

Adding on Facebook makes us like new friends more

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Trust me guys, you'll like me in the morning. opacity, Credit: CC BY-NC-ND

We've all returned home after a night out at a party to find a Facebook friend request from someone you briefly met but barely know. Just to be polite, you add the person to your friend list. But it turns out that this token gesture can change the course of your relationship with that person. The simple act of adding someone on Facebook makes you think more positively of them.

A study we recently published in [*Computers in Human Behavior*](#) found that when users click on the "add friend" button, they tend to like their new friend more than someone they did not add to their friend list.

Websites such as Facebook offer an opportunity to begin relationships in ways that depart from how face-to-face interactions typically proceed. In face-to-face interactions, relationships tend to grow stronger as individuals divulge both a breadth and depth information to one another over a period of time. As I tell you a little bit about myself, you tell me a little bit about yourself. If we seem to get along, we'll keep that up and begin telling one another more personal, sensitive information. Those disclosures can create interpersonal liking, trust and friendship.

Facebook is a departure from how we normally conduct our social affairs. To initiate a relationship on Facebook, you have to do something nice for someone at the start of the interaction. This typically involves validating their request to be called your friend and see your profile.

After granting someone access to your profile page, they have access to both a breadth and depth of information that would typically only be available after a period of time in a face-to-face setting. You might not reveal your interests, family history or travelling tales until after numerous interactions over days, weeks or months. That disclosure of breadth and depth doesn't happen instantaneously when you meet someone in the coffee shop but it does on social networking websites.

Meet Jordan, your NBF

We wanted to know how those two primary mechanisms of [social networking sites](#) – adding someone to your friend list and how much information a person's profile discloses – affect people's perceptions of one another.

We randomly assigned 231 students in a large lecture hall style class to one of several conditions. We told the students we were testing a new Facebook application to help them and others connect and form study groups.



Jordan's friend request is awaiting a response.

Half of the participants were told they needed to sign into their Facebook profile and accept a friend request from someone named Jordan in their class. In reality, they were really adding a fictional person whose profile we created. Sometimes Jordan was a man and sometimes Jordan was a woman.

We then asked participants questions about what they thought of Jordan, such as how well Jordan would get along with the student's circle of

friends and how much the student would like to have a friendly chat with Jordan. The students who added Jordan as a friend tended to think more favourably of our fictional character than students who didn't add Jordan as a friend.

The finding is surprising because adding someone to your friend list is a low-cost, quick and effortless gesture and might not necessarily be seen as a meaningful start to a relationship. Unlike buying someone you just met a cup of coffee, adding someone to your friend list has little intrinsic value.

But we did expect this to happen because human beings have a natural predilection for cognitive consistency. We tend to adjust our attitudes and beliefs to be in line with our behaviour. So if you're honest and you just labelled Jordan as a friend, you must think favourably of Jordan. If you don't, then either you've been dishonest with Jordan or you have friends you don't really like.

Benjamin Franklin first identified this [trait of human psychology](#). Being nice to someone makes us like them more and being mean to someone makes us like them less. We found that same trait of human psychology extends to small gestures in an online context.

Sharing and oversharing

We also wanted to know how the amount of information on a person's profile changes user opinion. We gave students access to Jordan's fictional Facebook profile but varied the amount of information Jordan disclosed. If disclosure on Facebook profiles functions similarly to disclosure in face-to-face interactions, then we would expect that the more information a new friend could see, the more they would like Jordan. What we actually found was that on a [social networking](#) site, more information doesn't always make people like you more.

We can't tell at this point why the additional information in the profile made people like Jordan less. The extra information might have been seen as an overshare and a violation of social norms online. Another possibility is that something in that extra bit of information triggered a less positive response from participants. What we can conclude though is that users need to carefully consider the amount and type of information they disclose to maximise the impression they leave on others.

And because we varied whether Jordan was a woman or a man, we were able to determine whether gender might change people's perceptions of the profile.

When Jordan was a man, people tended to like Jordan more when he disclosed more information. When Jordan was a woman, people liked a moderate amount of information disclosure. When she disclosed too little or too much [information](#), people liked her less.

These findings give an insight into how online interaction is changing our relationships and even suggest how you might try to behave if you want your latest online friend to like you more.

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