

Examining Intercultural Differences in Close Friendship Maintenance on Facebook: A Relational Dialectics Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Close friendship is a crucial and distinctive interpersonal tie that can survive a lifetime. Maintaining such friendships at a satisfactory level, even with the aid of social networking websites (SNS) such as Facebook, can be a challenging process. Previous research has shown that relationship satisfaction among close friends depends both upon relationship maintenance strategies (e.g., positivity, openness, supportiveness) and the management of dialectical contradictions (e.g., openness-closeness and autonomy-connection). Furthermore, cultural differences may also dictate how individuals choose to maintain close friendships online. Therefore, guided by the relational dialectic perspective, a key objective of this research was to determine whether the role of Facebook in friendship maintenance differs significantly across two cultures: the U.S. and Malaysia. All participants completed an online survey in which they were asked to think of a close friend with whom they communicated both face-to-face and on Facebook. Among others, findings showed that Malaysian respondents perceived their close friends as using certain maintenance strategies (i.e., positivity, interaction planning, openness, social information seeking, and avoidance) significantly more often than did Americans. Culture also influenced how relational dialectics moderate the relationship between maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction among close friends. The implications of the findings for the role of Facebook in close friendship maintenance across culture, and the relational dialectics theory will be discussed.

Keywords: *Cultural value orientations, close friendships, relational dialectics, relationship maintenance strategies, social networking websites (SNS).*

INTRODUCTION

Friendship can be defined as the “voluntary interdependence between two persons over time that is intended to facilitate socio-emotional goals of the participants, and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance” (Hays, 1988, p. 395). Rawlins (1992) argues that friendships can be differentiated from other types of interpersonal ties, as they are voluntary in nature, more fluid and can challenge discrete classification. One of the ways in which different types of friendships can easily be sustained is through the aid of communication technology. The rapid development of computer mediated communication (CMC) technology has created a convenient, relatively inexpensive, and ubiquitous platform for friendship maintenance. Johnson and Becker (2011) argued that rather than being conceptualized as ‘fragile’, friendship today is more flexible, as the use of communication technology can easily facilitate the process of friendship maintenance. Therefore, the use of CMC technology, such as social networking websites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, may significantly influence how friendships are maintained. Research on SNS and relationship maintenance indicate that SNS can be used to maintain a broad range of relationships including relationship with former high school friends, acquaintances, close friends and even used to maintain relationships with geographically distant family members, such as siblings or other relatives

(e.g. Bryant & Marmo, 2009; Bryant & Marmo, 2012; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Miller, 2013).

Despite the obvious benefits of having close friends in one's interpersonal network, friendship is not static and maintaining friendships can be challenging and complicated. Current research has indicated a few factors can influence the process of maintaining close friendships, including frequency of face-to-face communication, the level of intimacy or closeness perceived by each partner, friendship types, and even gender of close friends. For instance, a study by Oswald, Clark, and Kelly (2004) found that close friends reported more supportiveness, openness, and interaction compared to casual friends, while Marmo and Bryant (2010) discovered that frequent communication via various Facebook channels (e.g. chat, private message, wall message) was the most highly used maintenance behavior across all friendship types (e.g. casual friends, close friends, and acquaintances). Thus, strategies used to maintain close friendships may differ across the communication channel (i.e. Facebook versus face-to-face communication).

Further, friendship maintenance may also vary across culture. Currently, there are very few studies that have examined cross-culture variations in close relationship maintenance, and a majority of these studies have focused mainly on relational maintenance behaviors among married couples or romantic partners (e.g. Baptist, Norton, Thompson & Cook, 2012; Yum & Canary, 2009; Yum & Li, 2007). Also, present literature on Facebook relational maintenance behaviors have mostly concentrated on Western societies, and it is uncertain if these findings can be generalized to other population. Hence, although Facebook is a global phenomenon, numerous studies on social media often focus on individual or group-level characteristics, and rarely highlight cultural variables. It is possible that the use of close friendship maintenance behaviors would vary across culture, as culture would determine how each relationship is perceived, and whether each of these maintenance behavior behaviors conforms to the social norms dictated by each culture in maintaining close relationships.

Accordingly, this study attempts to extend previous studies on close friendship maintenance by examining the use of social networking websites in maintaining friendships, as well as cultural variables in the use of close friendship maintenance strategies. As such, the research objectives for this study are:

- To identify cross-cultural differences in daily active Facebook use, intensity in using Facebook, and total number of Facebook friends.
- To examine cross-cultural differences in the perceived use of close friendship maintenance strategies on Facebook (i.e. supportiveness, positivity, interaction planning, avoidance, openness, social information seeking, and passive browsing).
- To study the moderating role of dialectical tensions of openness-closeness and autonomy-connection, in the relationship between perceived use of close friendship maintenance strategies on Facebook (i.e. supportiveness, positivity, interaction planning, avoidance, openness, social information seeking, and passive browsing) and relationship satisfaction, and if this effect varies across culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relational Dialectics Theory

Four theoretical approaches have been successfully applied to studying close relationship maintenance: the equity theory, the relational dialectics theory, the social skill approach and the attachment theory (Dainton, Zelle & Langan, 2003). However, using the dialectical approach to studying relationship maintenance is a comparatively new approach, with the initial research being carried out starting from the 1980s (e.g. Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Rawlins, 1983a, 1983b). Relational dialectics theory (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) is a relational communication theory originally based on the mid-twentieth century work on dialogism by the Russian language philosopher and scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). A fundamental principle of the theory is that connecting with others is a 'dialogic' process, and a communicative process characterized by the unity of contradictory tendencies (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Unlike previous approaches that emphasize the goal of homeostasis, this perspective accentuates on different aspects and goals in close relationships, such as process, motion, and interconnection (Matten, 1999). Furthermore, compared to other more linear or causal models of relationship development and maintenance that emphasize seeking a specified state of relationship satisfaction or interaction in the relationship (e.g. equity theory), the dialectical approach assumes that relational partners experience patterns of redundancy while simultaneously escalating between contradictory, but also interdependent tendencies (Dainton et al., 2003). Three fundamental and commonly addressed dialectal tensions in personal relationships include integration-separation, expression-nonexpression and stability-change (Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007). Therefore, relationship maintenance from the dialectical point of view is the process of sustaining relationships at a satisfactory level, in the presence of ongoing dialectical fluctuations (Baxter & Simon, 1993). Specifically, based on the relational dialectics theory, maintaining close friendships at a satisfactory level with the use of technology may require relational partners to also negotiate and manage the types of dialectical tensions that are salient in the relationship.

Close Friendship Maintenance Behaviors and SNS

Generally, relational maintenance can refer to behavioral dynamics that facilitates preserving a relationship (Dindia, 2000). Based on the research tradition in relational maintenance, Canary and Dainton (2006) established that relational maintenance research has mainly focused on the specific techniques that relational partners can use to maintain their relationships and maintenance activity across different types of contexts, and mostly in face-to-face settings (e.g. self/cognitive, system, network, and culture). The majority of research on relational maintenance has aimed to develop a range of pro-social or positive maintenance behaviors (Ye, 2006). Stafford and Canary (1991) captured one of the earliest and most widely used typology of such behaviors. In their initial research on relational maintenance strategies used by married couples, they derived five positive and pro-active maintenance strategies through factor analyses, and that includes positivity, assurances, openness, sharing tasks, and social networks.

However, with advancement made in communication technology, relationships can also be maintained through the use of social networking websites. A popular and convenient way of maintaining personal relationships is through technology, aptly labeled "mediated relational maintenance" (Tong & Walther, 2011, p.100). Joinson (2008) reports

that the most frequently reported use of SNS, such as Facebook is for relational maintenance purposes, specifically for “people you don’t get to see often” (p.1030). With SNS, scholars believe that it offers advantages over traditional means of maintaining relationships (Wright, Craig, Cunningham, Igiel & Ploeger, 2008). In one of the earliest studies on Facebook relationship maintenance, Bryant and Marmo (2009) examined how college students used Facebook in order to maintain different types of relationships (e.g. close friends, casual friends, acquaintance, romantic partners, outsiders such as bosses, parents and teachers). Through focus group interviews, a list of maintenance behaviors in Facebook were created, based on the relational maintenance strategies created in previous studies (e.g. Stafford & Canary, 1991; Canary, Stafford, Hause & Wallace, 1993). In their study, 11 different strategies were used to maintain relationships on Facebook including: positivity, assurances, social network, shared tasks, joint activities, using card, letters and calls, avoidance, anti-social, humor and surveillance. A more recent study by Vitak (2012) also examined the relationship between Facebook use (e.g. number of times logging into the website and the number of Facebook friends), relational maintenance strategies, and different types of relational outcomes. Using exploratory factor analyses (EFA), four main Facebook maintenance strategies were established including supportive communication, shared interests, passive browsing, and social information seeking. Overall, the main findings of this study indicate that all four strategies impacted relational closeness and stability. Also, the findings of this study indicate that Facebook users tended to engage in these maintenance strategies to maintain weaker ties, and viewed the site with more positive impact on their relationship, such as having increased relational closeness with their relational partner.

Overall, findings from these studies on SNS and relational maintenance indicate that friendship maintenance can be easily facilitated through the use of SNS. Conceptualizing friendship maintenance, particularly for long-distanced friendships, as ‘fragile’ may no longer be a true account of the friendship maintenance process in the digital age. While SNS is particularly useful for maintaining *pre-existing* relationships, or long-distanced relationships, many users also find Facebook useful for maintaining weak tie relationships, such as acquaintances.

Cross-cultural variations in SNS behaviors

Previous research also indicates that there are cross-cultural differences in the maintenance behaviors used in close relationships. Typically, studies on the cross-cultural variability in SNS will utilize the use of individualism-collectivism cultural value orientations by Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001) to explain and predict behavior variability across the national culture (e.g. Cho, 2010; Choi, Kim, Sung & Sohn, 2011; LaRose, Connolly, Lee, Li & Hales, 2014). According to Hofstede (1980), individualism is marked by a tendency of looking after oneself and their immediate families only, while collectivistic societies emphasize more on in-group identities, where in-group members tend to look after one another in exchange for loyalty. Thus, Hofstede (1980) developed an individualism index to ascertain a culture’s relative position on the individualism-collectivism dimension. Examples of highly individualistic cultures include some Western countries such as United States, Canada, Britain, the Netherlands, Italy, and New Zealand. Some examples of highly collectivistic cultures include most Asian countries, such as China, Korea, Pakistan and also Malaysia.

Based on the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension, studies on cultural variability in SNS use have indicated that SNS behaviors may differ across these dimensions. For instance, Asian SNS users are more likely to maintain smaller and denser SNS network with almost equal portions of strong and weak ties (e.g. Choi et al., 2011), have fewer friends in SNS (e.g. LaRose et al., 2014), tend to keep their public profiles private, exchange fewer self-disclosures, use more non-verbal means of communication, such as graphics or icons (Cho, 2010), and perform more in-group sharing in Asian-based SNS (Qiu, Lin, & Leung, 2013). Also, Korean SNS users are also more likely to share pictures with only close friends and Chinese SNS users are more likely to play games with their friends (Chapman & Lahav, 2008).

Conversely, American SNS users tend to have more friends, exchange more frequent self-disclosures, and rely more on direct text-based communication (Cho, 2010). American SNS users were also more likely to display their real photos online (Marcus & Krishnamurthi, 2009), have larger but looser SNS network with the greater portion of weak ties (Choi et al., 2011), spend more time using SNS, and have stronger motivations to use SNS for the purpose of information seeking, maintaining the current social network, entertainment and for academic discussions (Xu & Mocariski, 2014). Therefore, SNS behaviors and attitudes may reflect elements of the group-level cultural values.

However, only a handful of studies has specifically examined cross-cultural comparison of relationship maintenance behaviors used in close relationships in face-to-face communication (e.g. Yum, 2000; Yum & Li, 2007; Yum & Canary, 2003) and in online interactions (Ye, 2006). One such study by Ye (2006) examined cross-cultural links in offline and online friendship maintenance based on the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension. Based on Hofstede (1980) cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism, the Chinese participants were categorized as higher in collectivistic orientation compared to the American participants, although there was no significant difference individualism score between the American and Chinese participants. One main finding of the study was that regardless of friendship types (i.e. close friends versus casual friends), American participants engaged in three maintenance behaviors (i.e. positivity, openness, and supportiveness) more regularly than Chinese participants, while Chinese participant engaged in anti-social maintenance behaviors (i.e. avoidance, deception, and coercion/criticism) more regularly compared to American participants. Also, American participants also self-reported higher engagement in pro-social maintenance behaviors, regardless of the interaction channel (i.e. offline versus online friendships). Thus, maintenance activities do seem to vary across national culture, and based on the cultural value orientation of individualism and collectivism.

Specific to Malaysia, existing studies that have examined the general Facebook use established one of the main motives for Malaysian university students in using Facebook is to maintain existing relationships (Hamedi & Samira, 2015; Mohd Zaidi & Bahiyah, 2013). Other studies on SNS adoption in Malaysia indicate that Facebook is well-received and regularly used, particularly among young adults and university students (e.g. Hamat, Embi, & Hassan, 2012; Mustaffa, Ibrahim, Wan Mahmud, Ahmad, Chang & Mahbob, 2011). A recent news report indicates that since the introduction of Facebook, the average Malaysian Facebook actively uses Facebook; some may spend three more hours a day browsing Facebook (Free Malaysia Today, 2016). Finally, one Internet survey carried out by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) identified Facebook as the

most popular social media in Malaysia compared to Instagram or Twitter. Specifically, the study found that 96.5% of 2,402 Internet users admitted to owning at least one Facebook account (MCMC, 2016). Therefore, Facebook is well received in Malaysia, comparatively to other social media.

Since Malaysia is a highly collectivistic society that stresses on the importance of group harmony and maintaining close relationships, rather than individualism (i.e. Abdullah, 2001; Abdullah & Gallagher, 1995), it is possible that for active Facebook users, a main reason for using Facebook is to maintain existing relationships including close friendships. Since the use of Facebook is widespread in Malaysian, Malaysians are likely to actively use Facebook and have more Facebook friends, as many collectivistic societies viewed social media as a natural extension to their relational life (i.e. La Rose et al., 2014). To maintain group harmony and to manage conflict through face-saving, it is speculated that Malaysians may also prefer using certain maintenance strategies on Facebook, such as avoidance, positivity, and supportiveness. Since Malaysia also practices an indirect communication style, it is predicted that compared to Americans, Malaysians were not as likely to self-disclose or practice openness on Facebook. Therefore, based on the discussion above, and the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses and research question are proposed for this study:

- H1 (a): There is a significant difference in the daily active use of Facebook between Malaysians and Americans.
- H1 (b): There is a significant difference in the total number of Facebook friends between Malaysians and Americans.
- H1 (c): There is a significant difference in Facebook intensity use between Malaysians and Americans.
- H2 (a): Malaysians would perceive their close friends as being more supportive and positive on Facebook, as well as engaging in planning interactions on Facebook more often, compared to Americans.
- H2 (b): Malaysians would perceive their close friends as using avoidance more often on Facebook compared to Americans.
- H2 (c): Americans would perceive their close friends as being more open on Facebook compared to Malaysians.
- H3: There is a significant difference in the use of passive browsing and social information seeking between Malaysians and Americans.
- RQ1: Does dialectical tensions moderate the relationship between close friendship maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction, and does this effect vary across culture?

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the quantitative approach, with a cross-sectional survey as the research method in exploring the use of close friendship maintenance strategies on Facebook among Malaysians and Americans. The main target respondent consists of Malaysian and American students enrolled in undergraduate communication courses at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Kent State University, USA. These universities were chosen as the main sample due to the similarities between them: they were both public universities located in a semi-urban area, and offered an undergraduate communication program. The

main sample was then supplemented with a snowball sample of adult Facebook users over the age of 24 from Malaysia and USA. It was necessary to include the snowball sampling, as this study was also interested to capture adult Facebook users from a different age range who used Facebook to maintain close friendships. Both samples from the United States and Malaysia were then combined for data analysis ($N = 369$). Basic demographic information was required (i.e. gender, age, marital status, highest education level obtained, and level of study, if they were an undergraduate student) before the respondents could proceed with other items in the survey.

The survey was designed using the Qualtrics software, and a link was sent to all respondents in order for them to complete the survey online. For items concerning close friendships, respondents were instructed to think of a close friend they communicated with on Facebook, and to report on the relationship they have with that friend. These friendships were then categorized into three separate friendship dyads (i.e. male-male, female-female and cross-sex). Those who did not use Facebook actively were excluded from the final data analysis. Table 1 presents a more detailed profile of respondents that participated in the study, based on their nationality.

Table 1: Profile of respondents.

ITEMS	MALAYSIANS	%	AMERICANS	%
Number of respondents	n (226)		n (143)	
Gender	Male : 60 Female : 166	26.5 73.5	Male : 55 Female : 88	38.5 61.5
Age	18-24 : 155 25-29 : 27 30-39 : 40 40+ : 4	68.6 11.9 17.7 1.8	18-24 : 78 25-29 : 33 31-39 : 26 40+ : 6	54.4 23.1 18.2 4.2
Education level	High school : 13 Diploma/Undergraduate: 166 Postgraduate : 47	5.8 73.4 20.8	High school : 26 Diploma/Undergraduate: 73 Postgraduate : 44	18.2 51.1 30.7
Friendship dyads	Female-female : 134 Male-male : 43 Cross-sex: 49	59.3 19.0 21.7	Female-female : 60 Male-male : 35 Cross-sex : 48	42.0 24.5 33.6

In this study, based on national culture, Americans represented groups that are leaning towards individualistic tendencies, while Malaysians are considered more collectivistic. The independent variables for this study include: Facebook use, close friendship maintenance strategies on Facebook, and dialectical tensions in close friendships, while relationship satisfaction served as the dependent variable.

Four main measures were used in the study. To measure *close friendship maintenance strategies on Facebook*, items were adapted from a combination of three different scales (Dainton, 2003; Oswald, Clark & Kelly, 2004; Vitak, 2014). A 7-point Likert scale was used to examine seven types of close friendship maintenance strategies (i.e. positivity, supportiveness, openness, positivity, interaction planning, avoidance, passive browsing, and social information seeking), with response items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Respondents were asked to rate the perceived use of these strategies with their close friends on Facebook. Next, to measure *dialectical tensions in close*

friendships, four sub-scales representing four different dialectical tensions (i.e. openness, closeness, autonomy, and connection) were adapted from the dialectical contradiction scale created by Baxter and Simon (1993), and to measure dialectical tensions, a 7-point Likert scale was also used, with response items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). To measure Facebook use, three items were used. First, to measure the intensity in using Facebook, the researcher used the 7-item Facebook intensity scale created by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007), and response items also ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Respondents were also asked to report their daily active Facebook use (in hours and minutes), and total number of Facebook friends. Finally, the *level of relationship satisfaction in close friendships* was measured using the 7-item relationship satisfaction scale developed by Hendricks (1999), where response items ranged from 1 (*poorly*) to 7 (*extremely well*). Variables used in the study were also subjected to reliability test and accordingly, the Cronbach alpha values indicated that all measures used in the study were highly reliable, with scores ranging from .75 to .90.

FINDINGS

a. Cross-Cultural Differences in Daily Active Facebook Use, Facebook Intensity Use, and Total Number of Facebook Friends

To answer H1a-c, three separate independent sample t-tests are used to measure cultural differences in Facebook use, in terms of daily active use of Facebook (hours), Facebook intensity and total number of Facebook friends. Two of the t-tests are significant: daily active use of Facebook, $t = 2.69$ ($p < .05$), and total number of Facebook friends: $t = 2.34$ ($p < .05$). Specifically, these findings indicated that Malaysians used Facebook more actively on a daily basis (based on hours of active usage per day), and had significantly more Facebook friends on their account. However, the level of Facebook intensity did not vary across culture, $t = 0.48$ ($p = 0.64$). Therefore, H1 (a-b) was supported, but the H1 (c) was not supported.

b. Cross-Cultural Differences in The Use of Close Friendship Maintenance Strategies on Facebook (i.e. Supportiveness, Positivity, Interaction Planning, Avoidance, Openness, Passive Browsing and Social Information Seeking)

To examine cultural differences in the use of close friendship maintenance strategies on Facebook (H2a-c), seven independent sample t-tests are also carried out, and four are significant. Overall, these findings indicated that there are cultural differences in the use of close friendship maintenance strategies with their close friends on Facebook. Specific findings are presented in the following paragraphs.

First, Malaysians perceived positivity being used more frequently by their close friends compared to Americans ($t = 2.38$, $p < .05$), but there is no significant difference in the use of supportiveness on Facebook ($t = 1.78$, $p = .07$). Finally, Malaysians used Facebook to plan future interactions more often than Americans ($t = 1.91$, $p = .05$). Thus, H2 (a) was partially supported. For H2 (b), Malaysians preferred to use avoidance more often compared to Americans ($t = 3.63$, $p < .05$). Thus, H2 (b) is supported. Finally, results indicate that Malaysians perceived their close friends as being more open on Facebook compared to Americans, contrary to what is expected ($t = 3.60$, $p < .05$). Thus H2 (c) is not supported. Finally, to answer H3, two independent t-tests are carried out. Results indicated that Malaysians used social information seeking on Facebook more frequently as a maintenance

strategy compared to Americans ($t = 2.87, p < .05$). However, there is no significant difference in the use of passive browsing on Facebook between Americans and Malaysians ($t = 0.82, p = .42$). Therefore, there is partial support for H3.

c. Moderating Role of Dialectical Tensions in The Relationship Between Close Friendship Maintenance Strategies and Relationship Satisfaction (Malaysians versus Americans)

To examine the moderating role of dialectical tensions in the relationship between close friendship maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction (RQ1), two separate hierarchical regressions are carried out, based on respondent's nationality (Malaysians versus Americans). For both regression analyses, in the first step, seven Facebook maintenance strategies are entered into one block. Then, each dialectical contradiction is entered into the second step. Finally, in the third and final step, the terms of all six predicted interactions, in order to examine the moderating role of dialectical tensions, is entered simultaneously. Relationship satisfaction served as the dependent variable in both regression analyses.

Table 2 presents a summary of the regression analysis in predicting relationship satisfaction for Malaysians ($n = 226$). The final equation accounted for 24.9% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. The F change is not significant ($p = .62$). Overall, the results suggest that for Malaysians, although Facebook maintenance behaviors did not moderate the relationship between dialectical contradictions and relationship satisfaction, taken together, the maintenance behavior of Facebook avoidance and the dialectical tensions of excessive autonomy and connection negatively predicted relationship satisfaction. Facebook avoidance also negatively influenced relationship satisfaction.

Table 2: Summary of regression analysis for predicting relationship satisfaction in close friendships (Malaysian Facebook users).

Predictors	Relationship Satisfaction		
	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Friend's FB Supportiveness	.19	.10	.24
Friend's FB Positivity	.28	.10	.31**
Friend's FB Interaction Planning	-.04	.07	-.06
Friend's FB Openness	-.02	.09	-.02
Friend's FB Avoidance	-.19	.06	-.21**
Friend's FB Social Information Seeking	-.24	.08	-.31**
Friend's FB Passive Browsing	.02	.07	.02
Step 2			
Friend's FB Supportiveness	.14	.09	.18
Friend's FB Positivity	.15	.09	.17
Friend's FB Interaction Planning	.03	.07	.04
Friend's FB Openness	.00	.09	.00
Friend's FB Avoidance	-.10	.06	-.12
Friend's FB Social Information Seeking	-.14	.08	-.18
Friend's FB Passive Browsing	-.02	.06	-.02
Excessive Openness	.10	.07	.13
Excessive Closeness	.08	.07	.10

Excessive Autonomy	-.19	.06	-.28**
Excessive Connection	-.17	.06	-.28**
Step 3			
Friend's FB Supportiveness	.13	.10	.16
Friend's FB Positivity	.17	.09	.19
Friend's FB Interaction Planning	.03	.07	.04
Friend's FB Openness	.04	.09	.05
Friend's FB Avoidance	-.14	.06	-.16*
Friend's FB Social Information Seeking	-.14	.08	-.18
Friend's FB Passive Browsing	-.03	.07	-.04
Excessive Openness	.08	.07	.10
Excessive Closeness	.06	.04	.09
Excessive Autonomy	-.20	.06	-.28**
Excessive Connection	-.18	.06	-.28**
Friend's FB Openness X Excessive Closeness	-.04	.05	-.06
Friend's FB Openness X Excessive Openness	-.01	.06	-.01
Friend's FB Int. Planning X Excessive Autonomy	.01	.05	.02
Friend's FB Int. Planning X Excessive Connection	.04	.05	.11
Friend's FB Avoidance X Excessive Openness	.05	.06	.08
Friend's FB Avoidance X Excessive Connection	.00	.06	.00

Note. $N = 226$, FB = Facebook. $R = 0.39$, $R^2 = 0.15$, $F(7, 218) = 5.64$, $p < .001$, for Step 1; $R = 0.54$, $R^2 = 0.29$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.26$, $F(4, 214) = 7.99$, $p < .001$, for Step 2; $R = 0.55$, $R^2 = 0.31$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.25$, $F(6, 208) = 5.39$, $p = .62$, for Step 3 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Next, Table 3 presents another regression analysis conducted using only the American sample ($n = 143$). The final equation accounted for 34.7% of the variance being explained in relationship satisfaction. The F change is significant ($p < .05$). Overall, given the results, there were slight differences in predictors for relationship satisfaction across culture. Specifically, the dialectical tension of excessive connection is a significant, negative predictor to relationship satisfaction, and excessive autonomy emerged as a significant, positive predictor to relationship satisfaction. Finally, for American respondents, there was a significant interaction between excessive connection and Facebook avoidance.

Table 3: Summary of regression analysis for predicting relationship satisfaction in close friendships (American Facebook users).

Predictors	Relationship Satisfaction		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>β</i>
Step 1			
Friend's FB Supportiveness	.09	.11	.15
Friend's FB Positivity	.18	.10	.26
Friend's FB Interaction Planning	-.05	.08	-.09
Friend's FB Openness	-.05	.10	-.08
Friend's FB Avoidance	-.23	.06	-.35**
Friend's FB Social Information Seeking	-.08	.10	-.12

Friend's FB Passive Browsing	.06	.08	.08
Step 2			
Friend's FB Supportiveness	.01	.10	.00
Friend's FB Positivity	.09	.10	.14
Friend's FB Interaction Planning	-.05	.07	-.08
Friend's FB Openness	.06	.09	.10
Friend's FB Avoidance	-.12	.06	-.19*
Friend's FB Social Information Seeking	.14	.08	.18
Friend's FB Passive Browsing	.04	.08	.06
Excessive Openness	-.01	.07	-.02
Excessive Closeness	.07	.07	.12
Excessive Autonomy	-.28	.06	-.46**
Excessive Connection	-.10	.07	-.17
Step 3			
Friend's FB Supportiveness	-.02	.10	-.03
Friend's FB Positivity	.07	.10	.11
Friend's FB Interaction Planning	-.09	.08	-.15
Friend's FB Openness	.09	.10	.15
Friend's FB Avoidance	-.02	-.08	-.03
Friend's FB Social Information Seeking	.04	.09	.06
Friend's FB Passive Browsing	.04	.08	.05
Excessive Openness	-.07	.08	-.11
Excessive Closeness	-.13	.07	-.20
Excessive Autonomy	.28	.06	.45**
Excessive Connection	-.17	.08	-.28*
Friend's FB Openness X Excessive Closeness	.06	.04	.17
Friend's FB Openness X Excessive Openness	.00	.04	.01
Friend's FB Int. Planning X Excessive Autonomy	.00	.04	.00
Friend's FB Int. Planning X Excessive Connection	-.02	.04	-.05
Friend's FB Avoidance X Excessive Openness	-.01	.06	-.03
Friend's FB Avoidance X Excessive Connection	.12	.06	.29*

Note. $N = 143$. FB = Facebook, FtF = face-to-face. $R = 0.39$, $R^2 = 0.15$, $F(7, 135) = 3.49$, $p < .05$, for Step 1; $R = 0.58$, $R^2 = 0.34$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.28$, $F(4, 131) = 6.13$, $p < .001$, for Step 2; $R = 0.65$, $R^2 = 0.43$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.35$, $F(6, 125) = 5.45$, $p < .05$, for Step 3 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper focused on the moderating role of dialectical tensions in the relationship between Facebook maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction among close friends across culture. First, the first set of hypotheses examined various Facebook uses across cultures (H1a-c). Overall, findings seem to indicate that there were cultural differences in Facebook use. Specifically, Malaysians spent more time on Facebook on a daily basis, and had a larger network of Facebook friends. Although this finding contradicts previous studies indicating that Americans SNS users tended to have a significantly higher number of FB friends compared to Asian SNS users (e.g. Choi et al., 2011; La Rose et al., 2014), this finding

should come as no surprise when a recent SNS pattern in Malaysia is taken into account.

Although Facebook was initially created in the United States, and intended for communication among college friends, in recent years it has become a global phenomenon, and Malaysians in particular have become active users of Facebook. Lee (2016) reported that there are 18 million Malaysian Facebook users, and they are twice as likely to like a Facebook page, compared to the global average. Finally, they are also ranked 10th globally in the number of friends on Facebook, which is 60% more than the average.

The next set of hypotheses addressed the use of each relational maintenance behavior by the respondent across cultural value orientations (H2a-H2c). First, the findings indicated that Malaysians are more positive with their close friends, and tended to plan future interactions on Facebook more often compared to Americans. These findings are expected, due to the collectivism tendencies practiced by Malaysians. Specifically, due to their emphasis on maintaining group harmony and relationships with others deemed as important in their network, such as close friends, Malaysians may be more motivated to notice and appreciate pro-social behaviors (i.e. Facebook positivity) with their friends online. The other finding that indicates Malaysians conduct interaction planning on Facebook with close friends, is also expected, as previous findings indicate that social media activities vary based on individualism-collectivism tendencies, and those with higher collectivism scores viewed social media activities as a regular addition of their social and relational life (i.e. La Rose et al., 2014). Therefore, for Malaysians, planning future interactions over Facebook is viewed positively; as efforts invested in maintaining strong tie relationships are not viewed as an arduous task or intrusive, but just as a common and expected practice among friends in everyday life.

Also not surprising was the findings that Americans are less prone to using avoidance as a maintenance strategy compared to Malaysians (H2b). Since United States is a low-context culture favoring open and direct communication with an emphasis on speed, accuracy, and efficiency (Hofstede, 2001), avoidance is perhaps not a highly effective or culturally relevant friendship maintenance strategy for Americans, and therefore, this would explain why Americans do not engage in avoidance on Facebook, compared to Malaysians, who may use avoidance as a conflict maintenance strategy. Research on conflict management across culture (i.e. Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubiskey, Yang, Kim, Lim & Nishida, 1991) has established that although it is not a pro-social maintenance behavior, Asian cultures (such as the Malaysian culture) tend to use avoidance to manage interpersonal conflict more often than their American counterparts, as it is an effective face-saving strategy.

More intriguing was the unexpected findings that Malaysians are found to be more open on Facebook with close friends compared to Americans (H2c). This finding contradicted previous studies indicating that American SNS users tended to exchange more SNS self-disclosures compared to Asian SNS users (e.g. Cho, 2010; Xu & MocarSKI, 2014). However, as the Malaysian culture favors sensitivity towards others, face-saving and indirect communication (Bakar, Mohamad, & Mustafa, 2007), the Malaysian sample in this study may feel more comfortable expressing their private thoughts and feelings indirectly through Facebook rather than through face-to-face communication. This is a possibility as post-hoc analysis also revealed that Malaysians also preferred using more private forms of communication available on Facebook (i.e. private messages and instant chats), rather than more public forms of communication (i.e. status updates) compared to the American

sample. Also, prior research has indicated that for collectivistic societies, engaging in online self-disclosures may be regarded as information sharing with other in-group members, such as friends in their social network (e.g. Qiu, 2013). This is also supported by further post-hoc analysis that found Malaysians engaging in sharing related activities on Facebook (i.e. sharing contents, videos, and links) significantly more often than did Americans. This would also explain why Malaysians relied more on online social information seeking compared to Americans (H3). Perhaps Facebook is regarded as reliable, unobtrusive and surreptitious way of obtaining personal information about a friend (i.e. marital status, childbirth, death, etc.) rather through direct face-to-face communication, as a personal concern of collectivistic societies is to maintain group harmony and face-saving and thus, an indirect communication style is preferred when communicating with others (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2013).

Finally, the next set of analysis examined the moderating role of dialectical tensions in the relationship between relationship maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction, and whether this effect varied across cultures (RQ1). Overall, culture influenced how dialectical tensions moderated the relationship between FB maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, for Malaysians, excessive autonomy, excessive connection, and Facebook avoidance are significant, negative predictors to friendship satisfaction. Although avoidance is a common practice among collectivistic societies, particularly for face-saving and conflict management, perhaps it is already being used very frequently in face-to-face interactions. Thus, when it is already being employed in face-to-face interactions, using it the online environment may be perceived as overkill, and thus it negatively affects relationships satisfaction. A separate regression analysis does indeed indicate that face-to-face avoidance is a significant, negative predictor of relationship satisfaction for Malaysians, and face-to-face positivity and interaction are significant, positive predictors of relationship satisfaction.

For Americans, excessive autonomy and connection were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. As a society leaning towards individualistic tendencies, maintaining a separate identity as an individual (as opposed to a group level identity) is an important aspect of individual expression (Hofstede, 2001; Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2013). Thus, it is not surprising that excessive connection emerged as a significant, negative predictor to relationship satisfaction, while excessive autonomy on the other hand, emerged as a significant, positive predictor to relationship satisfaction. Further, results indicated that the dialectical tension of excessive connection moderated the relationship between Facebook avoidance and relationship satisfaction. In other words, the effect of the friend's Facebook use of the 'avoidance' maintenance behavior on relationship satisfaction is moderated by the dialectical force of *excessive connection*, such that: when the excessive connection is high, 'avoidance' has a positive effect on relationship satisfaction. Therefore, for Americans, the use of Facebook avoidance is particularly useful if the excessive connection experiences in the relationship, in order to maintain relationship satisfaction. Further analysis does indicate that for Americans, face-to-face avoidance is also a significant, negative predictor of relationship satisfaction, but to a lesser degree when compared to Malaysians. Taken together, these analyses indicate that while avoidance (whether online or face-to-face) is not a common conflict management strategy for individualistic societies (where direct style of communication is more effective), it may be

used as a friendship maintenance strategy when the relational partner demonstrates excessive need for closeness and intimacy, and therefore some distance is needed.

Finally, across cultures, for both Malaysians and Americans, close friends perceived excessive connection as a negative influence on relationship satisfaction. It appears that although close friendship is an important interpersonal tie, regardless of cultural value orientations, it is crucial that close friends maintain a balance between being relationally close and also having one's own personal space, in order to be satisfied with the relationship. Overall, the latter finding also provides support for the relational dialectics; in order to maintain close relationships at a satisfactory level, there is a crucial need to maintain a delicate balance between these opposing dialectical tensions (Baxter, 1998; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Future Studies and Limitations

Future studies could benefit from examining different types of tensions that may influence close friendships. For instance, since Baxter and Montgomery (1996) have acknowledged that there are an infinite number of dialectical tensions experienced in close relationships, future studies could also examine more closely other types of dialectical tensions that may be more instrumental and crucial in friendship maintenance among young adults, such as the dialectical tensions between judgment and acceptance (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Rawlins & Holl, 1988), affection and instrumentality (Rawlins, 1992), or loyalty-disloyalty (Baxter, Mazanec, Nicholson, Pittman, Smith, & West, 1997).

However, several limitations of this study include methodological challenges. First, this study utilized the self-administered online survey method. An acknowledged problem with using surveys is response accuracy and issues with recall; respondents may have difficulties in answering the survey instrument honestly and accurately. For example, respondents may have problems in providing precise estimates of their friend's use of Facebook maintenance behaviors, particularly more covert maintenance behaviors such as passive browsing and avoidance, especially if they were not intense Facebook users. Furthermore, there may have been issues with social desirability, which is a 'response determinant that refers to the tendency of people to deny socially undesirable traits or qualities and to admit to socially desirable ones' (Phillips & Clancy, 1972, p.923). Thus, respondents may have overestimated their use of certain relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g. supportiveness and/or positivity), and underestimated others (e.g. avoidance). With that in mind, future research could utilize the triangulation method when collecting data by using focus group interviews, or by using the experimental method in order to validate these findings and to compensate for some of the limitations linked to using survey as the research design. Finally, although this study has grouped each respondent into either collectivistic (Malaysians), and individualistic (Americans) based on national culture, future studies could examine individual scores in collectivism and individualism (i.e. high versus low individualism and collectivism) and its influence on dialectical tensions and the strategies used to maintain close friendships.

In summary, this study did find some support for the relational dialectics theory, while also highlighting some cultural differences in the process of maintaining close friendships in the Facebook environment. However, by sampling Facebook users from two distinct cultures, the present research is only able to provide a miniscule amount of evidence as to how close friendships in two different cultures are being maintained at a

satisfactory level with the use of social media, in the midst of managing different dialectical tensions that occur in close relationships.

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