

It's Your Birthday!: Greetings as a Function of Gender and Relationship Status on Facebook

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Abstract

The present study examines the variables of gender and relationship status as a function of one component of Facebook activity, viz., the percentage of birthday greetings a Facebook user received. Information regarding birth date, relationship status (single or in a relationship) number of friends, and number of birthday wishes received were obtained from the profiles of 200 Facebook users, 100 men and 100 women. Results were significant for both variables of gender and relationship status. Specifically, women in a relationship received the most greetings, paired males received the second most greetings, followed by single females and the recipients of fewest greetings were single males.

Keywords: Facebook research, gender, friendship

1. Introduction

The cultural involvement with social networking sites, particularly the global online presence of Facebook has been dramatic. Data indicates that by February, 2012 there were over 845 million Facebook users spending almost 10 billion minutes a day on the site (2). This phenomenon is providing social scientists with opportunities to examine personality and gender differences in the naturalistic setting of online behavior. A recent and comprehensive review identifies over 412 published articles which includes information concerning motivations for Facebook use, identity presentation on Facebook and a descriptive analysis of Facebook users (3). A recent investigation conducted by the first author with students and colleagues examined gender, sexuality and impression management on Facebook (1). The

present investigation examined the Facebook profiles of 200 users, 100 males and 100 females, whose birthdays ranged from January 1-March 31. The percent of responses was based on a function of the amount of friends at the time of data collection and the amount of greetings received for the birthday. This study aims to see if gender and relationship status affects the amount of greetings received on the birthday. Influenced by Evolutionary Psychology, it was hypothesized that females will receive more birthday wishes than males, and single individuals will receive more birthday wishes than individuals in a relationship. It was also hypothesized that gender and relationship status will interact, such that, single females will receive the most birthday greetings.

2. Methods

Participants

Participants were randomly selected from Facebook profiles of the authors' friends. There were a total of 200 Facebook users, 100 males and 100 females. Participants were also selected based on birthdays; only participants whose birthdays fell on or between January 1, 2012 to March 31, 2012 were examined.

Procedures

The participants information was tabulated on an excel spreadsheet. The information recorded was the subject number, relationship status (single or in a relationship), number of friends, number of birthday wishes, and birth date. The percentage of birthday wishes was then calculated as a function of the amount of friends they had at the time if data collection.

Results

Paired females had the highest percentage of birthday wishes to number of friends ($M= 17.14$, $SD = 6.46$). Paired males had the second highest percentage of birthday wishes to number of friends ($M= 14.79$, $SD = 4.98$). Single females had the third highest percentage of birthday wishes to number of friends ($M = 14.71$, $SD= 4.60$). Single males had the lowest percentage of birthday wishes to number of friends ($M= 13.78$, $SD = 4.95$).

A Two-Way ANOVA was used to analyze the data. Results showed that there is a significant difference within gender ($F(1, 200) = 4.23$, $p= .041$). Results also showed that there is a significant difference within relationship status ($F(1, 200) = 4.69$, $p = .032$). However, when both factors are analyzed together, there is no significant difference between the groups of gender and relationship status ($F(1, 200) = .81$, $p = .370$).

Discussion

It was hypothesized that females will receive more birthday wishes than males. Our results were statistically significant in favor of the female gender ($p = .041$). There are many reasons that females would receive more birthday wishes than males; generally females have a larger circle of friends and a busier social life than males. Another reason would be that if a male is pursuing a female he might wish her a happy birthday as a means of contact. It is less likely that a female would pursue a male, and therefore less likely she would wish him a happy birthday.

It was also hypothesized that single individuals would receive more birthday wishes than individuals in a relationship. Our results were statistically significant in favor of individuals in a relationship ($p = .032$); therefore we fail to reject the null hypothesis. When an individual is

in a relationship, their circle of friends may expand to include both partner's friends and acquaintances. This means that paired individuals may receive more birthday wishes because they have a larger amount of friends than a single individual. Another reason that paired individuals may receive more birthday wishes is that they could be perceived as less threatening than a single individual. For example, a single male may be intimidated to "approach", or in this case give a birthday greeting, to a single female who he finds attractive because she seems threatening because there is a chance of rejection. However, when this same female is in a relationship, the single male does not have the fear of rejection, and thus she is not threatening, making it more likely that he will wish her happy birthday.

Finally it was hypothesized that gender and relationship status will interact, such that, single females will receive the most birthday greetings. Our results were not significant for this interaction ($p = .370$). Although we fail to reject this null hypothesis, there was a correlation between gender and relationship status, such that paired females received the most birthday wishes ($M = 17.14$, $SD = 6.46$). As stated previous, females tend to be more social, and when an individual is paired they add to their circle of friends by including their partner's friends. These two effects, when combined will results in paired females having more friends than another gender and relationship status combinations.

It can be suggested that mate-seeking habits are at play, but further research could be done to examine more closely who the well-wishers are, rather than examining who was receiving birthday wishes. This study may grant greater insight to mate-seeking behaviors exhibited in social media.

References

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