



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***ENACTING FRIENDSHIP AND NEGOTIATING ONLINE IDENTITIES IN  
FACEBOOK AMONG A GROUP OF MALAYSIANS***

**LAI YUH YING**

**FBMK 2014 28**



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ONLINE IDENTITIES IN FACEBOOK AMONG A  
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**MASTER OF ARTS  
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FACEBOOK AMONG A GROUP OF MALAYSIANS**

By

**LAI YUH YING**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,  
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Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**February 2014**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra  
Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

## **ENACTING FRIENDSHIP AND NEGOTIATING ONLINE IDENTITIES IN FACEBOOK AMONG A GROUP OF MALAYSIANS**

By

**LAI YUH YING**

**February 2014**

**Chair: Associate Professor Yap Ngee Thai, PhD**

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Facebook, one of the leading social-networking sites nowadays has become a necessary communication medium in our life. Facebook has tremendous influence to friendship and identity, thus this study attempts to investigate performing friendship and negotiating online identities by a group of Malaysian in Facebook.

To determine the way friendship is performed in Facebook, this study investigated three aspects. Firstly, friendship behavior categories that are observed in posted messages. Secondly, social or communicative functions of the interaction mode in friendship behavior categories. In addition, to determine the way online identities are negotiated in Facebook, this study also investigate the types of online identities constructed and the way online identities are negotiated through message posted and comments in Facebook. Lastly, this study attempted to determine the relationship between online identities and friendship in Facebook.

This study employed purposive sampling. Five Facebook users participated in this study. There are four theories selected to construct conceptual framework. These theories are Social Network Theory, Hyperpersonal Model, Self-presentation Theory and Social Identity Theory. Content analysis approach was used to analyse posted messages and comments. Interviews about relationship of participants and their friends, as well as reasons they posted messages online, were conducted to achieve the objectives of the study.

It is concluded that Facebook is an additional medium to perform friendship. The social-networking site provides another channel for individuals to initiate and

maintain friendship. With the resources provided on Facebook, a group of Facebook users manipulated the available resources to expand their network and presented themselves. Facebook resources especially the mode of interaction constrains the way friendship is performed and identities are negotiated in Facebook realm. Facebook users posted messages about themselves and started to connect with their friends with textual or visual information which they desired were shared on Facebook.

In addition, Facebook is a form of social-networking site for individuals to project their identities online. Facebook has negotiated their online identity construction where individuals presented themselves as a thoughtful, sociable, well-roundedness, caring, authoritative, optimistic and expressive person. Participants and their respondents projected more than one identity to perform their friendship online. These can be seen when participants negotiated their identity as a friend to other identities such as motivator, broadcaster and computer expert. They negotiated different identities while communicating with different people in different communication contexts.

This study makes several significant contributions. This study has contributed to the understanding of Facebook phenomenon in Asia region and the understanding of Facebook usage among adults. Suggestions for future studies on performing friendship and negotiating identities can be conducted on different regions and contexts, age range, number of subjects with different background and various types of online communication mediums. The comparative study of various categories mentioned above also worthwhile to be researched as well.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sastera

**ENAKMEN PERSAHABATAN DAN PERUNDINGAN IDENTITI DALAM  
TALIAN DI FACEBOOK DALAM KALANGAN SEKUMPULAN RAKYAT  
MALAYSIA**

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*Facebook* merupakan salah satu laman rangkaian sosial yang terkemuka dan menjadi suatu keperluan dalam kehidupan kita. Memandangkan pengaruh besar *Facebook* terhadap persahabatan dan identiti, kajian ini berusaha untuk mengkaji identity semasa melaksanakan persahabatan dan perundingan dalam talian oleh sekumpulan rakyat Malaysia dalam *Facebook*.

Kajian ini mengkaji tiga aspek tentang cara persahabatan yang dijalin dalam *Facebook*. Pertama, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti kategori tingkah laku persahabatan yang terdapat dalam mesej *Facebook*. Kedua, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti fungsi sosial atau komunikasi dalam kategori tingkah laku persahabatan. Di samping itu, untuk mengenal pasti kaedah perundingan identiti secara dalam talian dalam *Facebook*, kajian ini juga mengenal pasti jenis identiti yang dibina secara dalam talian dan kaedah perundingan identiti secara dalam talian melalui mesej dan komen dalam *Facebook*. Seterusnya, hubungan antara identity dalam talian dan persahabatan dalam *Facebook* juga akan dikaji.

Kajian ini berdasarkan cara persampelan bermatlamat. Lima orang pengguna *Facebook* dipilih sebagai responden kajian. Beberapa teori yang bersesuaian telah dipilih untuk membentuk kerangka konsep. Teori-teori yang dipilih adalah Teori Rangkaian Sosial (*Social Network Theory*), Modal Komunikasi Hyperpersonal (*Hyperpersonal Model*), Teori Persembahan Diri (*Self-presentation Theory*) dan Teori Identiti Sosial (*Social Identity Theory*). Kaedah analisis kandungan digunakan untuk menganalisis interaksi dalam mesej dan komen responden. Kaedah temuduga yang bertanyakan persahabatan antara responden kajian dan rakan-rakannya dan

sebab-sebab mereka menulis mesej dalam talian juga digunakan untuk mencapai objektif kajian ini. Dengan ini, dapat disimpulkan bahawa *Facebook* merupakan media tambahan untuk memanifestasikan persahabatan. Laman rangkaian sosial, *Facebook* menyumbangkan saluran tambahan untuk individu memulakan dan mengekalkan persahabatan. Dengan sumber yang ada pada *Facebook*, individu telah memanipulasikannya sumber-sumber tersebut untuk meluaskan jaringannya dan menampilkan diri untuk tatapan orang lain dalam rangkaian *Facebook*. Sumber *Facebook* terutamanya kaedah interaksi mengawal persahabatan dan identiti dalam *Facebook*. Pengguna *Facebook* menampilkan mesej tentang diri mereka sendiri dan mula berhubung dengan rakan-rakannya dengan informasi dalam bentuk teks atau visual yang ingin dikongsi dalam *Facebook*.

Di samping itu, *Facebook* merupakan satu laman rangkaian sosial untuk individu memaparkan identity dalam talian. *Facebook* telah memudahkan pembentukan identiti individu dalam talian dengan menampilkan diri sebagai seorang individu yang berfikiran bernas, bersosial, berkebolehan, berprihatin, berkuasa, berfikiran positif dan ekspresif. Responden kajian dan responden mesej memaparkan lebih daripada satu identiti dalam talian semasa memanifestasikan persahabatan dalam talian. Ini dapat dikesan apabila responden kajian berunding tentang identiti mereka sebagai seorang kawan kepada identiti yang lain seperti pakar motivator, juruhebah, mangsa dan pakar komputer. Responden kajian menukar watak yang berlainan semasa berkomunikasi dengan orang yang berlainan dalam konteks komunikasi yang lain.

Kajian ini telah menyumbangkan pemahaman terhadap fenomena *Facebook* di Asia, dan penggunaan *Facebook* dalam kalangan orang dewasa. Kajian masa depan yang dicadangkan ialah kajian ini boleh dijalankan di negara atau konteks yang berlainan, peringkat umur yang berbeza, bilangan subjek yang lebih banyak, dan mencakupi pelbagai media komunikasi dalam talian. Perbandingan kajian tentang kategori yang disebutkan juga boleh dijalankan pada masa hadapan.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of this study. Thus, this chapter explains the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose and scope of the study, conceptual and theoretical framework, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of terms.

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Technology has become increasingly important in the lives of people nowadays. Every part of our life seems to go online: online friendship, online shopping, online banking, online education, online government, and online corporate affairs. Many people are heavy users of electronic communication technologies such as instant messaging, e-mail and blog, as well as social-networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr which are the most popular communication-oriented sites in this day and age. For example in Facebook, users can perform online friendship. Friendship can still be maintained online even though friends do not meet each other face to face; they can even advertise their products or outlets on the profile for publicity. Being online and using online services apparently make our life easier as these can be done through the internet—saving energy and saving time.

Many researchers have been keen to investigate the advances of computer and new technologies in assisting pedagogical activities (Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe & Sirc, 2004; Sirc, 2002; Selfe, 1999), even if each influences of technology have not always been viewed positively by society. The overwhelming effects of Internet and other technologies such as text messaging, video games and online social sites appear to have influenced human behaviour slightly and more and more people are becoming dependent on these new technologies. There is a widespread view that ‘technospeak’ change the rule of standard English, where online sites nowadays have been reported to cause rampant use of informal language and non-standard varieties of English. However, David Crystal (2006) views the reverse trend where the Internet has stimulated a whole new language in terms of variety and creativity of language apart from Standard English.

These social networking sites also make available tools that ease communication and overcome traditional communication behaviors. For example, a shy person who does not commonly speak to strangers may share videos, links, comments, opinions more frequently on these sites. The new technologies have gradually changed people's lives.

Online social network sites offer a new platform for people to perform friendship in cyberspace. Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Friendster and MySpace allow individuals to build their social network (Baym, 1995), maintain relationship (Lea & Spears, 1995), access to information (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002), emotional support (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002) and present themselves online (Wellman, Garton, & Haythornthwaite, 1997; Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Participants may shift their offline friendship to online or establish a new network of "friends". SNSs allow its users to create personal profiles and display their relationship with other users in the friends list online as well. These sites provide an online communication platform for users to create their online friendship.

What is friendship? Traditionally, friendship is the word used to describe a relationship which is close and at least more like acquaintances (Allan, 1989). Friendship is also an informal relationship between two persons without specific boundaries such as boss and workers, or mutual responsibilities like family from a sociologist point of view (Boyd, 2006). "Voluntary relations, the content and future of the bond being always at the discretion of each party" indicate the meaning of 'just friends' (Fischer, 1982). Friendship may be interpreted differently in different cultures (Pahl, 2002; Smart, 1999). 'Good brothers', for example, is always referred as close friends by Chinese men (Yang, 2005) and friendship can be used to refer to social relationship among class-mates and colleagues (Smart, 1999). The meaning of friendship is interpreted by scholars from different perspectives.

Online friendship, however, seemed to have taken on a wider and perhaps different meaning. It has emerged as a dominant type of relationship in many people's lives. People build their relationship online through social networking sites such as Facebook. No matter what the relationship is when the individuals are offline, a new relationship can be established online and everyone is now called a 'friend' in Facebook. People can trace your daily routine and activities from status messages by viewing your updated post or profile information. Personal information disclosed on profile pages can expose oneself to the public. Strangers can now befriend one another online for all kinds of motives and purposes. Even though people put themselves online, with a simple intention, that is to befriend other users, they may also be putting themselves at risk of being duped. As online friendship has the whip hand in our life, those who know too

little about the vulnerability of online friendship may not be alert of the risks that may put them into unpredictable troubles.

Since the establishment of Facebook, the concept of 'friend' is being manipulated. Facebook has become a tool or "bridge" to expand and spread influence online. People add friends to Facebook not only to befriend people, but also for other reasons. In current SNSs trend, shops, companies, universities, non-government organisation (NGO) and celebrities are now on Facebook to get more customers, to sell their products, to get more popular and to get more supporters. They advertise themselves on Facebook to achieve commercial effect. The meaning of 'friends' has changed because people add friends to Facebook not simply to befriend other people, but with underlying purposes. In these contexts, these people are called friends simply because that is the terminology used in Facebook and members are sorted in the friend list.

Besides friendship, online identity has also attracted attention from researcher about the use of language and other visual devices to create identities that are different from offline settings. Thomas (2000, 2004) investigated how adolescent "cybergirls" used words, images and symbols such as emoticons and 'avatars' to create their identities which reflect their fantasies and desires. In addition, an individual may even change information about themselves such as gender, ethnicity, age, race or physical appearance, while communicating online. This is done because individuals want to present an ideal appearance to the people they want to communicate with. A study done by Tsang (2000), which focused on Taiwanese users of online chat rooms, found that people will be more likely to chat with the researcher if the researcher indicated he was Caucasian, rather than Chinese. Thus, the desire to communicate with other people online is based on imagination of other online users toward the other users from identities which are shown by online users.

The study of online identity construction has come to attract significant attention from researchers (Cover, 2012; Tsang, 2000; Thomas, 2000, 2004; Yurchisin et al, 2005; Tan, 2006; Locher and Hoffman, 2006, Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, 2008). Most of the studies have been concerned mainly with online identity constructions in anonymous environments, for instance, Internet Relay Chat, Chat Rooms, MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) and Bulletin Boards (Bechar-Israeli, 1995; Cherny, 1999; Rheingold, 1995; Surratt, 1998; Turkle, 1995). In the past few years, however, scholars began to shift the line of study to investigate identity construction in nonymous online environment such as Social Network Sites (Goodings, 2007; Zhao, 2008) and self-presentation on Internet dating sites (Ellison, 2006; Gibbs, 2006; Yurchisin, 2005). The findings of these studies

suggest that the way people construct identity and present themselves in non-anonymous online environments is different from anonymous online environments.

The online spaces provide new platform for users to enact self-presentation that may also be different from face to face settings. Previous studies have examined self-presentation online (McKenna, 2002) and internet dating site (Gibbs, 2006). The popularity of Facebook has attracted scholars to pay attention to self-presentation issue on this social network sites. Kim (2011) for example, examined the effects of self-presentation on subjective well-being on Facebook as paths to happiness. They found out that an honest self-presentation strategy may increase happiness that originated from social support provided by Facebook friends. However, Mehdizadeh (2010) studied the influence of narcissism and self-esteem to self-presentation on Facebook. The study revealed that individuals with higher narcissism but lower self-esteem were associated with greater online activity and self-promotional content. Online users perform different self-presentation strategies in different online settings.

## **1.2 An Overview and the popularity of Facebook**

Facebook appeared to have gained popularity around the world leading to the establishment of other online social networking sites for instance MySpace.com, Twitter and Friendster. A study done on Compete.com in January 2009 indicated that Facebook has the highest number of monthly active users worldwide. In January 2011, Facebook has reached more than 600 million active users worldwide.

Facebook is currently one of the most popular computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies. The fever of Facebook is spreading around the world where people would like to sign up as a Facebook user to connect with the people around the world. Based on the statistics provided by the [malaysiacrunch.blogspot](http://malaysiacrunch.blogspot.com) in 2008, this social network website currently had more than 140 million active users and the fastest growing demographic are users who are 25 years old and older, with an average user having 100 friends in their site. More than 70% of Facebook users are outside the US. In November 2006, nearly 22,000 organizations have Facebook directories (Smith, 2006).

The establishment of SNSs and its influence to our life has been transformed into the documentary genre. In 2010, the chronological history of Facebook, since the year of its establishment in 2005 has been adapted into the movie entitled "*The Social Network*".



The movie described the founder of Facebook, incidents that happened while implementing Facebook, how it spread worldwide and its impact on human life.

In Malaysia, Facebook enjoyed a steady growth among Malaysian internet users. There are around 800,000 active users as of December 16, 2010 in which 45% of them were male, 51% female and 4% unstated. In terms of age, young adults are the main contributors as expected. Regional wise, Malaysia has the most Facebook users in Southeast Asia. The Star online (13.10.2010) reported that Malaysians have the most number of friends on social-networking sites. A survey conducted by an international firm, TNS, reported that Malaysians have an average of 233 friends in their social network and that Malaysians spent nine hours weekly on Facebook in terms of hours spent on social sites.

Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) was founded for academic purpose where students can have assessment discussion online. This social networking service was launched in February 2004 for Harvard University students. It then spread to other campuses such as Stanford, Yale and Columbia respectively. In 2006, however the membership is now no longer restricted to this selected group, instead, it is widely spread to employees of companies, and other institutions. This social network website has gone public, accessible to anyone from any part of the world to be a part of this new wave of online social networking. From then on, Facebook was known as a site for 'friending'.

Before social-networking sites such as Facebook was established, asynchronous message applications within a synchronous medium such as Instant Messenger (IM) were used to negotiate online relationships and social activities (Baron, 2005). Baron (2005) explored how American college students use away messages in Instant Messaging to negotiate their life in campus. This study is replicated by Nastri et al. (2006) who confirmed that the informational and entertainment goals were reflected in away messages. In Facebook, status messages have a similar purpose with away messages. It is because an individual can provide his or her status in an open text field for others to view. In short, asynchronous media allows more synchronous application and vice versa.

Media characteristics enable utterances constructed in written text to facilitate interpersonal communication. Nastri et al. (2006) studied the speech act in away messages in instant messaging where the messages were constructed in asynchronous application of synchronous medium. In SNSs, especially Facebook, status messages can still be viewed and the information can be retrieved if the user is away from his or her computer for synchronous chat. Status messages can also be viewed by others online.



Communication through SNSs like Facebook in daily practice impinges on social relationships including friendship. Online friendship is probably established in cyberspace which shifted from offline friendship. Boyd and Ellison (2007) pointed out that users do not really have intention to meet new people, as they prefer to sustain existing offline friendship online (DeAndrea, Shaw, & Levine, 2010).

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The establishment of social-networking media especially Facebook has probably changed how friendship is performed and how identity is constructed and this is the focus of the current study. Identity construction and friendship performance on cyberspace is known to be constrained by the characteristics of the online media. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) have argued that the advantages that Facebook provides such as the convenience and free-of-charge services such as daily reminders of friends' wedding and birthday help create the perception of being connected with others.

The study of online friendship has come to attract significant attention from cross-areas of researchers, yet the dearth of this issue need to be filled in language studies. Previous studies have dealt with issues like the possibility to create friendship and how friendship progresses and is maintained via CMC (Walther, 1992; Utz, 2000; McKenna et al., 2002; Dawyer, 2007; Bryant, Marmo & Ramirez, 2011), long-distance friendship through CMC (Johnson, 2001; Johnson et al. 2008) and the quality of online and offline friendships (Park & Floyd, 1996; Park & Roberts 1998; Cummings et al., 2002; Chan & Cheng, 2004). However, the question of how friendship is created and maintained through media such as email and messenger is different from how people create and maintain friendship in social-networking site. Studies on relationship have focused on all types of relationships for example family members, friends, bosses and colleagues, acquaintances and professors (Boase et al. 2006; Katherine & Peluchette, 2007) or have focused on more than one medium (Boase et al, 2006; Utz, 2007).

It is difficult to relate media characteristics and the characteristics of particular interpersonal relationships. Social-networking sites (SNSs) offer personal connections among users that their relationships, or friendships is indicated on the sites (Boyd, 2006) and these most common sites are Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. For example, there are studies on the relationship between parents, their children and their aging parents who interacted with each other through mobile technologies (Lee, 2006) and the number or content of messages was found to be an important factor that reinforced strong bonds

within families (Christensen, 2009). What about the friendship in Facebook? As friendship is one of the common relationships in people's lives, it is interesting to investigate how the characteristics of Facebook such as the features of this site like status messages and comments have constrained the friendship in offline contexts. Thus, it is worthwhile to study online friendship in the most popular and frequently used social networking media, Facebook.

The literature of identity negotiation is largely based on offline environments, and studies on how identity is negotiated have mainly been conducted in an organizational context (e.g. Llewellyn, 2004; Cohen, 2010; Clifton & Mierop, 2010), and on how ethnic identities are negotiated (e.g. Gavrilos, 2010; Sartawi & Sammut, 2012). While there are some studies that have looked at how identity is negotiated in an online discourse community (e.g. Matsuda, 2002), these studies have focused on the linguistic features and metaphors used to identify relationships. Very few studies have looked at how social identities are negotiated. Social media users negotiate their online identity as they share their profile online and the responses to the profile picture create the individual choice of photo into a social identity (Ellis, 2010; Hum & et al., 2011). In the case of online identity negotiation, users' post wall messages and comments from their friends are the essential criteria by which their identity is judged. Thus, this study focuses on the interaction of posted wall messages and comments instead of just profile photos.

Identity construction is influenced by the attributes of online setting and the user's social characteristics such as ethnicity, gender and social class (Tsang, 2000; Thomas, 2004; Ho, 2010). Previous studies have shown that identities are constructed and negotiated through the use of different modalities (McCabe, 2004; Patrona, 2005), question and answer (Locher & Hoffman, 2006), politeness and impoliteness (Graham, 2007), and indirect and mimetic cues (Zhao et al., 2008). Previous studies have also identified various motivations for different identity construction such as self-presentation (Pempek et al., 2009) and the perception of social attractiveness from their friends (Walther, 2008; Utz, 2010). Identities which are constructed by online users may reflect their real innate behavior and intention as these come from their self-expression, but in some cases, the identities constructed online are not the real-self. Instead, the identities constructed may be the way Facebook users respond to the social environment of their place (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). In the less anonymous setting such as Facebook, the question of whether the identities constructed via posted messages are real or shaped by the environment still needs to be investigated.

#### **1.4 Purpose and scope of the study**

The current study aimed to investigate how Malaysian youths perform friendship and negotiate online identities in messages posted on Facebook. The current study is conducted to address the following objectives:

1. To study the way friendship is performed in Facebook.
  - a. To analyse the friendship behavior categories that are observed in Facebook posted messages.
  - b. To analyse the social or communicative functions of the interaction mode in the friendship behavior categories.
2. To study the way online identities are negotiated in Facebook.
  - a. To analyse the online identities constructed in Facebook.
  - b. To analyse the way online identities are negotiated in interaction (posted messages and comments) on Facebook.
3. To study the relationship between online identities and friendship in social-networking site.

The scope of this study is to focus on the popular social networking site, Facebook. This study employed purposive sampling. There were five respondents chosen to participate in this study. These five participants had maintained their Facebook accounts for more than one year and they were active users. This study attempts to explore the identity of Facebook users and their friendship profiles using content analysis and analysis of speech acts as the main methods used in the study.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

The current study aims to investigate how Malaysian youths negotiate friendship and related social identities online in messages posted on Facebook. This study will answer the following questions:

1. How is online friendship performed in Facebook?
  - a. What friendship behavior categories are observed in Facebook posted messages?
  - b. What are the social or communicative functions of the interaction mode in the observed friendship behavior categories?
2. How are online identities negotiated in Facebook?
  - a. What online identities are constructed in the messages posted on Facebook?
  - b. How are online identities negotiated in interactions (posted messages and comments) on Facebook?
3. How are these online identities related to online friendship?

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

In this section, four theories have been adopted to guide this study as these theories provide holistic explanation about the study which covers the important elements such as social-networking sites, identities and ways of performing friendship. The four theories adopted in this study are 1) Social Network Theory, 2) Self-presentation Theory, 3) Hyperpersonal Communication Theory, and 4) Social Identity Theory, which will be discussed accordingly below.

### **1.6.1 Social Network Theory**

A social network is a “web of ties” between persons. The structure of network will be distinguished by the type of connections in different communication medium (Milroy, 1987). The structure of a social network consists of participants and relationships. The social network tie is constructed when the ties of various strengths from center individual is linked directly with other people. Besides, orders are the way of defining the position of an individual within a social network. The orders are first order zone, second order and third order zones. First order zone for an individual who is the core member in the network who is directly linked to any other individual; second order zone is any person who is connected to at least one individual from the first order zone, but the connection is loose; third order zone is an individual who is not directly linked to the first order zone but may have links to the individuals in the second order zone.

Relationships between center individual and other individuals are shaped by these components such as density, member closeness centrality, multiplexity and orders. The density of a network depends on the loose and tight connection among members. A network can be dense when all its members have strong connections with each other, but the network can be loose in the sense that not all members are familiar and know each other. Besides, member closeness centrality measures the closeness between one individual with another individuals. An individual with high closeness centrality is the center member, who has frequent contact with other members and vice versa. In terms of multiplexity, a network is described to be multiplex when the network ties are based on more than one relationship, similarity or activity (Milroy 1987: 50–51). Finally, orders define the place an individual is situated in a social network.

### **1.6.2 Hyperpersonal Communication Theory**

Hyperpersonal communication theory is an interpersonal communication theory. Computer-mediated communication becomes hyperpersonal because it provides different communicative advantages to sender over traditional face-to-face interactions. Senders have the opportunity to revise and present the desired one's self to others. Receivers idealise senders based on the message features and conditions that the verbal cues in face-to-face interaction are absent in online realm. The asynchronous nature of CMC channel promotes editing, space, convenience and volition for users to present themselves. Finally, CMC users may create feedback to meet the expectation of other users and reciprocated via mutual interaction.

### **1.6.3 Self-presentation Theory**

Self-presentation theory is proposed by Goffman (1959) to explain the way individuals present themselves to others. When a person interacts with other people, he or she will attempt to change or adjust the appearance, manner and setting of himself or herself to control the impression that other people might make of him or her. For example, when a person attends a job interview, he or she will certainly wear a formal attire and strive to present his or her capability in handling the job to convince the interviewers.

Goffman believed that social interaction is a kind of theatrical performance. He believed social life as a theatre, whereas social interaction is like a stage. The individual is the actor and the setting can affect how individuals play their role in life which Goffman called 'Front' stage and 'Back' stage. In 'Front' stage, an individual is on the stage in front of the audience. Individual performs desired or ideal impressions and positive aspects about themselves to other audiences. In 'Back' stage, individuals can drop their

mask and relinquish their role or identity in society as the ‘back’ stage can be hidden or is private places for individuals to be themselves.

#### **1.6.4 Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory describes intergroup relationships which is how people consider themselves as members of in-group in comparison with out-group (Turner et.al, 1987). However, social identity theory also explains what occurs when people take on a role which is called role identity theory. Role identity theory is described as once a person has a particular role identity, the person would act accordingly to achieve the expectations of the role, and negotiate communication with role partners while interacting with others (Burke, 1980; Burke & Reitzes, 1981). In role-based identities, when a person performs a role, some form of interaction and negotiation are involved (McCall & Simmons, 1978) and the environment may be manipulated to control the resources which are associated with a role.

#### **1.6.5 Summary**

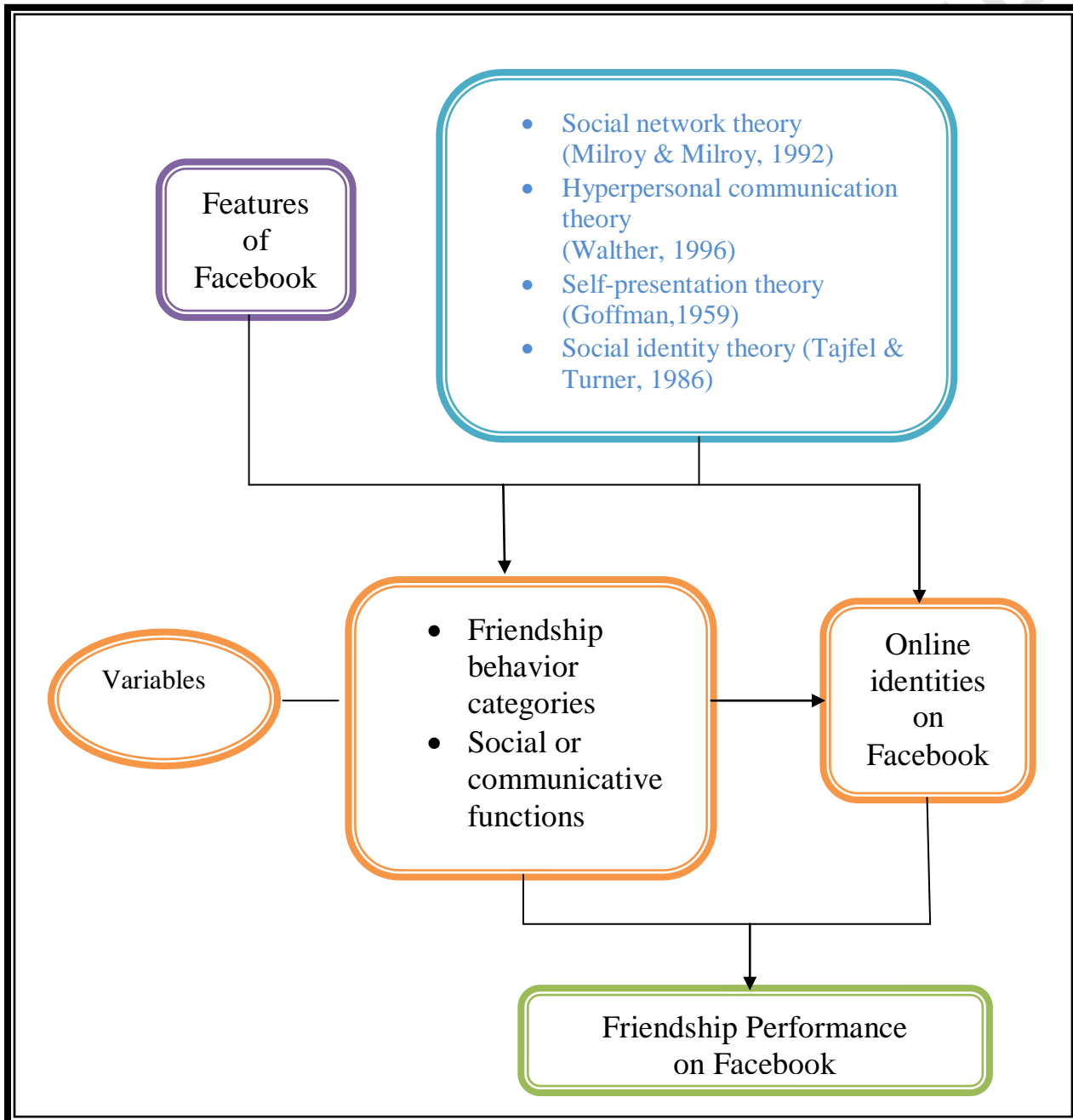
These four theories are adopted in this study as these theories can explain the main key aspects of this study such as social-networking site, identity and ways of performing friendship. From the discussion above, firstly, social network theory explains about the structure of a social network. Secondly, hyperpersonal communication theory explains the vital properties of communication which are senders, receivers, channel and feedback. Thirdly, self-presentation theory describes the way Facebook users portray themselves while performing friendship. Finally, social identity theory served as a guide in identifying the type of identities that Facebook users adopt in negotiating their identities while communicating with other users. The conceptual framework will be discussed in the following section.



## 1.7 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study

Based on the literature reviewed and the objectives of the study, a conceptual and theoretical framework for this study was constructed and is presented in Figure 1.1. The framework shows the relationship between variables that were studied.

**Figure 1.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study**



The diagram above shows the conceptual and theoretical framework of this study. Features of Facebook have been identified to constrain the friendship performance and online-identity negotiation. Features of Facebook act as mode of interaction and there are textual mode such as posted messages and comments, the focus of this study, followed by visual mode and verbal mode.

There are four theories have been adapted to form the conceptual and theoretical framework to guide this study. Firstly, Social Network Theory (Milroy & Milroy, 1992) explains social network of participants in social networking site, Facebook. Secondly, Hyperpersonal Communication Theory (Walther, 1996) describes the components of communication such as senders, receivers, computer-mediated communication (CMC) channel and feedback in communication, which can be seen in interaction between participants and friends. Next, self-presentation theory explains the way participants present themselves while friending and negotiating identities in Facebook. Finally social identity theory interprets manipulation of identity or role by a person while performing friendship.

The features of Facebook and the four theories adapted in this study identified the variables which constrain friendship performance in Facebook. The variables are friendship behavior categories and social or communicative functions. These two variables were manipulated by participants to construct and negotiated personal identities while performing friendship in Facebook.

### **1.8 Significance of the study**

This study is one of the few attempts to investigate written communication in terms of how it is used to perform online friendship and negotiate online identity among Malaysian adult Facebook users. Therefore, this study provides a fundamental basis for further research in this area of interest. The findings of this study could

- (a) provide an understanding of the phenomenon of Facebook in the Asian regions like Malaysia, a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country.
- (b) provide references or guidelines to researchers related to the field of social media communication and linguistics. It forms the basis for empirical work for further research in this area. It could help in the study of different online settings.



To ensure that new policy or programme is beneficial to a nation, systematic monitoring procedures must be carried out at different levels in a certain project or programme. Hence, this study therefore could provide some feedback regarding to the usage of ICT among Malaysian adults.

## 1.9 Definition of key terms

This section presents the definition of key terms that will be utilized in this study.

### 1.9.1 Social network

Milroy and Gordon (2002:117) define ***social network*** as “the aggregate of relationships contracted with others, a boundless web of ties which reaches out through social and geographical space linking many individuals, sometimes remotely”. Eckert (2000) describes social network as a better sense of capturing the dynamics underlying speakers’ interactional behaviors than as a fixed social category.

***Social networking sites (SNSs)*** is a web-based application that provide three functions allowing users to 1) create a public or semi- public profile, 2) display a list of others users in their shared connection, 3) view and follow a list of others users within their connection system. The word ‘*Network*’ has been highlighted rather than ‘*networking*’ because many of the SNSs users convert their offline network into online network instead of ‘*networking*’ or finding stranger to become their friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

***Asynchronous communication*** is an electronic communication that does not happen in real time. The messages sent to recipients may be viewed at their convenience. This communication has two dimensions of audience scope, whether the communication is directed for a single person (one-to-one) such as email, mobile phones’s texting, or for a larger audience (one-to-many) as in newsgroups, listservs, blogs, MySpace, Facebook and Youtube (Baron, 2008).

***Synchronous communication*** refers to electronic communication that happens in real time. This form of communication has two dimensions of audience scope, whether the communication is directed for a single person (one-to-one) such as instant messaging

(IM), or for a larger audience (one-to-many) as in computer conferencing, MUDs and MOOs (Baron, 2008).

### 1.9.2 Friendship

*Friendship* is one of the common types of interpersonal relationship. Hartup (1975) defined friends as those 'who spontaneously seek the company of one another' and closeness between one another without strong social pressure. Wright (1984) defined friendship is 'a relationship involving voluntary or unconstrained interaction in which participants respond to one another personally...' (p.119).

*Online friendship* is a new form of friendship which people initiate, develop and maintain friendship through computer-mediated communication (CMC) in online social settings, such as social-networking sites, chat-rooms, newsgroups and websites. Online friendship exists when people bring their friendship from offline context into online realm.

### 1.9.3 Performing Friendship

*Friendship behavior categories* are the behaviors practised by people in the process of performing friendship. The friendship behavior categories found from the literature review are self-disclosure (Qian & Scott, 2007), content sharing (Brandtzæg, Lüders, Skjetne, 2010), reciprocity (Vallor, 2011) and keeping in touch (Brandtzæg, Lüders, Skjetne, 2010). These friendship behavior categories are practised by participants with an intention of initiating and maintaining friendship online.

*Social or communicative function* refers to the language of an utterance that delivers the speaker's intention in the message. For instance, a speaker's intention may be to thank, to request information and to share information. Social or communicative functions can be inherently link to the activities, such as performing friendship that are being undertaken by the speakers.

#### 1.9.4 Online Identity

**Identity** from the Latin word *idem* means “the same” which indicate similarity and dissimilarity. Identity is something that can distinguish an individual from other people (Buckingham, 2008). Identity is connected with a wider social group. This mean we share identities such as national identity, cultural identity and gender identity with other people in more or less the same aspects (Buckingham, 2008). Identity can also refer to fixed and stable essence features of selfhood (Tracey, 2002) such as ethnicity, nationality, social class, gender, age and occupation. Identity is to know ‘who is who’. This includes knowing who we are, knowing who other people are, knowing how other people think who we are as an individual and as members of collectivities (Ashton et al. 2004 cited from Jenkins, 2008). Calvert (2002) argued that interpersonal characteristics of a person, for instance “who am I”, the character and relationship with others in an interaction and an individual’s personal values and beliefs, are able to create an identity. In the other word, identity is an *identification* that makes one similar or different from others.

**Social identity** refers to the facets of an individual regarding his or her group memberships. Even though a person is a member of many distinct groups, somehow only some social identities are salient. Some social identities are shared with other people who claim the similar categorical membership, for instance, as a man, as a woman, as a teacher, as a student, or as a Muslim. Deaux (2001) points out that social identity exists in many aspects and the aspects of social identities show the way how people relate to other social groups, and this relation is also called social identification. Types of social identity can be formed into different social identifications, such as ethnicity and religion, political affiliation, vocations and avocations, relationships, and stigmatized identities.

**Construction of identity** is a process that involves both the “identity announcement” made by the individual claiming an identity and the ‘identity placement’ made by others who endorse the claimed identity, and an identity is established when there is a ‘coincidence of placements and announcement’ (Stone, 1981: 188).

**Negotiating social identity** is how people shift from one identity to another identity to make an appropriate choice in responding to a particular situation. There are many factors influencing social negotiation, such as the range and salience of a person’s social identities, the location in which a person is situated, and the behaviour and influence of others to that place (Deaux, 2001). In a situation where a person is the only Christian in a group of Buddhists, that will make the religion of the single person more salient. In

addition, the setting makes the social identities become more important. For instance, being present in school may make the people who hold the identities of teachers and students in school become more vital.

### **1.10 Summary of chapter**

This chapter presents the background and rational of this study, and presents a combination of conceptual and theoretical framework, to explain how Facebook users perform their friendship and negotiate their identity in Facebook. It also addresses the research objectives, problem statements, significance of the study and definition of key terms.

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