

## A Profile of Arguing Behaviors on Facebook

### Abstract

This study explores how people argue on social-networking sites. Specifically, participants ( $N = 170$ ) responded to open and closed-ended questions about the most recent argument they had engaged in on Facebook. Results of a content analysis of participants' answers revealed individuals tended to argue mostly about public issues, in somewhat complex arguments that involved a median of six people and with about 30 comments exchanged. Individuals often pursued multiple goals, with persuasion and defending themselves or others also reported by some. Arguments tended to end without resolution and most had no effects on arguers' relationships; however, for 20% of the sample, arguments permanently damaged their relationships. Although the number of friends participants had did not have a substantial effect on their frequency of arguing, the frequency with which one's friends argued on Facebook was positively related to one's own arguing frequency. These results are interpreted in connection to argumentation and computer-mediated-communication literatures. Limitations of the study as well as directions for future research are also discussed.

*Keywords:* interpersonal argumentation; Facebook communication; content analysis

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### 1.1. Introduction

People argue all the time; friends may banter about their favorite sports teams or strangers riding the train together may discuss the platform of presidential candidates. In everyday life, arguing permeates a multitude of interactions, in various forms, ranging from polite, intellectual discussions to uncivil, emotional fights. Thus, interpersonal arguing refers not only to the exchange of reasons or utterances, or what O’Keefe (1977) calls argument<sub>1</sub>, but also to specific interactions in which people exchange these argumentative statements, or what O’Keefe calls argument<sub>2</sub>. In sum, interpersonal arguing captures both the negatively valenced fights or quarrels that come to the mind of naïve actors when they think of arguing (Benoit, 1982) and the intellectual debates or conversations that scholars focus on when studying argumentation (Hample, 2005).

It is not surprising that arguing can also be found in online interactions between people, such as discussion groups, social networking platforms, or news feeds. Still, extant literature that examines interpersonal argumentation in online contexts is scarce. One area that has received attention previously pertains to online decision-making in groups or mediated negotiations (e.g., Brashers, Adkins, & Meyers, 1994; Lemus, Seibold, Flanagin, & Metzger, 2004). Another area of interest has examined interpersonal exchanges conducted via mediated channels (e.g., Ellis & Maoz, 2002, 2007; Maoz & Ellis, 2001). This project follows along these lines by examining interpersonal arguing behaviors that occur on the social networking platform Facebook. As of [March 2017](#), Facebook had approximately [1.28 billion](#) active daily users worldwide (Facebook, [2017](#)), making it the largest and most popular social networking site in the world (eBizMBA, 2016). Thus, Facebook is well known, used frequently, and permits argumentative exchanges

between individuals in the form of status updates, comments to other people's posts (or one's own), private messaging, or group discussions. Furthermore, "the site's mediated and semi-public nature might lead users to follow a unique set of interaction rules" (Bryant & Marmo, 2012, p. 1014). The ubiquity of this mediated platform for communication prompts researchers to question how interpersonal arguing may be similar or different from its traditional, face-to-face (FtF) manifestations.

The following paper reviews major findings in respect to arguing in interpersonal relationships, details research examining communication behaviors on Facebook, and connects the two by highlighting the interests and research questions pursued in this project in respect to arguing on Facebook. After this review, an overview of the study conducted to answer these questions, results, and a discussion and interpretation of the findings are presented.

## **1.2. The What, Why, and How of Interpersonal Arguing on Facebook**

Individuals argue about variety of issues, from trivial things, everyday decisions, and relationship issues, to financial and socio-political matters (Cionea, Hopârtean, Hoelscher, Iles, & Straub, 2015). Kuhn (1991) claims some form of reasoning is believed to lie at the base of our thinking. In this way, arguments permeate our very thinking and underlie our beliefs and decision-making processes.

How do arguments come about? Toulmin (1958), for instance, explained that, "arguments are produced for a variety of reasons" (p. 12), but usually develop in support of an assertion that someone makes. In other words, if we advance a claim, we are then obligated to provide support for that claim (i.e., make an argument). This idea aligns with O'Keefe's argument<sub>1</sub>. Other researchers have explained the occurrence of argument<sub>2</sub>. For example, Benoit and Benoit (1990) explained that individuals argue with others when they feel insulted, when their requests are

refused, when demands are made upon them that threaten their face or personal freedom, and when they need to justify themselves following an accusation. Similarly, Witteman (1992) explained that individuals initiate confrontations when they perceive the demand made by another person as illegitimate, when they are criticized, or when annoyance with the other party's behavior has reached a tolerated limit. Conflict scholars (e.g., Hocker & Wilmot, 2010; Witteman, 1988) have highlighted that perceived incompatibility between parties or situational perceptions (e.g., frequency of conflict, attributions about the other person) lead to conflict.

Research on social networking sites (SNS) suggests that conflict is a common occurrence on Facebook, albeit less frequent than on other websites that allow users anonymity (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). Multiple scholars (Halpern & Gibbs; Hutchens, Cicchirillo, & Hmielowski, 2015; Svenningson, 2014) have reported that people engage in arguments on Facebook [that involve](#) political discussions or controversial topics that directly challenge their beliefs. Much of this research has focused on negative aspects associated with conflict, such as verbal aggressiveness, which may depress one's willingness to enter an argument on Facebook. Svenningson (2014), for instance, reported that young Swedes were reluctant to engage in political argumentation on Facebook because they feared being ganged up on by verbally aggressive users. In addition, Chen (2015) found that insults led to angry retaliation as they threatened people's positive face. Thus, similar to FtF arguing, issues directly relevant to a person's self-concept and their face are likely to motivate a person to start or engage in a Facebook argument. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

*RQ1: How are Facebook arguments usually initiated?*

Research on new technology adoption suggests that social influence is a primary determinant of media utilization (Fulk, Schmitz, & Steinfeld, 1990). For instance, Leonardi

(2012) reviewed research on adoption and use of media that suggests a recursive shaping from both social ties and technological capabilities in determining how users engage with a medium. Simply put, users are more likely to use a medium in the way their social connections use that medium, meaning that what similar others are doing heavily influences what a user will do (Leonardi, 2012). Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2011) showed that social variables are powerful predictors of Facebook use. In the case of arguing behaviors, these research findings suggest that the behavior of similar others, such as one's Facebook friends, will influence one's own behaviors. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H: How often a person argues with others on Facebook is positively correlated to how often the person's friends argue on Facebook.*

Furthermore, Jang, Lee, and Park (2014) found that there was a negative correlation between how many Facebook friends a user had and the likelihood of engaging in conflict. In other words, people may refrain from engagement if they have more friends, perhaps because a larger audience risks offending others and damaging offline relationships. We investigate this idea further by asking the following:

*RQ2: What relationship (if any) exists between how often a person argues with others on Facebook and a) how often that person posts on Facebook, and b) the number of Facebook friends the person has?*

In addition to understanding what triggers arguing on Facebook, and how arguing relates to the use of this site, it is also important to examine what type of issues individuals argue about on Facebook. Johnson (2002, 2009) has proposed that argument topics (in FtF communication) can be categorized as public or personal issues, depending on the issue at the heart of the argument (as opposed to based on the context or sphere in which an argument occurs; cf.

Scheuer, Loll, Pinkwart, & McLaren, 2010). A public topic is one that does not directly involve the relationship between arguers; this type of argument could be carried out with anyone (e.g., sports, views on political candidates, racism). A personal topic is one that pertains directly to the relationship between arguers as the relationship contextualizes the behaviors and issues that arise and trigger an argument (e.g., relational transgressions, division of chores, appropriate relational behaviors).

It is reasonable to expect that individuals will argue about similar issues on Facebook. According to Tsovaltzi, Weinberger, Scheuer, Dragon, and McLaren (2012, 2013), SNS were created mainly for the sharing of personal information among users. However, the authors explain that academic, scientific opinions are also exchanged on such platforms, and can actually lead to information sharing, collaboration, and learning from engagement in an opinion conflict on Facebook. Thus, the question is whether arguing on Facebook presents unique characteristics, given the mediated environment and the relatively public nature in which such arguments occur. For instance, Vitak et al. (2011) found that young people who are politically inactive feel that Facebook is an inappropriate venue for arguing about politics. Across age groups, those who are more active seem to engage more frequently (Halpern & Gibbs; Hutchens et al. 2015; Sveningson, 2014). Other research has found that young people may feel social-networking sites are inappropriate venues for an argument because they dislike the conflict that such discussion can produce (Sleeper et al., 2013). Thus, in light of these considerations, we ask:

*RQ3: Do individuals argue mostly about public or personal topics on Facebook?*

Another feature that helps explain individuals' argumentative behaviors pertains to the end outcomes they wish to attain by arguing. Goals are fundamental features of human interactions (Berger, 1997) and direct people's behavior when interacting with others (Dillard,

1990). Researchers have found that individuals pursue goals such as personal expression, dominance, persuasion/compliance gaining, problem-solving, or learning when arguing with others (Cionea et al., 2015), as well as mutual understanding, conflict resolution, standing up for oneself, enjoyment, or emotional release (Cionea, Hoelscher, & Ileş, 2017). Thus, in FtF interactions, arguing is used to accomplish a multitude of desired outcomes. Does the same happen with arguments on Facebook?

Some research suggests that goals such as persuasion, problem-solving, dominance, and emotional release are pursued by arguers on Facebook. For instance, verbally aggressive behavior and bullying (i.e., goals of dominance and emotional release) occur frequently on Facebook, despite research that has found that it is usually a minority of users who engages in such behaviors (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Hutchens et al., 2015). Halpern and Gibbs (2013) reported that posting tended to get particularly verbally aggressive when the topic was an especially controversial one that challenged people's beliefs. Similarly, angry retaliation occurred when people's self-concepts were threatened (Chen, 2015). Hutchens et al. (2015) found that individuals who reported engaging in political discussion online frequently were also likely to respond to political comments they disagreed with by using verbally aggressive messages. These findings suggest arguing with others on Facebook is characterized by somewhat destructive goals, such as dominance and demonstrating one's power, but also by defensive goals such as standing up for oneself when attacked.

Despite these negative outcomes, several scholars (e.g., Davies & Chandler, 2012; Steffensmeier & Schenck-Hamlin, 2009; Weger & Aakhaus, 1999) contend that online discussions can represent a valuable venue for public discourse and more candid public discussions about important topics. Thus, individuals may pursue and accomplish goals such as



persuasion, personal expression, or mutual understanding. Tan, Niculae, Danescu-Niculescu-Misil, and Lee (2016) examined a board on the Reddit discussion website in which people who are willing to be persuaded post their position and their reasons for holding that position. Tan et al. noted that one of the unique features of this board was that the original poster could indicate if another person persuaded him/her by clicking on a symbol for the post that convinced him/her. This instance exemplifies the goal of persuading others (or be persuaded by others) in online interactions. Similarly, Tsovaltzi et al. (2012) found that Facebook discussions led arguers to change their opinions. Arguing on Facebook may also be characterized by positive goals, such as genuine persuasion, personal expression of one's beliefs and positions, as well as potentially learning from others and their arguments. A relatively recent line of research has examined how argumentation can be taught via computer software (i.e., computer-supported collaborative learning). The goal of this endeavor was to teach students constructive argumentation, including the pursuit of cooperative goals, not unilateral, competitive ones (for a review see Scheuer et al., 2010). Facebook could represent a medium in which such good argumentation practices may be enacted. Based on this varied evidence, the following research question is advanced:

*RQ4: What goals do individuals pursue when arguing with others on Facebook?*

One of the unique features of SNS, such as Facebook, is the possibility they offer individuals in remote locations to engage in conversation with each other. Although platforms such as Facebook may lack in richness, as they limit users' ability to post certain types of content, they also have certain advantages not accessible in FtF arguments, such as the inclusion of video or pictures (i.e., visual argumentation). The complex accumulation of posts from various users that are part of one's circles (or "friends") also has potential advantages. For instance, Lewiński (2010) explained, "many (individual) turns can be taken at the same time and

a line of criticism consisting of objections provided by others can develop” (p. 100). His online argumentation model proposes two forms of online argumentation: 1) vertical argumentation, which occurs when a group joins together against a particular position, and 2) horizontal argumentation, which occurs when each person brings distinct perspectives to an argument. Thus, one of the advantages of collective arguments, like those facilitated by Facebook, is the ability to incorporate multifarious perspectives. Furthermore, “graphical interfaces may have a greater ‘affordance’ or natural support for creative emergence within dialogues than more linear threaded discussions” (Wegerif et al., 2010, p. 614). In other words, a platform such as Facebook may enable creativity, defined as “the emergence of new perspectives from the tension of holding multiple perspectives together” (Wegerif et al., 2010, p. 614), which opens up possibilities and the discursive space for dialogue about an issue. Such possibilities may be reflected in the complexity of arguments on Facebook. Therefore, we ask the following question:

*RQ5: How complex are Facebook arguments?*

In addition, to characterize people’s arguing behaviors on Facebook, we must also examine how Facebook arguments end (if they do). In FtF contexts, arguments are sometimes resolved but continue to recur periodically as no resolution has been accomplished (i.e., serial arguments; Trapp & Hoff, 1985). Constructive argumentation implies the resolution of the issue that has spurred disagreement or revealed an incompatibility between parties and their goals, but is that even possible in an online environment, such as Facebook? Stromer-Galley and Wichowski (2011) argued that, “even if the technology makes online political discussion possible,” there is no guarantee that users will engage in fruitful discussion online (p. 181). Online arguments may not actually be productive. Participants can disengage much easier than in FtF arguments by signing off or simply ignoring the issue. So, we ask,

*RQ6: How do Facebook arguments usually end?*

Furthermore, an important issue to examine concerns the consequences and effects of such online arguments on individuals and their relationships with those involved in the online exchange. Online arguments may hurt offline relationships. Ethnographic work asking Facebook users about interactions they regret confirms that this fear is sometimes valid. Wang et al. (2011) reported that some users felt their pushiness while arguing on Facebook had hurt their offline relationships. The users in Fox and Moreland's (2015) interview study echoed that sentiment by discussing how uncivil arguments on Facebook had moved offline to produce offline relational consequences. Thus, we ask,

*RQ7: What (if any) are the consequences of Facebook arguments?*

*RQ8: How does satisfaction with the way the argument ended relate to a) the type of topics individuals argued about, b) the complexity of the argument, and c) the way the argument ended?*

Finally, we are interested in the overall valence that participants associate with arguing on Facebook. In FtF interactions, Benoit (1990) and Hample (2005) have reported that people often perceive arguing negatively as they associate stress and tension with this type of exchange. Furthermore, some individuals take conflict personally in that they believe conflict is a punishing, often victimizing, experience with negative consequences. Others do not personalize conflict as much and believe it can have positive effects on people's relationships (Hample & Dallinger, 1995). Along the same lines, some individuals believe arguing is detrimental to one's self-esteem, leading to dysfunctional outcomes, whereas others see arguing as enjoyable and leading to positive outcomes (Rancer, Baukus, & Infante, 1985). We expected that users' attitudes would differ in respect to arguing on Facebook as well. Therefore, the following

research question was proposed:

*RQ9: What are people's opinions about arguing on Facebook?*

### **1.3. Method**

#### **1.3.1. Participants**

Participants in the study were 238 students from a West South Central university in the United States. Responses from 68 participants were eliminated because they were incomplete, were duplicates, or did not respect the eligibility requirements for the study (explained below). Thus, the final sample consisted of 170 participants who ranged in age from 18 to 39 years ( $M = 20.24$   $SD = 2.45$ ). Seventy-three participants were males, 94 were females, one indicated "other," and two participants did not report their sex. Participants' class standing was as follows: 42 were freshmen, 48 were sophomores, 36 were juniors, 41 were seniors, one was a master's student, one indicated another class standing, and one did not report his/her class standing. Most participants were White ( $n = 117$ ), followed by Asian ( $n = 16$ ), Black or African-American ( $n = 13$ ), Native American or Alaska native ( $n = 8$ ), Hispanic or Latino/Latina ( $n = 7$ ), and other ethnicities ( $n = 8$ ); one participant did not indicate his/her ethnicity. Participants reported various majors, such as Communication ( $n = 51$ ), Business, which included Accounting, Finance, or Marketing majors ( $n = 51$ ), Health and Exercise Science ( $n = 13$ ), Education ( $n = 9$ ), Computer Science ( $n = 7$ ), Economics ( $n = 6$ ), Public Relations ( $n = 6$ ), dual majors ( $n = 7$ ), other majors, such as Biochemistry, Letters, or Interior Design ( $n = 15$ ), or undecided ( $n = 5$ ).

#### **1.3.2. Procedures**

Participants were recruited from a departmental research pool and received extra credit for their participation. Those who consented (the first page of the online questionnaire used for the study) and were eligible to participate (i.e., had a Facebook account and had been involved in

an argument on Facebook) then answered (mostly) open-ended questions about their arguing behaviors. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the first author's university.

### 1.3.3. Instruments

Participants were instructed to think about the last argument they had with someone on Facebook and revisit the argument if they needed to before answering so that they can provide details about it (without any identifiable information about the other people involved). The questions asked about participants' role in the argument, the other person they were arguing with, the topic of the argument, the complexity of the argument (i.e., number of comments, number of people involved), the goals they wished to accomplish by arguing, how the argument ended, the argument's consequences, and participants' opinion about arguing on Facebook and online. Participants also indicated by using a 1-5 Likert-type scale (1 = *very dissatisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*) their satisfaction with how the argument ended ( $M = 3.02$   $SD = 1.11$ ).

In addition, participants reported the number of Facebook friends they had, which ranged from 40 to 5,000<sup>1</sup> ( $M = 979$ ,  $SD = 882$ ,  $Median = 800$ ). They also indicated how frequently they logged on Facebook and posted on Facebook by using a multiple-choice answer ranging from *every day* to *every few months*. Most participants logged in every day ( $n = 94$ ) or a few times per week ( $n = 47$ ), and most participants posted something on Facebook every few months ( $n = 52$ ) or a few times a month ( $n = 47$ ). Participants also reported by using a 1-5 Likert-type scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *all the time*) how often they argued on Facebook ( $M = 1.83$   $SD = 0.60$ ) and how often their friends argued on Facebook ( $M = 2.83$   $SD = 0.76$ ). Finally, participants provided demographic information (sex, year in school, ethnicity, and major).

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<sup>1</sup> We eliminated from calculations here two responses that indicated 5,230 and 9,001 Facebook friends. Facebook's policy is that that a user can have a maximum of 5,000 friends so we considered these responses invalid.

#### 1.4. Results

A quantitative content analysis of participants' open-ended answers was conducted to answer the study's research questions. All [three](#) authors read the data multiple times and developed a coding scheme based on previous theoretical classifications (e.g., the public/private topic distinction was based on Johnson's (2002) classification), repetitive patterns identified in the data, and dichotomous (yes/no) categorizations of answers. [The first and second author](#) then practiced coding a sub-set of the data ( $n = 50$ ) and revised the coding scheme as needed, based on the disagreements encountered. The same [two](#) co-authors then coded another subset of the data ( $n = 41$ ) to examine intercoder reliability and to make any other needed revisions to the coding scheme. Reliability was assessed with Krippendorff's (2004) alpha, computed based on Hayes' (2013) macro for SPSS. Finally, the same [two](#) co-authors coded the remaining 79 responses independently, assessed intercoder reliability (reported in each table below), and discussed any disagreements to reach a final code for the responses in question.

Supplemental qualitative representations were extracted by examining the open-ended data, reasoning inductively, and repeating the process by "induction via ongoing data comparisons" (Heath & Cowley, 2004, p. 145). Specifically, the first author sorted and re-read the qualitative data corresponding to each category of responses to a question to gain a better understanding of the perspectives captured under each code. This process allowed the researchers to find representations of codes that had complex meaning (as demonstrated by lower intercoder reliabilities). Following the identification of key examples, the first and second author reviewed examples to ensure each code captured the nuanced complexities of each category.

[RQ1 asked how Facebook arguments are usually initiated. To answer this question](#), we examined responses provided for the questions pertaining to people's role in the argument and

their argumentation partners (see Table 1). Most respondents indicated that they commented on someone else's status. When doing so, respondents either 1) disagreed with the original poster (OP) or with someone who had commented on the OP's status, thus starting an argument, or 2) they engaged in an argumentative exchange that was already unfolding, by contributing their opinion. In the first case, respondents willingly assume the role of challenger to someone else's contention, which suggests a protagonist role motivated perhaps by involvement or high stakes in the argument. In the second case, respondents weigh in on the argumentative exchange, similar to how audience members may take sides in a fight that already has two protagonists. A much smaller number of respondents indicated they initiated an argument by posting something that invited a debate or sparked a controversy. Interestingly, some of the respondents indicated that they did not anticipate their post would trigger an argument. In other words, when initiating an argument on Facebook, some participants do so intentionally and are prepared to carry out the exchange, whereas others unintentionally incite an argument and then have to decide whether to carry it out or retract their post.

Table 1  
*Coding Scheme Categories and Intercoder Reliability for RQ1*

Question	Frequency of responses
<i>What was your role in the argument? (e.g., you posted something that sparked an argument, you commented on someone else's post)<sup>2</sup></i>	Krippendorff's alpha = .87
Sparked an argument (intentionally or not) on own status update	47
Commented on someone else's status	115
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	8
<i>Who were you arguing with? (e.g., were your comments directed at the person who posted the status update, or a person who commented on the status)</i>	Krippendorff's alpha = .76
The person who posted the status	54
Someone who commented on a posted status	81
Both the original poster and someone who commented on the status	11

<sup>2</sup> An association was found between ethnicity and role in the argument,  $\chi^2(14) = 33.61, p < .01$ , Cramer's V = .32,  $p < .01$ . Asians were more likely to have sparked an argument on their own status than to comment on someone else's status, which was the opposite for African-Americans and Hispanics or Latino/Latina.

Other	7
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	17

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This study's hypothesis predicted that how often a person argued on Facebook was correlated with how often that person's friends argued on Facebook. To test this prediction, we examined the correlation between the frequency with which participants reported engaging in arguments on Facebook and the frequency with which their friends engaged in such arguments. We found a moderate positive correlation,  $r(165) = .23, p < .01$ , which offered support for the first hypothesis. The more one's friends argued, the more one argued as well. Furthermore, thesecond research question asked whether there was a relationship between how often a person argued on Facebook and how often that person posted on Facebook (RQ2a) or the number of friends that person had on Facebook (RQ2b). To answer this question, we examined the correlations between these three variables. In response to RQ2a, there was a moderate negative association between how often people posted on Facebook and how often they engaged in arguments with others on Facebook,  $r(165) = -.30, p < .001$ . In other words, the more individuals posted on Facebook, the less likely it was that they engaged others in an argument. In response to RQ2b, there may be a negative correlation between the number of friends and how often a person engaged in an argument on Facebook. This was similar to what Jang et al. (2014) found, but in this study this correlation, although in the same direction, was not statistically significant,  $r(165) = -.10, p > .05$ .

RQ3 asked what type of topics individuals mostly argue about on Facebook: public or personal ones. To answer RQ3, we examined responses provided to the question of what the argument was about and to the question of whether respondents had argued about these issues offline as well (see Table 2). Most arguments reported concerned public topics (e.g., sports, politics, religion, racism, vaccinations, popular culture, gun control), and a large portion of these



public topics pertain to political and societal issues at the time. For instance, political arguments were about candidates or elections; racial issues arguments pertained to treatment of Black or Middle Eastern group members and events such as Ferguson, Missouri and the Trayvon Martin trial; and gay rights arguments involved discussions about gay marriage or marriage equality. Multiple arguments here revealed individuals' position vis-à-vis these issues either in their own posts or as reactions to statements made by others. Thus, some Facebook arguments reflect current public discourse and individuals' engagement with such issues, and involve both policy-oriented arguments (i.e., how a certain issue should be handled) and value-oriented arguments (i.e., whether a certain position is right or wrong; whether a statement, behavior, or comment is rude, hateful, inappropriate). Another portion of public topics arguments pertained to leisure or entertainment aspects, with the major topic being sports, primarily football, but also popular culture figures (e.g., actors, singers). Sports arguments involved disagreements as to which team was better, which athletes were better, and how teams have or would fair during a matchup.

Personal-issue arguments captured about a quarter of the arguments reported and they pertained to a variety of personal behaviors and statements. For instance, some arguments emerged as challenges to a person's statement or a reaction to comments that were perceived as rude, passive aggressive, or inappropriate altogether (e.g., calling someone a liar, making fun of someone). Other arguments were due to what some participants in the exchange perceived as sharing too much personal information or "drama" on Facebook (e.g., discussing personal relational issues on Facebook, keeping in touch with one's ex via Facebook). An interesting category pertained to arguments started due to pictures posted on Facebook, either because someone perceived the picture as inappropriate and asked the OP to remove it, or because the picture was (mis)interpreted as reflecting behaviors with which that someone disagreed.

Almost two thirds of respondents indicated that they had argued about these issues offline as well, suggesting that topics individuals argue about on Facebook may not be uniquely related to online behavior. Some arguments were continuations of offline behavior in that the issue involved offline behaviors that were then addressed via the online interface. Other arguments started on Facebook but were then continued in person as participants discussed the issue when they saw each other next. The salience of the issue may be an important catalyst for arguing both online and offline. For instance, several participants indicated that they would always say something when someone makes racist statements, whether online or in FtF interactions.

Table 2  
*Coding Scheme Categories and Intercoder Reliability for RQ2*

Question	Frequency of responses
<i>What was the argument about?</i>	Krippendorff's alpha = .78
Public topic	108
Personal topic	41
Other (e.g., occupational matters)	8
Combination of topic types	8
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	5
<i>Have you argued about this topic with other people offline, face-to-face?</i>	Krippendorff's alpha = .87
Yes	110
No	56
Other	3
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	1

The fourth research question asked what goals individuals pursued when arguing with others on Facebook. To answer RQ4, we examined the responses participants provided when asked what they tried to accomplish through the argument (see Table 3). The coded goals revealed that arguing on Facebook was most frequently a complex goal-pursuit activity in that most participants ( $n = 62$ ) reported they sought to accomplish multiple goals, whether similar in their nature (e.g., multiple persuasion goals) or not (e.g., personal expression and persuasion).

Therefore, the first two authors unitized these responses further by separating answers from participants who indicated they pursued multiple goals. Each goal became a single a coding unit; the 62 multiple goals responses yielded 131 single goals coding units, increasing the total number of goals coded from 170 to 239. Intercoder reliability for the unitizing process was assessed with Guetzkow's *U*, which was .04, indicating 96% agreement in unitizing.

Following this step, most single goals identified by participants for their Facebook arguing pertained to persuading another person to change his or her beliefs or position on an issue, to open one's mind to different perspectives, or behave in a different manner. Examples of persuasion goals include, "to disprove what the other guy was saying," "to get them to understand" their behavior, "to get them to support Hobby Lobby rather than be against it," open their eyes to a different perspective," and "trying to prove" one's point of view on an issue. The second most reported goal (although by far fewer individuals) was to defend oneself or someone else who was attacked via the comments. For example, participants indicated they argued to defend their beliefs about a topic, to stand up for themselves when others challenged them or insulted them, but also to show support for others, and save the face of others such as friends or family members. A third goal identified was to request or command another person to engage in some instrumental task or behavior such as taking down a picture posted or reading an article. The main desired outcome in this category is not necessarily a change of belief or attitude as in the persuasion goal, but actual behavioral action, regardless of whether the target changes his or her beliefs in respect to the issue. Finally, some participants identified expressing one's opinion or position on a controversial issue being discussed as a desired outcome from their argument engagement. Examples include "let the world know my stance on the issue," "trying to show a different perspective" on the issue, or "just my two cents."

Table 3  
*Coding Scheme Categories and Intercoder Reliability for RQ4*

Question	Frequency of responses*	Frequency of responses**
<i>What were you trying to accomplish through this argument?</i> <sup>3</sup>	Krippendorff's alpha =	
.61*	Krippendorff's alpha = .64**	
Defend someone being attacked or defend self	17	36
Persuade someone to change their beliefs/attitudes or convince someone of an idea/position/belief	39	109
Accomplish an instrumental purpose/task, behavior-oriented (e.g., get the other person to do something)	16	29
Express my ideas/perspective/stance on an issue	9	20
Multiple goals from those above	62	-
Other	18	36
Do not know	1	1
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	8	8

\* Coded answers in which the "multiple goals" category appears.

\*\* Coded answers in which multiple goals were unitized and further separated in the single goal categories.

RQ5 asked how complex individuals' Facebook arguments were. To answer this research question, we examined participants' responses about the number of comments the argument had generated and the number of people involved in the argument. Overall, participants reported somewhat complex arguments. The number of comments ranged from 3 to 600 ( $M = 47$ ,  $SD = 69$ ,  $Median = 30$ ) and the number of individuals involved in these arguments ranged from 2 to 200 ( $M = 12$ ,  $SD = 25$ ,  $Median = 6$ ). We also coded participants' responses to whether they were arguing with one person in particular or with multiple others (see Table 4). More participants reported that they were arguing with one person in particular than with multiple people. The open-ended responses revealed that, when arguing with one person, the exchanges could involve multiple turns between the same individuals, regardless of whether others joined in. When arguing with multiple people, commenters often took sides and formed groups with other

<sup>3</sup> An association was found between the unitized goals (second column) and one's major,  $\chi^2(70) = 154.79$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ . Business majors reported primarily instrumental goals, followed by persuasion, whereas Communication majors reported primarily defend goals, followed by enjoyment, and then persuasion. Health and exercise science majors reported primarily enjoyment goals.

commenters, arguing together and supporting each other against others. Given these features, Facebook arguments resemble small-group discussions but offer more flexibility and the possibility to focus on one post/person than FtF interaction would. It also appears that some Facebook arguments do not result in sustained argumentation from all parties involved, in which claims and evidence follow previously presented ones, building on them. It may be that the platform itself makes developing and cultivating an argument more difficult (Sche because people have to be willing to scroll back and read through all the comments.

Table 4  
*Coding Scheme Categories and Intercoder Reliability for RQ5*

Question	Frequency of responses
<i>Were you arguing with one person in particular or with multiple people?</i>	
Krippendorff's alpha = .94	
One person	83
Multiple people	60
A combination (e.g., started with one person but involved multiple people as the argument evolved)	20
Other	1
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	6

In response to RQ6, [which asked how Facebook argument usually ended](#), we examined the coded responses in which participants indicated how the argument ended and who “won” the argument (see Table 5). The coded endings for a Facebook argument revealed that the vast majority of exchanges ended in a neutral manner, without reaching any agreement. For instance, participants often indicated that they ignored the post or stopped paying attention to the comments after a while. Others reported they detached from Facebook due to various reasons (e.g., late night, had to do other things), choosing not to the exchange any longer, still others reported the post was removed by the OP given, sometimes, the heated discussion it had generated. Most often, Facebook arguments ended due to a simple, behavioral action, such as

someone ignoring/unfollowing the post or someone deleting the post. As multiple participants put it, “it just died out.” These results reveal an interesting feature of Facebook arguments that is the result of the online medium: the possibility to simply sign off and terminate one’s involvement in an argument. Although FtF arguments also involve avoidance or withdrawal, Facebook makes such behaviors much easier than FtF communication. Also interesting are the numerous comments from participants about the arguments just dying out, which suggests a short life-span of Facebook arguments and, possibly, competition over the respondents’ digital attention. One may be fully involved when making the comment or post, but detach afterwards while browsing other posts on Facebook.

In terms of outcomes, a little over one third of participants (38%) indicated that no one won the argument they described, whereas approximately another third of participants (36%) indicated they, or the side they were on, won the argument. Thus, a good number of these exchanges fishtail, not producing any resolution but rather failing at persuading others (e.g., “Neither of us “won” because nothing was solved”). Participants’ comments acknowledged this impasse (e.g., “No one really won [...] we all agreed that we disagree”) and several also indicated that winning an argument was not even possible on Facebook (e.g., “I don’t think anyone can win an argument on Facebook”). Those who considered themselves victors in a Facebook argument indicated they had won because they had stronger evidence or better claims that persuaded the other party (e.g., “I effectively proved my point that made [the other person] stop arguing”). But many respondents considered they had won an argument if compliance was gained (i.e., the other party did what was asked, such as removed a picture considered offensive) if the other party in the argument stopped responding (e.g., “I finally got them to stop commenting”), or if they managed to rally more commenters on their side than the other party

did (e.g., “I ‘won’ because most of the people were supportive of my ideas”). While some of these responses suggest genuine persuasion, others point to dominance and compliance techniques that suggest a more distributive undertone of Facebook arguments.

Table 5  
*Coding Scheme Categories and Intercoder Reliability for RQ6*

Question	Frequency of responses
<i>How did the argument end? (i.e., it dies out as people stopped commenting, the person who posted the comment deleted it, and so on)</i>	
Krippendorff’s alpha = .64 for Coding 1	
Krippendorff’s alpha = .85 for Coding 2	
<i>Coding 1</i>	
Positive manner (convinced someone, reached agreement, other person apologized)	13
Neutral manner (stopped looking at posts, post was deleted, did not reach any agreement)	120
Negative manner (was de-friended, post was reported, stopped talking to the other person)	6
Combination of the above manners	18
Other	8
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	5
<i>Coding 2</i>	
Simple ending (one action)	125
Complex ending (combination of actions)	32
Other	7
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	6
<i>Who would you say “won” the argument?</i>	
Krippendorff’s alpha = .64	
Participant/Participant’s side	62
Participant’s opposing side	6
No one	64
Other	18
Do not know	1
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	19

Research Question 7 asked what consequences, if any, resulted from Facebook arguments. Most participants indicated that the argument did not have any effects on the relationship they had with the other parties involved in the Facebook exchange. For instance, respondents said, “We went on as if nothing was said,” “It[’s] just a Facebook argument so it has no real affect [sic] to any degree upon life,” and “It did not affect my relationship with anyone in the post, most people did not take these arguments personally.” Similarly, some participants

indicated the argument had no effects because they did not have a relationship in the first place with the other individuals involved in the argument (e.g., “I never even knew the guy” or “No, I was not very close to the people who took part in the argument”). In contrast, for roughly 20% of respondents, the Facebook argument damaged the relationship, either permanently or temporarily. For example, some participants reported that they lost respect for the other person, that they no longer talked to the other person(s), that they have unfriended the other person or have been unfriended themselves, and, in some cases, that the argument ended the relationship with the other(s) altogether.

Others encountered only temporary consequences, including tension and awkwardness when seeing or interacting with the other person(s) involved in the argument. Participants mostly worked through these effects or chose to forgive and forget in order to repair their relationship. Finally, the Facebook argument improved the relationship a small minority of participants (7%) had with those involved in the argument. For example, respondents indicated that, “Many true friends had my back, we created a stronger bond,” or “We grew closer as we discussed how we felt and then came closer in our relationship.” In terms of anticipating interaction with the other persons involved in the argument on Facebook, responses were split between “Yes” (51%) and “No” (46%), suggesting that, for roughly half of the participants, the FtF interaction may function as a factor they weigh when they comment or continue an argument on Facebook.

Table 6  
*Coding Scheme Categories and Intercoder Reliability for RQ7*

Question	Frequency of responses
<i>Did this argument affect in any way the relationship you have/had with the people involved in it?</i>	
	Krippendorff’s alpha = .84
Relationship was hurt permanently	35
Relationship was hurt temporarily	12
No effect/Relationship stayed the same	63
Relationship improved	12



Did not have a relationship with the other people involved	34
Other	13
Do not know	1
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	0
<hr/>	
<i>Did you anticipate interaction with any of the people with whom you argued in the future, offline?</i>	Krippendorff's alpha = .91
<hr/>	
Yes	87
No	78
Other	1
Do not know	1
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	3
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RQ8 examined satisfaction with Facebook arguments. Specifically, we asked whether satisfaction with the way an argument ended was related to the type of topics individuals argued about (RQ8a), the complexity of the argument (RQ8b), or the way the argument ended (RQ8c). For RQ8a, we compared satisfaction scores between the public and personal topics. These scores did not differ significantly  $t(145) = -0.23, p > .05$  between public ( $M = 3.40, SD = 0.97$ ) and personal topics ( $M = 3.44, SD = 1.18$ ). For RQ8b, bivariate correlations revealed that satisfaction was not associated with the number of people involved in an argument ( $r(168) = -.02, p > .05$ ) or with the number of comments an argument generated ( $r(168) = -.05, p > .05$ ). Finally, for RQ8c we entered satisfaction as a dependent variable and the three codes for how an argument ended (positive, neutral, or negative manner) in a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The omnibus  $F$ -test revealed a significant difference,  $F(2, 136) = 3.19, p < .05$ . According to the means plot, satisfaction was highest when the ending was considered positive ( $M = 4.00, SD = 0.91$ ), followed by a neutral ending ( $M = 3.42, SD = 1.00$ ), and a negative ending ( $M = 2.83, SD = 1.17$ ). Planned comparisons afterwards revealed that the decrease in satisfaction was significant when the ending was positive as compared to when it was neutral or negative,  $t(134) = -2.53, p < .05$ , but there was no significant difference in satisfaction between a neutral and negative ending,  $t(134) = -1.39, p > .05$ . Overall, then, satisfaction is not a function of the topic or the number of

parties involved, but satisfaction decreases depending on whether the ending is positive or negative/neutral.

The final research question, RQ9, asked what opinions people had about arguing on Facebook. To answer this question, we examined participants’ coded responses in which they indicated their opinion about arguing on Facebook. Most respondents (63%) had a negative opinion about such exchanges. They relied mostly on the examples provided in the question stem stating that arguing in Facebook was a waste of time, a useless activity, “dumb,” and pointless. Some provided explanations for their opinion, such as “There is no point in arguing on social media for everyone to see it,” “It is a waste of time because commenting generally takes too long so the argument can easily die out,” and “Nothing gets accomplished and everyone talks big because their [sic] behind a computer.” These illustrative examples question not only the possibility that arguing could be constructive when conducted on Facebook, but whether it should even be undertaken to begin with. The features of the Facebook platform also affect how individuals argue and, in this case, are perceived as hindrances to a productive exchange. About 24% of respondents had a more nuanced opinion of Facebook arguments in that they indicated this activity could sometimes be appropriate (and hence a positive experience) and sometimes it could be negative, depending on the specific argument at hand, its topic, and the other commenters.

Table 7  
*Coding Scheme Categories and Intercoder Reliability for RQ9*

Question	Frequency of responses
<i>What is your opinion about arguing with others on Facebook? (i.e., is it productive, useful, a waste of time, harmful, etc.). Explain your answer.</i>	Krippendorff’s alpha = .85
Negative opinion (it is a waste of time, stupid, inefficient)	107
Positive opinion (it is productive, useful)	7
It depends (may or may not be appropriate and useful depending on the topic of the argument, the people involved, etc.)	40

Other	14
Residual (missing or unclear answer; not enough details to code)	2

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## 1.5. Discussion

This analysis of individuals' arguing behaviors on Facebook offers several strengths. Few studies have been conducted attempting to explore how people argue on Facebook in general, rather than looking at specific types of arguing (e.g., political argumentation; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). Our exploratory study provides some initial, tentative findings about arguing on Facebook which could be developed in the future into systematic explorations of SNS argumentation practices, in general. For instance, researchers could map out the beginning, progress, and end of online arguments on Facebook and other SNS, generating specific models that can capture the unique ways in which individuals argue online. Pragma-dialectical considerations (van Eemeren & Grotendorst, 2004) or creative thinking algorithms (Wegerif et al., 2010) could be employed to examine the nature and characteristics of online argumentation. From such research, interventions may be designed to improve understanding of arguments in new media and educate individuals on how to conduct such arguments in constructive ways. As collaborative learning research demonstrates, online environments can be used to foster argumentation training.

Arguing on Facebook resembled arguing FtF in some ways but decidedly differed from corporeal arguing in other respects. Most arguments on Facebook started when people commented on other users' posts or other people's comments to those posts (RQ1). Furthermore, some of these arguments were extremely complex, reaching up to 600 comments (RQ5). Both these aspects speak to the unique nature of arguing on Facebook and the affordances this medium provides users –the ability to engage with any of the posters (not just the OP), as well as read the sequence of comments and choose how to reply either on the spot or after giving the

issue some thought. In addition, Facebook's platform enables complex arguments that involve a relatively large number of people (the maximum reported number of individuals involved in an argument was 200, with an average of 12 and a median of 6 other persons) to engage in the (presumably) same discussion. Because online communication can span both time (users can post when they want) and space (users can post from wherever they have Internet access), this complexity reflects a spatiotemporal benefit of mediated communication. Such discussions blend forms of interpersonal arguing with public or group argumentation practices and suggest future research ought to study in more depth how such arguments are carried out.

Not surprisingly, our data indicate that most of the topics discussed on Facebook were public topics (RQ3). Infante and Rancer (1993) found that, in FtF arguments, those high in argumentativeness also argued mostly about public topics. Furthermore, the somewhat public nature of Facebook suggests public topics would be broadcasted in such a forum. From this perspective, it is actually surprising to see that private matters, such as relational transgressions or judgments of family members' behaviors, were discussed in the form of Facebook posts. This result prompts researchers to ask how individuals separate the personal and public issues they are willing to discuss on Facebook and what other mediums of communication they use to argue about personal and private relationship matters, given the prominence and ubiquity of online communication in virtually every organizational and personal relationship (Edley & Houston, 2011).

In addition, our respondents indicated that they had discussed these issues offline as well (RQ3). Moreover, people tended to argue more if their Facebook network also argued more (RQ2), consistent with either a birds of a feather flocking together effect or a descriptive norm effect. Previous research has suggested that social networks tend to form such that similar others

find each other (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Our results suggest that those who are argumentative tend to “friend” each other online as well. In other words, those high in argumentativeness (Infante & Rancer, 1982) end up in similar SNS, which allows them to engage others also high in argumentativeness. Along the same lines, Lea, O’Shea, Fung, and Spears (1992) found that online flaming was the result of social influence and occurred more frequently with co-interactants engaged in the behavior online. This behavior speaks to another trait, verbal aggressiveness (Infante & Wigley, 1986), which has been studied extensively in the context of SNS. Thus, future research should explore in more depth the role of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in people’s arguing on Facebook and other SNS.

Some individuals engage the more constructive trait of argumentativeness while arguing with others on Facebook, whereas others resort to the destructive trait of verbal aggressiveness. In previous research, argumentativeness has been positively associated with extraversion and psychoticism, whereas verbal aggressiveness was correlated negatively with psychoticism (Heisel, La France, & Beatty, 2003; McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond, 2001). Furthermore, Facebook behavior has also been associated with personality traits (Carpenter, 2012; Chen, 2015; Marshall, Lefringhausen, & Ferenczi, 2015; Ross et al., 2009). For example, Carpenter (2012) found that the grandiose exhibitionism dimension of neuroticism predicted self-promoting behaviors on Facebook as well as the number of friends one had, the frequency with which a person would accept friend requests from strangers, whether one retaliated against negative comments, or got angry at the lack of comments. Chen (2015) reported that extraversion predicted the number of Facebook friends one had, whereas Ross et al. (2009) reported that individuals high in extraversion belonged to more groups on Facebook. Thus, a potential fruitful avenue for future research is the examination of how personality, argumentation traits, and

Facebook (or other SNS) behavior are related.

As in FtF arguments, people often pursued multiple goals (RQ4), including both influence and face-saving goals (Cionea et al., 2017; Cionea et al., 2015). An interesting goal revealed during the coding process was defending oneself or others, which is somewhat similar to Cionea et al.'s (2017) standing up for oneself goal, but also brings some unique nuances. Interestingly, the open-ended responses revealed that individuals commented on a post in which another friend was being attacked or sided with others in defending the OP or the target of a verbally aggressive or inappropriate comment. This goal was not as frequently reported during FtF arguments by individuals in [neither Cionea et al. \(2017\) or Cionea et al. \(2015\)](#) as it was in our current data. This finding may be explained by the overemphasis on flaming in online contexts. Although research on flaming has demonstrated that it is a relatively rare occurrence (i.e., generally less than 5% of users; Kayany, 1998), research has also shown that heated discussions (in which flaming occurs) are higher in certain online contexts. Thus, future research ought to examine how individuals' involvement in an argument on Facebook connects to the situation that demands argumentation, the goals individuals pursue, and how such discussions, which are often times heated, are affected by the medium in which they occur (i.e., online). [Furthermore, our findings about different majors reporting slightly different goals suggests another avenue for future research. Are Communication majors, for instance, more outspoken and, therefore speak up or stand up for others by defending them online? Is argumentation a more pragmatic, instrumental activity for Business majors who may associate it with the negotiation and decision-making processes characteristic of business interactions? Declaring a major sets one on a path of educational experiences, with tailored courses meant to offer that individual the necessary skills and competencies for that major. It is feasible to assume that a](#)

liberal arts education differs in substantive ways from a science or business education; hence, the argument skills and competencies of individuals from these majors could differ and explain their differentiated pursuit of goals while arguing online.

Some findings of our study suggest that the affordances of Facebook may encourage different argumentation patterns than those found in FtF. For example, people who post often, generally reported engaging in arguments less often (RQ2). One would expect that simply increasing one's communication in a medium would increase the likelihood that one encountered people of differing opinions, resulting in conflict. If people share their opinions with others FtF, it seems likely that they would encounter disagreement more often than if not voicing their opinions. Perhaps this finding can be explained by the often-reported reluctance to engage in expressing controversial opinions on Facebook found by previous studies (Sleeper et al., 2013; Sveningsson, 2014). People who post more often may have had negative experiences with posting about controversial topics and have subsequently chosen to avoid such topics, developing an online etiquette about how to post without attracting controversy. This explanation is consistent with the finding that most people reported commenting on others' statuses rather than offering an original post that produced controversy (RQ1). In all, these findings suggest that mediated argumentation may enable domain-ontologies, or context dependent, argumentation behavior (Scheuer et al., 2010).

Another interesting aspect of Facebook argumentation is that the vast majority of people's arguments remained unresolved. In FtF arguments, the issues may become serial arguments (Trapp & Hoff, 1985) that are periodically resurrected. However, most participants reported they stopped commenting on the post or the post was deleted altogether. One interpretation is that the arguments' importance, or what has been termed argument stakes

(Hample, Dai, & Zhan, 2017), is not high enough to warrant subsequent attempts to resolve them. In the future, scholars should consider topic and argument stakes when examining differences between arguments online and FtF.

Another interpretation is that Facebook, as a medium, changes the nature of argumentation and even questions the existence of a phenomenon such as serial arguments. Facebook is persistent and disentrained (*i.e., people can communicate without accessing the medium simultaneously*), which gives this medium some particular affordances (Carr & Hayes, 2015). In FtF communication, people do not make a claim and then walk away and come back to hear the response later that day or even days later. It is unsurprising, then, that many Facebook arguments ended when someone metaphorically decided to not walk back and communicate further or simply forgot about the interaction. Although Facebook does offer notifications of when someone has responded to one's comments, people may choose to turn these notification off, not to read them, or not to respond to others given this medium's affordances. In a FtF interaction, ignoring someone's last comment is not always an option and poses a face threat. Future research should examine perceived differences in how individuals report ending their arguments between online and FtF arguments, whether phenomena such as serial arguments appear in online arguments, and potential differences in personality traits, such as need for closure (Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993) and arguing behavior online.

Finally, our results suggest that individuals generally perceive arguing with others on Facebook negatively. The mediated communication environment poses barriers to solving an issue productively via arguing as participants cannot manufacture or interpret subtle nonverbal cues (*cf.* Walther & Parks, 2002), are more likely to be met with verbal aggressiveness, and no resolution seems to be accomplished in the vast majority of these exchanges. *These results are*



somewhat contrary to those of Tsovaltzi et al. (2012, 2013). It may be the case that naturally occurring arguments are perceived as less able to elicit collaborative learning, in which case arguing online needs a radical reframing. Some hope comes from the finding that individuals report they engage in arguing on Facebook in order to persuade others, although they also acknowledge this goal seldom accomplished and arguing is usually a waste of time. So, then, why do it? Similar to FtF argumentation, individuals may lack the necessary skills to engage in in-depth explorations of their values, beliefs, and argue about them with others in a cogent manner (Kuhn, 1991; 2005). Future research should investigate in more detail how individuals decide to engage in arguments on Facebook and other online platforms. Additionally, research should examine how, when, and if nonverbal cues are or are not important in the contexts of arguments in such mediated environments.

Overall, this study utilized many open-ended questions to explore how individuals argue on Facebook. Rather than trying to focus on a particular negative outcome of Facebook arguing (e.g. verbal aggression; Nitin, Bansal, & Khazanchi, 2011) or the discussion of certain topics (e.g. political issues; Sleeper et al., 2013), this study sought to conduct an exploratory investigation of people's general experiences with arguing on this specific SNS. Based on the qualitative data presented, measures of some of the concepts proposed here could be developed to explore systematically the relationships among some of these variables. Additional research is also needed to explore systematically the extent to which the affordances of Facebook produce particular kinds of argumentation outcomes that differ from FtF interactions and interaction in other CMC channels.

## 1.6. Limitations

Our study is not without limitations. This sample was composed of primarily White

students from one university in the United States. Given that the sample was not random, the proportions reported should not be taken as point estimates of population coefficients. The goal of this study was merely exploratory in that it indicated how some people argue on Facebook. Further replication with larger, more representative samples is needed to assess the extent to which the reports from participants in this sample are typical of Facebook users more generally. A second limitation of our study is that we relied on cross-sectional, self-report data rather than the actual text from these participants' Facebook arguments. This type of data collection is then subject to individual recall and perception biases. Given the proprietary nature of Facebook and ethical considerations about reporting others' behaviors without their consent, our data is a close approximation of the actual arguments participants had on Facebook. Our instructions did ask participants to revisit the exchange they were reporting on prior to beginning the questionnaire in order to help them remember the argument, which may have reduced some recall issues. Despite these limitations, this study has offered helpful directions for researchers trying to understand arguing in online environment such as Facebook or other SNS.

### **1.7. Conclusion**

This study found clear indications that arguments happening on Facebook have some unique features, not previously identified by research on FtF arguments. Although we did not directly compare FtF and online arguments, we relied on previous interpersonal argumentation literature as a reference point against which to develop and interpret the results of our study. In general, Facebook arguments are about public topics, usually directed at people who respond to a status update. When arguments occur on Facebook, participants most commonly aim to persuade others to change their beliefs and attitudes, or open their minds to different perspectives and viewpoints. Surprisingly, while most participants reported such arguments had occurred in FtF

contexts, with other people, only about half anticipated seeing the person in the future. This result is somewhat different than FtF arguments, which most often occur between proximal individuals, such as friends, romantic partners, family members, and co-workers (Cionea et al., 2015). Arguments on Facebook are generally inconsequential to the arguers (although some have negative consequences) and often fizzle out rather than reaching a clear conclusion. It is proposed here that the disenfranchisement of Facebook likely yields these outcomes, but studies could examine the extent to which that affordance is the likely cause of this phenomenon. Most participants reported a negative opinion of Facebook arguments and contend that it is not appropriate to argue online. Continued and systematic study of the issues explored in the current research is needed to understand how the affordances of Facebook and other online mediums affect how people argue.

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