

# Keep your friends close

November 14 2018, by David Bradley



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Online social networks, such as the well-known Facebook, allow users to form connections with each other quickly and easily. A user might invite another to become their "friend," "like" a page they have created on the system, or join a group that forms a community within the overarching community. Of course, it is implicit that one should only "friend" people

one knows. But, there are millions if not billions of connections where a user may not be even a passing acquaintance in the offline world and yet well connected to another person in the online.

Researchers in Switzerland, David Weibel and Bartholomäus Wissmath of the Department of Psychology, at the University of Bern, have investigated what inspires a person to accept a friendship request from another on Facebook. It seems that there is something of a stereotypical response: "men prefer cold calls from attractive women while women favour unattractive friends," the team has found. The research builds on earlier work from Wang in 2010 that used fictitious user profiles to study what kinds of response to friendship requests might be seen in an [online social network](#).

In the new work, the team sent out actual friendship requests to 800 Facebook users from male or female [profile](#) owners who were considered either attractive or unattractive. The study corroborated Wang's 2010 finding and showed that approximately one in ten users responded to the cold calls, the unsolicited friendship requests from previously unknown users. They also demonstrated, as had Wang, the way in which men responded. However, they found that female users accepted invitations from unattractive profile owners rather than from attractive profile owners, regardless of the profile owners' gender.

"Unlike our offline appearance, the shape of our online appearance is much more malleable and can be rapidly adapted in more subtle ways. Moreover, we believe that this study also raises in offline [friendships](#)," the team adds.

**More information:** David Weibel et al. Friendship acceptance on Facebook: men prefer cold calls from attractive women while women favour unattractive friends, *International Journal of Web Based Communities* (2018). [DOI: 10.1504/IJWBC.2018.094919](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2018.094919)

Provided by Inderscience

Citation: Keep your friends close (2018, November 14) retrieved 19 September 2024 from  
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