



Do Offline Gossiping Behaviours Translate onto Facebook Behaviours? A Correlational Design Exploring the Relationship Between Gossiping and Facebook Usage

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### ABSTRACT

Technological advances over the past decade have revolutionised the way humans communicate, particularly with the introduction of 'Facebook'. As gossip dominates interpersonal interactions, contemporary ways to communicate may have influenced gossiping behaviours. However, there is no current research that draws upon relationships between offline gossiping behaviours and their potential translation onto Facebook use. The present research aimed to investigate whether or not there are relationships between offline gossiping behaviours, such as the Tendency to Gossip, Functions of Gossip and the Motives to Facebook Use.

In an online questionnaire study, 149 participants (33 males and 116 females, with a mean age of 26.23) participated via opportunity sampling. Four questionnaires measuring gossiping and Facebook behaviours were completed and responses were analysed using Pearson's *r* correlational analysis and multiple regressions. To summarise the current study's findings, there were several positive, significant correlations found between Tendency to Gossip/Functions of Gossip and the Motives to Facebook Use, and significant predictors were identified. Most commonly, the voyeuristic uses of Facebook that seek information about others, such as Photographs, Social Investigation and the Newsfeed were highly correlated with offline gossiping behaviours. However, there were no significant correlations between time spent on Facebook and offline gossiping behaviours. These findings suggest there is a relationship between gossiping behaviours and Facebook use, highlighting a need for further directed research into these relationships.

<b>KEY WORDS:</b>	<b>GOSSIP</b>	<b>FACEBOOK</b>	<b>FUNCTIONS OF GOSSIP</b>	<b>TENDENCY TO GOSSIP</b>	<b>MOTIVES TO FACEBOOK USE</b>
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## Introduction

Gossip is an omnipresent phenomenon that dominates interpersonal interactions within the human social environment, accounting for almost 65% of conversation time (Dunbar, 2004). Within psychological research, the most prevalent definition states gossip is “the exchange of personal information (negative or positive) in an evaluative way (negative or positive) about absent third parties” (Foster, 2004:83). This suggests gossip can be attached to a positive or negative valence. Whilst discussing gossip, the current study will adhere to this definition of gossiping behaviour. Psychological research claims gossip is purposeful and important to social functioning (Beersma and Kleef, 2012). However, there is no denying that victims of gossip may take offence to the interpersonal interaction (Foster, 2004). Interestingly, the gossiper can also suffer in terms of self-criticism after gossiping, regardless of the valence (Cole and Scrivener, 2013). Society’s social construction of the behaviour often prevails on the social sanctions of gossip and ignores the positive functions of the behaviour (Foster, 2004).

Nevo et al. (1993) developed the ‘Tendency to Gossip Questionnaire’ (TGQ) to determine who has the tendency to gossip, based on a sample of college students. The TGQ concentrated on four components that determine tendencies to gossip: physical appearance, achievement, social information and sublimated gossip. Physical appearance refers to others’ appearances and achievements refers to the success and failings of others, in terms of employment and education. Social information refers to interesting details of others’ lives, such as personal problems and love affairs. Sublimated gossip refers to gossip in disguised, socially-acceptable forms. These subscales emerged from factor analysis but were regarded as tentative. Therefore, the TGQ is used as a whole scale, rather than subscales. Those who score highly on TGQ are those who tend to gossip more frequently. At the time, this research was a superb advance in understanding gossip as a psychological phenomenon. It is important to be mindful that the sample was a student population; therefore, findings may not be generalised to participants that do not fall into that demographic. The TGQ assists in understanding an individual’s tendency to gossip, however it lacks explanation of what purposes gossip serves.

Therefore, Foster (2004) developed the ‘Gossip Functions Questionnaire’ (GFQ), drawing attention to four main functions of gossip: ‘Information’, ‘Friendship’, ‘Influence’ and ‘Entertainment’. This allowed psychologists to further understand the functions that gossip can serve. ‘Information’ refers to gossiping to find out new information about others. Gossiping for ‘Friendship’ means individuals gossip to create and build upon relationships, through talking about others. Gossiping for ‘Influence’ means individuals gossip to help make judgments about others, or aspects of their own lives. Gossiping for ‘Entertainment’ refers to passing on information in order to provide entertainment to oneself or others. Scoring highly in any of these four functions allows for researchers to examine the most advantageous function of gossip for that particular individual. For example, scoring highly in ‘Entertainment’ and despairingly in ‘Friendship’ could suggest that a person gossips mainly for entertainment purposes rather than to improve friendships. Exploring the functions of gossip was a breakthrough for psychological research, as it allows researchers to explore motivations behind gossiping behaviour on an individual level. Materials that measure

gossiping behaviours such as GFQ and TGQ, could potentially benefit from a modernisation to utilise modern day concepts, as technological advances and social media outlets have introduced contemporary ways to communicate.

A surge in technology over the previous decade has revolutionised the way humans interact, particularly with the introduction of 'Facebook' pre-emanating social networking sites (Anderson et al., 2012). A reported 1.49 billion people use Facebook monthly and 65% report using Facebook daily (Hope, 2015) and 'Facebook Addiction' has become a recognised disorder (Kirwan-Taylor, 2012). This is pivotal, as a change in interpersonal interactions is almost certain to have implications on gossiping behaviours. It is important to research how, or if this behaviour translates onto online behaviours.

Since the creation of social networking sites (SNS), people are steadily investing more time using social networks, with Facebook being the most successful platform (Kaun and Stiernstedt, 2014). Around 52% of digital media time is being accessed using mobile devices (Baumgartner, 2014). It is important to consider modern day uses of Facebook whilst planning new research as uses of SNS evolve over time (Lampe et al., 2008). Recent studies have found 'social surveillance' to be a good predictor of time spent on SNS (Joinson, 2008) with one study finding 67% of participants engaging in forms of 'Facebook stalking behaviours' (Lyndon et al., 2011). Communicating and maintaining relationships continue to prevail in current SNS uses, with female users obtaining greater satisfaction from maintaining relationships, whilst male users found greater satisfaction from the entertainment uses of Facebook (Chan et al., 2015).

Spiliotopoulos and Oakley (2013) developed a comprehensive questionnaire that measures the Motives of Facebook Use (MFU). This was split into seven subscales: 'Social Connection', 'Shared Identities', 'Photographs', 'Content', 'Social Investigation', 'Social Network (SN) Surfing' and 'Newsfeed'. This allowed researchers to determine what features of Facebook motivates individuals to use the SNS. 'Social Connection' refers to reconnecting or viewing the activity of individuals previously lost contact with. 'Shared Identities' refers to communicating with likeminded people via groups and events. 'Photographs' refers to viewing, posting and virtually 'tagging' or selecting others in photographs. 'Content' refers to using applications, quizzes or games, and searching for specific individuals on Facebook. 'Social Investigation' refers to 'stalking' others or 'virtual people watching', via their profiles. 'SN Surfing' refers to viewing mutual friends, including others not known to the individual. 'Newsfeed' refers to news on a virtual timeline, using posts that others have personally written to appear on the newsfeed. This measure was derived from Joinson's (2008) research, taking a more updated version in order to meet contemporary uses and features of Facebook. The motives to using Facebook highlighted by the literature outlined are highly similar and appear to correspond with Foster's (2004) Gossip Functions.

However, despite the surge in technological advances, particularly within SNS and the methods used to communicate on these platforms, there has been little research conducted on how this relates to gossiping behaviours, and in particular, whether offline gossiping behaviours translates onto Facebook behaviours. Whilst conducting the literature review, it became apparent that many of the motives behind Facebook use were linked to the GFQ and TGQ components, giving rationale to explore these

concepts further to discover potential relationships. To explain in further detail, Facebook has enhanced communication in many different ways, by using online features and willingness of users to post details about their lives, that they may not necessarily say face-to-face. This is called the 'Disinhibition Effect' (Suler, 2004). The Disinhibition Effect may lead to more intimate, private details of people's lives being posted online, which in turn leads to more exciting gossip.

However, research has found 91% of participants use Facebook settings in attempt to control online privacy (Mathiyalakan et al., 2013). Individuals engage in 'impression management' to appear socially desirable (Gorbatov, 2007; Tracey, 2016) and to portray a particular image of oneself. This could be an attempt to stop others gossiping or discovering private details about oneself. This is linked to the 'Information' gossip function, as individuals gossip to seek information about others. Facebook enhanced 'social investigation' features in 2006 when the 'Newsfeed' was introduced, which allowed people to easily and quickly browse friends' statuses and activities (Lampe et al., 2008). This among many other features that Facebook regularly introduces can contribute to the ease of accessing other peoples' information. One of the most recent features include being able to hide an ex-partner's activity from the newsfeed (Titcomb, 2015). Previously, people may have 'unfriended' an ex-partner but this new feature will allow for 'social surveillance' without banishing that individual from their social network indefinitely.

The Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) may help explain why people constantly seek information about others. Social comparison is a psychological theory that significantly links gossiping behaviours and Facebook use. Social comparison is a process that surrounds thinking about an individual or individuals in relation to the self (Wood, 1996) and allows individuals to make sense of the world (Festinger, 1954). Research has found that unflattering social comparison is a common experience for Facebook users (Appel et al., 2016). However, self-affirmation, which is protecting the value of one's individual self, has also found to be an important value underlying Facebook use (Toma and Hancock, 2013). Within gossip research, knowledge of motivations behind social comparison can be used to understand the motivations of gossiping behaviour (Wert and Salovey, 2004). Commonalities between research within gossip, Facebook use and social comparison theory suggests there is a need to research whether or not there exists a link between gossip and motivations to Facebook use. Previous research within gossip has also expressed the links between gossip and understanding Facebook use, highlighting a need to research them synonymously (McAndrew, 2014). This provides rationale for the current study, as it aims to explore relationships between MFU and gossiping behaviours.

Therefore, the current study was designed to examine whether or not there are relationships between offline gossiping behaviours (TGQ and GFQ), and Facebook use (time spent on Facebook and MFU). Exploring correlations between Facebook behaviours and offline gossiping behaviours will allow for a more in depth understanding about how, or if individuals are gossiping online whilst using Facebook and the implications of such knowledge. Previous gossip research implications include learning how to better manage workplace gossip to ensure productivity (Ellwardt et al., 2012), ambience within group dynamics (Grosser et al., 2012) and within educational settings tackling bullying (Lind et al., 2007) and cyber-bullying (Cook, 2010). The introduction of Facebook is an additional platform embedded into current daily life in

which people can access an abundance of information about others. Gaining a deeper understanding about how this extra component is used by people in relation to gossiping may have implications within issues such as bullying, privacy control and other issues surrounding the spread of private information. It is pivotal to keep research surrounding these issues up to date within a changing society. As gossip and Facebook motives have not been previously researched synonymously, there is a need to enhance psychological knowledge.

## **Aims/Hypotheses**

The research question the current study aims to elucidate is: 'Do offline gossiping behaviours translate onto online Facebook motives and usage?' with a particular focus on relationships between Facebook usage and motivations, and offline functions and tendencies of gossip.

Based on previous findings from an extensive literature review, the hypothesis for the proposed study will expect to find a link between Facebook motives and gossip tendencies and functions.

*Hypothesis One:* There will be a relationship between time spent on Facebook and the scores on Tendency to Gossip and the Functions of Gossip scales.

*Hypothesis Two:* There will be a relationship between the Tendency to Gossip and the Motives to Facebook Use scales. The motives to Facebook use that are likely to be correlated with the TGQ will surround 'SN Surfing', 'Photographs', 'Social Investigation' and 'Newsfeed'.

*Hypothesis Three:* There will be a relationship between the offline Gossip Functions and the Motives to Facebook use. The motives to Facebook use that are likely to be correlated with offline Gossip Functions will surround 'SN Surfing', 'Photographs', 'Social Investigation' and 'Newsfeed'.

*Hypothesis Four:* There will be a relationship between offline Gossip Functions and Facebook Gossip Functions. This correlation will show whether or not there exists a link between the functions of gossiping offline with the functions of gossiping on Facebook.

These hypotheses were determined as they each measure a form of gossiping behaviour with a form of Facebook behaviour, allowing the research objectives to be explored. It is expected that the voyeuristic uses of Facebook, as mentioned above, will correlate most with gossiping behaviours, as these motives actively seek information about others. As the first stage of research, results can provide insight into further areas of study.

## **Method**

### **Design**

The current study used a correlational design to examine correlating variables between Facebook usage and gossiping behaviours. Correlational analysis was

appropriate as it is a statistical technique that can test relationships between variables, whilst determining the magnitude and significance of these relationships (Prematunga, 2012). The variables measured were: time reported on Facebook, scores in MFU, scores in GFQ, scores in F-GFQ and score on TGQ. As correlational analysis can only determine relationships between variables, multiple regression analysis may help further explore these relationships (Prematunga, 2012).

## Participants

The minimum number of participants required for the study to execute was 85. This was calculated using a Power of Pearson's  $r$  two-tailed product moment table (Clark-Carter, 2004), based on a power of 0.8 and a medium effect size estimate according to Cohen's  $r$  (Cohen, 1969). Power and effect size required estimation due to no other previous studies following the same procedures as the current study (Kirkby et al., 2011).

Initially, 187 participants signed up to complete the questionnaire and out of these responses, 155 participants fully completed the questionnaire, giving a 78% response rate. A further 6 participants were removed due to selecting 'prefer not to say' for the majority of the questionnaires. Therefore, a total of 149 responses were used for analysis, of which 22.1% were male (N=33) and 77.9% were female (N=116). The age of participants ranged between 18-60, with a mean age of 26.23, SD=9.72.

Participants were obtained using an opportunity sample. A large number of participants were recruited via 'Facebook' and the Participation Pool (Sona Systems, 2015). These participants were appropriate as they belong to the student population, whom are likely to be Facebook users, as they are 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001). However, if this was not the case, they were unable to take part in the study, due to the exclusion criteria (non-Facebook users, individuals under the age of sixteen and those who cannot give informed consent).

## Materials

The data was collected using online questionnaire creator and distributor 'Qualtrics' (2015). Participant demographics such as age and gender were recorded. Responses to the survey were measured using Likert scales (Likert, 1932). 'Qualtrics' was chosen, as online questionnaires increase response rates by five per-cent, in comparison to paper-based questionnaires (Johnson et al., 2014). The current study used four questionnaires, in which three were established questionnaires, contributing to higher reliability and validity of the measures. Before using established questionnaires, the authors' permission was requested and granted (Appendix A).

Original alpha scores have been replaced with the current results' alpha scores, within the descriptions to follow. Generally, a Cronbach's alpha value of .7 to .8 is acceptable (Field, 2013) in which the MFU and TGQ meet the standards. Some lower alpha scores are reported within the GFQ, such as GFQ: Friendship ( $\alpha=.65$ ), suggesting this subscale may be less reliable and is to be taken with caution. The F-GFQ also has some lower alpha scores, as reported below. However, it is argued that in the early stages of research, values above .5 will suffice (Nunnally, 1978). As the F-GFQ is newly modified and all alpha scores are above .5, reliability may be

considered sufficient. However, for the purpose of this research, the F-GFQ will be taken with caution.

### **Motives to Facebook Use Questionnaire (MFU)**

The Motives to Facebook Use Questionnaire (Spiliotopoulos and Oakley, 2013) (Appendix B) is a 24-item questionnaire measuring seven Facebook Motives: 'Social Connection' ( $\alpha=.82$ ), 'Shared Identities' ( $\alpha=.58$ ), 'Photographs' ( $\alpha=.86$ ), 'Content' ( $\alpha=.73$ ), 'Social Investigation' ( $\alpha=.72$ ), 'Social Network Surfing' ( $\alpha=.82$ ) and 'Newsfeed' ( $\alpha=.76$ ). These seven factors contribute to the motives behind Facebook usage. Items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 7 (very important). 'Content' scores could range from 5-35, 'Social Connection' and 'Photographs' could range from 4-28, 'Shared Identities' and 'SN Surfing' could range from 3-21, 'Social Investigation' and 'Newsfeed' could range from 2-14. 'Virtual people watching' was an example item from this questionnaire.

### **Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ)**

Foster's (2004) Gossip Functions Questionnaire (Appendix C) is a 24-item questionnaire with four subscales: 'Information' ( $\alpha=.72$ ), 'Friendship' ( $\alpha=.65$ ), 'Influence' ( $\alpha=.70$ ) and 'Entertainment' ( $\alpha=.71$ ). These four subscales measured participants' scores on the functions of gossip, using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scores on each subscale could range from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 42. Some items required reverse scoring: 'Information' items 2, 4 and 6, 'Friendship' item 6, 'Influence' item 5, 'Entertainment' items 1, 3, 4 and 6. 'I like to gossip at times' was an example item from this questionnaire.

### **Facebook Adaptation of 'Gossip Functions Questionnaire' (F-GFQ)**

A 24-item adaptation of the GFQ measuring Facebook Gossip Functions was also used (Appendix D). The F-GFQ required minimal alterations, in some cases adding 'on Facebook' to the end of statements was adequate. Some statements required more adapting than others. This measured the same previous four subscales, but modified these behaviours for Facebook gossiping functions: 'Information' ( $\alpha=.72$ ), 'Friendship' ( $\alpha=.55$ ), 'Influence' ( $\alpha=.62$ ) and 'Entertainment' ( $\alpha=.64$ ). These four subscales measured participants' scores on the F-GFQ, using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scores on each subscale could range from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 42. Items that required reverse scoring mirror Foster's (2004) GFQ. 'I like reading Facebook posts about other people, at times' was an example item from this questionnaire.

### **Tendency to Gossip Questionnaire (TGQ)**

Nevo et al.'s (1993) Tendency to Gossip Questionnaire (Appendix E) is a 19-item questionnaire ( $\alpha=.93$ ) which originally contained 20-items, however item-4 was removed by the authors (1993), due to low reliability score. TGQ measures four factors: physical appearance, achievement, social information and sublimated gossip. These four factors together, measure participants' tendency to gossip, using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always), with a minimum score of 19 and a



maximum score of 133. 'Tell friends interesting details of others' was an example item from this questionnaire.

## **Procedure**

Prior to the completion of the questionnaires, participants were invited to the study via an invitation post (Appendix F) on either the researcher's personal Facebook account or the MMU Participation Pool, with a hyperlink to the study website. The Participation Pool is a resource that MMU students access to gain 'participation points', which are used to recruit participants for future research, in a non-coercive way. The hyperlink directed participants to the information page (Appendix G), with detailed information regarding the procedures of the study, followed by an informed consent form (Appendix H) that participants electronically signed before participating. Participants were required to complete a demographic form (Appendix I) and then completed the four questionnaires in a randomised order, which took on average between 10-15 minutes. All questions had a 'prefer not to say' option should participants find a question sensitive. Before ending the study, participants read a debrief page (Appendix J) that required creation of an anonymous participant ID, should they have wished to withdraw after completion.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Whilst planning the current study, ethical issues were taken into consideration, in line with MMU's Ethical Guidelines. There was little risk to the researcher and participants, due to the online questionnaire based method. Data protection was ensured, as results were stored on a password protected computer. The current study was posted on 'Facebook' and therefore adhered to the BPS guidance on the Use of Social Media (BPS, 2012). Participants' data was anonymous and participants were able to withdraw using their individualised code by contacting the researcher via university email address. A 'forced answer' question seeking consent and participants' age was implemented to ensure each individual taking part could fully consent. Deception was not used as part of this study. All potential ethical issues were addressed in the Application for Ethics Approval Form (Appendix K).

## **Results**

### **Data Input and Preparation**

The questionnaire data was exported from 'Qualtrics' and inputted into IBM-SPSS (IBM Corp, 2015) using an interval scale. The data was prepared for analysis by recoding 'prefer not to say' responses into missing variables. Reverse coding was implemented for relevant questions within GFQ and F-GFQ scales, as instructed by the author. Reliability analysis (Appendix L) using Cronbach's alpha was conducted, with values reported within the 'Materials' section. The data was reduced and transformed into correct subscales using mean totals. Parametric assumptions were tested before analysis commenced.

## Tests of Normality

Initially, tests of normality were executed. Skewness and kurtosis values checked for all scales and subscales. Skewness and Kurtosis values were considered normal, according to Rose et al. (2014), as most values did not deviate beyond the  $\pm 1.96$  threshold for normality. The F-GFQ: 'Information' subscale must be treated with caution as skewness value was outside of  $\pm 1.96$ . See Appendix M for SPSS normality test outputs.

## Tests of Linearity

Further tests of normality were performed in terms of testing for linearity (Appendix N). Most correlations did not test significantly on 'deviation from linearity' values, with exception to MFU 'Social Connection' and GFQ 'Entertainment' ( $p=.043$ ), MFU 'Social Investigation' and GFQ: 'Entertainment' ( $p=.003$ ), F-GFQ 'Information' and GFQ 'Influence' ( $p=.012$ ). Scatter plots were generated for deviating correlations (Appendix O) and upon visual inspection, box plots appeared approximately normally distributed. However, it is best practice to treat these correlations with caution.

## Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics (Appendix P) were generated using mean totals for each scale and subscale. This is to further explore scores within gossiping and Facebook behaviours, to determine whether the scores lie within the higher or lower end of the scale.

Table 1:

*Means and Standard Deviations of Scores Obtained on Each Scale and Subscale, including Hours Spent on Facebook<sup>1</sup>*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Hours Spent on Facebook</b>	3.18	2.52
<b>MFU: Social Connection</b>	16.33	3.80
<b>MFU: Shared Identities</b>	9.11	3.13
<b>MFU: Photographs</b>	14.56	4.37
<b>MFU: Content</b>	9.97	4.75
<b>MFU: Social Investigation</b>	4.75	2.57
<b>MFU: Social Network Surfing</b>	6.32	3.38
<b>MFU: Newsfeed</b>	6.69	2.11

<sup>1</sup> All tables are in line with APA formatting guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2010)

<b>GFQ: Information</b>	22.51	5.54
<b>GFQ: Friendship</b>	23.13	5.17
<b>GFQ: Influence</b>	19.54	5.28
<b>GFQ: Entertainment</b>	20.24	5.68
<b>F-GFQ: Information</b>	20.97	5.71
<b>F-GFQ: Friendship</b>	21.89	5.47
<b>F-GFQ: Influence</b>	18.13	4.68
<b>F-GFQ: Entertainment</b>	21.75	5.12
<b>Tendency to Gossip</b>	67.20	22.10

*N=145 (minimum)*

Table 1 shows the mean totals for each subscale including the hours spent on Facebook. On average, participants self-reported spending 3.18 hours on Facebook per day, which is quite a substantial amount of time. The MFU yields interesting results within the more voyeuristic uses of Facebook, such as Social Investigation and SN Surfing, as they show lower averages. Comparing averages for the GFQ and F-GFQ, participants are gossiping slightly more in person than they are on Facebook based on total average scores. The TGQ demonstrates a fairly average score.

### **Pearson's Correlation Coefficient**

Pearson's two-tailed correlation coefficients of each of the specified combination of variables were performed, to initially establish potential linear relationships between each of the combinations and whether they were positively related, negatively related or non-related (Field, 2013). Pearson's *r* correlational analysis works with continuous variables and measures linear association, as opposed to Spearman's correlation coefficient, which measures monotonic relationships between variables and variables on an ordinal scale (Puth et al., 2014), making Pearson's *r* correlational analysis more appropriate for the current study. There were a number of significant correlations determined. Correlation strengths are labelled as weak, moderate and strong, with values  $\geq .50$  being considered as strong (Cohen, 1992; Cohen, 1969). Due to the high volume of correlations within the analysis, explanations have been grouped in terms of strength and significance. SPSS outputs and matrixes for all correlations can be found in Appendix Q.

### **Hypothesis One: Hours Spent on Facebook, Tendency to Gossip and Gossip Functions**

There was no significant correlation between Hours Spent on Facebook and the Tendency to Gossip ( $r(143) = -.001$ ;  $p = .99$ ). There were also no significant correlations between Hours Spent on Facebook and Offline Gossip Functions (Appendix Q) as all *r* values  $< .20$ , all *p* values  $> .05$ .

Therefore, it can be concluded that Hypothesis One is rejected: hours spent on Facebook has no significant relationship with individuals' tendency to gossip or any of the four offline gossip functions.

### **Hypothesis Two: Tendency to Gossip and Motives to Facebook Use**

TGQ demonstrated a significant strong positive correlation with MFU: 'SN Surfing'.

There were moderate significant positive correlations observed between TGQ and MFU: 'Photographs', 'Social Investigation' and 'Newsfeed'.

There were some weaker significant positive correlations between TGQ and MFU: 'Social Connection' and 'Content'.

There was no significant correlation observed between TGQ and MFU: 'Shared Identities'.

Coefficients for all relationships can be observed in Table 2.

Table 2:

*Pearson's Correlation Coefficients between Tendency to Gossip and Motives to Facebook Use*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>MFU: Social Connection</b>	<b>MFU: Shared Identities</b>	<b>MFU: Photographs</b>	<b>MFU: Content</b>	<b>MFU: Social Investigation</b>	<b>MFU: Social Network Surfing</b>	<b>MFU: The Newsfeed</b>
<b>Tendency to Gossip</b>	<b>.27**</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>.46**</b>	<b>.20*</b>	<b>.49**</b>	<b>.53**</b>	<b>.39**</b>

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$  (2-tailed) N=145 (minimum)

Table 2 shows Pearson's correlation coefficients between TGQ and MFU scores. Hypothesis Two can be accepted as significant relationships were found between the variables, with the exception of 'Shared Identities', which demonstrated a non-significant relationship.

### **Hypothesis Three: Offline Gossip Functions and Motives to Facebook Use Correlational Analysis**

There were some significant correlations observed between GFQ and MFU.

There were strong, significant positive correlations found between Gossip Functions: Friendship/Entertainment and MFU: 'Photographs', 'Social Investigation', 'SN Surfing'. There was also a strong, significant positive correlation found between Gossip Function: 'Entertainment' and MFU: 'Newsfeed'.

There were moderate, significant positive correlations found between Gossip Functions: Information/Friendship/Influence and MFU: 'Photographs', 'Social Investigation', 'SN Surfing' and 'Newsfeed'.

There were weak, significant positive correlations found between all four Gossip Functions and MFU: 'Social Connection'. There were also weak, significant positive correlations found between GFQ: Information/Influence/Entertainment and MFU: 'Content'. There were also weak, significant positive correlations found between Gossip Functions: Friendship/Entertainment and MFU: 'Shared Identities'.

There were non-significant relationships found between Gossip Functions: Information/Influence and MFU: 'Shared Identities'. There was also a non-significant relationship found between Gossip Function: 'Friendship' and MFU: 'Content'.

Coefficients for all relationships can be observed in Table 3.

Table 3:

*Pearson's Correlation Coefficients between Offline Gossip Functions and Motives to Facebook Use*

Variable	MFU: Social Connection	MFU: Shared Identities	MFU: Photographs	MFU: Content	MFU: Social Investigation	MFU: Social Networ k Surfing	MFU: The Newsfee d
GFQ: Information	.26**	.12	.39**	.24**	.48**	.47**	.46**
GFQ: Friendship	.23**	.19*	.52**	.15	.54**	.56**	.45**
GFQ: Influence	.25**	.13	.43**	.18*	.43**	.45**	.38**
GFQ: Entertain- ment	.26**	.17*	.50**	.26**	.56**	.54**	.52**

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$  (2-tailed)  $N=145$  (minimum)

Table 3 shows Pearson's correlation coefficients between GFQ and MFU scores. Hypothesis Three can be partially accepted as a significant relationship was found between the majority variables with the exception of a few combinations, as outlined above.

#### **Hypothesis Four: Offline Gossip Functions and Facebook Gossip Functions Correlational Analysis**

A significant relationship was observed between GFQ and F-GFQ.

Significant, strong positive correlations were observed between GFQ: 'Information' and F-GFQ: 'Information' and 'Entertainment'.

Significant, strong positive correlations were observed between GFQ: 'Friendship' and all four Facebook Gossip Functions.

Significant, strong positive correlations were observed between GFQ: 'Influence' and all four Facebook Gossip Functions.

Significant, strong positive correlations were observed between GFQ: 'Entertainment' and all four Facebook Gossip Functions.

Significant, moderate positive correlations were observed between GFQ: 'Information' and F-GFQ: 'Friendship' and 'Influence'.

Coefficients for all relationships can be observed in Table 4.

Table 4:

*Pearson's Correlation Coefficients between Offline Gossip Functions and Facebook Gossip Functions*

Variable	F-GFQ: Information	F-GFQ: Friendship	F-GFQ: Influence	F-GFQ: Entertainment
GFQ: Information	.71**	.46**	.46**	.62**
GFQ: Friendship	.57**	.68**	.57**	.65**
GFQ: Influence	.52**	.58**	.71**	.52**
GFQ: Entertainment	.55**	.57**	.50**	.66**

\*\* $p < .01$  (2-tailed)  $N=145$  (minimum)

Table 4 shows Pearson's correlation coefficients between GFQ and F-GFQ. Hypothesis Four can be accepted as there is significant relationships between all GFQ and F-GFQ variables.

### Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was then performed using the significant correlations outlined above, to determine to what extent the MFU predicted offline gossiping behaviours (TGQ and GFQ). In the absence of prior research, multiple regression and correlations are used together in an exploratory fashion to identify best predictors of an outcome variable (Cohen et al., 2013). SPSS outputs for all regressions can be found in Appendix R.

## Collinearity Assumptions

The standard method of multiple regression analysis was used based on collinearity assumptions. All of the data had tolerance levels greater than 0.2 (Menard, 1995) and VIF less than 10 (Myers, 1990) meaning the data met collinearity assumptions.

## Multiple Regression One: Tendency to Gossip and Motives to Facebook Use

A multiple regression analysis was performed using significant correlations to determine which MFU best predicted tendency to gossip. MFU were entered as predictors of TGQ.

Using the standard method, a significant model emerged  $F(6,134)=11.45$ ,  $p<.001$ . The relationship between the variables was strong ( $r=.58$ ) and the model could explain 31% (adjusted  $R^2$  value of .31) variance in 'TGQ' score.

Out of the variables, 'SN Surfing' was the strongest predictor of 'TGQ' ( $t(135)=2.97$ ,  $p=.003$ : 95% CI 0.77–3.85), followed by 'Photographs' ( $t(135)=2.24$ ,  $p=.027$ : 95% CI 0.13–2.07).

Table 5:  
*Contributions of each Predictor Variable in Account for the Variance in TGQ Scores*

Variable	B	SE B (std. Error)	t	$\beta$ (beta score)	Sig. (p)
Constant	31.01				
MFU: Social Connection	.22	.47	.48	.04	.634
MFU: Photographs	1.10	.49	2.24	.22	<b>.027*</b>
MFU: Content	-.22	.37	-.58	-.05	.563
MFU: Social Investigation	.86	.95	.91	.10	.366
MFU: SNS Surfing	2.31	.78	2.97	.36	<b>.003**</b>
MFU: The Newsfeed	-.02	1.07	-.02	-.00	.988

Note:  $R^2 = 0.34$   
Adj.  $R^2 = 0.31$

\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$ ; N=142

Table 5 shows that 'SN Surfing' was the strongest predictor of TGQ, closely followed by 'Photographs'. This suggests that individuals who have a higher tendency to gossip

use Facebook for voyeuristic purposes, such as viewing others' photos and SN surfing.

### Multiple Regression Two: Offline Gossip Functions: Information and Motives to Facebook Use

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine which MFU best predicted Gossip Function 'Information', from the significant correlations determined above. Significant MFU were entered as predictors of GFQ: 'Information'.

A significant model emerged  $F(6,136)=10.05$ ,  $p<.001$ . The relationship between the variables was strong ( $r=.55$ ) and the model could explain 28% (adjusted  $R^2$  value of .28) variance in 'GFQ: Information' score.

Table 6:

*Contributions of each Predictor Variable in Account for the Variance in Offline Gossip Functions: Information Scores*

Variable	B	SE B (std. Error)	t	$\beta$ (beta score)	Sig. (p)
Constant	13.77				
MFU: Social Connection	.03	.12	.25	.02	.802
MFU: Photographs	.03	.13	.22	.02	.829
MFU: Social Investigation	.54	.24	2.22	.25	<b>.028*</b>
MFU: Social Network Surfing	.22	.19	1.12	.14	.267
MFU: Newsfeed	.50	.27	1.85	.20	.067
MFU: Content	.07	.10	.63	.05	.531
Note: $R^2 = .31$ Adj. $R^2 = .28$					
* $p < .05$ <span style="float: right;">N=143</span>					

Table 6 shows that 'Social Investigation' was the strongest predictor of GFQ: 'Information'. This suggests that individuals who use Facebook for 'Social Investigation' are also gossiping offline to seek information.

### Multiple Regression Three: Offline Gossip Functions: Friendship and Motives to Facebook Use

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine which MFU best predicted Gossip Function: 'Friendship'. MFU were entered as predictors of GFQ: 'Friendship'.



A significant model emerged  $F(6,136)=16.14$ ,  $p<.001$ . The relationship between the variables was strong ( $r=.64$ ) and the model could explain 39% (adjusted  $R^2$  value of .39) variance in GFQ: 'Friendship' score.

Table 7:

*Contributions of each Predictor Variable in Account for the Variance in Offline Gossip Functions: Friendship Scores*

Variable	B	SE B (std. Error)	t	$\beta$ (beta score)	Sig. (p)
<b>Constant</b>	14.81				
<b>MFU: Social Connection</b>	-.01	.10	-.10	-.01	.919
<b>MFU: Shared Identities</b>	-.26	.13	-2.01	-.17	.047
<b>MFU: Photographs</b>	.36	.11	3.21	.31	<b>.002**</b>
<b>MFU: Social Investigation</b>	.25	.20	1.25	.13	.212
<b>MFU: Social Network Surfing</b>	.46	.16	2.92	.31	<b>.004**</b>
<b>MFU: Newsfeed</b>	.24	.23	1.02	.10	.311

Note:  $R^2 = .64$   
Adj.  $R^2 = .39$

\*\* $p<.01$ ; N=144

Table 7 shows that 'Photographs' was the strongest predictor of GFQ: 'Friendship', closely followed by 'SN Surfing'. This suggests that individuals who use Facebook for 'Photographs' and 'SN Surfing' are gossiping offline for 'Friendship' functions.

#### **Multiple Regression Four: Offline Gossip Functions: Influence and Motives to Facebook Use**

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine which MFU best predicted Gossip Function: 'Influence'. MFU were entered as predictors of GFQ: 'Influence'.

A significant model emerged  $F(6,134)=8.01$ ,  $p<.001$ . The relationship between the variables was moderate ( $r=.51$ ) and the model could explain 23% (adjusted  $R^2$  value of .23) variance in GFQ: 'Influence' score.

Table 8:

*Contributions of Each Predictor Variable in Account for the Variance in Offline Gossip Functions: Influence Scores*

Variable	B	SE B (std. Error)	t	$\beta$ (beta score)	Sig. (p)
Constant	11.65				
MFU: Social Connection	.03	.12	.26	.02	.795
MFU: Photographs	.25	.13	2.02	.21	<b>.045*</b>
MFU: Content	-.02	.10	-.22	-.02	.825
MFU: Social Investigation	.28	.25	1.11	.13	.270
MFU: Social Network Surfing	.36	.20	1.80	.24	.075
MFU: Newsfeed	.03	.27	.12	.01	.909

Note:  $R^2 = .26$   
Adj.  $R^2 = .23$

\* $p < .05$        $N = 142$

Table 8 shows that 'Photographs' was the strongest predictor of GFQ: 'Influence'. This suggests that individuals who use Facebook for 'Photographs' are gossiping offline for 'Influence' functions.

#### Multiple Regression Five: Offline Gossip Functions: Entertainment and Motives to Facebook Use

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine which MFU best predicted Gossip Function: 'Entertainment'. MFU were entered as predictors of GFQ: 'Entertainment'.

A significant model emerged  $F(7, 137) = 16.48$ ,  $p < .001$ . The relationship between the variables was strong ( $r = .68$ ) and the model could explain 43% (adjusted  $R^2$  value of .43) variance in GFQ: 'Entertainment' score.

Table 9

*Contributions of Each Predictor Variable in Account for the Variance in Offline Gossip Functions: Entertainment Scores*

Variable	B	SE B (std. Error)	t	$\beta$ (beta score)	Sig. (p)
Constant	10.14				
MFU: Social Connection	.00	.11	.04	.00	.972

<b>MFU: Shared Identities</b>	-.40	.14	-2.78	-.22	<b>.006**</b>
<b>MFU: Photographs</b>	.30	.12	2.56	.24	<b>.012*</b>
<b>MFU: Content</b>	.11	.90	1.26	.09	.209
<b>MFU: Social Investigation</b>	.58	.22	2.59	.26	<b>.011*</b>
<b>MFU: Social Network Surfing</b>	.28	.18	1.55	.17	.125
<b>MFU: Newsfeed</b>	.53	.25	2.11	.20	<b>.037*</b>

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**Note:**  $R^2 = .46$

Adj.  $R^2 = .43$

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\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ;  $N = 145$

Table 9 shows that 'Shared Identities' was the strongest predictor of the GFQ: 'Entertainment', closely followed by MFU: 'Social Investigation', 'Photographs' and 'Newsfeed'. This suggests that individuals who use Facebook for 'Shared Identities', 'Social Investigation', 'Photographs' and 'Newsfeed' are gossiping offline for 'Entertainment' purposes.

## Discussion

### Hypothesis One

There was no significant correlation found between time spent on Facebook and the tendency to gossip or the functions of gossip, which was not predicted. This concludes that the time an individual spends on Facebook is not related to offline gossiping behaviour. The lack of research surrounding gossip and time spent on Facebook means there is little previous research to relate this finding to. However, most contemporary research has found time and intensity of Facebook use is related to an individuals' Time Perspective, with Past Negative being a predictor (Przepiorka and Blachnio, 2016). Due to the many different uses of Facebook, research is still widely being conducted within this area, as 'Facebook Addiction' is a recognised disorder (Kirwan-Taylor, 2012). Therefore, these findings may suggest that individuals who score highly in TGQ or GFQ may be at no more at risk of becoming 'addicted' to Facebook.

### Hypothesis Two

As predicted, there were significant relationships between the Tendency to Gossip and MFU, with the exception of 'Shared Identities'. The stronger correlations surrounded the voyeuristic uses of Facebook, which included 'SN Surfing', 'Social investigation', 'Photographs' and the 'Newsfeed'. The strongest predictors of TGQ were 'SN Surfing' and 'Photographs'. This means individuals who tend to gossip more frequently are using Facebook for voyeuristic motives, such as investigating what

others are doing and viewing photographs of others. Although previous research has not explored these two constructs together at present, there is support for previous findings surrounding voyeuristic uses of Facebook and social comparison (Lyndon et al., 2011; Joinson, 2008; Appel et al., 2016).

Gossip research states the importance of understanding competitive gossip in order to underpin use of Facebook (McAndrew, 2014). However, the current findings can contribute to this, as the tendency to gossip can help further understand uses of Facebook, with a particular focus on voyeuristic uses. In theoretical terms, the findings can be explained by social comparison theory, as individuals who tend to gossip offline seem to be using features of Facebook that allows them to seek information about others online. Future research may draw upon gossip, TGQ and MFU in terms of social comparison to explore further relationships.

### **Hypothesis Three**

As predicted, there were significant relationships between FGQ and MFU. However, there were also some non-significant relationships found between the Facebook Motive: 'Shared Identities' and Gossip Functions: Information/Influence and also between MFU: 'Content' with the Gossip Function: 'Friendship'. The strongest correlations and best predictors of each gossip function was generally the voyeuristic uses of Facebook, such as 'Photographs', 'Newsfeed', 'Social Investigation' and 'SN Surfing'. These findings consolidate that people who are gossiping for information, friendship, influence and entertainment functions are using Facebook to explore details of others' lives by viewing photos, viewing mutual friends and viewing activities.

These findings can be explained by the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), as individuals are using Facebook in a voyeuristic way to find out information about others, which can then be used for social comparison and self-affirmation (Toma and Hancock, 2013). This is particularly present within the GFQ 'Information' which was best predicted by the Facebook motive 'Social Investigation'. This supports previous findings (Wert and Salovey, 2004; Joinson, 2008) that suggest individuals use Facebook as a tool to find out interesting information about others. The 'Disinhibition Effect' (Suler, 2004) can theoretically explain why Facebook may be a better tool for obtaining gossip, as the platform contains information that may not have been known from an interpersonal interaction.

It was also found that Facebook use and gossip can both serve purposes in terms of building relationships (Chan et al., 2015; Foster, 2004). The current findings support the link as friendship as a gossip function was linked to both the voyeuristic Facebook uses but also 'Social Connection', although this was a weaker correlation. Interestingly, 'Shared Identities' was the strongest predictor of GFQ 'Entertainment', which was not expected. Further research into the Gossip Functions and Facebook usage in a more direct way, concentrating solely on each function could help provide further explanation into why each Facebook motive is important to a particular function of gossip. As 'Photographs' was the most common predictor for Gossip Functions, future research may explore photograph-based social media, such as 'Instagram' to explore gossiping behaviours with photographs in a more directive and focused way.

## **Hypothesis Four**

As predicted, there were strong significant positive relationships between GFQ and F-GFQ. This means that individuals who gossip offline for a particular purpose are also translating this behaviour onto online Facebook gossiping behaviours. This was expected, as individuals' functions of gossip was predicted to remain stable whether gossiping online or offline. The purpose of this correlation was to provide an additional reliability check, due to the F-GFQ being an adaptation of the GFQ and after subscales of F-GFQ yielded lower alpha scores.

As some of the F-GFQ subscales needed to be taken with caution due to lower alpha scores, it would be beneficial for future research to improve and adapt the scale in order to create a reliable and valid measure of Facebook Gossip Functions. Furthermore, due to the lack of research relating Facebook gossip and offline gossip, these findings can conclude that there is a relationship between offline gossip functions and Facebook gossip functions, which in turn may contribute to rationale for future research.

## **Limitations**

The design of the study was credible in many ways, with particular strengths lying within the use of the online questionnaire, which allowed for randomisation of scales and forced-answer questions, which would not have been possible in paper-based questionnaires (Brace, 2008). However, in addition to the suggestions posed, there are a number of issues that could be addressed in future research. Firstly, there are some limitations involved with the use of a questionnaire design, such as 'socially desired responding' in which individuals give answers based on what is socially desirable. This concept is linked with impression management (Tracey, 2016), which in turn is also linked with Facebook (Buehler, 2015; Krämer and Winter, 2008) and gossip (Gorbatov, 2007). This could mean that vital responses may have been dampened, or modified to portray social desirability.

It is important to consider that features of Facebook constantly change (Lampe et al., 2008). Consequently, the MFU may be slightly outdated as Facebook will have updated since 2013, when the measure was produced. Despite this, alpha scores were satisfactory for MFU subscales. As mentioned, there was concern with both F-GFQ and MFU: 'Shared Identities' reliability. This suggests both the adapted and original GFQ may need some improvements in order to measure current gossip functions more reliably. There were also some minor concerns as three of the correlations deviated from linearity, all in which involved variables from the GFQ subscales, suggesting results involving GFQ variables ('Entertainment' and 'Influence') should be taken with caution.

It must also be considered that the majority of the sample were females. Although some males participated, result generalisability must be taken with caution with regards to gender. This is particularly important as there are gender differences amongst gossiping behaviour (McAndrew, 2014) and Facebook use (Chan et al., 2015). Thus, future research may separate genders to infer gender differences within this area of study.

## Implications

The current findings can help further understand the uses of Facebook on gossiping behaviour in terms of managing workplace gossip (Ellwardt et al., 2012), school-based gossip (Lind et al., 2007), group dynamics (Grosser et al., 2012) and gossiping for competitive reasons (McAndrew, 2014), by providing further understanding into the voyeuristic features of Facebook and the impacts of using Facebook voyeuristically to seek gossip.

As the main findings conclude that Facebook's voyeuristic uses are highly correlated with gossiping behaviours, this could have further implications for research surrounding 'cyberstalking'. This may provide a different perspective into who are cyberstalking others and why, as currently online gossip is highly scrutinised due to its links with cyberbullying (Cook, 2010). Potential alternative explanations could surround self-affirmation and social comparison justifications.

## Conclusion

The current study provided an enlightening insight into the linear relationships between offline gossiping behaviours, such as tendency to gossip and functions of gossip, and the motivations of Facebook use. It was also concluded that there is no relationship between time spent on Facebook and gossiping behaviours. As the current study was largely exploratory, findings can provide rationale into further study of the relationships found between gossip and Facebook behaviours, possibly using qualitative methods to identify vital themes. This will also include researching directly and specifically in attempt to determine causation of these relationships. Further empirical research will allow the relationships between gossip and Facebook behaviours to be discussed further, as currently available research relies largely upon a theoretical basis whilst discussing gossip and Facebook behaviours synonymously.

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