

Beyond the “Like”: How People Respond to Negative Posts on Facebook

Spottswood, E., & Wohn, D. Y. (in press). Beyond the “Like”: How people respond to negative posts on Facebook. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*

Abstract

New social network site (SNS) features afford users the ability to navigate potentially sensitive situations in ways they could not before. This study surveyed Facebook users ($N = 260$) to uncover how people are using the site’s new “reaction” buttons to respond to others’ posts about negative topics such as traumatic life situations, catastrophic current or past events, and interpersonal crises. Results suggest that users do not perceive the reaction buttons as adequate tools to help them check-in with the people they have close relationships with. Instead, these new PDAs seem to help users engage in social grooming.

Keywords: Social Network Sites; paralinguistic digital affordances; emotes; reactions

Beyond the Like

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Today, millions of people use social network sites (SNSs) to openly disclose or post about traumatic and/or upsetting events, situations, and feelings. This phenomenon places users of these technologies in a bit of an interpersonal pickle: how to respond to those negative posts when they are posted by people they are not particularly close to. Traditionally, in face-to-face (FtF) interactions, negative disclosures typically occur between people in close relationships, where the receiver would know the sender well enough to know how to respond (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). However, SNSs make it possible for people to see negative disclosures in the form of public posts from people they are not as close to. The inclination is to respond in some way in order to preserve or maintain the relationship (a.k.a., “social grooming”, Donath, 2007; Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014), but a lack of closeness or familiarity with the poster may make it difficult to determine how to respond.

Research has shown that people sometimes take advantage of paralinguistic digital affordances (PDAs) to respond to others’ posts (Carr, Wohn, & Hayes, 2016). PDAs are “cues in social media that facilitate communication and interaction without specific language associated with their messages” (Hayes, Carr, & Wohn, 2016, pp. 172-173). Sometimes, responding to a post by using a PDA is seen as a signal of social support (Wohn, Carr, & Hayes, 2016), but not always (Hayes et al., 2016). Moreover, as SNSs add new PDAs to their sets of features, research needs to continue to examine when, why, and how PDAs are being used to respond to others’ posts. In 2016, Facebook added five new single-click response features called “Reactions” that afford users the ability to express their emotional response to content they come across on the site without using words or text. These include a heart symbol icon and four icons of facial expressions that include a laughing face (“haha”), a surprised face (“wow”), a sad

Beyond the Like

face (“sad”), and an angry face (“angry”).¹ This study set out to uncover how users are incorporating these new features into their responses on Facebook, especially when people come across posts that contain a negative disclosure.

Literature Review

Negative Disclosures via FTF and SNSs

This study characterizes a negative topic disclosure as a disclosure about an emotionally upsetting experience and includes topics such as traumatic life situations (e.g., loss of a loved one, serious mental or physical illness), catastrophic current or past events (e.g., school shootings, political upheaval), and interpersonal crises (e.g., divorce, family fights). Typically, people disclose about negative topics to people they have close relationships with in order to obtain comfort or support (Greene, Derlega, & Matthews, 2006). In addition, it is considered inappropriate for people in less close relationships to make negative disclosures to each other (Petronio, 2012). This is consistent with research on the nature of strong versus weak ties, where strong tie is a term used to indicate the tie or relationship between two people is strong or close (Putnam, 2000). These lines of research when considered together potentially suggest: 1) people typically disclose about negative topics to strong ties and 2) people may be less sure how to respond if and when they encounter a negative topic disclosure from a weak tie.

Research about negative topic disclosures has been extended to SNSs. For example, recent studies have found that users sometimes publicly disclose or post about their struggles with depression (e.g., Bazarova, Choi, Whitlock, Cosley, & Sosik, 2017), illness (Gage-Bouchard, LaValley, Millica, Beaupin, 2017), relationship dissolution (Haimson, Andalibi, De Choudhury, & Hayes, 2018), and death (Marwick & Ellison, 2012). Given that users sometimes post about negative topics, they are likely to see

¹ These are also the terms Facebook uses to describe their reactions or PDAs on their brand resource center page.

Beyond the Like

other users' negative topic posts on the site as well. It is this latter group of users that this study is interested in.

Social Grooming on SNSs

One might assume that seeing a negative topic post from a weak tie does not necessitate the need to respond; however, users of SNSs tend to see these platforms as a way to maintain a large and diverse network of both strong and weak ties (Ellison & Vitak, 2015). As a result, they may feel the need to respond to their weak ties' posts, a phenomenon known as social grooming. According to Donath (2007), social grooming takes place when a person attempts to signal to another person that they are thinking of them, likes them, trusts them, or considers them to be important. Ellison and colleagues (2014) believe that people use SNSs to engage in social grooming behaviors such as posting on each other's profiles as well as "Liking" or using PDAs to respond to each other's posts. The use of PDAs in particular seem to be a very efficient way for weak ties to engage in social grooming; on Facebook, the "Like" PDA has been shown to signal to the receiver that they are being thought about and cared for (Carr et al., 2016). But different people have different interpretations about what Facebook "Likes" actually signal (Hayes et al., 2016; Scissors, Burke, & Wengrovitz, 2016).

The ambiguity of the "Like" PDA can leave people unsure if it is appropriate to use them to respond to a negative topic post from a weak tie. However, composing and leaving a comment is not necessarily a better response option. Responding to a negative post can be challenging, especially when the responder does not know the discloser well. That may be why Facebook users sometimes feel stressed or burdened by seeing and feeling the need to respond to negative topic posts from other users on the site (Maier, Laumer, Eckhardt, & Weitzel, 2014). This suggests that SNS users might want low-effort response options that they feel express their emotional reaction to a post. Since Maier et al.'s (2014) study, Facebook has rolled out new features that afford users the ability to express their emotions in response to others' posts with a single click.

Beyond the Like **Responding with Paralinguistic Digital Affordances**

Facebook has many communication features that afford users the ability to respond to content they see on the site with more or less effort and emotional expressivity. Until early 2016, Facebook's "Like" PDA, which is represented by a thumbs-up icon, was the only PDA available to users on the site. As discussed above, what a "Like" is supposed to mean or signal varies according to the situation, the poster, and the responder. Given the "Like's" many potential meanings, users may want to use other efficient but nuanced PDAs to respond to their weak tie's posts. Facebook is one SNS that seems to have addressed that need with their inclusion of more emotionally expressive PDAs.

The heart, or "Love" icon as Facebook refers to this icon on its site, looks similar to other SNSs that also have this response feature (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest) although not all SNSs interpret the heart as "Love" (e.g., On Twitter, a heart indicates that one "likes" the post). It is possible Facebook users perceive the "Love" as more indicative of affection than the "Like" button on the site. As a result, people may feel that the "Love" button does a slightly better job at expressing how they feel for a weak-tie when the latter posts about a negative topic on Facebook (i.e., that the responder cares for the poster, is sending them positivity, etc.).

The other four PDAs are icons of facial expressions that tend to be associated with certain human emotions, potentially making it easier for receivers to interpret their meaning. For example, the sad face emote contains upward slanting eyebrows, open eyes, a frown, and a single tear which are all symbolic of sadness. Alongside the sad face emote is a laughing face emote, a surprised or shocked face emote, and an angry face emote. In addition to these new PDAs as being more emotionally expressive, they require slightly more physical effort to use as well (i.e., you have to hover over the "Like" button in order to see, access, and then click on the "Love" or emote buttons). As such, while requiring less effort than other response options such as commenting or private messaging, they require slightly more effort than just clicking on the "Like" button. And yet, though they require slightly more consideration and

Beyond the Like

execution, they are still a low-effort way to express one's emotional reaction to a post. People may see these emotes as useful response options that can help them respond to a weak tie's negative topic post in a way that signals how they feel for the poster and/or the situation (e.g., sad) without requiring the effort of composing and leaving a comment and/or risk committing an interpersonal faux pas. Thus, the "Like" button could be perceived as the vaguest type of PDA on Facebook, the "Love" PDA as a slightly more emotionally expressive but still relatively vague type of PDA on Facebook, and the emotes as the most emotionally expressive type of PDA on Facebook.

Other Response Behaviors

PDAs, of course, are not the only way users can respond to others' posts on Facebook. Below each Facebook post is a comment box where users can write out a response that is shared with a group of unknown others on the site, since the poster, not the commenter, decides on the privacy settings. Commenting takes more effort and allows for more emotional expressivity-- they allow users to craft a verbal response indicating how they feel about the post as well as their concern for the poster (Burke & Kraut, 2016). Users can also send their verbal response via private message if they prefer their response to be less visible. It is also possible that users may reach out to the poster outside of Facebook. Given that Facebook users sometimes post about negative topics on Facebook, and now Facebook affords users the ability to respond to those posts with varying degrees of effort and emotional expressivity, this study wanted to explore what influences the different ways people respond to negative posts they see on Facebook? Moreover, given the newness, distinctiveness, and lack of research examining the emotes, this study set out to explore a few key relational and individual factors that may affect different response behaviors on and off Facebook.

Relational & Individual Factors

Closeness. As discussed above, tie strength or relational closeness may be a factor that partially explains when and why people respond to others' negative topic posts on and outside of Facebook.

Beyond the Like

People in close relationships tend to take the effort to be there for each other in times of need whether the interaction occurs face-to-face (Argyle & Henderson, 1984) or via SNSs (Vitak, 2014). Since the majority of a user's Facebook network tends to be comprised of weak ties (Ellison & Vitak, 2015), coupled with the inclination to maintain and nurture weak ties, people may perceive the new PDAs as useful response options to help them signal to their weak ties their emotional reactions to the latter's negative topic posts on Facebook. On the other hand, people may be more inclined to use more effortful forms of responding when they see a negative topic post from a strong tie to ensure the poster is ok and to signal they care about the poster.

H1a. Closeness will negatively explain the likelihood of responding to negative topics on Facebook in a way that is emotionally expressive but not effortful, such as the use of emotes.

H1b. Closeness will positively explain the likelihood of responding to negative topic posts on Facebook in a way that is emotionally expressive and effortful, such as usage of:

- a) Commenting
- b) Responses outside of Facebook post

Reciprocity. Reciprocity may also play a key role in how people respond to negative topic posts on Facebook. Social grooming is typically conceptualized as a reciprocal activity (Donath, 2007; Ellison & Vitak, 2015). In terms of SNSs, when a person sees their "friends" have left PDAs or comments in response to their post, they might feel like they should use PDAs and/or leave comments for them in return. For example, Vitak and colleagues (2011) found that responding to others' posts in the past predicted if participants felt they had close relationships and could rely on those they are close to for guidance and support. They interpreted this finding to mean that if a user hopes to obtain support, it is important to take the time to reply to others' posts on SNSs such as Facebook. The current study seeks to add to the research on reciprocal communication behaviors that occur on SNSs by examining this phenomena on a more dyadic or interpersonal level:

Beyond the Like

H2. Reciprocity of responding to each other's posts will positively explain the likelihood of responding to negative topic posts on Facebook in a way that is emotionally expressive such as usage of:

- a) Emotes
- b) Commenting
- c) Reaching outside of the context of the Facebook post

Automaticity. Another individual factor that is relevant to this study is a user's habits of clicking on PDAs. Habits are defined as "learned sequences of acts that have become automatic responses to specific cues" (Verplanken & Aarts, 1999, p.104). This is distinct from unconscious behavior; in which the person is fully aware of what they are doing, they are simply just not deliberating on what is motivating their behavior. Research has consistently shown that habit is a strong construct that can explain social media use, including communication or responding behavior (Wohn, Velasquez, Bjornrud, & Lampe, 2012). Those who have an inherent tendency to automatically respond to content on SNSs (Wohn et al., 2016) may use the "Like" to respond to negative posts they see on Facebook, but probably not other reactions, which require more effort. As a result, this study predicted:

H3. PDA Automaticity will positively explain the likelihood of responding to negative topic posts on Facebook with a method that is easy and simple, such as a "Like" button.

Topical Factors

There are many different negative topics that users sometimes post about on Facebook. However, the aforementioned examples are in no way an exhaustive list of the types of negative or upsetting topics that users post about on Facebook. As such, this study also wanted to see if certain topics affect response behaviors on the site:

RQ1. Which types of negative topics explain the choice of various response behaviors?

Methods

This study used an online panel service by Qualtrics to recruit U.S. adult Facebook users ($N=260$) to take our survey. Participants were an average age of 36.20 ($SD= 13.67$), ranging from 18 to 77 years. In terms of gender, 48.5% identified as male and 50.4% as female. Our sample was predominantly White (66%), followed by Black (12%), Hispanic (7%), Asian (5%), and Native Indian/Pacific Islander (1%). On average, participants had 340.19 Facebook friends ($SD= 494.586$).

After filtering participants for those who had used Facebook in the past three months, participants were asked to complete a survey with open and close-ended questions. They were first given the following description: “Very often people see Facebook posts about negative experiences, such as a post about a death, loss of job, feeling sick, or fighting with a friend. Tell us about a recent time that you saw a post about another person’s negative experience. Please pick something that got your attention and that you responded to (e.g., Liked, clicked on a reaction button, and/or commented on the post). Please copy and paste that person’s post here or describe in detail what it was.” Participants could then write in the details of the specific post into an open-ended text box. Since we did not obtain permission from the Facebook friend to analyze their post, we did not report any identifying details of any individual post in our analyses-- the main purpose of recalling a specific post was to make that memory salient for the participant so they could answer subsequent questions about their experience.

We then asked participants how they responded to this negative post. They could choose all that applied from a list that included “Like”, all Reaction options, commenting, and reaching outside of Facebook. We then had a second open-ended text box asking participants why they chose the response that they had indicated in the previous question. We also asked a number of questions about the participant’s relationship with the poster, such as length of acquaintance, frequency of communication, perceived closeness, how often they respond to the poster in general, and how often the poster responds to the participant in general.

Beyond the Like Measures

Closeness ($M=2.96$, $SD= 1.11$, Cronbach's alpha= .92) assessed an individual's perception of closeness with the poster and their desire to be close to the poster from 1 (no relationship at all) to 5 (very close) (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Reciprocity ($M=3.06$, $SD= 1.19$) referred to how often the individual responded to the poster when they posted something and vice versa, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). PDA Automaticity ($M=2.34$, $SD= .94$, Cronbach's alpha= .83) was measured using a four-item subscale of the Self-Reported Habit Index (Verplanken & Orbell, 2003), which includes automaticity as one of the dimensions. The items were "I respond to posts without thinking," "I respond to posts automatically," "I respond to posts without having to consciously remember," and "I respond to posts before I realize I'm doing it" which participants rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

There were also some control variables. Time on Facebook ($M=3.31$, $SD= 1.67$) was an ordinal measure of six options asking participants "In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes *per day* have you spent actively reading and posting on Facebook?" The answer options were less than ten minutes (13.5%), 10-30 minutes (26.5%), 31-60 minutes (19.2%), one-two hours (14.2%), two-three hours (9.2%), and more than three hours (17.3%). Empathy, the ability to project oneself into the experiences of others (Davis, 1983), was a control variable because studies have found that people who are more empathetic also tend to be more likely to reach out to another who exhibits distress (e.g., Devoldre, Davis, Verhofstadt, & Buysse, 2010). Empathy ($M= 3.50$, $SD= .49$, Cronbach's alpha= .84) was assessed using a well-established scale (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006) that included 20 different scenarios, such as how much the individual understood others' feelings. Statements were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Demographic variables included age and sex.

Results

Topic Categories

Beyond the Like

This study first sought out to categorize the different negative topics participants discussed in their surveys. Three independent coders developed categories through iterative coding. After developing a list of preliminary categories, each coder independently coded the same 50 posts to determine intercoder reliability. As coders were not in 100% agreement, they discussed and refined the definition of each of the categories and went back and recoded the same 50 posts. This was an iterative process until they reached 100% agreement on those posts. Then the coders coded the rest of the posts—any disagreements were resolved through discussion. The most predominant category for (perceived) negative posts was death and illness (43%), followed by family (29%), personal venting (14%), politics (9%), relationships (8%), financial hardships (6%), personal property damages (5%), news (4%), and prayer requests (4%). Also, 23% of the posts were “vaguebooking” meaning that the reader perceived it as being negative but the context was very unclear. Death and illness included posts mentioning recent deaths as well as earlier losses of family, loved ones, or pets, usually on the anniversary of the death. The family category refers to a post that mentioned a family member— most common topics were related to tragedies or conflicts, such as child custody issues or grievances about specific family members. The relationship category included posts about the dissolution, betrayal, or discontent related to friendships and romantic relationships, excluding family. Most examples were about relationships that did not end amicably or involved abuse, contained expressions of heartbreak or thoughts of revenge. The prayer category consisted of posts that literally referred to giving, receiving, or requesting prayers. The political category included posts about politically-oriented events such as national protests (e.g., Black Lives Matter), complaints about the inadequacy of gun control legislation, and criticism of specific politicians (e.g., Hillary emails and Donald Trump tax return). Personal property posts referenced the loss, theft, or destruction of personal property. The news category was for posts that linked to news stories that were not political. These included bad weather-- such as complaining about the excessive heat or reporting that low water levels caused closures to boat ramps-- local car accidents, or animal

Beyond the Like

abuse. Financial hardship posts were about job loss and/or poverty. Personal posts were about private situations that could not be categorized into any of the previous categories, such as drinking problems or misunderstandings with others. Vaguebooking was a post that expressed unhappiness, frustration, or depression, etc., without discussing the context-- the reader knew that the poster was in a negative state but not why.

Hypothesis Testing

To test our hypotheses and explore our research question, we ran binary logistic regressions with how the participant responded to the post as the dependent variable. There were five dependent variables: choice of “Like”, “Love”, emotes, comment, and reaching out to the poster outside of Facebook.

When asked about how they responded to negative posts, 16.2% of the participants used a “Like” button, 3.5% used a “Love”, 2.7% a “haha”, 5.4% a “wow”, 44.6% a “sad” face, 6.9% an “angry” face emote—in total, 59.6% used some sort of emote, 29.2% commented, and 36.5% said they reached out to the person outside of Facebook. Commenting and reaching outside of the Facebook post was not mutually exclusive to responding with a PDA—23 people who used a PDA also commented, and 64 people who used a PDA also reached outside of Facebook. Of the people who reached out to the poster outside of Facebook, 32.7% made a phone call, 31.7% sent a private message (either through Facebook messenger or text message), and 16.8% said that they visited the poster in person. Three individuals used email, one used videochat, and one used a postal letter.

For our regression models, we had age, sex, active minutes on Facebook, and empathy as control variables. Independent variables were closeness, reciprocity, PDA automaticity, and the nine topic categories. All regression model results are in Table 1.

Beyond the Like

Explaining "Like". This study set out to explore what explains likelihood of the use of the "Like" button. The model (Table 1) explaining choice of a "Like" as a response indicated with 85% accuracy the likelihood of choosing that response (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .20$). The Hosmer and Lemeshow GOF test indicated that the model was well-fitting ($R^2 = 5.04$, $df = 8$, $p = .75$). Consistent with H4, Automaticity was positively related to using the "Like" button, suggesting that users are continuing to perceive "Likes" as a way to signal they've noticed others' posts without really expressing any emotional reaction to the post directly. Younger participants were more likely to "Like". Participants were less likely to use the "Like" button to respond to a death/illness-related post.

Explaining "Love". This study also set out to explore the factors related to the likelihood of the usage of the "Love" button. The model explaining using the "Love" button as a response explained with 96.9% accuracy of the likelihood of choosing that response (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .26$). The Hosmer and Lemeshow GOF test indicated that the model was well-fitting ($R^2 = 11.94$, $df = 8$, $p = .15$). None of the independent variables explained the use of the "Love" button.

Explaining an emote. This study also inquired about the likelihood of using an emote. The model explaining choice of an emote as a response explained with 68.8% accuracy of the likelihood of choosing that response (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .22$). The Hosmer and Lemeshow GOF test indicated that the model was well-fitting ($R^2 = 10.11$, $df = 8$, $p = .26$).

This study expected that relational closeness would negatively predict the use of an emote, and this hypothesis (H1a) was supported. The closer the participant was to the person who posted about a negative topic, the less likely they were to use an emote as a response. Reciprocity was hypothesized to explain the likelihood of using an emote (H2a) but this was not supported. For death and illness-related posts, participants were more likely to use an emote as a response.

Beyond the Like

Explaining commenting. The model explaining choice of a comment as a response explained with 70.8% accuracy of the likelihood of choosing that response (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .13$). The Hosmer and Lemeshow GOF test indicated that the model was well-fitting ($R^2 = 9.96$, $df = 8$, $p = .27$). Time spent on Facebook was positively related to commenting. On posts that were vaguebooking, participants were less likely to comment. None of the relationship variables explained likelihood of commenting, thus H1b and H2b were not supported.

Explaining reaching outside of the Facebook post. The model explaining reaching outside of Facebook (that was done in addition to responding to the post on the site) explained with 78.1% accuracy of the likelihood of choosing that response (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .39$). The Hosmer and Lemeshow GOF test indicated that the model was well-fitting ($R^2 = 7.02$, $df = 8$, $p = .53$). Closeness and reciprocity were positively associated with the likelihood of reaching out outside of Facebook, supporting H1c and H2c respectively. Participants were also 6.4 times more likely to reach out outside of Facebook when the post they saw was related to a prayer request. Empathy also did not increase likelihood of commenting.

(INSERT TABLE 1 HERE)

Discussion

The findings of this study have some important implications for research examining when people use communication features such as PDAs on SNSs to respond to others' negative topic posts on these sites. First, this study found that what constitutes a negative topic post on Facebook is diverse across a wide range of topic areas and some of these areas are consistent with past research examining SNS disclosure phenomena. This study found that face emotive PDAs were used to respond to negative posts made by weak ties which suggests that the new more expressive PDAs on Facebook may help people in weak tie relationships respond to each other's negative topic posts. This study also found that people were more likely to reach out to the poster off the site if the negative topic post came from a strong tie.

Beyond the Like

This same pattern of effects was also found for reciprocity. These results will be unpacked in more detail below.

What is a “Negative” Post?

This study found that users post about a variety of different emotionally upsetting or negative topics. Some of the topics are consistent with past research that looked at posts about relationship dissolution (e.g., Haimson et al., 2018) or serious illness (Gage-Bouchard et al., 2017) and were topics that one would intuitively associate with being negative or difficult to experience as well as share with other people. However, this study also saw that people sometimes perceive posts about politics or even the weather as being “negative” if the poster expressed frustration or anger in response to those events. Moreover, about a fifth of the posts that our survey respondents identified as being negative fell into the “vaguebooking” category. This suggests that users of social media are aware of emotions that their contacts are expressing, even if they don’t know the context. However, in some situations, context does matter: the results about response type frequencies suggest that not all negative topic posts are responded to equally, with some accruing more emotes, comments, and/or reach-outs. This could mean that unspoken norms have already developed for particular topic areas-- for example, we found that participants were less likely to use the “Like” button when responding to death or illness-related posts

The participant’s relationship with the poster also seemed to matter-- but not uniformly across all types of PDAs. For example, participants who reported they had a close relationship to the poster tended to use face emotes PDAs less frequently to respond to their negative topic posts. In fact, participants who felt close to the poster tended to reach out to them outside of Facebook. However, relationship closeness did not have any association with the usage of “Likes.”

As such, the results of this study not only expands upon the types of negative topics people disclose on Facebook, but also starts to uncover how people respond to such posts when they are seen on Facebook. Moreover, the results suggest that participants who reported being less close to the poster

Beyond the Like

tended to use more emotive PDAs to respond to the latter's negative topic posts, but they were not more or less likely to use the "Like" button as a response, which may mean that PDAs that contain emotional expressions are seen as useful responsive tools that facilitate social grooming behaviors on SNSs because they convey more nuanced emotional reactions than the "Like" with less effort required than sending a private message or writing a comment.

PDAs & Social Grooming

This study predicted that people would use emotive PDAs to respond to negative posts made by their weak ties, and the results were consistent with this prediction. The participants in this study who did not feel close to the person who posted about a negative topic tended to use the emotive PDAs to respond to the post. This suggests that the new PDAs may help people navigate sensitive situations they may have had less experience with prior to the emergence and widespread popularity of SNSs. Most people can acknowledge that death and/or loss of a loved one is one of the most traumatic events anyone can experience in life. Before the advent of SNSs, people were likely less aware of when a less close friend or acquaintance (i.e., a weak tie) was dealing with a serious illness, meaning they did not need to worry about if and how to respond to the poster. Now, thanks to SNSs such as Facebook, people are not only exposed to more negative disclosures or posts from their weak ties, they are also afforded the ability to respond to those posts with more or less expressivity. Not responding at all seems to suggest callousness, and people do not want their weak ties to think they do not care and risk losing the tie. Leaving a "Like" may cause worry that the PDA's ambiguity suggests the responder does not truly care about the poster, and may even be clicking the "Like" PDA out of habit. On the other hand, responding to every negative post from every weak tie is not possible either because 1) it would be cumbersome and 2) the responder may not know how to compose a comment that is appropriate for the poster or the situation. Now, with PDAs that express a range of emotions including sadness and shock, people can let their weak ties know they are thinking of them with a single click. As such, emotionally expressive

Beyond the Like

PDA's may help people do something they were hard pressed to do before: express their emotional reaction to a weak tie's traumatic or difficult experience with relative ease but still measured expressivity. Moreover, this finding suggests that people adapt their response behaviors when SNSs add new communication features to their site. For example, Marwick and Ellison (2012) found that users sometimes clicked on "Like" to respond to others' posts about death (i.e., their grief) on Facebook. But it is important to note that they conducted their study in 2012 when the only PDA available to users was the "Like". Given that this study shows users take advantage of new PDA's to respond to others' posts about death on Facebook, it suggests that users are adapting their response to grief posts as the site evolves to allow for more nuanced low effort responding. Thus, as SNSs keep us in more frequent contact with our weak ties, new affordances such as emotionally expressive emotes may help people nurture their weak-tie relationships with relative ease.

Relational Closeness & Effortful Communication

People in close relationships tend to engage in more effortful displays of support and care for each other when either exhibits emotional distress (Clark & Reis, 1988), and the findings from this study are consistent with this line of research. This study found that relational closeness predicted the likelihood a participant would reach out to another user off the platform, which is the most effortful response behavior asked about in this study. PDA's generally do not take much effort to use, their use as the sole response might suggest that the user is not inclined to take much effort to respond to the poster, which might imply to the poster that the responder does not care about them. Given that people in close relationships want their strong ties to know they are there for them in times of distress (Argyle & Henderson, 1984), they may choose more effortful types of response options because doing so nonverbally communicates that the responder cares enough about the poster that they would go out of their way to support the poster. Moreover, according to Media Multiplexity Theory, people in close relationships tend to use multiple communication technology to stay in touch while those in less close

Beyond the Like

relationships tend to be connected via fewer media (Haythornthwaite, 2005). It is possible that participants who were less close to the poster were unable to reach out to the poster outside of Facebook because they did not have the poster's phone number, email, or rarely saw them face-to-face, making the SNS their only option to respond to the negative topic post. Future research should continue to explore how closeness affects response behaviors on and off SNSs.

Although closeness did not predict commenting, this study did find that the more users spend time on Facebook overall, the more likely participants commented on negative topic posts. Perhaps more time and experience on the site makes commenting feel relatively effortless. In addition, if a user has left several comments on various types of posts in the past, they may perceive themselves as an adept commentator and feel capable of commenting on a negative topic post without violating interpersonal norms and/or threatening their relationship to the poster. It could also be a simple matter of spending more time on Facebook leads to doing more activities on Facebook, including but not limited to commenting on other's posts on the site. Future research should explore how past commenting behavior influences more recent responding behavior.

Reciprocity Revisited

Reciprocity did not predict using a PDA or leaving a comment, but it did predict reaching outside of Facebook. Given that participants were only asked how frequently they respond to the negative topic poster's post and vice versa, the reciprocity measure may have not been able to pick up on the more nuanced ways people can respond to each other via Facebook (e.g., using a PDA, leaving a comment, sending a message). Given that most work on reciprocity examines how said construct affects communication behavior in general, the results of this study do not necessarily contradict earlier work examining the construct (Carr, Hayes, & Sumner, 2017; Ellison et al., 2014). However, the lack of a significant effect of dyadic reciprocity in this study leaves questions about how and when reciprocity affects communication behaviors on SNSs at the dyadic level. Future research may want to use more

Beyond the Like

nuanced measures of response behaviors to illuminate how reciprocity may affect dyadic communication on SNSs.

Automaticity

PDA automaticity, a construct that represents more or less “mindless” clicking, was only statistically associated with “Liking” but none of the other response options, consistent with H4. The lack of its association with any of the Reactions also suggests that not all PDAs are the same, and that some may require more thinking than others. At the same time, Reactions are still a relatively new feature in comparison to the “Like” button. Thus it could be that users are that much more familiar with “Likes” and have had the time to develop a habit that may not be the case with emotes. Also, the design of the interface, which requires users to hover over the “Like” button to activate additional reaction options, takes longer than clicking the “Like” and this seemingly small technical feature that delays the response by a second or two is enough to make people more mindful. Further investigation, however, is needed to pick apart the confounds to see if it unfamiliarity, technical delay, or other factors that make a feature’s use less automatic.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was allowing participants to discuss any negative topic they wished rather than asking them to focus on a specific genre of negative topics. This may have thwarted this study’s ability to see patterns in response to specific negative experiences or events. This study also did not look at the effect of each emote separately because it wanted to conceptualize emotes as one type of affordance, but more granular studies on emotes may require breaking them down in order to uncover how users perceive and differentiate between emotes. The prompt also gave examples of within-Facebook responses-- this could have resulted in reduced examples of posts where they reached outside of Facebook.

Beyond the Like

This study also asked participants to focus on a single negative post rather than answer questions about if and how they respond to negative posts in general. This raises questions such as why participants chose certain posts over others, and if their response is emblematic of if and how they respond to negative posts more generally. However, we asked participants to select a specific post in hopes that doing so would result in seeing a range in the types of posts that participants would perceive as “negative” which could help how the type of post may affect certain types of responding behavior. Future research should also seek to survey responding to negative posts more generally to further uncover how people respond to different types of negative posts they see on SNSs.

Finally, it is important to understand that the context of this study was to assess participants’ perceptions of posts that appeared in their Newsfeed. This study did not ask about negative topics encountered in specific Facebook groups which could affect responding behavior due to differing affordances, audience concerns, and norms of responding. Future research should examine response behaviors that are prompted elsewhere on Facebook as well as other SNSs.

Conclusion

The present study examined factors correlated to responding behavior on Facebook as it expands its communication features and affords users new ways of responding to each other’s posts through emotive PDAs. Findings suggest that users may perceive emotive PDAs as a way to express their emotional reactions to content posted on social media, but only in specific contexts (e.g., responding to a negative topic post from a weak tie on Facebook). As social media such as Facebook continue to add features that afford users new ways of interacting with each other on these sites and mobile apps, research needs to continue to examine how users interpret and use these new features. Results coming from this line of research will help current and future researchers better understand and predict how, when, and why users incorporate PDAs into their everyday social media communication practices.

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Beyond the Like

Table 1. Binary logistic regression models explaining the likelihood of how users responded to a negative post on Facebook

	Like	Love	Face emote	Comment	Reaching out outside of post
Age	-.03*	-.04	.02*	.01	-.01
Sex	.64	.45	.00	-.45	-.42
PDA Automaticity	.40*	.12	-.07	-.27	.10
Closeness	.16	.53	-.41*	.30	.59**
Reciprocity	-.39	.80	.28	-.07	.60**
Time on FB	-.13	-.30	.10	.24*	.14
Empathy	-.24	.15	-.03	.41	.38
<i>(Topics)</i>					
Politics	-.39	-17.69	.00	-.57	-.64
News	-.14	-15.32	-.33	-.72	-19.78
Prayer	-.80	2.26	.14	-.77	1.85*
Venting	-1.28	.94	.63	.13	-.28
Finance	.16	-17.86	-.35	.04	.06
Property	-1.25	.86	-.01	-.62	.08
Death/illness	-1.35**	.01	1.66***	-.53	-.34
Vaguebooking	.19	-.41	.29	-.98*	.40
Nagelkerke R ²	.20	.26	.22	.13	.13

Values are beta coefficients, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$