

## “Guanxi” Matters? Social Distance and Social Capital in Three Belgian Taiwanese Immigrants’ Facebook Virtual Communities

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**Abstract:** Abundant studies have demonstrated that people in Confucian societies influenced by the traditional cultural concept of *guanxi* may perform different social behaviors based on varying degrees of social distance in daily life. However, few studies have explored how people perform *guanxi* behaviors in the virtual world, especially in the migrant context. In order to fill this research gap, the author examined how Belgian Taiwanese immigrants executed the *guanxi* behaviors of *ganqing*, *renqing*, *xinren*, and social distance evaluation in various Facebook virtual communities. The author also explored the effects for the users of obtaining online social capital in various virtual communities. The author applied the mixed-methods approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data on Belgian Taiwanese immigrants’ experiences of using Facebook. By conducting online surveys and semi-structured interviews, this study collected 97 online questionnaires and interviewed 13 Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users. This study demonstrated that the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users perform the distinct *guanxi* behaviors of *Ganqing*, *Xinren*, and Social Distance evaluation, and acquire different levels of online bonding social capital in different virtual communities on Facebook. Moreover, this article argues that the different scales of virtual communities may play a critical role in explaining why Facebook users perform different *guanxi* behaviors and gain different levels of online social capital in various virtual communities. The research limitations and suggestions for future research are also discussed in the article.

**Keywords:** Belgian Taiwanese immigrant, Facebook, *guanxi*, social capital, social network sites

### 1. Introduction

*Guanxi* is a prominent relationship concept in Confucian culture that has influenced how people define and cultivate interpersonal relationships with others in Asian societies, including Taiwan, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macao. The original concept of *guanxi* in the Chinese language refers to social connections and interpersonal relationships; however, influenced by Confucian culture *guanxi* has evolved into a body of more complex parameters regarding interpersonal relations, including loyalty, trustworthiness, and social distance. In the Confucian concept of *guanxi*, people may perform different social and ritual behaviors based on their evaluation of the degree of social distance with various individuals. However, different scholars have varying definitions of *guanxi*. Jacobs (1979) claimed that *guanxi* is a particular

type of interpersonal relationship. Gold (1985) defined *guanxi* as a type of power relationship in which people in more important network position could have greater opportunities to access valuable social resources. Yang (2002) asserted that *guanxi* is a concept that describes how people in Confucian societies interact with each other, while *guanxi-xue* (關係術) is the strategy people use to cultivate and manage good relationships. Still, some scholars regard *guanxi* as the process of exchanging resources. People could gain social resources from their *guanxi* networks, and in doing so people could obtain additional *guanxi* capital. Based on a synthesis of these definitions, *guanxi* can be regarded not only as a static concept of defining relationships but also the practical strategy people use to manage interpersonal relationships in daily life.

Moreover, Chen and Chen (2004) demonstrated that the concept of *guanxi* in Confucian culture includes other important interpersonal relationship rules, such as *ganqing*, *renqing*, and *xinren*. The concept of *ganqing* in *guanxi* means the level of emotional support and intimate attachments between people. If people have a higher level of *ganqing*, they may also have a closer level of social distance. Therefore, cultivating *ganqing* with others becomes an important *guanxi* strategy for managing a good relationship. Furthermore, Chen & Chen asserted that in cases of close social distance and high levels of *ganqing* relationships, people may have greater motivation to engage in reciprocal behaviors and would be more willing to observe obligations in relationships. Accordingly, *ganqing* could be described as a feeling of intimacy, which can be regarded as a measure of the strength of a particular interpersonal relationship, or *guanxi*. In practice, people develop and cultivate *ganqing* to maintain or strengthen their relationships and *guanxi* with others, which means that the more *ganqing* exists in the relationship, the firmer the *guanxi* between/among people. Moreover, Qi (2013) indicated that *renqing* refers to the process of reciprocal favor exchange. In Chinese, doing a *renqing* means doing a favor for someone, and owing a *renqing* means being indebted to someone. In this regard, Qi stated that *renqing* could be one of the strategies of *guanxi* behavior. By utilizing this strategy people can cultivate and manage relationships. Similar with *ganqing*, Qi stated that the quality and the frequency of *renqing* exchange could be a key factor for examining the quality of *guanxi* and relationships.

Furthermore, the meaning of *xinren* in the Chinese language is the trust at an interpersonal level, indicating one's trust of others. In Confucian societies, people may feel different levels of interpersonal trust based on the different social distances and qualities of *guanxi*. In this regard, *xinren* is therefore essential in order for people to experience a good quality of *guanxi*, and also for conducting a *renqing* exchange; it facilitates favors or behaviors that create mutual benefit. Moreover, people in Confucian societies experience different levels of *xinren* and interpersonal trust based on the evaluation of social distance between/among peoples (Kriz & Fang, 2003). Fei (2003) called these ideas about different levels of *xinren* and interpersonal trust an "ego-centred social relationship" or *Chaxugeju*. He indicated that *xinren* and interpersonal trust in Confucian societies are not objective terms, however; they are based on the subjective evaluation of the social distance and quality of *guanxi*.

In this regard, Ruan (2017a) claimed that the concept of *guanxi* in Confucian culture cannot be understood without considering the level of closeness in interpersonal relationships. In Confucian societies, people usually apply the terms "insider" [zìjǐ rén] (自己人) and "outsider" [wàirén] (外人) to define social distance and evaluate the quality of interpersonal relationships. In this regard, people treat different people in different ways. However, the role

of the interpersonal relationship in western societies is regarded as part of a rational calculation; people would like to maximize the individual's interests in the relationship. On the contrary, the role of interpersonal relationships in Confucian societies follows the logic of *guanxi* and closeness. People would treat an outsider according to the logic of the rational economic human for maximizing their own benefits. However, people would treat an insider differently, by distributing benefits and interests equally among other members, instead of attempting to maximize their own interests. Moreover, Hwang (2011) indicated that in Confucian societies, people define the different levels of closeness in interpersonal relationships by three types. The first type is the expressive tie. This refers to long-term and stable interpersonal relationships. Individuals connected by expressive ties are families and close friends; they share stronger feelings of emotional support and attachment. The second type is the instrumental tie. In this tie people are in unstable and temporary relationships. Individuals connected by this tie are acquaintances or casual friends; they might not share their feeling or offer emotional support, and instead seek to fulfill instrumental needs. The third type of interpersonal relationship according to Hwang's definition is the mixed tie. In this type, people engage in moderate degrees of information exchange, obligation, and sentiment. More recently, Ruan (2016:60-65) defined three categories to explain interpersonal relationships and the level of closeness of *guanxi* in Confucian societies: the close *guanxi*, the moderate *guanxi*, and the distant *guanxi*. Moreover, Ruan asserted that the different levels of interpersonal closeness and social distances are a combination of *ganqing*, *renqing* and *xinren*, with different degree of each.

In Taiwan, the impact of Confucian culture and the ideas of *guanxi* on society and the educational system are profound. Before 2006, traditional Chinese culture was taught as mandatory courses at the senior high school, with texts and teachings including Analects of Confucius (*lùn yǔ*), the philosophy of Mencius (*mèngzǐ*), The Great Learning (*dà xué*), and Doctrine of the Mean (*zhōngyōng*). These are the classic ideologies of Confucianism. From 2006 to 2010, these courses became elective; however, after 2011 these courses again became mandatory at the high school level. In this regard, the traditional ideas of Confucianism still play a critical role in education and daily practices in contemporary Taiwan. Moreover, Gu (2018) indicated that Confucian culture has a tremendous impact not only on people who live in Confucian societies in Asia but also on those who migrate to other countries. Gu found that Taiwanese Americans, even those who had lived in the U.S. for decades, were still influenced by Confucianism in their thinking and everyday lives.

### 1.1. Guanxi, Social Distance, and Social Capital

Moreover, Qi (2013) claimed that *guanxi* is not a uniquely non-western concept; on the contrary, the ideas of trust, reciprocity, and obligation in *guanxi* are also the crucial elements of the western sociological theories, especially of social capital theory. Qi indicates that no matter if the concept is of *guanxi* or social capital, the goals of individuals are to utilize their *guanxi* or personal networks to gain social resources and to achieve their individual interests. In this regard, Qi has asserted that *guanxi* is not an idea independent from social capital; on the contrary, Qi regards *guanxi* as one of the elements people can use to generate social capital. In this regard, *guanxi* seems to be one component of social capital rather than social capital

itself, since social networks, norms, obligation, reciprocity, and the closeness of interpersonal relations are all critical elements of social capital.

In his concept of social capital theory, Putnam (2000) divided the individual level of social capital into two categories based on the different social distance and level of closeness of the interpersonal relationship: bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Putnam asserted that bonding social capital is found between family members, close friends, and others with strong/close ties. Maintaining good relations and frequent interactions with a person with whom we feel intimacy provides opportunities to access rare resources and gain emotional support. Through these actions, people acquire bonding social capital. The interpersonal relationships in the bonding ties are exclusive and most of those experiencing such ties have homogeneous personal backgrounds. As a result, although people gain emotional support from strong ties and intimacy, the similarity in their backgrounds may result in fewer opportunities for receiving new and useful information from these relations. In contrast, bridging social capital is found in the weak ties of members, including co-workers, classmates, and acquaintances or members of a community or religious organization. In Putnam's categorization, bridging social capital refers to crosscutting social networks. Because the backgrounds of bridging networks are more heterogeneous, people acquire different and new points of view and information. In this regard, Field (2008) asserted that the two categories of social capital of bonding and bridging are likely to be associated with the level of social distance in the interpersonal relationship. Moreover, Ruan's (2017b) study demonstrated how Chinese people utilize different *guanxi* behaviors to gain the bridging and bonding social capital in everyday life. He found that Chinese people usually apply several *guanxi* behaviors, which include gift giving, entertaining, exchange of favors, giving face, applying ritualized patterns, and giving money to make the interpersonal relations become closer. By conducting these *guanxi* behaviors, people may gain social capital in daily life offline.

## 1.2. *Guanxi* Strategies, and Social Capital on the Social Media

Several studies have already demonstrated how the use of *guanxi* behaviors could help people to obtain social capital in daily life. However, few studies have explored how people perform *guanxi* behaviors online, and moreover what the effects those behaviors have on gaining social capital online. In this section, the author reviews and discusses the studies related to the online *guanxi* practices and the social consequences.

Zhang (2017) explores how Chinese students studying in the UK use WeChat to perform *guanxi* behaviors and to help them manage interpersonal relationships with fellow students. Zhang found that the students sent emotional emojis and virtual "red packets" to fulfill the practice of gift giving. By doing so, the students shared their *ganqing* and emotional support with others. Zhang also found that by using different virtual tools, WeChat has become a useful platform for students to use to perform different online *guanxi* behaviors. Lisha, Goh, Yifan and Rasli (2017) applied the concepts of *ganqing*, *renqing*, and face to explain the technology behaviors of accepting and using WeChat. This study found that *ganqing* had a positive effect in influencing the users to accept and use the new technology and WeChat. By using WeChat for chatting and sharing their feelings, the users could communicate their *ganqing* and shorten

the social distance between users in the same chat group. However, it is worth noting that face (*mianzi*) had a negative effect in influencing users to use WeChat, since the WeChat usage experiences would make the users feel that they were losing face. On the contrary, the authors demonstrated that the *renqing* factor had no statistically significant effects in influencing the users to accept and use WeChat. Lindtner, Mainwaring and Wang (2009) conducted an online ethnography study to explore how online game players performed their *guanxi* behaviors with other players. The study found that by performing the *guanxi* behaviors in the online game, players could not only build new friendships but also could help players to find pre-existing *guanxi* networks. In this regard, online games have become an important platform for players to cultivate and manage their interpersonal relationships online and offline. Yan and Yasseri (2017) applied the text-mining method to explore how Twitter users in Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao post and reply to information about *guanxi*. They found that Twitter users in Mainland China posted information related to the traditional ideas of *guanxi*, whereas users in Taiwan and Hong Kong converted the conventional *guanxi* meaning into different senses.

Moreover, Lin, Tov and Qiu (2014) found that the number of users and scale of the online community would further influence the users' posting behaviors regarding emotional information. The authors pointed out that in a large online community, the social distance among the users is greater, which reduces the likelihood that users will post emotional information and share their feelings. On the other hand, in a smaller online community, the social distance among the users is reduced, and, as a result, users are more willing to post information regarding emotional issues and feelings. Accordingly, the scale of an online community could not only influence the users' posting behavior but also could further affect the users' ability to gain different levels of social capital online. A study by Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe (2011) showed that when a user has fewer than 500 friends on Facebook, the user can obtain more online social capital as the number of friends increases. However, when a user has more than 500 friends on Facebook, the social capital effect is reversed; in other words, the users may gain less online social capital when the number of friends exceeds 500. In this regard, the authors claimed that the number of 500 is a tipping point and that, beyond this point, the effects of using social media to gain online social capital may reverse.

Based on the literature reviewed, the author has found that few studies examine how users perform the different *guanxi* behaviors in different virtual communities, and what social opportunities exist for users to gain online social capital by performing different online *guanxi* behaviors. Moreover, most of the studies regarding online *guanxi* practices focus on the experiences of users from Mainland China. There is little research exploring the experiences of Taiwanese users, especially in the migrant context. In order to fill the research gap, this study examined whether Belgian Taiwanese immigrants perform different *guanxi* behaviors on different virtual communities on Facebook and what social opportunities exist for users to gain online social capital by performing different *guanxi* behaviors online. Accordingly, the research questions of this study are:

1. Is there any difference in *guanxi* behaviors performed by the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users in different virtual communities?

2. Is there any difference in social distance evaluation shown by the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users in different virtual communities?
3. Is there any difference in online social capital gains among the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants when using different virtual communities on Facebook?

## **2. Research Method**

This study adopted the mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data. According to the perspectives from Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), mixed methods refers to a process in which qualitative and quantitative research methods are employed simultaneously to collect, analyze, and interpret research data. For instance, the researcher can first adopt a qualitative method (e.g., participant observation and interviews) to collect first-hand data, and then, based on the data collected through this qualitative approach, the researcher can employ a quantitative method to develop questionnaires and implement questionnaire surveys. Finally, in order to mitigate the potential problem of insufficient results obtained through the quantitative approach, the researcher can revert to a qualitative approach and use interviews to gain more comprehensive and deeper research data, thereby making the study more complete. The above research design, alternating between qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect and analyze research data during different research stages, is called a convergent mixed method design and was proposed by Teddlie and Tashakkori. The present study adopted mixed methods to collect, analyze, and interpret research data. Specifically, the process of data collection and data analysis could be divided into the following two phases.

### **2.1. Qualitative Approach – Netnography and Semi-Structured Interview**

In order to explore Belgian Taiwanese immigrants' everyday Facebook virtual communities' usage experiences, in this phase, the researcher participated in three Facebook virtual communities launched by Belgian Taiwanese immigrants, namely "Taiwanese in Belgium" (TB), "Taiwanese Wife and Husband in Belgium" (TWHB), and "Belgium Taiwanese Wife Chat Forum" (BTW). Notably, the TB community has 4300 members, the TWHB community has 93 members, and the BTW community has 32 members.





Figure 1. The Facebook Pages of the Virtual Communities  
Source: The screenshot from the author's cellphone

In this regard, the researcher adopted Netnography (qualitative approach) as the research method and treated the above three virtual communities as the online fieldwork places of this study. The researcher proactively participated in discussions and supplying information in these three virtual communities, thereby developing an understanding of and familiarity with the different types of interactions between Belgian Taiwanese migrants and the primary topics online discussions that appeared in these three communities. In the process of this online participation, the researcher also recorded field notes of observations. In this phase, the researcher was attempting to identify frequent users of the three Facebook communities. After three months of online participation observation (from September 2017 to December 2017), the researcher identified the users who participated in the interactions and discussions more frequently. According to the categories of user in a virtual community based on participation frequency proposed by Kozinets (2012), such users can be divided into four categories: tourist, mingler, devotee, and insider. Kozinets suggested that researchers should conduct intensive online tracking and observation of users with the higher participation frequencies, devotee and insider. By doing so, researchers can develop a deeper understanding of the interactions between users in virtual communities. After three months of online participant observation, the researcher recruited 13 high-frequency users (devotee and insider) from these three communities and conducted semi-structured interviews with them from January 2018 to July 2018.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Research Informants

CODE	DATE OF INTERVIEW	PLACE OF RESIDENCE	GENDER	MEMBERSHIPS OF COMMUNITIES
P1	2018/1/4	Liege	Female	TB, BTW
P2	2018/1/13	Brussel	Female	TB, TWHB

<b>P3</b>	2018/2/7	Brussel	Male	TB, TWHB, BTW
<b>P4</b>	2018/2/25	Brussel	Female	TB, BTW
<b>P5</b>	2018/3/3	Namur	Female	TB, BTW
<b>P6</b>	2018/3/19	Leuven	Female	BT, TWHB
<b>P7</b>	2018/4/13	Liege	Male	TB, TWHB, BTW
<b>P8</b>	2018/4/23	Antwerp	Female	TB, TWHB
<b>P9</b>	2018/5/9	Leuven	Female	TB, BTW
<b>P10</b>	2018/5/27	Herentals	Female	TB, TWHB, BTW
<b>P11</b>	2018/6/11	Ghent	Female	TB, TWHB
<b>P12</b>	2018/6/25	Ghent	Male	TB, TWHB
<b>P13</b>	2018/7/19	Mol	Female	TB, BTW

Source: This study

The purpose of these interviews was to explore the impact of the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants' usage experiences on Facebook's virtual communities in their migrant everyday practices. Moreover, the data collected in this phase would be the basis for developing the online questionnaire, which was the main data collection tool in phase 2.

## 2.2. Quantitative Approach – Online Questionnaire and One-Way ANOVA

Based on the online observations and interviews conducted in phase 1, this study adopted the GRX (*ganqing*, *renqing*, *xinren*) Questionnaire (Yen, Barnes & Wang, 2011; Yen, Abosag, Hung & Nauyen, 2017) and revised part of its contents in order to explore how the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants perform *guanxi* behaviors online and to identify the social opportunities for gaining different levels of online social capital throughout their usage experiences on the Facebook virtual communities. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , measured in three factors on the original questionnaire, namely *ganqing*, *renqing*, and *xinren*, were 0.83, 0.88, and 0.95, respectively. This showed that the reliability of this questionnaire was acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The validity of the questionnaire adopted in this study was also good because its contents were developed by referring to the GRX questionnaire. Moreover, before collecting data, the researcher invited two experts to discuss and evaluate the quality of the questionnaire (one expert in social sciences and one expert in educational sciences), thereby exerting the function of expert validity. After revising this questionnaire and confirming its quality, the researcher used Google's online questionnaire system to develop an online version of the questionnaire and post it on the three previously mentioned virtual communities for data collection.





Figure 2. The Online Questionnaire Website Page  
Source: The screenshot from the author's cellphone

Data collection was conducted from January 2018 to the end of May 2018. A total of 102 online questionnaires were collected from the three communities; among them, 97 online questionnaires were valid (59 from Taiwanese in Belgium, 27 from Taiwanese Wife and Husband in Belgium, and 11 from the Belgium Taiwanese wife chat Forum). The rate of valid questionnaires was 95%. The online questionnaire included 35 questions and was divided into six parts. The first part evaluated the level of *ganqing* in *guanxi* behaviors; the second part assessed the level of *renqing* in *guanxi* behaviors; the third part measured the level of *xinren* in *guanxi* behaviors; the fourth part evaluated the degree of social distance among users; and the fifth and sixth parts measured the level of online social capital obtained by users in the different virtual communities. The scale used was a Likert-scale; the range of this scale is 1 to 10. One indicated that the participant disagreed strongly with the given statement on the questionnaire, while 10 indicated that the participant agreed strongly with the statement on the questionnaire.

This study employed one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyze the data. The researcher proposed the following null hypotheses for the research questions according to the statistically significant confidence level (i.e.  $p < 0.05$ ).

1. *Guanxi* strategy (*ganqing*, *renqing*, *xinren*) performed by users on Facebook communities.  
-H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in *guanxi* behaviors performed by Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users in different virtual communities.
2. Social distance shown by users in Facebook communities  
-H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in social distance shown by Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users in different virtual communities.
3. Social capital (bridging and bonding) obtained by users in Facebook communities  
-H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in online social capital gains for the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants when using different virtual communities on Facebook.

If F value of the ANOVA is equal or less than the statistically significant confidence level (i.e.,  $p < 0.05$ ), the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) will be rejected, which means there is a statistically significant difference in the mean between at least two groups. In order to further confirm the mean of differences, post-hoc tests were adopted. To reduce the type I error caused by several comparisons of post-hoc tests, this study adopted the Scheffe test to evaluate the research questions (McHugh, 2011).

### 3. Results and Analysis

#### 3.1. Results and Analysis from the Quantitative Approach

First, the author utilized the quantitative approach and one-way ANOVA statistics to answer questions 1 to 3. By analyzing the online questionnaire data, the author tried to examine whether the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants performed different *guanxi* behaviors and social distance evaluation in the different virtual communities and whether the users gained different levels of online social capital by using the different virtual communities.

Table 2 illustrates the mean of 97 samples in terms of the different factors in this study. For *guanxi* behaviors, the mean of *ganqing* among users in “Taiwanese in Belgium,” “Taiwanese wife and husband in Belgium,” and “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum” is 5.04, 5.56, and 6.18, respectively. The mean of *renqing* among users in these three communities is 5.18, 5.68, and 5.71, respectively. The mean of *xinren* among users in these three communities is 4.85, 5.53, and 6.07, respectively. For social distance evaluation, the mean of users in these three communities is 4.76, 5.41, and 6.36, respectively. For social capital, the mean of bridging social capital regarding new friends in these three communities is 5.46, 5.56, and 6.18, respectively. The mean of bridging social capital regarding new information in these three communities is 6.76, 6.22, and 6.36, respectively. The mean of bonding social capital regarding emotional support in these three communities is 4.10, 5.52, and 6.64, respectively.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

		N	Mean
<i>Ganqing</i>	TB	59	5.0424
	TWHB	27	5.5617
	BTW	11	6.1818
	Total	97	5.3162
<i>Renqing</i>	TB	59	5.1751
	TWHB	27	5.6790
	BTW	11	5.7121
	Total	97	5.3763
<i>Xinren</i>	TB	59	4.8542
	TWHB	27	5.5259
	BTW	11	6.0727
	Total	97	5.1794

Social Distance	TB	59	4.7627
	TWHB	27	5.4074
	BTW	11	6.3636
	Total	97	5.1237
Bridging Social Capital of New Friends	TB	59	5.4576
	TWHB	27	5.5556
	BTW	11	6.1818
	Total	97	5.5670
Bridging Social Capital of New Information	TB	59	6.7627
	TWHB	27	6.2222
	BTW	11	6.3636
	Total	97	6.5670
Bonding Social Capital of Emotional Support	TB	59	4.1017
	TWHB	27	5.5185
	BTW	11	6.6364
	Total	97	4.7835

Before one-way ANOVA, homogeneity of variance should be adopted to confirm whether the various samples among different groups are homogeneous. In this regard, table 3 illustrates that, regardless of factor, the outcome of Levene's test of samples among different groups showed that they are homogeneous ( $P > .05$ ). Hence, the researcher could conduct one-way ANOVA for further examination, and in this study the researcher adopted the Scheffe as a post-hoc test for evaluating the mean differences among different groups (McHugh, 2011).

Table 3. Homogeneity of Variance

	Levene Statistic	df 1	df 2	Sig.
<i>Ganqing</i>	2.848	2	94	.063
<i>Renqing</i>	1.905	2	94	.155
<i>Xinren</i>	2.102	2	94	.128
Social Distance	1.361	2	94	.261
Bridging Social Capital of New Friends	.212	2	94	.810
Bridging Social Capital of New Information	.149	2	94	.862
Bonding Social Capital of Emotional Support	1.044	2	94	.356

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3 shows the outcome of ANOVA analysis of *guanxi* behaviors and online social capital acquisition of the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants' Facebook usage experiences in different virtual communities. The users' performance in four factors – *ganqing* ( $F = 19.435, p < .001$ ), *xinren* ( $F = 17.064, p < .001$ ), social distance ( $F = 17.064, p < .001$ ), and bonding social capital

regarding emotional support ( $F = 26.280, p < .001$ ) showed statistically significant differences. However, there were no statistically significant differences in the users' performance in the remaining factors, namely *renqing* ( $F = 1.474, p > .05$ ), bridging social capital regarding new friends ( $F = .298, p > .05$ ), and bridging social capital regarding new information ( $F = .605, p > .05$ ).

Table 4. Analysis of Variance

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig
<i>Ganqing</i>	SS <sub>B</sub>	14.294	2	7.147	19.435	.000***
	SS <sub>W</sub>	34.566	94	.368		
	SS <sub>T</sub>	48.860	96			
<i>Renqing</i>	SS <sub>B</sub>	6.102	2	3.051	1.474	.234
	SS <sub>W</sub>	194.636	94	2.071		
	SS <sub>T</sub>	200.738	96			
<i>Xinren</i>	SS <sub>B</sub>	18.259	2	9.129	24.874	.000***
	SS <sub>W</sub>	34.500	94	.367		
	SS <sub>T</sub>	52.759	96			
Social Distance	SS <sub>B</sub>	26.774	2	13.387	17.064	.000***
	SS <sub>W</sub>	73.742	94	.784		
	SS <sub>T</sub>	100.515	96			
Bridging Social Capital of New Friends	SS <sub>B</sub>	4.867	2	2.434	.298	.743
	SS <sub>W</sub>	766.947	94	8.159		
	SS <sub>T</sub>	771.814	96			
Bridging Social Capital of New Information	SS <sub>B</sub>	5.924	2	2.962	.605	.548
	SS <sub>W</sub>	459.890	94	4.892		
	SS <sub>T</sub>	465.814	96			
Bonding Social Capital Emotional Support	SS <sub>B</sub>	79.778	2	39.889	26.280	.000***
	SS <sub>W</sub>	142.676	94	1.518		
	SS <sub>T</sub>	222.454	96			

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

In other words, the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users performed different *ganqing*, *xinren*, and social distance evaluation in different Facebook virtual communities; moreover, the bonding social capital regarding emotional support obtained by the Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users may vary in different Facebook virtual communities. However, there was no statistically significant difference in *renqing* behaviors performed by the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users in different Facebook virtual communities. Furthermore, there were no statistically significant differences for the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users to gain bridging social capital regarding new friends and new information in different communities. Table 5 illustrates the outcome of the post-hoc test. It confirms that there were no statistically significant differences in the performance of Belgian Taiwanese immigrant

Facebook users in *renqing*, bridging social capital regarding new friends, and new information.

Table 5. Multiple Comparisons

IV	(I) SNS	(J) SNS	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig	Comparison among communities
<i>Ganqing</i>	TB	TWHB	-.51936*	0.1409	0.002**	TB < TWHB,BTW
		BTW	-1.13945*	0.19915	0***	
	TWHB	TB	.51936*	0.1409	0.002**	TWHB > TB, TWHB < BTW
		BTW	-.62009*	0.21691	0.02*	
	BTW	TB	1.13945*	0.19915	0***	BTW > TB,TWHB
		TWHB	.62009*	0.21691	0.02*	
<i>Renqing</i>	TB	TWHB	-0.50387	0.33434	0.326	No Statistically Significant Difference
		BTW	-0.53698	0.47258	0.527	
	TWHB	TB	0.50387	0.33434	0.326	
		BTW	-0.03311	0.51471	0.998	
	BTW	TB	0.53698	0.47258	0.527	
		TWHB	0.03311	0.51471	0.998	
<i>Xinren</i>	TB	TWHB	-.67169*	0.14076	0***	TB < TWHB,BTW
		BTW	-1.21849*	0.19896	0***	
	TWHB	TB	.67169*	0.14076	0***	TWHB > TB, TWHB < BTW
		BTW	-.54680*	0.2167	0.046*	
	BTW	TB	1.21849*	0.19896	0***	BTW > TB,TWHB
		TWHB	.54680*	0.2167	0.046*	
Social Distance	TB	TWHB	-.64470*	0.20579	0.009**	TB > TWHB,BTW
		BTW	-1.60092*	0.29088	0***	
	TWHB	TB	.64470*	0.20579	0.009**	TWHB < TB, TWHB > BTW
		BTW	-.95623*	0.31682	0.013*	
	BTW	TB	1.60092*	0.29088	0***	BTW < TB, TWHB
		TWHB	.95623*	0.31682	0.013*	
Bridging Social Capital of New Friends	TB	TWHB	-0.09793	0.66368	0.989	No Statistically Significant Difference
		BTW	-0.72419	0.93809	0.743	
	TWHB	TB	0.09793	0.66368	0.989	
		BTW	-0.62626	1.02172	0.829	
	BTW	TB	0.72419	0.93809	0.743	
		TWHB	0.62626	1.02172	0.829	

Bridging Social Capital of New Information	TB	TWHB	0.54049	0.51393	0.577	No Statistically Significant Difference
		BTW	0.39908	0.72642	0.86	
	TWHB	TB	-0.54049	0.51393	0.577	
		BTW	-0.14141	0.79118	0.984	
	BTW	TB	-0.39908	0.72642	0.86	
		TWHB	0.14141	0.79118	0.984	
Bonding Social Capital of Emotional Support	TB	TWHB	-1.41682*	0.28625	0***	TB < TWHB,BTW
		BTW	-2.53467*	0.40461	0***	
	TWHB	TB	1.41682*	0.28625	0***	TWHB > TB, TWHB < BTW
		BTW	-1.11785*	0.44068	0.045*	
	BTW	TB	2.53467*	0.40461	0***	BTW > TB,TWHB
		TWHB	1.11785*	0.44068	0.045*	

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

However, statistically significant differences did exist in *ganqing*, *xinren*, social distance evaluation, and bonding social capital regarding emotional support. Notably, the *ganqing* performed by the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users in the community of “Taiwanese in Belgium” were significantly lower than those in the other two Facebook communities. The *ganqing* behaviors performed by the immigrant users in “Taiwanese wife and husband in Belgium” were significantly higher than those in “Taiwanese in Belgium” but significantly lower than those in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum.” Moreover, the *ganqing* behaviors performed by the immigrant users in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum” were significantly higher than those in “Taiwanese in Belgium” and “Taiwanese wife and husband in Belgium.” Furthermore, the *xinren* performed by the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants in “Taiwanese in Belgium” were significantly lower than those in the other two Facebook communities. The *xinren* performed by the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants in “Taiwanese wife and husband in Belgium” were significantly higher than those in “Taiwanese in Belgium” but significantly lower than those in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum.” The *xinren* performed by the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum” were significantly higher than those in “Taiwanese in Belgium” and “Taiwanese wife and husband in Belgium.”

In the social distance dimension, the social distance evaluations shown by the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users in “Taiwanese in Belgium” were significantly lower than in the other two Facebook communities. In other words, the users in the “Taiwanese in Belgium” community perceived the lowest degree of social distance evaluations. Moreover, the users in “Taiwanese wife and husband in Belgium” performed significantly higher degrees of social distance than those in “Taiwanese in Belgium” but significantly lower degrees of social distance than those in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum.” As for the users in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum,” their degree of social distance evaluations are significantly higher than those in the other two Facebook communities. In other words, the Belgian Taiwanese

immigrant Facebook users in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum” have the closest social relationships with each other. For bonding social capital regarding emotional support, the emotional support obtained by the users in “Taiwanese in Belgium” was significantly lower than those in “Taiwanese wife and husband in Belgium” and “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum.” The emotional support acquisition by the users in “Taiwanese wife and husband in Belgium” was significantly higher than for the users in “Taiwanese in Belgium” but significantly lower than for the users in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum.” As for the users in “Belgium Taiwanese wife chat forum,” the emotional support obtained was significantly higher than for the users in the other two communities.

As the above analysis demonstrates, the study showed that the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants performed different *ganqing*, *xinren*, and social distance evaluation among these three virtual communities on Facebook. It showed that the users in different communities may obtain different levels of bonding social capital regarding emotional support. However, the study also found that among these three Facebook communities there were no statistically significant differences in the users’ performance of *renqing* and the effects for the users of acquiring both the bridging social capital regarding making new friends and getting new information.

### 3.2. Results and Analysis from the Qualitative Approach

According to the analysis above, the study demonstrated that the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants performed different *guanxi* behaviors of *ganqing*, *xinren*, and social distance evaluation and obtained different levels of online bounding social capital in the three virtual communities discussed. On the other hand, there were no statistically significant differences in *renqing* behaviors and bridging social capital gains between the three virtual communities. However, based on the ideas of mixed-methods analysis, the qualitative data could be regarded as complementary data to supplement the insufficiency of quantitative data. The qualitative data has further use for theorizing explanations and finding the possible causal mechanism of the phenomenon based on the finding of the quantitative analysis (Sung & Pan, 2010). In this regard, the researcher has tried to apply the qualitative interview data in further discussions to explain why the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants performed different *guanxi* behaviors and obtained different levels of social capital in the three virtual communities, and further to find the possible causal mechanism explanations.

First, the author will apply the interview data to discuss and explain why the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants performed different *guanxi* behaviors of *ganqing*, *xinren*, and social distance evaluations in the three virtual communities. Informant P10 explained why a different number of members and a different scale of a virtual community could influence her to perform different *guanxi* behaviors:

*I have the membership of these three virtual communities; however, the feeling and the level of emotional attachments of these communities are different. For example, in the smallest one, I knew 80 percent of the users, we have the regular and close interactions no matter online or offline. On the online platform, we are frequently communicating*



*with each other, and furthermore, on some important festivals we would gather together for having the dinner. In this regard, I have more close relationships with the members in the Taiwanese Wife chat forum, moreover, by the frequent interactions with each other, we have stronger feeling of guanqing and xinren. Moreover, I am also the member of Taiwanese immigrant in Belgium community on Facebook, however, which is a virtual community with more than 4000 members, I don't even know them. In this regard, we don't have the further interaction, as a result, we can hardly have the opportunities to make the interactions with each other. I think when the scale of the virtual community is too big, which would further make the members too difficult to interact and share the feeling of emotion (P10 interview data).*

The comments from P10 confirm the research findings of Lin, Tov and Qiu (2014), which claimed that the number of members in the virtual community could influence the online users' posting behaviors regarding emotional information. This study found that the scale of the virtual community may also influence the users to perform different *guanxi* behaviors online. Accordingly, the authors have identified the number of members and the scale of the virtual community as possible causal mechanisms for explaining why the social network site users may perform different *guanxi* behaviors in different online communities. Users may make different social distance evaluations about each other based on the scale of the virtual community. Moreover, according to the evaluations, users may perform different *guanxi* behaviors online and, by doing so, gain different levels of online social capital in different virtual communities. In this regard, the present study argued that the scale of the virtual community would be the possible causal mechanism explanation for why the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants Facebook users perform the different *guanxi* behaviors, make the different social distance evaluation and gain the different level of online social capital in these three different virtual communities.

Moreover, the author's online fieldwork and observations serve as evidence for confirming this causal mechanism explanation. According to the author's calculation, there are 13 types of most frequently posted information on the largest virtual community of "Taiwanese in Belgium" on Facebook; these include visa applications, university offer applications, house rent, vacations, job applications, language learning, transportation and communication, legal information, medical information, food information, bank information, tax information, and other information (author's online field note). However, the author also found that little emotional information was shared on the Facebook virtual community of "Taiwanese in Belgium," which means that this community may provide limited emotional support for users. Similar usage patterns are shown on the quantitative online questionnaire. Of the users in the virtual communities of "Taiwanese in Belgium," "Taiwanese Wife and Husband in Belgium", and "Belgium Taiwanese Wife chat forum", the frequencies of sharing the emotional information were 10%, 33%, and 45%, respectively. It is clear that the users in the biggest online community are the least likely to share and post emotional information; however, the users' willingness to share emotional information in the other two communities is much higher. The users mostly post the information regarding emotions in the smallest virtual community. For example, the informant P7 posted emotional information regarding his relationships

problem with his partner on 27th January 2018 on the BTW community as follows:

1月27日 4:24  
 😞 覺得藍色憂鬱。 ...  
 或許真的太不一樣，在這樣下去真的受不了了，我跟目前的伴侶，真的已經走不下去了，觀念想法的差異，生活的習慣，從內到外完全不同。  
 他買東西(衣服，家具，生活用品)萬物皆要問我，有的買貴了，我希望他不要買，他生氣，我只希望他高興就好，他喜歡就好。  
 我想買什麼，我也不愛問人意見，因為我很有主見  
 我喜歡，大家喜不喜歡，我一點也不在乎。  
 他買了房子在鄉下，一樓有一間空店面，他一直希望我能創業開餐廳，但是同時，我是比較慢慢磨的人，要開就要開到最好，我希望能成功，我希望我現在蹲的更低，之後可以跳的更高。

Figure 3. The Post Information on BTW

Source: The screenshot from the author's cellphone and this posted was authorized by the informant to be used on the study

After this information was posted, more than 80 percent of the community members “watched” this information and there were more than 40 replies. Within the reply streams other users offered encouragement or demonstrated attachment to the poster. For example, the user Emma replied and encouraged the poster and wrote that “*You are a brave man and also full of confidence. I believe you know which is more appropriate to yourself. Cheer up*”. The user Yuan also replied to this post with words of concern and emotional support: “*Are you okay now? If you have any problem, very welcome to contact with me, we can have a drink and chat together. Be careful, I believe you can deal with it well.*” Informant P13 was one of the users who replied to this post; he shared his experiences of using the virtual community:

*I think in the small community, the users may have more chances to share their feeling and emotional support, on the contrary, if the community has too many members, then it would make me feel embarrassed to post something about my feeling and emotions* (P13 interview data).

Moreover, one question raised by the data was why there was no statistically significant difference in *renqing* behaviors performed by Belgian Taiwanese immigrants in different Facebook communities. Informant P5 explained the above phenomenon with an ancient Chinese slang expression: “*Never create bad relationship between you and anyone since you might eventually meet again (ren qing liu yi xian, ri hou hao xiang jian).*” Accordingly, P5 was saying that there were only a few Taiwanese immigrants in Belgium, and they may easily meet on a number of occasions. If one is stingy in performing favors for others, no one may be willing to help when that person is in need no matter in online or offline life. In this regard, the study conducted by Zeng and colleagues (2018) supported the above idea of this study. They pointed out that Chinese people usually regard the requests from others as *renqing* demands even if the requests come from digital acquaintances. Hence, if people easily reject others' requests in social media, they may violate the “rule of reciprocity” [bào de guī zé] and increase

negative online personal reputations for others (Hwang, 2011). In this regard, the quantitative online questionnaires, regardless of virtual communities, all showed that more than 80% of users were willing to help other users if they made online requests. It is worth noting that *renqing* performances online follow offline *renqing* logic. In Confucian societies, if people help others by making a favor or *renqing* for someone, they would expect the recipients to reciprocate in the future. If today I help or do a *renqing* for someone, this means the other will owe me a *renqing*. As a result, if I have a problem or request in the future, the people who owe me *renqing* must return this *renqing* and help me without excuses. The results of this study not only echoed the perspectives of Pilotta (2013) that people influenced by Confucian culture are more likely to adopt the “logic of *Renqing* interaction” in daily life, but also demonstrated that the “logic of *Renqing* interaction” is displayed in interpersonal interactions on the online platform of the social network site.

Furthermore, in the information search and friendship-making dimensions, informants P7 and P2 shared their usage experiences of the three virtual communities and explained how these experiences could help them to collect new information, develop new interpersonal relationships, and gain online bridging social capital.

P7, a 32-year-old male, had lived in Belgium for five years. He shared his experiences regarding using Facebook virtual communities to make new friends and obtain new information:

*Participating in these three Facebook virtual communities is really important for me to obtain some information. It is because there are three language districts in Belgium, they all use their familiar languages to announce some information on their companies or enterprises such as information regarding local strike. Therefore, we cannot obtain relevant information immediately. However, many users of Facebook communities proactively post this information to these communities for every member; hence, I think obtaining some important information on these Facebook virtual communities is useful to me. Moreover, during the five years from the beginning of migrating to Belgium, I have made above 10 friends by Facebook! I think it is useful for me to gain some information and make friends by using Facebook and these virtual communities (P7 interview data).*

P2, a 29-year-old female, had migrated to Belgium for three years. She shared with the researcher how to find a job in a Chinese restaurant by using social media websites.

*Actually, except for my boyfriend, I seldom made friends after arriving in Belgium. At the beginning of arriving here, I think everything was fine to me; however, several months later, I started feeling bored when staying at my home. Hence, I wanted to find a job here. But at that time, I had yet to know how to speak Dutch or French, so there were no jobs suiting me. However, at that time I found the social websites were helpful to me as some Taiwanese migrants would post relevant working information on the social website. Afterwards, I contacted an owner of a Chinese restaurant by this working information; and then, the owner recruited me to work in his restaurant. I*

*have to say that, using the social network sites are useful for the new migrants to find the jobs in here (P2 interview data).*

According to the above analysis, the results of this study align with those of other current relevant studies which found that not only does people's usage experience of social websites increase their ability to obtain individual-level bridging online social capital, but also that there is no difference in gaining bridging online social capital among different social network sites (Antheunis, Vanden Abeele & Kanter, 2015). However, this study further indicated that the number of members in and the scope of a virtual community may have an impact not only on users' performance of *guanxi* behaviors but also on the emotional information shared by users and the possibility of obtaining bonding online social capital (Ellison et al., 2011).

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to explore (1) whether Belgian Taiwanese immigrants showed different *guanxi* behaviors in different Facebook virtual communities; and (2) whether the different usage experiences of virtual communities impact on the users' acquisition of social capital online. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach to collect data on the usage experiences of Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users in different virtual communities on Facebook. A total of 97 online questionnaires regarding social network site use experience were collected and 13 users of Facebook virtual communities were interviewed. The concrete results of this study are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. The Main Finding of This Study

HYPOTHESIS	RESULTS	DESCRIPTIONS
1. There is no difference in <i>Guanxi</i> strategies behaviors ( <i>Ganqing</i> , <i>Renqing</i> , and <i>Xinren</i> ) performed by Belgian Taiwanese immigrants in different Facebook virtual communities.	Partly rejecting $H_0$	The Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users performed different <i>Guanxi</i> behaviors in two aspects of <i>Ganqing</i> and <i>Xinren</i> , among the different virtual communities. However, there is no statistically significant difference of <i>Renqing</i> behavior performances.
2. There is no difference in Social Distance evaluated by Belgian Taiwanese immigrants among different Facebook virtual communities.	Rejecting $H_0$	The Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users made statistically significant difference of social distance evaluations among different virtual communities on Facebook.

3. There is no difference in online social capital gaining for the Belgian Taiwanese immigrants when using the different virtual communities on Facebook.	Partly rejecting $H_0$	The Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users obtained statistically significant difference of Bonding Social Capital regarding emotional support in the different virtual communities.  However, there is no statistically significant difference for the users to gain both of Bridging Social Capital regarding New Friends and New Information among different virtual communities.
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Source: This study

The analysis of the quantitative data in this study revealed that different *guanxi* behaviors were performed by Belgian Taiwanese immigrants in different Facebook virtual communities; for instance, users in different virtual communities performed different *ganqing*, *xinren*, and social distance evaluations. Moreover, users in different virtual communities obtained different levels of bonding online social capital. However, it is worth noting that users neither showed different *renqing* of *guanxi* behavior nor obtained significantly different levels of bridging online social capital in different virtual communities. Notably, this study adopted interview data of qualitative approach not only to complement the above analysis of the quantitative approach but also to provide possible explanations for the causal mechanism of the results obtained by analysis of the quantitative data. Accordingly, based on the qualitative interview data, this study argues that the possible causal mechanism explanation for why the Belgian Taiwanese immigrant Facebook users would perform different *guanxi* behaviors and obtain different levels of bonding online social capital is the scale of virtual communities. The study finds that different scales of virtual communities could not only influence users to post information regarding emotions, but also could influence how users perform *guanxi* behaviors and social distance evaluations in different virtual communities based on different interpersonal closeness and social distance evaluations, however, which would further influence the users' ability to gain social capital online.

Accordingly, this paper is the seminal study to uncover how people perform different *guanxi* behaviors in different virtual communities on Facebook by analyzing the quantitative data. The study has also tried to apply the qualitative interview data to find possible causal mechanism explanations. However, the explanations in this study are only possibilities; the author does not exclude other possible explanations for the causal mechanism. Moreover, a research limitation of the study is that because the present study applies the one-way ANOVA statistical method, it may illuminate the differences but be unable to provide further inferential explanations or verify the possible causal relationship. As a result, in a future study, the author expects to conduct further statistical research to confirm whether this causal mechanism explanation is accurate. The author also expects to conduct mediation or other inferential statistical analysis

to verify the possible causal relationship between variables.

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