

Dynamicity of Re-emerging Friendship in Social media Era: A study in Kolkata Metropolis, India

Jayeeta Naskar , Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta

Anindita Chaudhuri, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Calcutta

Corresponding Author: Jayeeta Naskar, Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta

ABSTRACT: As a vital component of human life, "friendship" has taken on many forms over the years. It changed with time, particularly in the last several years following the breakthrough in information and communication technology, or "social media." The vast array of alternatives available on social media in today's globalized world has shaped and influenced the mindsets of its users, particularly younger populations. It also has a significant impact on how people manage and govern their relationships. Technological developments, especially the internet and social media, have made it easier for people to connect with others across the world and build friendships with people they may not have met otherwise. Building friendships across cultural boundaries has also been facilitated by this. The study investigates the ways in which social media has profoundly affected people's perceptions, formations, and maintenance of friendships. By navigating friendship-related emotions through a variety of lenses, it looks at how the changing nature of friendships has affected specific events and how social media has affected people's sense of social connection. Thirty-one respondents, aged sixteen to twenty-three, were chosen for the study using purposive sampling, which guaranteed that respondents from the lower middle and higher middle socioeconomic classes (as defined by the Kuppuswami socioeconomic scale, which was updated in 2019) in the Kolkata metropolitan region would be included. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized for reflective, critical, and deeply situated analysis, with transcriptions and memos of observations coded and analyzed for emerging themes. The findings show that the respective age groups' perceptions of the role that social networks play in making friends are not entirely consistent. The statement highlights the ways in which contemporary friendships are redefined by perceived intimacy, restricted emotional connections, and contrasting realities. It also shows how, in this day and age, a narrow line that separates friends from strangers may lead to confusion and misunderstandings.

KEY WORDS: Friendship, Social media, Emotional connection, Perceived intimacy, Contrasting realities.

Date of Submission: 12-11-2023

Date of Acceptance: 28-11-2023

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of civilization, friendship has been a philosophical subject. Aristotle made a distinction between hedonistic, ethical, and utilitarian friendships. According to Aristotle, a perfect relationship is founded on virtue, moral principles, and good will. Perfect friendships involve spending a lot of time together, participating in shared interests, and acting in ways that benefit both parties (Bakardjieva, 2014). Friendship transcends time, culture, and became an essential component of human life. It is distinct, more powerful than blood, and crucial for psychological and emotional health. Childhood friendships sometimes develop based on closeness and common hobbies, such as playing with toys or video games. Friendships develop in complexity as we approach adolescence, fueled by common experiences and emotional support. In maturity, the quality of connections frequently prevails over the number, with a select group of close friends serving as our rock-solid foundation.

"We found in our study that people, college students, are not getting a sense of social support from being on the phone. They're getting social support through bigger networks and having a sense that their audience is large." Patricia Greenfield (2014)

Patricia Greenfield, a developmental psychologist at UCLA, has observed that youth's use of social media has led to a decline in intimate relationships. But for many young people today, their personal validation comes from the "likes" and comments on their posts. (2014) CBC. According to Greenfield's own study, young people feel socially supported when they have large networks of online friends—friends they may or may not ever meet in person. In Indian perspective, News 18 network (August, 2023) also reported how social media dynamics have profound influence on friendship now-a-days. As per the report social media has completely changed how people remain in touch with one another by making it simple to share updates, images, and videos. Additionally, technology makes it easier to meet new people through online forums and communities. However, it could result in irrational expectations for friendship, leaving one feeling inadequate and insecure. Constant social media usage

can also cause isolation and separation from real-world connections, which makes it more difficult to sustain intimate friendships. Therefore, maintaining a good relationship requires a balance between human interactions and social media use. The average daily usage of social media in India is 2.4 hours, with 13 to 19-year-olds accounting for 31% of users and 18 to 24 year-olds accounting for the bulk of Facebook and Instagram users (Statista, 2021).

An intriguing facet of contemporary interpersonal interactions is the dynamic nature of re-emerging friendships in the social media age. People often reconnected with former pals from various phases of their lives in the era of social media. Social media has ingrained itself into our lives in the digital age and has a significant impact on how we connect, communicate, and preserve relationships. It has several effects, but one of the most important is on friendships or the concept of it. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter are just a few examples of the social media sites that have completely changed how we see, develop, and sustain connections. Despite the fact that these platforms provide never-before-seen possibilities for connection, they also present particular difficulties and complexity that influence the character of contemporary friendships. Online relationships, in which people communicate with one other via email and other computer-mediated communication systems, are becoming more common as a result of the easy availability of internet. These connections stand in contrast to conventional offline interactions, which take place via conventional media like the telephone or face-to-face communication. Online connections may now overcome barriers, replace offline relationships, and strengthen and complement more established ones thanks to social media (Butler & Matook, 2014).

Friendships are voluntary, mutually beneficial connections between people from diverse backgrounds, age groups, and social settings. In addition to offering attachment, company, assistance, and emotional support, they also give ego support, self-affirmation, security, utility, and excitement. (Wright, 1984). Closeness is often used to measure relationship strength. Social media allows people to create a platform to support various kinds of relationship specially friendships. Social media platforms offer a variety of opportunities for people to retain and grow their connections through reciprocity. While some systems, like Twitter, just provide mutual acknowledgment, others need explicit acknowledgment. Social networking platforms encourage users to interact with shared messages by giving them likes, accepts, comments, and responses. These mutually beneficial actions create connections and support friendships throughout time. Online and offline encounters combined to form hybrid friendships are dwindling in number. Even if a hybrid strategy may be the best option, people can still keep a variety of connections to meet their various social demands. Social media-enabled friendships could be a good option for assistance on a social and emotional level. Friends may congratulate one another, offer support, and send well wishes using text-based social networking capabilities. People now have an expanding range of alternatives for keeping relationships with their friends.

II. THEORIES UNEARTHED UNDER THE CONCEPT OF DYNAMICITY OF RE-EMERGING FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is being challenged today on brand-new technical grounds. The numerous new terms we use to describe friendship that further impede our search for it include strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973), social networks, social capital, Dunber's number (Dunber, 1992, 1993), and homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001), to name a few. Making a profile on a social networking website and then asking another profile to become your friend is known as the "socio-technical practice" of friending in today's world. Aspects of social media may be compared to Ritzer's (1993) idea of McDonaldization since both phenomena share certain traits relating to rationalization, efficiency, and standardization. McDonaldization, which prioritizes quantity above quality and standardization, might be related to how friendship is occasionally reinterpreted and experienced on social media. It's important to understand that not all internet friendships fit within this description. On social media sites, many individuals do make sincere and lasting connections, and the value of those friendships may be substantial. On the contrary the idea of having human groupings of 150 or fewer have a cognitive upper limit is known as "Dunbar's number." (Dunber 1992,1993). This is due to the fact that "[t]o maintain group cohesion; individuals must be able to meet their own requirements and coordinate their behaviour with other group members." In the context of social media context Dunbar's Number argues that people often only keep a smaller, intimate circle of actual friends or close ties, despite having a large number of internet contacts. It emphasizes the significance of differentiating between the amount of online connections and the caliber of close friendships, implying that social media may not be able to completely replace or equal the depth of real-life, close friendships. Another concept emerges out very strongly from social networking point of view which portrays social networks are made up of both strong and weak links and are essential to our social life. This whole idea was based on the work of Mark Granovetter's (1973) theory of weak and strong ties, also known as "The Strength of Weak Ties". This concept is relevant in the present day since social media platforms allow for the dissemination of information, social support, and possibilities, demanding a successful balancing and exploitation of these connections.

Having a distinct idea of one's online and offline personas is crucial in the modern digital world. Therefore, there is always a conflicting perspective on how online and offline life relate to one another, and these perspectives have important ramifications for how we view and interact with friends in the modern world (Zekany & Bregović, 2013; Crider, 2016). Today's world of friendship on social media is marked by two starkly opposing phenomena: on one hand, online and offline interactions take place in distinct universes, and on the other, online and offline life are intertwined and cohabit. In the first instance, it was argued that online contacts lacked the authenticity and significance of in-person ones ((Audrezet et.al, 2018). In contrast, it is obvious in the second instance that technology is essential to enabling the cohabitation of the online and offline worlds (Ibáñez Sánchez et.al, 2022; Alamäki et.al, 2021). Although there are many different perspectives on the value of online friendships, it is becoming increasingly clear that, depending on the depth and quality of the connection, these friendships may often be just as meaningful and important as those developed via face-to-face interactions (Scott et.al, 2022; Clark & Green, 2019).

Homophily is a term that is increasingly popular today to describe the type of connection that people make online when it comes to relationships specially friendships. People are more likely to form relationships and friendships with people who share their interests, values, viewpoints, demographics, and even behaviours ((Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; (McPherson et.al, 2001). Despite the fact that homophily is a human inclination that social media may amplify, it's crucial to recognize that online connections forged around similar interests or traits can be worthwhile and meaningful. These relationships may result in thriving communities, thought-provoking conversations, and helpful networks. It's important to understand how homophily may lead to echo chambers and restrict exposure to different viewpoints, though (Kitchens, Johnson & Grey, 2020; Eli Pariser, 2011). A well-rounded online social experience requires balancing relationships based on similar interests with chances to interact with other points of view.

The way individuals deliberately control their online identities and interactions to sculpt the perceptions that others have of them (Schlenker, 1985, p. 67). Because individuals are drawn to and form connections with those who fit the projected image, this may have an impact on the nature of online friendships. Sometimes online personas are edited representations of people that emphasize some parts of their lives while hiding others (Goffman, 1959). People project a desired image through social media and online interactions, such as being daring, successful, or kind. This may have an impact on the character of online friendships. People carefully choose what information to disclose and keep private on social media, which has an impact on how others see them and the kinds of connections they attract (Barbovschi et al., 2018; Pounders et al., 2016; Schwartz & Haleboua, 2015). According to Barbovschi et al. (2018), tagged photographs in particular have caused teenagers to struggle with how they show themselves. They realized they had to make management decisions when people posted things they didn't like. Protective self-presentation techniques might be subtractive—deleting or untagging the content—or repudiative—adding extra posts or photographs (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). In online connections, striking a balance between reality and idealization is sometimes difficult. Self-presentation theory has an impact on how connections begin and grow because individuals are drawn to those who have similar values or interests (Hollenbough, 2021). This self-presentation includes how people manage their online friendships, acting in ways to uphold a particular image.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Context

The ethnographic study was conducted in Kolkata, a metropolitan city of the Eastern Indian province of West Bengal. Social media is a vital aspect of our everyday life in the contemporary generation. The way we converse, exchange knowledge, and engage with the world has been completely transformed. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and You tube have become extremely popular and had a significant influence on society. This study examines the many facets of social media in the contemporary period, as well as its advantages, disadvantages and ramifications for people in terms of their perception of relations specially friendship.

Apart from several attributes social media have offered to mankind, exploration of identity and reshaping relationships (Nesi, Choukas-Bradley & Princtein, 2018) emerging as one of the most observed attributes social media has to offer to this present era (Wood, Bukowski & Lis, 2016;). Social media has given people a place to express themselves and display themselves, enabling them to carefully cultivate their online personas. The result of this, though, is a phenomena known as “highlight reel culture” (Johnson, 2018; Baker, 2018). In contemporary society, people frequently only draw attention to the most exciting and fulfilling aspects of their lives, giving the appearance that everything is perfect and they are content. It may occasionally be challenging to conduct personal

talks in person due to constant social media and internet use. Overusing social media sites can interfere with time spent with people and having real-world experiences (Christensen, 2018). This may result in a lack of true interpersonal connection and a sense of alienation which negatively impact face-to-face interactions, hindering the development of meaningful relationships which lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings (Christensen, 2018; Turkle, 2011), as digital interactions lack non-verbal cues and context. Online interactions may feel less personal and less genuine, potentially reducing empathy and emotional connection, as excessive social media use can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Hammad & Awed, 2023), as people focus on online connections instead of real-world interactions. Overall, excessive social media use may negatively impact friendships and support.

3.2 Inquiry approach and data collection

This exploratory study in an Indian postcolonial metropolis intends to explain the various ways how traditional concepts of friendship have been redefined in this social media era.

Whereas Social media platforms offer various ways to interact, such as comments, likes, direct messages, video calls, and live streams which allows friends to stay in touch and express themselves creatively, enhancing the depth and richness of their friendships in one hand and on other hand unlike traditional face-to-face interactions, social media allows for asynchronous communication, where friends can interact and respond to messages at their convenience leading to a sense of disconnection. People can use social media to carefully regulate how they present themselves online, emphasising only the finest parts of their lives. People may compare their personal connections to carefully crafted representations provided by others, creating a notion of "idealised" friendships that might have an adverse effect on self-esteem and social comparison.

A twin emphasis dominates the investigation. The study first tries to understand how social media has significantly changed what people perceive, create, and keep friendships. Here, I'd want to make an effort to comprehend how the altered landscape of friendship that social media has provided has impacted and sparked certain occurrences. Second, has social media managed to impact people's perceptions of social connection by navigating the fundamental emotions linked to friendships with the exposure of multiple avenues? In this section, the article will try to explain how the virtual world affects people's perceptions of friendship.

The study is anticipated to provide information on a) how individuals can maintain their connections with one another in their respective worlds in light of the paradigm shift in friendships that has been brought about by the postmodern era's rapid technological advancements, globalisation, individualism, and collapse of traditional social structures. b) An investigation into how individuals are changing and fluidizing their identities in order to overcome the new problems that social media has introduced into their way of life.

A total of 31 respondents aged between 16-23 years of age were selected through purposive sampling that ensured the inclusion of respondents from lower middle and upper middle socio economic class (as per Kuppaswami socio economic scale modified in 2019) of Kolkata metropolis area. After the selection of respondents of preferred age group, rapport was established through contacting, observing and talking to the young Indians mostly located in clusters at certain spaces of Kolkata: families within familiar neighbourhood, coffee shops, playgrounds and parks where young people play and chat, coaching centers, restaurants, shopping malls, undergraduate colleges and university campuses in order to select more responsive and sensible respondents for final selection and collection of qualitative data through unstructured, semi-structured interviews and conversation. Use of internet via *facebook* app was effective for early online and later offline meets. The intention behind the selection of the concerned age group as follows (a) their diversity and differences of the lived processes and events, (c) convenience of my access and communication to the participants, (d) ages within the transit between childhood dependence and adult independence, (e) explicit responses about the varied realms of lived processes.

3.3 Data analysis

In order to have flexibility thematic interpretive approach was used initially to code data as analysis involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set (Braun & Clarke 2006) to extract meaning. The inductively obtained phenomena was set for possible and refreshing understanding of the scenario with the use of questionnaire and analysis of the data of 'definite' variables of those essential phenomena. Data extracted through initial analysis in order to search for meaningful themes assist to identify, analyse and outline the observed patterns in the form of themes (Braun & Clarke 2006). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to maintain reflective, critical and deeply situated analysis and the transcriptions of IPA data aided by memos of observations in the respective positions of the sequence was coded and analysed for finally emerging themes. IPA helped to understand people's lived experience of reality to have an understanding of the concerned phenomenon (McLeod, 2001).

Sl.No.	Pseudo- name	Gender	Age	Qualification
1.	R1	Female	19	B.A Honours, 2 nd Year
2.	R2	Male	18	B.Sc Honours, 1 st Year
3.	R3	Female	18	B.A General, 1 st Year
4.	R4	Female	16	Class XI
5.	R5	Female	18	B.A General, 1 st Year
6.	R6	Female	16	Class X
7.	R7	Female	19	B.Sc Honours, 1 st Year
8.	R8	Male	20	Karate Coaching class
9.	R9	Male	23	Drop out
10.	R10	Female	18	Class XII
11.	R11	Female	19	1 st Year B.A
12.	R12	Female	22	M.Sc 1 st year
13.	R13	Male	22	M.Sc 2 nd year
14.	R14	Female	22	M.Sc 2 nd year
15.	R15	Female	21	M.Sc 1 st year
16.	R16	Female	22	M.Sc 2 nd year
17.	R17	Female	21	M.sc 1 st year
18.	R18	Female	22	M.Sc 2 nd year
19.	R19	Male	17	Class XI
20.	R20	Male	17	Class XI
21.	R21	Female	17	Class XI
22.	R22	Male	21	Drop out
23.	R23	Female	21	BBA
24.	R24	Male	18	B.Sc General, 1 st Year
25.	R25	Male	21	Doing Job
26.	R26	Male	21	Class XII
27.	R27	Male	20	Music Student
28.	R28	Female	20	B.A General 1 st Year
29.	R29	Male	21	B.A General 3 rd Year
30.	R30	Male	21	B.A General. 3 rd Year
31.	R31	Female	19	B.A General 1 st Year

Table 1 : Profile of Research Participants

IV. INTERPRETATIVE FINDINGS

4.1 Virtual media (SNS) redefine friendship in this post-modern era

By exploiting virtual media, social networking sites in particular have redefined friendship in the postmodern era. People may now connect and communicate with one another in new ways that go beyond physical limits and open up new possibilities for social interaction thanks to platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The only requirements for friendship are no longer proximity to one another geographically or previously shared experiences offline. Friendships based on like interests, hobbies and online groups have been fostered through online platforms that have made it simpler to identify and interact with like-minded people. The post-modern era's approach to maintaining and fostering friendships has been completely transformed by virtual media. The immediate communication channels provided by social networking sites (SNS) enable people to keep in touch and have discussions regardless of their geographic location or time zone. Sharing personal experiences, ideas, and feelings on these platforms encourages a feeling of community and camaraderie. Online communities centred around certain interests, pastimes, or causes have also developed as a result of SNS, offering chances for friendship, teamwork, and idea sharing. By enabling people to develop deep connections with people they may have never met in person, these networks blur the lines between offline and online friendships, upending conventional ideas of friendship. Online connections may be just as meaningful and real as offline ones, as emotional connections can be established and nurtured through online interactions.

4.1.1 Limited personal connection

I have more than 1000 friends on my friend list. Though I do not know them all may be I know some of them by faces. I hardly have regular interaction with them. I generally do not chat with strangers on my friend list but I have many who are unknown to me. I do not feel the connection which I have with my real world friends. (R12)
I use to spent a lot of time on social media... means a lot..... you can say due to this huge investment of time on social media I hardly get time to meet people specially friends personally so much like before. If I have any requirement or need I generally end up messaging them or video call them..... (R17)

Intimacy and face-to-face relationships might indeed suffer from continual connectedness and social media activity. A sense of detachment and a lack of true human connection can result from spending too much time on social media and diverting attention and energy away from real-life interactions. Social media interactions are surface-level, involving likes, comments, and quick messages, which can reduce emotional connections and depth. This can lead to divided attention during real-world interactions, diminishing quality time spent with loved ones. Online interactions may involve addressing usernames or profiles, causing depersonalization and detachment from the real individuals. The quantity of connections on social media may compromise quality, with fewer close, genuine relationships.

Spending excessive time on social media can cause feelings of isolation, as people may substitute online interactions for in-person ones, leading to physical isolation from real-world social activities and meaningful connections. Online communication lacks non-verbal cues, causing emotional disconnect and reduced empathy. The anonymity and distance in online interactions can also disrupt real-world communication patterns, making it difficult to engage in meaningful conversations and express thoughts. This can result in mental and emotional exhaustion, limiting individuals' ability to invest in real-life interactions.

Instances of meeting friends and family physically decreased for sure.... Thanks to social media I can easily reach people, having conversation. Now I feel lethargic in order to get out from house and meeting people frequently. (R30)

I do not feel like to meet in person frequently. I can send wishes, gifts online if there is any occasion when I am busy or not feel like attending (smiling). So in this way I make people happy by sending gifts when I do not want to present in that particular occasion....I am ok with it.... (R13)

Engaging in social media may produce flimsy ties and brief exchanges, creating a virtual bubble that isolates users from emotions and experiences in the real world. Social media can create a virtual bubble, isolating users from real-world emotions and experiences. Online interactions lack emotional depth, leading to isolation and detachment from genuine feelings. Excessive use can be escapism, as people avoid real-life challenges, emotions, or responsibilities. This fragmentation can hinder deep engagement with emotions and experiences, and the lack of non-verbal cues in online communication can reduce empathy, making it harder for users to connect emotionally and understand others' feelings.

I love to be online all the time, rather you can say I have to be. Because if I am not I might miss something there are so many things happening around us specially in the field of fashion..... I love fashion... I love to follow recent fashion trends. So I am on every platform of social media be it facebook, Instagram, twitter checking out trends and try to follow them so that I can match up with recent trend. I do not want people call me backdated or less stylish. This is how I kept myself updated. (R 28)

I stalked some of my friends on social media in order to see what they upto so that I do not feel outdated whenever I am with my gang. Some time I feel the pressure to maintain myself in a certain way but I have to do it anyway..... I love to post pictures specially the best one (emphasised on 'best' and seems to very focussed) so that I can have maximum likes or comments.... I love to get the appreciation for my effort ... I mean come on who doesn't....(she laughed).....(R 18)

I belong to a group on facebook who shared news about gaming. I have to be very attentive and conscious about every moment. There are other person like me in that group. I chat with them always. Otherwise I will miss valuable information which can cost me later. I do not consider them as friends for real but yes most of my time are devoted to them rather than my offline friends. That is one of the reason I am on social media most of the time. (R 27)

Due to the regulated nature of social media information, FOMO (fear of missing out) and feelings of inadequacy can result from social comparisons. Social media frequently draws attention to people's positive traits, creating the false impression that they lead ideal lives. When comparing one's own life to others', which includes both highs and lows, this might cause feelings of inadequacy. Users frequently only disclose the most alluring elements of their lives, painting a distorted picture that doesn't accurately represent the whole spectrum of human emotions. The continual barrage of social media notifications might make FOMO—anxiety about missing out on opportunities worse. Social comparison may lead to poor self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy because users may believe that others have more fascinating, successful, or rewarding lives than they do. Regular exposure to other people's lives that seem to be flawless can cause jealousy and misery, which can result in dissatisfaction with one's own life or it can motivate someone in order to live in a certain way. The pursuit of likes, comments, and

validation on social media can become a measure of self-worth, and not receiving expected engagement on posts can contribute to feelings of inadequacy.

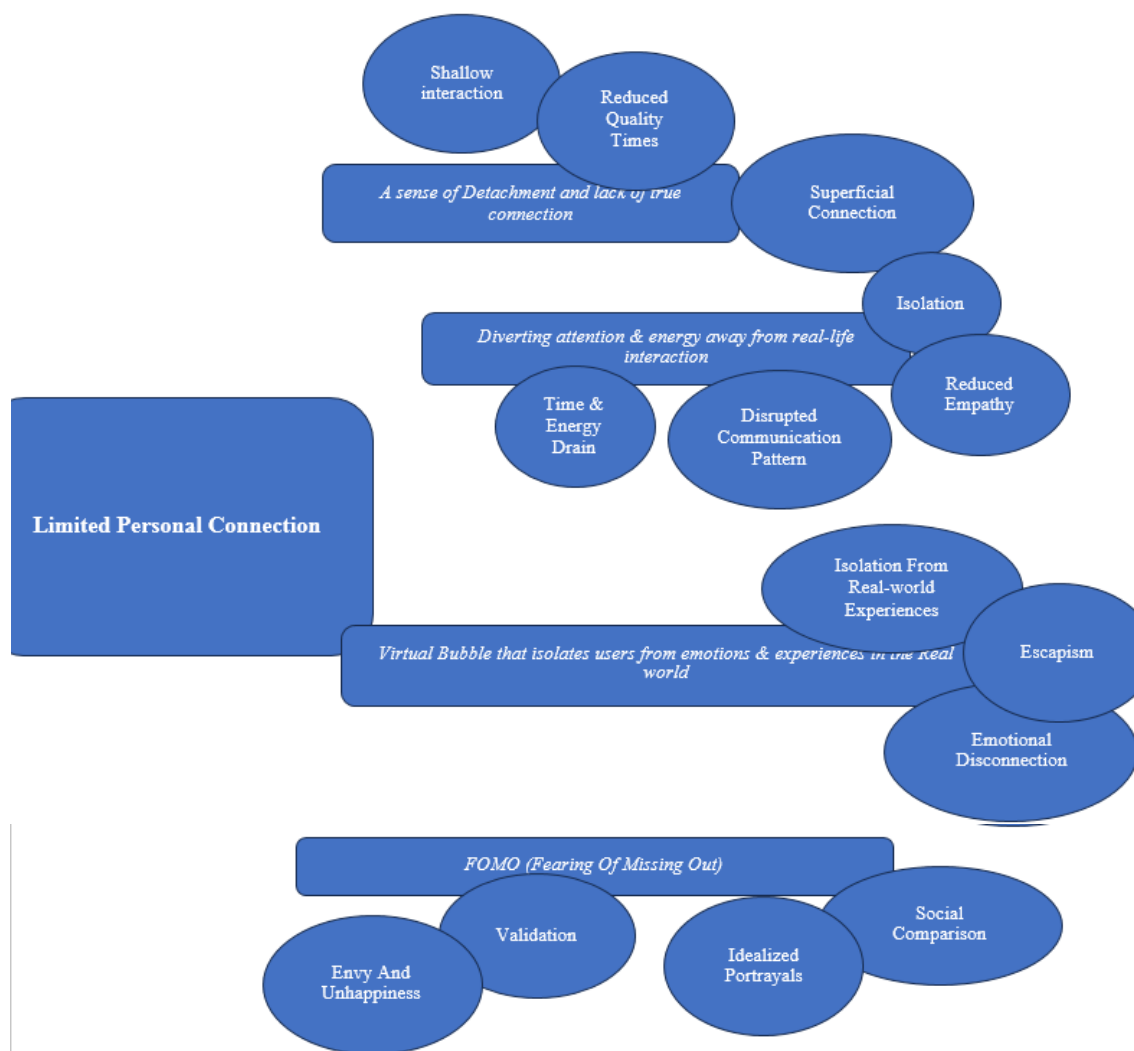


Diagram 1: How Limited personal/emotional connection cause the difference

4.1.2 Motivation for friend list size

On social media, having a large number of friends or followers may be seen as a sign of popularity and social standing. Possessing plenty of friends may provide one a feeling of validation and acceptance from others, enhancing self-esteem and social confidence.

Young adults may be inspired to grow their buddy network by being a part of numerous online communities like advocacy groups, fan sites, or interest groups.

- *Personal branding and Identity expression*

I use to follow people like Priyanka Chopra, Kylie Jenner. I love how they maintain themselves. It motivates me to understand things like how to maintain yourself in outer world. So yes I follow people in order to get inspiration to live better. I love when my friends call me fashionable or I am looking nice. (R15)

I use to post a lot on social media. I love to share my life with everyone specially the moment I cherished. When people responds I love that. It is not that I post everything but only those which I feel like people will appreciate. I believe it is not possible to showcase your life in details virtually. I like to have the attention or people's comments once I drop any post. I get excited if I have many responses. To get it you have to have a great number of friends

in your lists and you also have to active in terms of liking or commenting to other people's post otherwise they will not respond to your posts..... so sometime I do comment on stranger's posts as well. I think it is normal in this virtual world . Sometime I also receive comment from people I don't know.(she laughed)... (R 31)

I generally use to receive massive response on every post I shared on social media. I also receive negative comments sometime. I choose to ignore them, some people are so negative minded that they can't say anything positive to anyone. But earlier it affects me a lot. It used to take a toll to my mental health. I thought I was not good enough. But now I overcome this kind of situation by avoiding. But there are people I know who got upset by this kind of negative comment. (R 12)

In order to get 'likes', 'comments' I try to maintain a huge friend list on facebook and insta. I have approximately 1200-1300 friends... I am not sure. Earlier I use to post a lot but now I don't post frequently. I got anxious sometime as people comments harshly. Some people also started to judge me without even knowing me. It affected me badly. So now I share post very cautiously. (R23)

SNS platforms have also had an impact on how people create and portray their identities. Virtual friendships have mostly evolved around the opportunity to curate and share elements of one's life through posts, images, and status updates. People frequently utilise these platforms to highlight their personalities, passions, and accomplishments, which helps to build personal brands and cultivate online personas that mirror their ideal selves. Social media provides self-expression and identity curation, but online personas may not always reflect an individual's true self. The curated nature of content can create a perception gap between the virtual persona and real-life identity. Pursuing an idealized online image can create pressure and social comparison.. The impact of social networking sites on identity creation varies, with some finding empowerment and fulfilment while others struggle to navigate the balance between ideal selves and authentic identities. It is crucial for individuals to have validation from others in order to sustain their branding. In this instance, they began to accept friend requests in order to strengthen their already-established brand or to connect with additional people and receive feedback that would increase their value on virtual media. They don't bother talking to strangers unless they acknowledge their effort in order to get that gratification. Some people also accept criticism with the same openness they do praise. The number that determines their value on social media is the only concern they have.

- *Managing privacy and Security / Quality over Quantity*

I know people who have a ton of friends but I don't understand how a person have so many friends. Actually they are not real friends. I only have friends who is known to me. I maintain a very small lists of friend online. Social media is a place where people use to share their life so in my opinion it needs to fill with people you know; with whom you can share your story. I personally feel uncomfortable to share my life with people I don't know. (R 24)

I keep it small as I am concerned about security. You would have heard incidence of cyber-crime is increased now a days. So I think we need to be careful of what we share online and with whom. I try to stick with it and keep my friend list full of those who are known to me.(R 14)

One of my friend suffered from an unfortunate event which related to her online account which was being hacked and someone made a fake account on her name and tried to cheat people by her name. So this is something worried me that is why I keep my activity on virtual media checked and private.(R 25)

I have many people in my friend list but I do not interact with all of them. I use to connect only those who is known to me. Because virtual friend are never be equal to your real world friend. I know many will disagree but I love to keep my real friends close rather than those whom I never met. When I was younger I use to have chat strangers but time teach me that all can't be your friends, there can be only few real one who will be dedicated to you all time. You can trust them, you can share anything with them. You feel secure. There is a understanding with your real friends where they can understand you when no one can. This level of trust and understanding you can't expect from strangers. (R 9)

I am basically a private person. I don't like to share things with everyone. I do have accounts on facebook though but there are very few people in my friend list.(R 29)

Some young people might want to keep their circle of friends small in order to preserve their privacy and sense of security. They have control over who may see their posts and personal information by restricting access to their material. A limited circle helps keep personal information out of the hands of trustworthy people, preventing gossip or social media use of sensitive material. Additionally, it promotes better boundary management, a sense of

security, and a welcoming setting where people can be themselves. Trusting a narrower circle of friends lessens worries about weaknesses or personal information being used against you.

On the other hand, some young adults place more importance on the calibre than the number of their connections. To encourage more meaningful interactions and closer ties with individuals they consider close friends, they can decide to maintain a smaller, more intimate friend list. A smaller group of friends encourages more closeness and trust in relationships, enabling people to open up and express their innermost ideas and feelings without worrying about being judged or betrayed. Because there is less drama, conflict, and miscommunication in these relationships than in bigger circles, they are more gratifying. Young adults may put more time and effort into making connections that will result in relationships that are sincere, encouraging, and understanding. Stronger relationships and more compassionate interactions can be the consequence of a deeper understanding of each other's life, tastes, and personalities. Additionally, having fewer people around enables more in-depth interactions, which leads to greater exchanges of thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

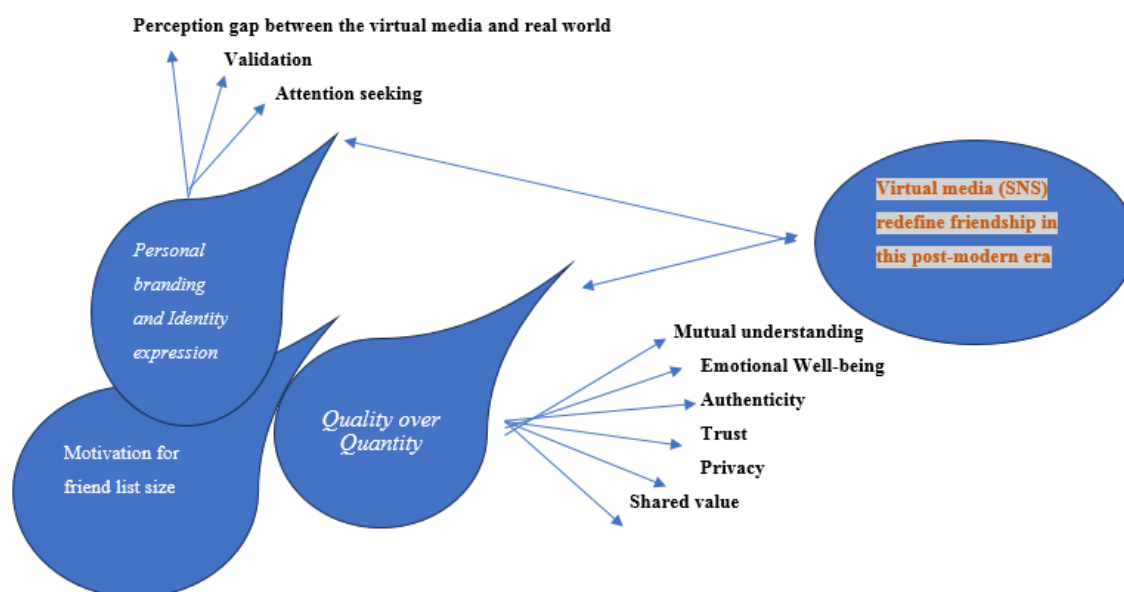


Diagram 2: Factors motivate to keep friends online

4.1.3 Enhanced Communication and Accessibility

It is very easy for me to connect my friends now. As I told you that I live alone here so I miss my family and friends back home. But thanks to video calls and chats I can be with them whenever I want. I know meeting people physically and virtually are different. But people like me I consider it's a blessing to stay connect with my loved ones once I am away. (R 27)

I am active on various platform like facebook, twitter, whatsapp, Instagram. So it became very easy for me to keep myself updated. I got news from so many mediums now. It became easier now with all these options. As I am pursuing journalism so you can understand how much it means to me. (R1)

Thanks to Jio (Telecom network) accessing internet became less costly for students like me. As my pocket money which I got from my family is limited it is important for me to avail internet if it is cheap only. It is so user friendly that anybody can have access of it. We can avail services like video calls, chats, browsing, sharing news or posts very easily. Thanks to these social media platform we are able to track almost everything anytime that also deepens our bond with friends as I am able to know about their whereabouts all the time... if I forgot anything social media will give me a reminder of it and I can arrange my next step according to that... (R19)

The advent of virtual media has revolutionised communication and made it simpler than ever to maintain regular contact with pals. SNS systems provide tools for continual contact, such real-time messaging, video calls, and group chats. Through the accessibility and promptness of contact through virtual media, friendships have developed into more active and ongoing exchanges. Friendship communication and connection have changed as a result of virtual media, notably SNS platforms. Through the use of virtual media, users may phone, text, and video chat with friends instantly and over great physical distances. Users may send voice messages, videos, and photographs using platforms like WhatsApp and Messenger, which provide a variety of communication formats. These platforms offer real-time updates on ideas, activities, and events, deepening relationships and keeping

friends informed. Technology for video calling adds a more genuine touch and enables more genuine communication. Friends may remain up to date on one other's lives without constantly speaking to each other thanks to virtual communication, which reduces expenditures like long-distance calling rates and foreign mailing.



Diagram 3: How Virtual media amplify communication and reachability

4.1.4 Contrasting reality when it comes to 'Friends'

I definitely can feel the difference between a friend from online whom I never met and my friends from my immediate surrounding whom I know from years. Though I have thousands of friends online but I know I can easily make connection with my real world friends rather my online friends. There is a trust issue as well. You can't be friended with someone whom you meet online quickly right? So I have online friends, mostly of them share a mutual friend, that's it. If you ask me that in trouble time whom should I contact first. The answer will be always my real friends whom I earned through my life. Some of them are from childhood, some are from school, college. I know may be now we can't meet regularly like before but whenever we are together we have blast. I miss them sometime. (R 25)

When you looking for trustworthiness or dependence I always depend on my school friends. Its been many years we are together. I have friends online and offline but I don't feel that kind of connection with anyone so far. You know didi, what I think, in my opinion facebook friends are more for liking your photos or commenting on your posts kind of. When it comes to reliability you can't be so sure. (R15)

I am telling you an incident that happened with my friend. He was very active on online... You can say he access social media all time. He have more than 4000 friends online, I guess... most of them he don't know... most of them are girls... he used to chat with them... among them there are 5 or 6 I don't know for sure, he chatted the most. But one of them became close to him and Gifts, pay for phone bills were happening.. Normally all the transaction happened through online. After few months that girl was gone... there was literally no trace of her... after some time he came to know that, there was no girl... It was a fake account.. (R 26)

I heard from one of my cousins that financial fraud have happened with his friends. Cheating, hacking accounts, stealing information are very common now a days if you are not careful.(R31)

On social media, the idea of "friends" can frequently diverge from what people actually have in common. Social media platforms enable people to interact with others and develop virtual friendships, but the nature of these connections can be very different from those found in real-world friendships. Real-world friendships prioritise quality and sincere emotional relationships, while social media typically places a higher priority on gaining "friends" or followers. While social media ties might be shallow and confined to likes, comments, and brief messages, real friendships entail significant events and true emotional connections. Because they frequently entail activities, talks, and in-person encounters that cannot be recreated online, virtual friendships may lack common real-world experiences. While social media friendships could entail sharing elements of life with a larger audience, real-world friendships require a better grasp of each other's personalities, emotions, and surroundings. Real friendships frequently involve a mutual respect for personal space and a sense of seclusion. Even if social media has made it possible to interact virtually and create the idea of online "friends," these friendships can still be very different from those in the actual world. The differences are found in the degree of emotional resemblance, the calibre of conversations, the physical proximity, and the longevity of the connections.

I do agree that online platform is very important for our generation now. Communication and getting information become so easy for this virtual media. When it comes to virtual friends; I will not say that friends you meet online can't be your real friends. I have few whom I met online initially but slowly a bond was build up between us and we met face to face and now I am dating one of them (she smiled expressing her happiness). But the number was

less I guess. You can't trust everyone you meet online and offline as well. But real bond may possible with few I guess. In my case it happened and I am very happy with that. (R 11)

Though there are several concept people have about virtual friends and kind of communication happened online. But what I have experienced is pretty good. Facebook and other social media platform offers us 'groups' or 'communities' where you can join and have easily connected with like-minded people from different background and share knowledge which prosper you as well. At least I experienced it this way. I am an animal lover I am member of a community and several groups where we share information, knowledge which helps me personally to take care of my pets and strays. I am also preparing for civil service so I joined a group where different teachers provide us platform to share and learn, which is quite useful for me. (R12)

Thanks to facebook I was able to connect my school friends after a long time... it was great feeling. If fecebook couldn't provide us this platform I may not find those friends who settled far away. But now we chat, video call... Sometimes we could not realise the physical distance between us. (R9)

Social media friendships may be useful in and of themselves, but it is crucial for people to understand the differences and to give priority to meaningful and true interactions in both the online and offline worlds. Social media is an effective tool for networking and establishing connections with individuals from various professions, backgrounds, and interests. While fulfilling social and emotional needs, virtual friendships may also strengthen real-life friendships by introducing common interests, interactions, and connections. The quality of offline friendships may be impacted by the communication patterns that emerge through online contacts and are carried over into real-world encounters. Despite the fact that online friends can offer emotional support, their absence may restrict the depth of such support in comparison to physical presence.

By exposing people to other cultures, ideas, and points of view, it promotes professional development, cooperation, and learning. Social media friendships make it easier to share knowledge, news, articles, and resources, which promotes intellectual and personal development. Support, guidance, and a sense of community are all provided via online communities and groups. Social media also makes it possible to re-connect with old acquaintances and classmates, which is both nostalgic and enlightening. Through connection with people from various vantage points, backgrounds, and experiences, virtual friendships help to deepen awareness of the world. Sharing content such as artwork, writing, photos, and other creative works on social media provides a forum for creative expression. Virtual companions offer helpful advice and encouragement. Interacting with a diverse range of individuals on social media exposes individuals to new ideas, fields of study, and topics.

I used to spent my time online with online friends most of the time as I could not get hold of my real life friends all the time. Actually I don't feel like to meet my friends regularly and have chat as I can chat with my online friends and offline friends as well. Though currently I am spending more time with friends whom I met online rather than my school or college friends. (R4)

I am very introvert kind of person. I don't have many friends outside. because of my nature it is easier for me to engage with someone virtually rather than having a face to face interaction. So I feel comfortable talking over messages only with my online friends. Due to my nature I use to suffer from anxiety issues a lot. Whenever I feel like low I use to talk to my friends through chat and discuss and that conversation help me. So I hardly miss my real world friends as I know I can chat with my facebook friends anytime and discuss with them about my issue. (R17)

By potentially lowering the amount and quality of in-person contacts, spending time with virtual pals online might potentially harm real-world connections. The depth of emotional connection may be diminished by emotional commitment in online connections, which may leave people with less emotional energy to devote to real-life relationships. Social comparisons between friends in real life and online can leave people feeling inadequate or questioning the value of their ties.

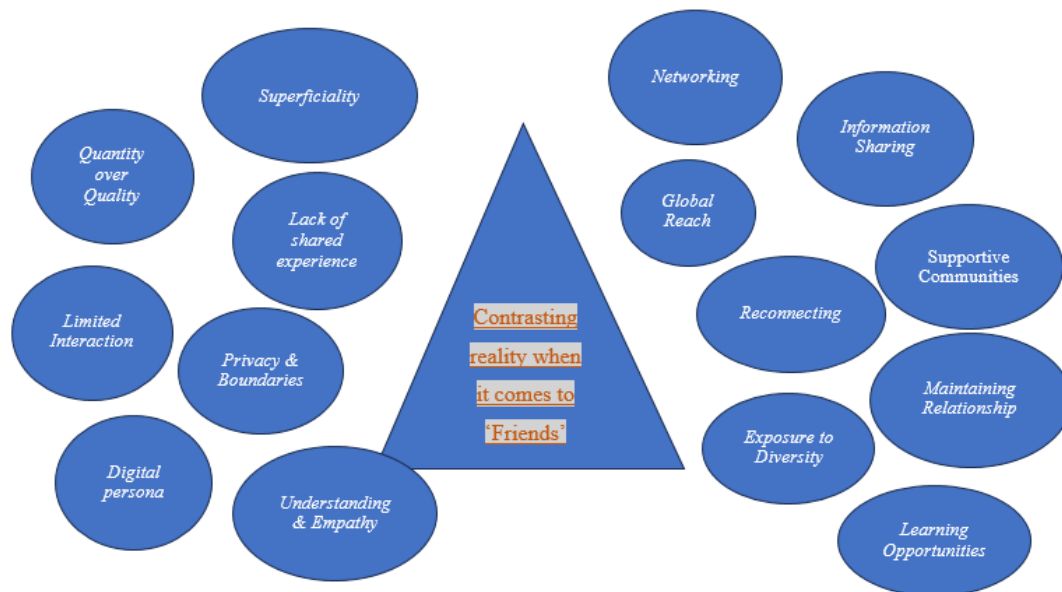


Diagram 4: 'Friendship' when reality differs

4.2 Thin linings between strangers and friends which create confusion, misunderstanding

The rise of social media has revolutionized the way we connect and interact with others, blurring the lines between strangers and friends. The ease of building relationships online may cause confusion and misunderstandings, despite the fact that these virtual platforms provide previously unheard-of potential for worldwide interactions. The thin lines between friends and strangers in the age of social media may have a big impact on boundaries, trust, and communication. This article explores the difficulties that might occur while interacting in virtual connections and the value of preserving candour and sincerity in our communication.

Because social media is instantly accessible, people may interact with people they may have never met in person. But the simplicity of adding people as friends or following them on social media can result in flimsy ties where it's hard to tell how deep a connection really is. When people misread the nature of these ties and believe they share a more profound connection, misinterpretations might result. Individuals on social media create a sense of intimacy, creating the illusion of friendship. However, confusion arises due to differing expectations, leading to disappointment, misunderstandings, and strained relationships. The blurred lines between strangers and friends can raise trust and privacy concerns, as people may share personal information with virtual connections they perceive as friends only to discover it has been misused or shared without consent. Establishing trust in online relationships can be challenging, as authenticity can be easily fabricated. Confusion can spill over into real-life interactions, as individuals may mistake virtual connections for genuine friendships, impacting their social circles and emotional well-being.

4.2.1 Lack of context

Sometime it became confusing for me to understand conversation through messaging, Whenever I chatted with someone whom I know through online only. Online chatting could not allow you to see anyone physically so it is just word they say. Sometime it is important to look at the face whom you talking you know...in this way you could manage to see the expression of that person. Sometime body language speaks a lot more than words. Now people also use emoticons but I don't think that is enough to portray how someone is feeling or his/her true emotion. (R23)

Miscommunication is very common in case of virtual communication as the communication is more like passive one. I am telling you what bothers me.. suppose someone sent me a text now sometime text may contain some inner meanings without having any face to face contact it is impossible for me to recover the real meaning right? Then I have to put my thought on that conversation... in this way the real meaning remain hidden or missed sometime.... I know it's complicated but sometime I feel that way. As I told you earlier that I have faced a very dark phase in my life related to my parent's separation. That was the time I used to feel terrible all the time... I need help desperately. I can't talk to my mother as she was dealing with her problem. That was the time I was dependent on facebook a lot.... So in this process I also talked to strangers to spent time. I would not lie but this give me a sense of satisfaction for sometime but slowly I started to realise it was not working. I could not able to place my actual

pain in written words or over a call. My pain was much more deeper and massive I related to what I can put my written words... I need some friend that time who can sit near me, hold me, let me cry my heart out and listen. (R1) I feel messaging is a kind of superficial kind of communication.... Other people may feel in other way but I think physical interaction can't be replace by any sort of virtual medium... written words have its own limitation... it can't be able to portray someone's emotion exactly the way it is... that is why I prefer to have words with friends upon a meeting... we love to arrange meeting almost 3 to 4 times a week and chill.... This feelings can't be replace by any sort of conversation happened on virtual media. There was one day I was really feeling low ... I was not understanding exactly what is happening with me but I was not feeling fine. So I called my friend but he did not pick up. So I messaged him saying " looking I am not feeling fine. Where are you?" There was no answer for quite some time..... I messaged him at least 4 times... still not getting any answer. After almost 3 hours he replied " what happened? Do you have fever? Then take some medicine." So I got upset as he replied late and he just assumed that I was unwell in terms of physical health without communicating. This was one time but I have experienced this kind of miscommunication or negligence many times.(R15)

Online interactions face a number of difficulties, including the absence of context, which can result in misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Online interactions can make it more difficult to establish empathy and emotional understanding, which could result in misunderstandings and misinterpretations due to the lack of non-verbal indicators and instant feedback. Face-to-face interactions are more effective when nonverbal indicators like body language, tone of voice, and eye contact are used. These signals are essential for expressing the sentiments, purposes, and overall significance of spoken words. However, these non-verbal indicators are frequently missing from or misinterpreted in the context of online communication, making it more challenging to decipher communications.. Without the tone of speech, facial expressions, body language, and instant feedback written words are likely to be misinterpreted because these clues assist communicate feelings and intentions. Humour and sarcasm can be tricky to portray online since they could be perceived seriously. The use of nonverbal clues like eye contact and body language is also lacking in encounters conducted online. The shortness of messages might oversimplify the intended message, and text-based communication can be restricted in its ability to convey complex concepts or emotions. While online communication may include delayed answers, allowing for assumptions and misinterpretations, real-world discussions allow for rapid explanation. Online communication also lacks real-time message receipt feedback, which is frequently impractical in social settings. Mostly because of these factors confusion and misunderstandings may result from text-based exchanges on social media, in emails, and in messaging applications as they lack context and tone. When signals are misunderstood and undesired reactions result, emotional misunderstanding can happen. When communicating face-to-face, instant feedback can help resolve misconceptions and is essential for determining the sender's intentions. Online communication delays can make misunderstandings more likely, and people may fill in the gaps with their own preconceptions and assumptions, leading to biased interpretations that do not correctly reflect the sender's intentions.

4.2.2 Perceived intimacy

I have many friends on facebook, I am not sure how many but a lot. We chat, share things about each other's life like normal friends do. There are many in my friend list who is stranger for me so am I to them. We never met physically. But we chat a lot. I don't know whether you people will tell this friendship or not but it felt like one. As I feel suffocated in my home, talking to them give me relief.... I love talking to them.... They listen and value my opinion... though I know them virtually... I am not sure about their true identity... they can tell me lie and I don't have any way to verify that... but talking to them make me happy so I do chat regularly... (R10)

Talking to strangers over facebook is quite common in our age group I think... Almost all of my friend do that including me... sometime I pretend to someone else and chat .. it is great fun... Specially with girls I use to pretend in order to impress them... Now a days in order to impress girl you have to be cool in your approach... suppose I am in class XI but girls I met on facebook they know that I am a second year college student and I ride bikes and play guitar... this thing impress them easily you know...(he started laughing).... (R19)

People want someone to listen to you... so if you let people talk and listen to them, support them they will easily going to trust you.... I normally give that space to people I chat on social media.. Most of them are unknown to me... But I can understand the pulse... I will not lie but yes I have some friends who think that I like them as in they are my boyfriends and they help me with my expenses sometime... though I have a steady boyfriend in real world.. he doesn't know about them.. I know it is wrong but I am enjoying it now, may be in near future I will leave this. (R 21)

Perceived intimacy is a significant phenomenon in social media, leading to a false sense of closeness and friendship. It can also create a false sense of support and emotional connection, as online friends may offer

comforting words and encouragement but may be based on limited knowledge of the person's life and struggles. The ease of connecting, sharing personal information, and engaging in conversations can create a false sense of intimacy that may not accurately reflect the depth of the relationship or the true nature of the connection. Social media allows individuals to present curated versions of themselves, blurring the line between the online persona and the person's real-life identity. The relative anonymity of the internet can lead to oversharing of personal information, fostering emotional closeness but not necessarily a genuine, deep connection. The accessibility and immediacy of social media communication can give the illusion of continuous and intimate interactions, even if the actual interactions are brief and superficial. Social media enables people to keep up with others' lives without asking permission, fostering a feeling of closeness. Asymmetry in relationships results from the fact that the person they're following might not have the same degree of expertise or connections. People may devote a lot of emotional energy to their imagined online interactions, which can cause emotions of obsession, loneliness, or disillusionment. Additionally, it may become less of a priority to forge genuine relationships, which might affect real-world friendships and interactions. Keeping a balance between online and real connections is so essential.

4.2.3 Limited Emotional Connection proceeds ambiguity

Platforms like facebook, whatsapp make communication very easy for us. Through facebook we are able to talk various kinds of people... some known to us and some are not... but we talk with strangers through several virtual medium. I do.... I admit that there is a huge difference in the nature of relation in both mediums.. I mean online and offline... there would be difference in how I response to a stranger in real world and virtual world. If a stranger asked me anything like how I am doing or what I ate earlier I will just avoid him/her or say that none of their business but while I met strangers online I generally answer them... I can't explain you why but I am sure many of us will do the same...I believe most of us quickly consider stranger friend online but in real world it was not that easy.. We are not generally emotionally involved much while talking to someone online, may be that matters; While real life friendship use to build on pure trust and dependence as they are easily accessible... like I have thousands online friends but in real life I hardly consider 3 to 4 people as my real friends.... Though I talk to my virtual friends, I also met some of them but I personally did not feel that attachment what I felt with my real world friends... one thing I also want to add that is that absence of this connection may create an ambiguous environment where they say something and you understand something else... you may meant something and they put their words in that ... so sometime situation may go out of your hand in the absence of basic gestures like body language, tone etc... it is all seem superficial sort of communication sometime.(R 1)

Online and offline friendships differ significantly in their levels of emotional attachment. Online encounters are less emotionally rich because they lack nonverbal indicators, shared experiences, and a careful approach. Face-to-face encounters, shared experiences, and direct emotional support are all advantages of real-world friendships. Individuals may negotiate social media interactions and create more sincere, emotionally satisfying friendships by being aware of these variances. This makes communication more prone to misunderstandings.

Online friendships on social media platforms frequently concentrate on surface-level interactions and lack the emotional depth of friendships in person. These relationships could be built on mutual friends or shared interests, but they don't have the emotional depth of significant offline activities. The emergence of emotional bonds might be hampered by the absence of non-verbal clues in online conversation. Due to the anonymity of the internet, both sides may approach conversations with caution, which prevents individuals from being as emotionally open with strangers they meet online.

Diagram 1 :

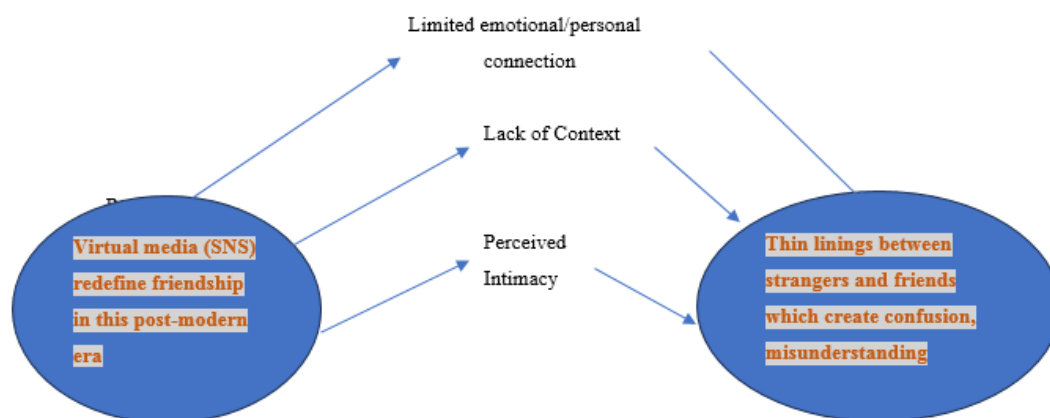


Diagram 5: What factors influence creating ambiguity in 'Friendship'

V. DISCUSSION

The idea and mechanics of friendship have undergone tremendous change as a result of the development of social media. People may now establish virtual connections with people they have never met in person thanks to apps like WhatsApp and Messenger, which have made it simpler for people to connect and make friends online. This has increased the diversity of social networks by enabling friendships to transcend geographical borders. Social media friendships frequently entail a variety of interactions, including direct messaging, exchanging information, commenting on things, and like them. Users have the ability to customise their life, which results in an idealised and more selective self-presentation. Instant communication is made possible by apps like WhatsApp and Messenger, which facilitates continuing discussions with friends. In addition, social media gives friends a forum to provide consolation, counsel, and assistance when needed. On the other hand, others contend that connections formed on social media can be shallow and centred upon likes and quick remarks rather than more meaningful in-person conversations. Furthermore, friendships on social media may be exposed to a larger audience, which may have an impact on how friends interact and see each other. Social media may make disagreements and confrontations more emotional and visible, which makes resolving disputes more difficult. The social media age has completely changed the friendship scene, giving rise to brand-new kinds of friendships and creative methods to communicate with others.

With billions of users worldwide, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and more recent additions like TikTok continue to be widely used in modern life. Platform popularity can fluctuate over time; In India TikTok had a spike in popularity, particularly among younger users till it was banned in India in 2020. A growing number of people are calling for regulations due to worries about data privacy and the exploitation of personal information. Platforms have altered their privacy rules and settings in response. The dissemination of inaccurate or deceptive information has created difficulties for content control.

The way individuals establish and sustain friendships has been profoundly changed by social media. People may connect with people globally using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, which helps them remain in contact with friends and family who reside far away. Through online communities, organisations, and hashtags, these platforms also assist users in finding others who share their interests, pastimes, or passions. Social media has been widely utilised by people to rekindle their ties with former classmates, friends, and acquaintances. Social networking sites facilitate the sharing of life events, significant occasions, and intimate tales with friends, so reinforcing friendships. Some friendships are completely virtual, with people developing strong relationships with acquaintances they may never have really met. Social media may, however, also bring difficulties, like miscommunication, disagreements, and the possibility for false information. Users frequently have to think about how sharing private information with friends and a larger audience may affect their privacy. Through online connections, social media has evolved into a forum for delivering consolation, guidance, and resources during trying times. But technology may also affect how friendships function since people could feel under pressure to uphold a particular online persona or follow their friends' antics. Social media critics contend that it could promote surface-level relationships at the expense of more meaningful, in-person partnerships. The world of friendship has changed as a result of social media, which has made it simpler to establish, uphold, and make new acquaintances. It also brings up issues with privacy, online conduct, and the kind and extent of these links.

A noteworthy problem that illustrates the variations in how people view and experience friendships is the perception gap between virtual and real-world friendships. While friendships in the actual world are formed via

in-person meetings, they frequently depend on digital contact in the virtual world. Online connections can be intimate and connective, but they might not have the same depth and richness as friendships that are formed in person. Because of shared experiences in person and more in-depth conversations, friendships in real life include a deeper emotional bond. Friends on the internet have discretion over how they display themselves; they frequently curate their image and provide only information that they feel comfortable sharing. Because in-person friendships are based on direct, uncensored communication, they are frequently regarded as more genuine. Virtual connections may be a great source of emotional support, but they might not be able to be there in person at crucial times. Real-world connections, such as being present in person during difficult times, may provide a higher level of instant, tangible support.

People must adjust their expectations and acknowledge the distinct advantages and drawbacks of each kind of relationship in order to bridge the complicated perception gap between virtual and real-life friendships. In order to satisfy their social and emotional requirements, people frequently discover methods to balance their offline and online social ties. Both kinds of friendships may be beneficial and gratifying.

The foundation of online friendships may attention-seeking, affirmation, and trust sometime, but mutual interests, pastimes, or ideals serve as the foundation for trust, which may be developed by regular, constructive contacts. Online friendships need empathy and mutual validation since individuals look to others for approval of their experiences, feelings, and ideas. Friendships can be strengthened when one of them provides emotional support during trying times. With social media and other platforms allowing users to express themselves, attention-seeking in online friendships can take the shape of reciprocal attention-seeking and attention-giving. While some friendships are primarily based on sharing experiences and sincere emotional ties, others may be transactional, centred on advice or assistance.

The people involved, the platforms they utilise, and their objectives all have an impact on how online friendships function. While friendships made online can provide a feeling of community, it's important to balance these virtual and real-world ties and to be mindful of possible problems like miscommunication and disagreement. It's important to strike a balance between virtual and in-person relationships, even if virtual friendships may be a useful kind of communication overall.

Authentic, emotionally stable, and mutually understanding online friendships are marked by deep and encouraging relationships. Friends in these kinds of relationships communicate honestly and openly, expressing their experiences, feelings, and ideas without holding back. True friends don't pressure one another to be someone they're not; instead, they embrace each other for who they are, imperfections and all. They give a secure environment for sharing emotions and worries as well as consolation, support, and encouragement when things are hard. Friends who care out for one other's emotional well-being frequently have chats regarding mental health and wellbeing. As friends actively listen to one another and comprehend one another's viewpoints and emotions, mutual understanding is crucial.

Friendships that are real, empathetic, and emotionally supportive may be very fulfilling and enhance one's feeling of connection and overall wellbeing. It is crucial to cultivate and preserve these friendships by being a trustworthy and understanding companion, honouring one another's personal space, and providing assistance when required. To guarantee a well-rounded social life, it's necessary to strike a good balance between in-person and virtual friendships.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Alamäki, A., Dirin, A., & Suomala, J. (2021). Students' expectations and social media sharing in adopting augmented reality. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, 38(2), 196-208. Retrieved from 10.1108/IJILT-05-2020-0072.
- [2]. Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. G. (2018). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, 117(9). doi: 10.1016/j.busres.2018.07.008.
- [3]. Bakardjieva, M. (2014). Social media and the McDonaldization of friendship. *Communications*, 39, 369-387. Doi: 10.1515/commun-2014-0017.
- [4]. Baker, T. (2018). *The 1% Rule: How to Fall in Love with the Process and Achieve Your Wildest Dreams*. Archangel Ink.
- [5]. Barbovschi, M., Balea, B., & Velicu, A. (2018). Peer-ing in the online mirror: Romanian adolescents disclosure and mutual validation in presentations of self on social media. *Revista Romăna de Sociologie*, 29, 269-286.
- [6]. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- [7]. Christensen, S.P. (2018). *Social Media Use and Its Impact on Relationships and Emotions*. (Master thesis, Brigham Young University) All Theses and Dissertations. 6927. Retrieved from <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/6927>
- [8]. Clark, J. L., & Green, M.C. (2019). The Social Consequences of Online Interaction. In A. A. Smith et al. (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cyberpsychology*, Oxford Library of Psychology, Oxford Academic. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198812746.013.14>.
- [9]. Crider, J. (2016). *The Sunglasses of Ideology: Augmented Reality as Posthuman Cognitive Prosthesis*. (Master thesis, Clemson University). All Theses. 2318. Retrieved from https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/2318
- [10]. Goffman, E. (1959). *Presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- [11]. Hammad, M., & Awed, H. S. (2023). The Use of Social Media and its Relationship to Psychological Alienation and Academic Procrastination. *International Journal of Membrane Science and Technology*, 10(2), 332-340. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/social-media-affecting-teens-concepts-of-friendship-intimacy-1.2543158>

- [12]. Hollenbaugh, E.E. (2021). Self-Presentation in Social Media: Review and Research Opportunities. *Review of Communication Research*, 9, 80-98. Doi: 10.12840/ISSN.2255-4165.027.
- [13]. Ibáñez Sánchez, S., Orús, C., & Flavián, C. (2022). Augmented reality filters on social media. Analyzing the drivers of playability based on uses and gratifications theory. *Psychology & Marketing*, 39, 559-578. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21639>
- [14]. Johnson, M. (2018). *Connected: Living Mindfully in the Digital Age*. University of Southern California. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/openview/ba38bc42367c7696c6a9805d23da58d8/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- [15]. Kitchens, B., Johnson, S. L., & Gray, P. (2020). Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS quarterly*, 44(4), 1619-1649. Doi:10.25300/MISQ/2020/16371
- [16]. Lazarsfeld, P.F., & Merton, R.K. (1954). Friendship as a social process: A substantive and methodological analysis. In M. Berger, T. Abel & H. Charles (Ed.), *Freedom and Control in Modern Society* (pp.18-66). New York: Van Nostrand.
- [17]. McLeod, J. (2001). *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- [18]. McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 415–444. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2678628>
- [19]. Nesi, J., Choukas-Bradley, S., Prinstein, M.J. (2018). Transformation of Adolescent Peer Relations in the Social Media Context: Part 1-A Theoretical Framework and Application to Dyadic Peer Relationships. *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev.*, 21(3), 267-294. doi: 10.1007/s10567-018-0261-
- [20]. Pariser, E. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. London: Penguin.
- [21]. Pounders, K., Kowalczyk, C. M., & Stowers, K. (2016). Insight into the motivation of selfie postings: Impression management and self-esteem. *European Journal of Marketing*, 50(9-10), 1879-1892. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-07-2015-0502>
- [22]. Rui, J. R., & Stefanone, M. A. (2013). Strategic image management online. *Information, Communication, & Society*, 16(8), 1286-1305. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2013.763834
- [23]. Schwartz, R., & Halegoua, G. R. (2015). The spatial self: Location-based identity performance on social media. *New Media & Society*, 17(10), 1643-1660. doi:10.1177/1461444814531364
- [24]. Scott, R.A., Stuart, J., & Barber, B.L. (2022). Connecting with close friends online: A qualitative analysis of young adults' perceptions of online and offline social interactions with friends. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 7, 100217, Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2022.100217>.
- [25]. Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. NY: Basic Books.
- [26]. Wood, M.A., Bukowski, W.M. & Lis, E. (2016). The Digital Self: How Social Media Serves as a Setting that Shapes Youth's Emotional Experiences. *Adolescent Res Rev*, 1, 163–173. doi:10.1007/s40894-015-0014-8
- [27]. Wright, P. H. (1984). Self-referent motivation and the intrinsic quality of friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 1(1), 115–130.
- [28]. Zekany, E. & Bregović, M. (2013). REAL, DIGITAL AND (NEO) MATERIAL: Thinking Digital Dualism through Media Archaeology. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342210484_REAL_DIGITAL_AND_NEOMATERIAL_Thinking_Digital_Dualism_throu gh_Media_Archaeology