

The varieties of friendship in a music-based social network site

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What does “friend” mean?

Last.fm

- Founded in London 2005
- >35 million users
- Highly international
- “scrobbling”
- Recommendations
- Multiple communication platforms

Challenging Survey Sampling

Sample

- **559 respondents** (355 male, 204 female) after deleting minors ($n = 89$) and those who reported having no friends ($n = 65$)
- Age range = 18 - 57 years ($m = 25.98$, $sd = 8.16$).
- Length of Last.fm usage = 0 to 60 months ($m = 18.35$, $sd = 10.91$)

48 countries of residence

- United States ($n = 165$, 29.5%)
- United Kingdom ($n = 101$, 18.1%)
- Germany ($n = 33$, 5.9%)
- Australia ($n = 27$, 4.8%)
- Canada ($n = 26$, 4.7%)
- The Netherlands ($n = 24$, 4.3%)
- Poland ($n = 19$, 3.4%)
- Finland ($n = 18$, 3.2%).
- Others in Europe (e.g., Italy, Spain), South America (e.g., Argentina, Brazil), and Asia (e.g., Japan, Saudi Arabia).

Random Last.fm Friend

Survey Measures

- Demographic characteristics of self and partner (a/s/I)
- Relational characteristics (met on site? length of Last.fm connection?)
- Relational development scale

Motivations for Friending

- shared taste in music
- shared musical history
- Profile characteristics (avatar, username)
- journal
- response to own profile
- Last.fm group or groups to which this person belongs
- existing online connection(s)
- existing offline connection

Qualitative Questions

- Why did you friend this person?
- What benefits do you get from having this person as a friend on Last.fm?
- What benefits do you think your friend gets from having you as a friend on Last.fm?

Last.fm friendships in general (flashback to Copenhagen)

- Moderately low relational development
- Homophilous in age, musical taste, not in sex or location
- Use an average of 2.3 media in the relationship

The Questions

- What reasons do people give for being friends?
- Do motives fit together into types?
- How do types fit with other variables?

The analyses

6 Types of Last.fm Friends

- Met on Last.fm
 - Linkers
 - Music Explorers
 - Last.fm Socializers
- Met online but not Last.fm
 - Online Socializers
- Met face-to-face
 - Local Socializers
 - Local Music Socializers

The Linkers (n = 109)

- Static connection
- Very little communication
- Would have been rude not to friend
- Newest friendships
- Low relational development

Linkers say:

- "she asked me about being my friend and I like her pic and she seems to be a very interesting person due to her studies"
- " Because he asked me... I had had no contact with him before, and have had very little since"
- "i accept all friend requests. If it makes someone happier when I'm in their friends list, then i don't have problem with that."

Music Explorers (n = 73)

- Music specialized
- Moderate Last.fm communication
- Little off-site communication
- Share music taste and history
- Share other similarities
- Oldest friendship partners
- Low relational development

Music Explorers say:

- "We talked through shoutbox because we have really similar musical tastes in really obscure singers. We share bands, and I'm sure we'd be friends if we met in real life."
- "I get to see different music tastes and recommendations from him as I know he has good taste. Purely music based in this case."
- "Even though she's always my neighbor, if that weren't the case her profile would be easily accessible."

Last.fm Socializers (n = 112)

- Into Last.fm as a unique social space
- Communicate most through Last.fm
- Likely to have met through site forums and discussion groups
- Interested in musical taste (may not share it)
- Talk about music as well as other things
- Appreciate their differences
- Tend to be international and same-sex
- Low relational development

Last.fm Socializers say:

- "Someone to talk to about music, life, art, vomit, philosophy, noise, brains, all of life's spoils."
- "we're part of a small community of friends that met on last.fm. it gives us a group of people to voice our concerns with, talk to, etc. like other groups of friends, it's basically the same thing. We also happen to all like music a lot, which is a serious bonus "
- "Because of a meeting in a group. We seemed to share some opinions, and the conversation was interesting, thought provoking and reminiscent. She also seems like the kind if person I would like to know in 'real life'."

Online Socializers (n = 72)

- Knew each other from another online environment
- Have often met face-to-face
- Low levels of face-to-face communication
- High online communication but not through Last.fm
- Same country, but not same town
- Low relational development

Online Socializers say:

- "I've been friends with them online, for over 2 years now. I met them on something called Souseek and i decided to join last.fm and they were on here already. She said if you want to set up a friend's request here is my username etc...so I added them :)"
- "I get to keep track of what he's up to and what he's listening to. Since we are not both members of any other site, and we first started emailing each other regarding music and CDs, it's a good fit for us to continue keeping up with each other on last.fm"
- "He is a member on a message board I frequent. On this board we had a thread where people posted their Last.fm URLs so we could add each other."

Local Socializers (n = 97)

- High levels of face-to-face, phone and online communication
- Unlikely to communicate through Last.fm
- Observe other's listening & appreciate sense of connection through site
- Music not a motivation
- Youngest and most likely to be cross-sex pairs
- Moderately high relational quality

Local Socializers say:

- "Just that she is one click away (since she appears on my Friends sidepanel). Also, your friends are listed on your dashboard, so I can tell if she is at home and listening to music (that sounds kind of stalker-ish, but I didn't mean it like that)."
- "The last.fm friendship feels like a residue of a social situation we used to be in as students; we're not much in contact any more, but his presence in my list is a sign that we are acquaintances."
- "It's my son! We live in different towns and it's nice to watch each other's music..."

Local Music Socializers

(n = 78)

- High face-to-face, phone and online communication
- Moderate Last.fm communication
- Music is a motivation for friending
- Observe other's listens and discover new music through Last.fm friendship
- Often introduced other to Last.fm
- Most developed relationships
- Using Last.fm longer than other clusters

Local music socializers say:

- "Another thread to the relationship - specifically about musical discovery"
- "I know her IRL, and she's the one who told me about lastfm."
- "I introduced him to Last.fm, so I can give him guidance... But he is also a close personal friend, and it is always nice to better know the musical taste of friend (even if only so I can make a better musical selection at the next party). Especially to find similarities."

Some implications

- There are recognizable types of relationship hiding under "friend" that may have different norms for interaction
- Last.fm is a venue for new relationship formation
- Relationships are both reproduced and enhanced through Last.fm
- Music is associated with developed relationships only when local

Some limitations

- These are *ideal* types with lots of exceptions and fuzziness in practice
- Only one person's perspective

