

## Chapter 59

# Remaining Facebook versus Face-to-Face Friends after a Romantic Breakup: Factors that Distinguish Those Who Do from Those Who Do Not

**Dylan T Medeiros**

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, USA*

**Lynne M Webb**

*Florida International University, Miami, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The study queried whether the relational characteristics that influence individuals to remain face-to-face friends with former romantic partners following a break up also impact the decisions to remain Facebook “friends” with former romantic partners. The sample included over 300 young adults who met two criteria: They maintained an active Facebook account and reported a pre-marital, romantic breakup. The results revealed that the variables that impact post-dissolution friendship decisions of former romantic partners in the face-to-face context (quantity of relational investments, relational satisfaction, and relational disengagement strategies) do not impact former romantic partners’ decisions to maintain or dissolve Facebook friendships. These results provide evidence that romantic partners may experience different relational motivations and dynamics in online versus off-line venues.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-6307-9.ch059

## **REMAINING FACEBOOK VERSUS FACE-TO-FACE FRIENDS AFTER A ROMANTIC BREAKUP**

Researchers continue to examine factors associated with former romantic partners remaining face-to-face friends following their breakup (e.g., Griffith, Gillath, Zhao, & Martinez, 2017; Hadden, Harvey, Settensten, & Agrew, 2018; Mogilski & Welling, 2017); however, very few studies have examined friendships between former romantic partners on social media venues such as Facebook. We could locate no previous study that examined whether the same factors (that distinguish former romantic partners who elect to remain face-to-face friends from those who do not elect to remain friends) were equally effective in distinguishing those who remain Facebook friends versus those who do not.

Given the prevalence of social media in contemporary life, our study endeavored to discover the extent to which the research findings concerning face-to-face friendship between former romantic partners apply to social media friendships. To that end, we examined factors that might distinguish college students' who remain Facebook friends with former romantic partners versus those who elect to "unfriend" former partners. The term "unfriend" comes from Facebook's friend-managing features that allow a user to "delete" a fellow user from his/her list of Facebook friends and thus prevent the former friend from directly viewing the user's profile and status updates.

Existing literature examining face-to-face relationships suggests that the quantity of relational investments (Stanley, Rhoades & Markman, 2006), disengagement behaviors used in the breakup process (Banks, Altendorf, Greene, & Cody, 1987), and relational quality prior to the breakup (Rhoades, Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011) influence the decision to (or not to) remain face-to-face friends with former romantic relationship partners. We directly examined whether these three factors differ significantly across two groups: former romantic partners who elect to remain Facebook friends versus those who do not.

Originally intended to connect college students at one U. S. university, Facebook now serves 1.47 billion daily active users worldwide (Facebook, 2018) and is widely considered the most used social media outlet on the planet. Research on Facebook primarily focuses on two topics: privacy/self-disclosure (e.g., Bazarova, 2012; Kanter, Afifi, & Robbins, 2012) and, more relevant to the current study, social networking (e.g., Craig & Wright, 2012; Crosier, Webster, & Dillon, 2012). For a detailed review of this literature, see Caers et al. (2013).

## **SOCIAL NETWORKING ON FACEBOOK**

Crosier et al. (2012) argues that humans have a genetic predisposition to desire connection and that online social networks provide venues for satisfying that desire. Facebook creates an environment where sharing and connecting with others is easier in many ways than traditional forms of face-to-face interaction. Indeed, Facebook "friendships" involve extremely low commitment. Users can elect to (a) post (or not to post) updates on their thoughts and activities for friends to read as well as (b) read (or not read) friends' posts. Activity leads to a sense of "keeping up with" people but Facebook allows users' to maintain "friend" status whether or not they actively engage on the website. Similarly, friendship status does not change if users spend a few minutes a day on the website or a few hours per day. Such a disassociation between investment and relationship status stands in sharp contrast to face-to-face relationships that

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:  
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/remaining-facebook-versus-face-to-face-friends-after-a-romantic-breakup/308655](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/remaining-facebook-versus-face-to-face-friends-after-a-romantic-breakup/308655)

## Related Content

---

### Blogs as Pathways to Information and Influence Within the Kenyan Blogosphere

Patrick Kanyi Wamuyu (2021). *Analyzing Global Social Media Consumption* (pp. 238-260).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/blogs-as-pathways-to-information-and-influence-within-the-kenyan-blogosphere/264941](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/blogs-as-pathways-to-information-and-influence-within-the-kenyan-blogosphere/264941)

### Harnessing and Evaluating Open Sim for the Implementation of an Inquiry-Based Collaborative Learning (Ib[C]L) Script in Computer Science: Preliminary Findings from a Case Study in Higher Education

Nikolaos Pellas (2013). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking* (pp. 1-23).

[www.irma-international.org/article/harnessing-and-evaluating-open-sim-for-the-implementation-of-an-inquiry-based-collaborative-learning-ibcl-script-in-computer-science/110965](http://www.irma-international.org/article/harnessing-and-evaluating-open-sim-for-the-implementation-of-an-inquiry-based-collaborative-learning-ibcl-script-in-computer-science/110965)

### Untimely Bollywood: Globalization and India's New Media Assemblage

Gil Toffell (2012). *International Journal of E-Politics* (pp. 54-56).

[www.irma-international.org/article/untimely-bollywood-globalization-india-new/63035](http://www.irma-international.org/article/untimely-bollywood-globalization-india-new/63035)

### Organization Still Matters: Parties' Characteristics, Posting and Followers' Reactions on Facebook

Rosa Borge Bravo and Marc Esteve Del Valle (2017). *International Journal of E-Politics* (pp. 30-49).

[www.irma-international.org/article/organization-still-matters/176426](http://www.irma-international.org/article/organization-still-matters/176426)

### Fake News and Information Warfare: An Examination of the Political and Psychological Processes From the Digital Sphere to the Real World

Rosanna E. Guadagno and Karen Guttieri (2019). *Handbook of Research on Deception, Fake News, and Misinformation Online* (pp. 167-191).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/fake-news-and-information-warfare/230753](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/fake-news-and-information-warfare/230753)