online interactions and the effect on participant offline relationships.



**Figure 2.** (2012) Most frequently used words to describe the effect of online interactions and the effect on participant offline relationships.

studies. Thus, exploring how to mitigate some of these issues may be helpful especially to those who work in fields where participants are directly affected by relationships unraveling, when online infidelity or family drama is a result of such ways of communicating, or "catching" loved ones in the act of speaking badly about another or more intimately with another than appropriate. It also seems that an overarching theme of reasoning behind using social networks is a positive one that encompasses the simple need to "stay in touch with friends and family." However, the actual qualitative statements reflect more trauma of an unexpected type that has an overriding effect on many people day after day, especially given the permanence of many items that have gone online, even after user deletion.

## Discussion

### *“Of Course I Don’t Post Too Much”*

The most surprising finding in this study was participant denial, for the most part, of posting “a lot” of information about themselves online. Overwhelmingly, participants stated that they post “a little.” This seems to reflect the feeling of participants that posting “a lot” must equate to posting “too much” and one simply does not do that. Most readers can easily tell from their own Facebook friends or other social networking lists that there are at least a handful that consistently post what most would consider “too much.” One may also consider that this participant group answered an online survey that may make them even more likely to have frequent online activity of some sort. Age was also a factor; with increasing age, there was decreased reporting of posting frequency as supported by Hypothesis 3.

### *Women See Things Differently From Men*

Women in general find it easier to maintain friendships online, as most can see visually on their own Facebook timelines when one weighs in on their own ratio of personal “friend” posts. However, women are more concerned about their in-person (offline) image than their male counterparts are. This result may not come as a surprise as was supported by Hypothesis 4. However, when you shift to online image, there was no difference between genders in their levels of concern about how others viewed them based on their posted information. In contrast to Hypothesis 1, women found it easier to maintain relationships online than their male counterparts. Furthermore, men were also less likely to trust information posted by others.

### *Least Likely to Mislead Others*

Interestingly, people aged 30 to 45 years were the least likely to post misleading information about themselves online such as appearance, interests, and age. This may be due to the fact that this group is less likely to be looking to impress others (romantically). This researcher theorized that this may well be that this is the age group more likely to be focused on family and raising children and perhaps are less likely to be concerned about their online image or finding a mate in contrast to Hypothesis 5, which would have found participants aged 30 to 45 years old as more concerned about their image than those ages older than 46 years. However, it seems that the oldest age category has more concern about their image than those in their middle years do.

Women aged 30 to 45 years are more likely to be posting photos of their children and other family-related milestones (Watkins & Lee, 2010), and men are more likely to post news stories of interest. If users are a single parent, they may be more likely to be honest about this information up front to

avoid unwarranted confusion about status and relationship type. Furthermore, it may be that once children leave the home, there is more focus on oneself.

### *Concern Level With Offline Versus Online Image*

Although there was not a statistically significant difference according to age group among participants when responding to the question about their level of concern with their offline image, this is expected to change over time. As people begin to realize how terribly permanent their online “records” are, and who can access them long after a young person has forgotten about things they or “friends” have posted on Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking sites, they have the potential to come back later in life and effect job status, interviews, insurance claims, and even personal relationships. These types of effects are only beginning to rear their ugly head in the popular media and have been playing themselves out in divorce cases at staggering rates.

### *Being Dishonest As a Fantasy Buy-In*

One would expect that if people were purposefully dishonest about themselves, they would be less likely to trust others’ posted information. However, it seems that the inverse is true. Perhaps the lack of in-person contact gives a feeling of license to be a bit more loose with accurate personal information and makes people who do this more willing to go along with others’ proffered representations of themselves.

### *Experience Equals Less Concern About Image Maintenance*

Whether one is talking about linear aging or relationship experience, it seems that experience is an indicator of lessening anxiety over how one appears to others. Given the permanent nature of items posted on the Internet, it may be that in the future, answers will evolve and change in studies with regard to the perceived positive or negative effect of social networking on relationships. Young adults are building a longer and more permanent history of actions, opinions, photos, activities, and relationships with more information available to potential friends, spouses, and employers that can affect their present relationships and future opportunities.

Much of this may be related to Hypothesis 2, which was supported in this study to reveal that despite ease of use and widespread availability of the newest modes of communication to support the maintenance of relationships, as the level of intimacy increases, likewise does the desire to communicate such information in person.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.



## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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### Author Biography

**Kristie Holmes**, PhD, is an associate professor of social work and actively researches topics related to gender, media, and health care as well as technology's impact on relationships, and women's overall health and well-being. She is in private practice in Los Angeles, California, and has spent a significant amount of time in the past 2 years working on a project with UNESCO, WeHealth/Millenia 2015 and acted as a moderator for an NGO at the United Nations 57th Commission on the Status of Women.