

Young Adolescent Friendships on
Social Network Platforms

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Abstract

The rise of internet use has led to the establishment of various online communication technologies that are now defining how people create and maintain relationships. Social networking platforms are now used as an addition to friendships offline. It is commonly used to establish new friendships and maintaining existing ones. Philosophers have contributed their opinions regarding online friendships in journal and research studies and others through theory. According to Marlowe, Bartley & Collins (2017), digitisation has increased the use of social networking platforms in making and maintaining friendships, but it is believed that it will not replace traditional friendships but supplements it. This paper highlights some aspects used by different scholars to review the advantages of online friendships in establishing, maintaining offline relationships, and identity online on social networks platforms especially in young adolescents stages. Besides that, this will provide objections and counter objections regarding online friendships.

Keywords: face-to-face interactions, friendships online, social networks, digitization, young adolescent

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According to Amichai-Hamburger, Kingsbury & Schneider (2013), “the essence of friendship has been deliberated by psychologists, philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists”. Amichai-Hamburger, Kingsbury & Schneider (2013) argues that friendship is a hybrid of a relationship with mutual benefit and intimacy, and the use of social networking platforms has made the concept of friendship less significant. Although there were disadvantages that were brought by the social network, research shows that it mostly brings people into a stronger community and making maintaining friendships easier than traditionally.

Today, the formation of new friendships and the way of maintaining existing friendships has changed due to social networking platforms. A significant amount of friendships is maintained and formed online on social networking platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. It is now one of the primary sources of interaction between people. The interaction between people can be entirely digitalised. For instance, friendships that are formed online can purely be online without any face-to-face interaction. Even though philosophers have questioned whether real friendships can be achieved online in a completely new world where individuals never experience face-to-face interaction (Kaliarnta, 2016). It is believed that strong ties are possible for friendships online. Without face-to-face interaction, personal information and messages can be conveyed without any tensions. Face-to-face interaction may cause unintended pressure to people by the environment or people around. According to Van Schalkwyk, Marin, Ortiz, Rolison, Qayyum, McPartland & Silverman (2017), social networking platform users utilises it to

maintain and establish existing friendship ties. Social networks can strengthen ties between people as a supplement of existing friendships. Besides that, research has shown that communications online through social networks has the potential of decreasing loneliness and depression (Van Schalkwyk, Marin, Ortiz, Rolison, Qayyum, McPartland & Silverman, 2017). Establishing new friendships online is easier because it is less intimate in the beginning which makes it more comfortable for users to interact with each other. Most young people prefer online friendships due to these factors.

The main argument about the potential of online friendships is the ability of individuals to reveal their real character and identity either intentionally or unintentionally. It is known that young people are more likely to share personal information online than offline (Van Schalkwyk, Marin, Ortiz, Rolison, Qayyum, McPartland & Silverman, 2017). Young adolescents are more comfortable with shortened contact and fast-paced interaction. Young people utilises social networks to develop friendships in a shorter amount of time than face-to-face interactions. According to Niland, Lyons, Goodwin & Hutton (2015), the transition of young adults to a self-focused life has led them to use social networking technologies more in assistant of their friendships, both establishing and maintaining. Niland, Lyons, Goodwin & Hutton (2015) argued that adolescents are the most significant consumers of social networking platforms such as Instagram and Facebook and this demonstrates the generational change in how personal relationships are engaged and managed. As a result, the impact of social networking platforms and online friendships have shifted from face-to-face interactions (Niland, Lyons, Goodwin & Hutton, 2015). According to Elder (2014), the affordances of social networking platforms have extended

the behaviour of people to a new world of communication where they share their photos and personal lifestyle to an invisible and larger audience. Traditionally, friendships are mostly formed in places such as schools and workplace, which is usually a smaller community and less people. With the growing population of social networking platforms today, it creates a larger audience and more opportunities for people to establish new friendships online.

Niland, Lyons, Goodwin & Hutton (2015) argue that friendship is a psychological issue whose development is determined by personal attachment and character. These qualities are crucial in the life phase development of young people. In particular, these qualities include help and support, self-disclosure and liking, expressions of closeness and shared interests. However, at this life development phase, the young adults are often troubled by stress, risky and conflicting behavior and moodiness. This transition usually affects their opportunities of succeeding in the society and also maintaining their youthful cultural practices (Niland, Lyons, Goodwin & Hutton, 2015). This often causes them to have difficulties in seeing friendships and adapting their lives. Vallor (2012) argues that transitions that young people go through in life have led them to make sense of friendships as an investment, fun times together and protection. They use social network sites to create and reinforce friendships by using instant message and funny comments, especially on Facebook as a way of investing in that friendship. On Facebook, self-authenticity is a concept that youths demonstrate through photos and active displays. Facebook interactions now show how friendships are negotiated, reinforced and reworked. The young adult's sense of friendship is a construct based on the immediate and visual friendship community,

which has replaced the more intense and authentic friendships that existed before. A research has shown that young people consider friendships as “fun times together”. It is mostly just fun rather than emotional attachment and intimacy (Niland, Lyons, Goodwin & Hutton, 2015).

According to Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer (2016), young adults usually consults their friends on life issues instead of their parents. As young adults continue to interact with their friends, these friends become a source of entertainment, the foundation of identity and create a sense of belonging. Friendships are preferred by young adults because they are less normative and less strictive. Among the young adults, the critical aspects of decent social life are having more friends (Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer, 2016). Most of these friendships appear out of social networking platforms, which in several ways have strengthened the quality of friendships among the early adolescents. The increased use of these sites is due to the fact that they are comfortable to communicate, and they enhance the contact between friends. Social networks platforms are also affordable among the early adolescents who have limited financial resources. Consequently, this has led to social network sites being viewed as relationship maintenance tools and the frequent message exchanges in those platforms reduce the cost of maintaining friendships (Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer, 2016). Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer (2016) argue that there is a positive relationship between the utilisation of social network sites and quality of friendship. Online communication technologies have enhanced the communication between existing friends, and this has had a positive effect on the quality of their friendships. At the adolescent stage, there is increased importance for early

adolescents to have peer relationships, but their significance becomes less relevant when they get older. These peer relationships can only be enhanced through social network sites (Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer, 2016).

However, according to Bobkowski & Smith (2013), embracing of social media is not a worldwide phenomenon mainly by the aging population who are not dedicated in adopting new technology. Despite social network sites being used to bring our social change among young adults, the majority of emerging adults have not embraced this technology. One of the most significant factors that are determining social media adoption is the age of the majority of young adults, specifically those that have already adopted technology (Bobkowski & Smith, 2013). However, Bobkowski & Smith (2013) argues that digital divide has also led to the low adoption of technology, especially among the socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority populations. People that are living in more developed countries have the highest access to online technologies and their ability to embrace those technologies is also high. Despite the increased importance of social networks in friendships and relationships in the modern society, their influence can be overlooked, particularly among the disadvantaged groups. The existence of conventional imbalance now determines who uses and benefits from the use of social networking platforms (Bobkowski & Smith, 2013).

Marlowe, Bartley & Collins (2017) highlights that non-adopters of social media mainly populate the fringes of the emerging adult group while the adopters are the young adolescents. For the emerging adults, their future goals are less clear, biographies are less

straightforward, and there is less certainty about their circumstances. As a result, they have fewer social ties and have difficulties concerning how they can overcome some of the challenges they go through when using modern technologies (Marlowe, Bartley & Collins, 2017).

According to Vallor (2012), the majority of social networking platform users value it more than their utility in relationship maintenance, or even creating virtual or new relationships. It is part of their daily life routine and their source for sense of belonging (Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer, 2016). Most social networking platforms such as Facebook and Instagram offer suggestions for friends that users might know. These suggestions are usually based on the number of mutual friends, groups, location and communities. Function that are offered by social networking platforms allow more opportunities for people to establish new friendships. Despite social networking platforms providing a few direct channels towards shared activity, they still serve as a source of friendship and a good life. It is the case because it gives emotional and informational mutuality that assist individuals to live together as friends and also pursue excellence as a group. Social media has also promoted interests of civic leadership, especially among grass root organizations and the youth.

Limitations of the Studies

Various studies indicate that there is difficulty in determining causal relationships between friendships born out of social media and the ability to support them. Besides, it was challenging to identify whether adults who use social media end up getting into

relationships. It was also challenging to determine whether individuals with many offline relations also benefit from social media. The studies assumed that social network sites are a favorite among the young adolescents who seek to build lasting friendships. Consequently, this makes them fail to analyze the importance of social media networks particularly in the modern business environment where a majority of business transactions close online. As a result, online technologies are a critical tool in business. Majority of companies have global reach, and they use social network sites to interact with their customers, primarily through advertising.

Conclusion

Although research studies have revealed that social network friendships will never achieve a healthy friendship and will remain superficial, it is known that social networking platforms are useful in helping users to keep in contact with each other and maintaining a long-term friendship. It can also be used to strengthen existing friendships and friendships offline. In the modern society, the majority of offline friendships are enhanced through social networking platforms to supplement face-to-face communications and interactions. It has become one of the most significant sources of interaction between people. Social networks have transitioned the daily interactions between users, and this has led to change in the culture of connectivity. Furthermore, social media has normalised how individuals engage socially. The majority of social networking platforms have reinforced existing networks, and this has resulted in a drastic change of friendships from face-to-face to now the preferred online integration. Friendships made online can stay digitalised entirely. Despite the quality of friendships, users are able to connect with each other conveniently.

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Research also shown that online friendships may potentially help with loneliness and depression in young adolescents. Lastly, social networking platforms have also brought about a new sense of belonging that would have been difficult to achieve through face-to-face interactions.

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