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When Sharing Less Means More: How Gender Moderates the Impact of Quantity of Information Shared in a Social Network Profile on Profile Viewers' Intentions About Socialization

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This study summarizes the results from a 2 (low vs. high information) × 2 (female vs. male profile) experiment that investigates the impact of quantity of information shared on a Social Network Site (SNS) profile on viewers' intentions to pursue further interactions with the profile owner. Quantity of information had no statistically significant effect on intentions to further socialize online. The two-way interaction between information quantity and profile gender was such that for male profiles more information increased profile viewers' intentions to further socialize with the profile owner, whereas for female profiles the opposite was the case. The three-way interactions among quantity of information, profile gender, and profile viewer's gender underline a tendency for male profile viewers to respond more positively to higher information shared by profiles from their own gender. For female viewers, this effect, although in the same direction, was smaller.

Keywords: Gender; Personal Information; Profiles; Self-Disclosure; SNS; Social Network Sites; Socialization

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With the rapid growth in the popularity of social network sites (SNSs), numerous studies have explored their use for socialization and relationship initiation (e.g., Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010; Papacharissi, 2009; Smith, 2011). These studies have focused on the influence of various SNS profile elements, such as profile photographs, comments posted on a profile, or size of friends list, on impression formation and relationship initiation (Walther, van der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008; Wang, Moon, Kwon, Evans, & Stefanone, 2010). However, there has been limited research on the impact of quantity (breadth) of information disclosed in a SNS profile (Utz, 2010) and SNS profile owners' and viewers' respective gender on relationship initiation (Wang et al., 2010). This study aims to fill this void by investigating how these three factors may influence profile viewers' intentions to further socialize with the profile owner.

Self-Disclosure and Quantity of Information

Research on relationship initiation in face-to-face interactions underlines the role that self-disclosure may play in reducing uncertainty and helping relationships develop (Berger & Calebrese, 1975). Degree of self-disclosure may vary in terms of sensitivity (depth) and quantity (breadth; Collins & Miller, 1994). Studies indicate that depth of disclosure may be of particular relevance to the maintenance of existing relationships. However, since disclosure of sensitive information first requires a level of trust to be established between partners, variations in quantity of information are more likely to influence the development of a relationship in its initial phases (Ignatius & Kokkonen, 2007).

Within the context of computer-mediated communications (CMC), evidence suggests that profiles containing longer texts receive more favorable evaluations (Utz, 2010). This may increase viewers' intentions to further socialize with profile owners. Conversely, increased availability of information in a profile may reduce viewers' need to further communicate with the profile owner to reduce uncertainty (Antheunis et al., 2010).

RQ1: How does quantity of information displayed in a SNS profile influence viewers' intentions to further socialize with the profile owner?

Gender and Dyadic Gender Structure

During initial phases of relationships, especially in CMC contexts that lack individualizing information, individuals may often utilize social category cues, such as gender, to reduce uncertainty (Albert, Hill, & Venkatsubramanian, 2011). In such cases, commonly held schema about gender roles may influence expectations regarding acceptable behavior (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). Studies about gender roles in relationship initiation offer mixed perspectives as to the nature of such expectations regarding disclosure by men and women. Namely, while communication skills and proclivity to intimacy are often associated with women (Lease et al., 2010), men are expected to assume leadership in relationship initiation, which often entails sharing information to start a conversation (Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008). Although

gender has frequently been investigated as a factor that may predict differences in disclosure (Nguyen, Bin, & Campbell, 2012), it has received little attention as a factor that may moderate the impact of disclosure on relationship initiation in SNS settings.

A related factor is the dyadic structure (cross-sex vs. same sex) of a relationship. Research indicates that cross-sex friendships are closely tied to cross-sex romantic relationships (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998). Accordingly, unlike same-sex dyads, cross-sex dyads tend to enjoy higher uncertainty because of its potential to add excitement to the relationship (Norton, Frost, & Ariely, 2007). To date, this potential moderating effect of dyadic gender structure on the relationship between disclosure and relationship initiation in SNS settings has not been tested.

RQ2: How do profile owners' and viewers' gender moderate the relationship between quantity of information displayed in a SNS profile and viewers' intentions to further socialize with the profile owners?

Methods

This study ($n = 1026$, 67% completion rate) was carried out online as part of the Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS) project. The mean reported age of the respondents was 47 ($SD = 16.76$), and 52% were female. A poststratification weighting procedure, utilizing data from the Current Population Survey, was applied to adjust for nonresponse bias.

The relationship between quantity of information shared in a SNS profile and viewers' intentions to further socialize with the profile owner was tested using a 2 (low vs. high information) \times 2 (male vs. female) replicated design (four versions for each condition). Such replicated designs control for potential case-category confounds (the possibility that the observed variation in the dependent variable is due to the characteristics [e.g., demographic vs. hobby] of the information; Brashers & Jackson, 1999). The "low-information" profile contained 20 pieces of information randomly selected from a library of items compiled from different SNS sites. The "high-information" profile was created by adding 10 randomly selected items. Gender was manipulated by using a male versus female avatar with either a blue or a pink shade.¹

Intention to engage in further social interactions with the profile owner was measured by asking the respondents to rate, on a 7-point scale from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*), the likelihood that they would "communicate online with this person" ($M = 2.22$; $SD = 1.58$) and "add this person as a friend in your social network profile" ($M = 2.21$; $SD = 1.62$). A manipulation check, which used a 5-point scale to ask the respondents to rate the amount of information displayed on a profile, confirmed the difference between the low information ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.05$) and high information ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.02$) conditions, $F(1, 1026) = 22.140$, $p < .001$.

Results

The data were analyzed using a MANOVA with the linear combination of two intention variables ("communicate online," "add to SNS friends' list") as the dependent

Table 1 MANOVA Predicting Intention to Further Socialize With SNS Profile Owner

	Wilks' Λ	$F(2, 1012)$	Partial η^2
Intercept	0.327	739.912***	.673
Information Amount (Low vs. High)	0.999	0.514	.001
Profile Gender (Male vs. Female)	0.989	5.485**	.011
Viewer Gender (Male vs. Female)	0.996	2.157	.004
Information Amount by Profile Gender	0.996	1.808	.004
Information Amount by Viewer Gender	0.999	0.462	.001
Profile Gender by Viewer Gender	1.000	0.157	.000
Information Amount by Profile Gender by Viewer Gender	0.989	5.509**	.011

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

variable (summarized in Table 1), followed by separate ANOVAs for each dependent variable.

There was no significant omnibus effect for quantity of information shared, Wilks' $\Lambda = .999$, $F(2, 1012) = .514$, $p = .598$. There was not a significant omnibus effect for the two-way interaction between quantity of information and profile gender, Wilks' $\Lambda = .996$, $F(2, 1012) = 1.808$, $p = .164$, or between quantity of information and viewer gender, Wilks' $\Lambda = .999$, $F(2, 1012) = .462$, $p = .63$. However, ANOVAs indicated that

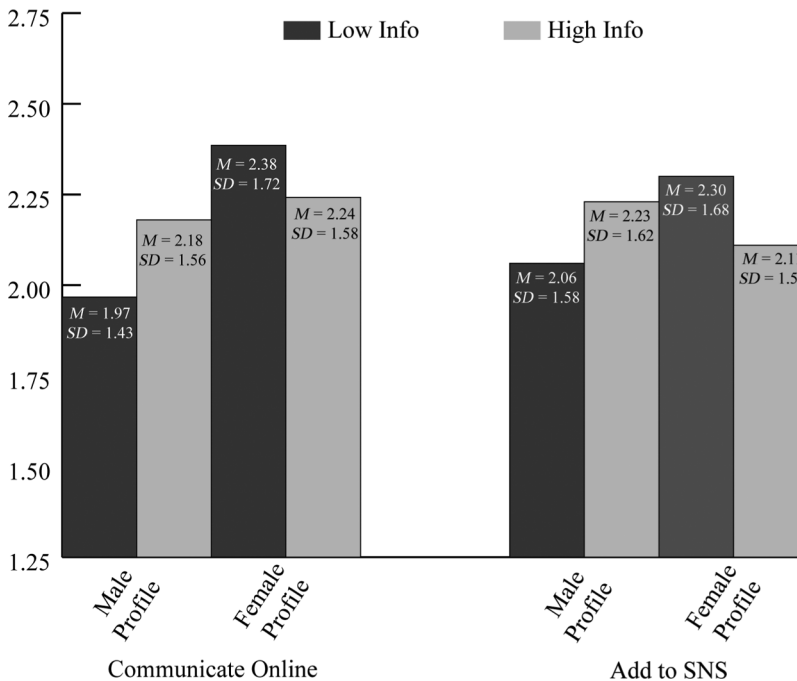


Figure 1 Quantity of Information × Profile Gender on Intention to Socialize Online.

the two-way interactions between profile gender and amount of information approached significance for both intention to “communicate online” $F(2, 1018) = 3.666, p = .056, \eta^2 = .005$ and “add to SNS,” $F(2, 1018) = 3.767, p = .053, \eta^2 = .005$. Accordingly, more information increased profile viewers’ intentions to socialize with male profile owners and decreased their intentions to socialize with female profile owners (Figure 1).

There was a significant omnibus effect for the three-way interaction among information amount, profile gender, and viewer gender, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .989, F(2, 1012) = 5.509, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .011$. Among male profile viewers, more information in a profile increased intentions to communicate online with male profile owners but decreased intentions to communicate online with female profile owners. For female profile viewers, more information led to higher intentions to communicate online with a female profile owner but not with a male profile owner, $F(1, 1018) = 9.085, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .009$ (Figure 2). Likewise, among male viewers, quantity of information had a positive impact on intentions to add male profile owners to SNS friends’ list but had a negative impact on intentions to add female profile owners to SNS friends’ list. Among female profile viewers, more information decreased intentions to add male profile owners to SNS friends’ list and slightly increased intentions to add female profile owners to friends’ list, $F(1, 1018) = 11.355, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .011$ (Figure 3).

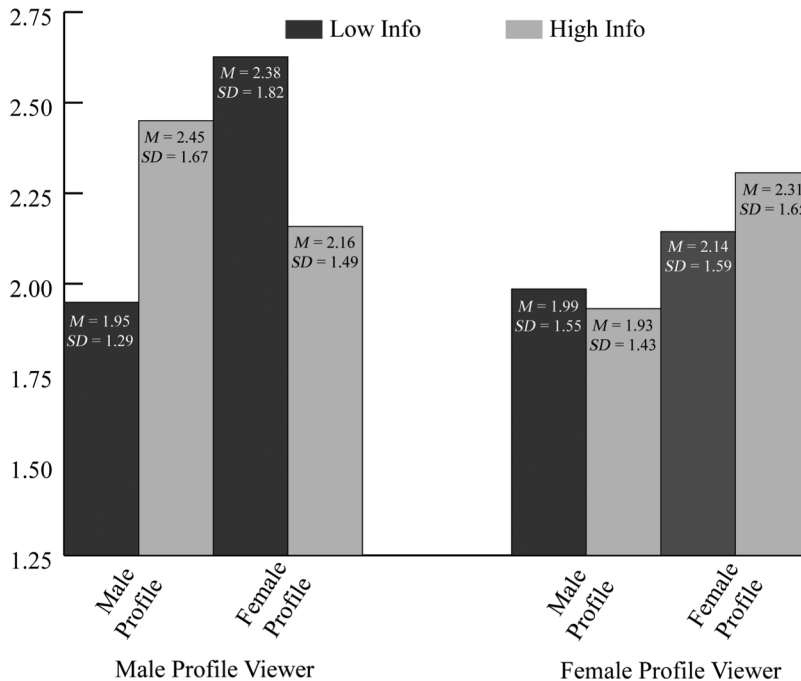


Figure 2 Quantity of Information \times Profile Gender \times Viewer Gender on Intention to “Communicate Online.”

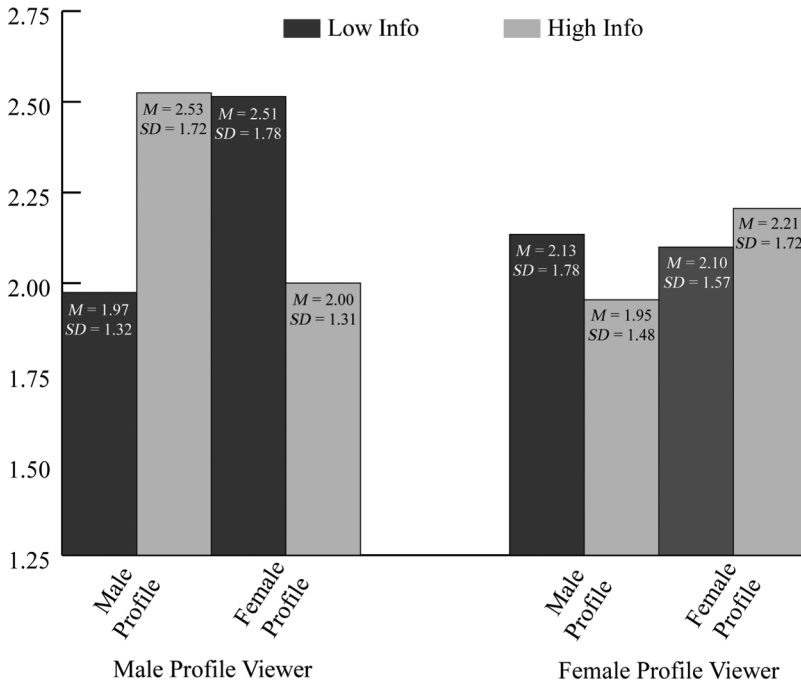


Figure 3 Quantity of Information × Profile Gender × Viewer Gender on Intention to “Add to SNS.”

Discussion

This study provided an experimental investigation of the impact of quantity of information shared in a SNS profile, profile owner’s gender, and profile viewer’s gender on the viewers’ intentions to further socialize online with the profile owner. First, it should be noted that, overall, both of the intention scores were low. Given that the intentions are based on impressions formed in a very short period of time and that the viewers did not have the opportunity to verify the information they have seen, such low intention scores are not surprising.

Quantity of information had no statistically significant effect on intentions to further socialize online. However, for both dependent variables, more information increased intentions to socialize with male profile owners and decreased intentions to socialize with female profile owners. This finding is consistent with the existing literature on sex roles suggesting that in early phases of relationships, men are expected to initiate the relationship, typically by sharing information, while women are expected to receive information and ask questions (Derlega et al., 2008). This may explain the more favorable reaction that disclosure by male profile owners received from viewers.

Finally, three-way interactions among information quantity, profile gender, and gender of the profile viewer indicate that profile viewers are more likely to respond favorably, by pursuing further interactions with profile owners, to more information

shared by same-sex profile owners. Consistent with earlier research on relationship initiation in face-to-face contexts (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998), these findings imply that in SNS-based relationships, same-sex and cross-sex encounters differ from each other in terms of expectations about the level of certainty. Namely, the results suggest that in SNS contexts, initiation of cross-sex relationships, even if not primed to be romantic, will be more likely than same-sex relationships, to benefit from a level of uncertainty.

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Note

[1] The profiles are available from the author upon request.

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