

E-Social Networking : A Study on Facebook Friendship

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Abstract

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are introduced to make easy social interaction and connection. SNSs are increasingly everywhere and there is growing demand. Among all SNSs Facebook has a keen popularity. People's behaviors and attitudes, related with the ways of maintaining friendship in the Facebook and peoples activities in a public domain have negative implications for friendships. The virtual friendship has significant difference with real life friendship. The purpose of this study is to explore grounds and practices of Facebook friendship and construct analysis of virtual friendship and real life friendship. One hundred current Facebook users completed a survey that evaluated various factors that closely related with friendship.

Key Words: Social Networking Sites, Facebook, Friendship, Virtual, Relationship

“O my friends, there are no friends.” – Aristotle

Introduction

A friend is a person loves across the world others, whether he served his interest or not. Neither expects any pay back. Friendship can be between the same sexes: man-man, woman-woman, or contrary: man woman. It doesn't consider age or relationship, and could subsist between even an old man and a small boy or between father and son, mother and daughter, husband and wife, brother and sister, elder brother and younger brother. In the early years of the 21st century, friendship of human is growing to meet new spheres and expectations. This is happening at a time of significant social change which is happening around the world, developed and under developed countries.

Social Network Sites (SNS) such as Facebook, MySpace, Hi5 and Twitter have fascinated millions of users, many of whom have incorporated these

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sites into their daily activities. After becoming successful in western countries, are currently spreading their reach to the rest of the world, e.g. Asia, Africa and Latin America. Among others, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are countries where SNS are experiencing a tremendous growth in terms of number of users. Of the world population, 22.2% come from these three countries.¹ A larger portion of the people in these countries has various socio economic backwards and lives below the poverty level and there are many places where basic needs are not available. Social Networking Sites have been broadly promoted even in those underdeveloped areas due to the technological advancement.

SNS, such as Facebook, an important means, people can communicate and connect with each other globally. It gives users a place to share their opinions, experiences, view, daily happenings and photographs with their friends. It also connect people with friends and others who work, study, and live around the world and help people to hear more about events, parties and other social functions that happening all over the world. The main function of this online social networking site is to make friendship. There are some universal variables of friendship and it has some significant values, norms and responsibilities. There has been lot of assumption about the negative impact of Facebook on users' lives. While developing and maintaining friendships are important reasons for using Facebook, there is proof that it may have some negative implications for friendships. Some fear that the use of Facebook might diminish human relationships and practical contact, perhaps increasing social isolation. If we survey and analyze the Facebook friendship pattern, behaviors and practices we will get an idea about friendship depth and relationship.

Objective of the Study

The open objective of the study is to explore the nature and behavior of the Facebook friendship and establish a comparison with real life friendship.

Study Materials and Methods

This study has been completed by using both primary and secondary method. The secondary data have been used to develop the historical and practical perspective of Facebook. But foremost source of information for the study was based on primary data. Primary data have been collected through survey of the Facebook users.

The study method involved a survey of social network sites users who are using Facebook. A total of 100 respondent surveys have been done. Among

¹ CIA – The World Factbook: <http://goo.gl/JIpCx>

the 100 respondents, all the respondents are between 18 to 32 years of age and a majority of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 23. Respondents were asked to respond to questions related with friendship on Facebook. All questions were explained to the respondents before giving the questionnaire so they may easily complete it and give the relevant response and each respondent had only one questionnaire.

Features of the Respondents

	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	18-20	45	45
	21-23	25	25
	24-26	15	15
	27-29	10	10
	30-32	05	05
	Total	100	100
Occupation	Student	85	85
	Private Service	10	10
	Business	05	05
Sex	Male	70	70
	Female	30	30
	Total	100	100

Conceptual Framework

Social Networking Site (SNS)

Social Networking Site is any web site that enables the users to create public profiles within that web site and build relationships with others users of the same web site who access their profile. Web sites offer a venue for people to share their ideas, views, activities, emotions, wishes, likings, disliking etc with family, friends and colleagues. Members of particular sites can create an online account and profile with biographical data, photos and any other information they desire to share. They can converse with each other by making their latest thoughts public in the social networking websites- share anything on his profile, like or dislike others post and sharing, discussion forums, instant messaging, quick message posting, create and share picture albums, calendar and any information updates, send any documents or images via e-mail, instant messaging, voice or videoconferencing with others members.

Social networking site has several defining characteristics. According to Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison's (2007) definition of "social network sites": [Social network sites are] web-based services that let individuals to (1) make a public or semi-public profile within a encircled system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they contribute to a connection, and (3) view and

pass through their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007)

Users who join Social networking websites are required to make a profile of themselves by filling up a form. After filling up the forms, users are supposed to give out information about their personality attributes and personal appearances. Some social networking websites require photos but most of them will give details about one's age, preference, likes and dislikes. Some social networking websites like Facebook allow users to customize their profiles by adding multimedia content. (Geroimenko & Chen, 2007)

Social networking is part of a larger group of social media tools that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 60) list at least six types of social media:

- collaborative projects (such as wikis and social bookmarking applications),
- blogs, content communities (sharing of media content between users such as Google docs and YouTube),
- virtual game worlds,
- virtual social worlds (such as Second Life) and
- social networking sites (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter).

There are hundreds of SNS, with various technological affordances, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. Most sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007)

Popular Social Networking Sites

The most significant Social networking websites commonly used by the people especially by the youngster like, Facebook, Hi 5, LinkedIn, Orkut, Flickr, and Twitter.

Facebook

This social networking service was introduced with the purpose of linking friends in Harvard University in 2004. Facebook allows users to construct a “profile” page containing personal information. A user can become “friends” with other Facebook users and, through this link, share status updates,

photos, links, and other information. Users have control over who they “friend” (they must approve requests to be friends) and what information is shared with friends and others.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn was founded in 2003 and was one of the first mainstream social networks devoted to business. LinkedIn is in some ways like Facebook, but oriented for professional networking. Like Facebook, users have a profile and request “connections” with other users who must approve the request. Users share professional information about themselves, such as employment history, and can share updates and information.

Twitter

Twitter was founded in 2006 and gained a lot of popularity during the 2007. Twitter is somewhat different from Facebook and LinkedIn. Its focus is not as much about sharing personal information about the user as it is about sharing general information and commentary through tweets of 140 characters or fewer. Most users of Twitter allow anyone who would like to follow them without prior approval, and tweets are publicly visible by default—so unlike Facebook, Twitter makes it hard to know how many people are reading your tweets.

Hi5

Hi5 is established in 2003. Users can set their profiles to be seen only by their network members. While Hi5 is not particularly popular in the U.S., it has a large user base in parts of Asia, Latin America and Central Africa.

Among all Social Networking Sites, Facebook is the almost widespread social networking site and it has the highest share of users’ daily visits, while Twitter and LinkedIn are occasional destinations. Facebook is, by far, the most popular SNS. Of those who use a SNS, almost all use Facebook (92%). Facebook is followed in popularity by MySpace (29%), LinkedIn (18%), Twitter (13%), and other social network services (10%).²

Friendship

A comprehensive definition of Aristotle’s notion of *philia* (friendship) is, ‘the mutually acknowledged and reciprocal exchange of goodwill and affection that exists among individuals who share an interest in each other on the basis of virtue, pleasure or utility’. In addition to voluntary associations of this sort, Aristotle also includes among friendships the non-chosen relations of affection and care that exists among family members and fellow citizens (Froding and Peterson, 2012).

² www.pewinternet.org

Friendship Quotes

Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It's not something you learn in school. But if you haven't learned the meaning of friendship, you haven't really learned anything.

Mohammad Ali, Newspaper, Daily Herald

“The essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity and trust.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1841

Virtual Friendship

Based on a modern reading of Aristotle's theory of friendship, we argue that virtual friendship does not qualify as genuine friendship. By 'virtual friendship' we mean the type of friendship that exists on the internet, and seldom or never is combined with real life interaction (Froding and Peterson, 2012).

Historical Background of Facebook

Facebook has made the way easy to be connected with one another. Now, this method of communication is very much popular to different age group for social communication. Markoff, J (2007) commented that Facebook has been created by two striving Harvard students, Mark Zuckerberg, along with his college roommates and fellow student. It was launched on 4th February in 2004. The number of Facebook users has multiplied rapidly after its commencement. Phillips, S (2007) wrote that the site was originated as "theFacebook.com" and encouragement from the books of student who provides headshot photos and basic biographical data distributed to Harvard students at the beginning of the academic year by university administrations to assist students and get to know each other. Within a day of its commencement, 1200 students had signed up with Facebook; within a month, half of the undergraduate population had joined with this media. At the beginning the attachment was initially restricted by the founders only to Harvard students, but was expanded to other colleges. It progressively added support for students at various other universities before opening to high school students in September 2005, and eventually to anyone with a valid email address who is willing to argue to be aged 13 and above.

Facebook, Bangladesh Perspective

Bangladesh is densely populated country where in its capital city almost 200 million people are living. According to popular website socialbakers.com, currently, there are 2732620 Facebook users in the Bangladesh, which makes it 52 in the ranking of all Facebook statistics by Country.

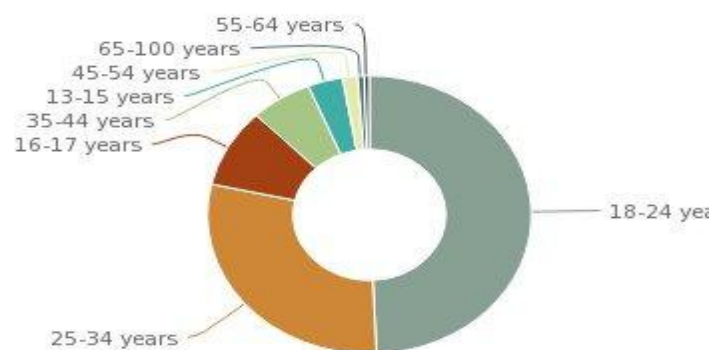
Users and Demography for Bangladesh



Source: www.socialbakers.com, retrieved on May 29, 2013

The social networking statistics show that Facebook penetration in Bangladesh is 2.37% compared to the country's population and 67.33% in relation to number of Internet users. The total number of Monthly Active Facebook Users (MAU) in Bangladesh is approximately 37,04,480 and grew by more than 4,21,880 in the last 6 months. Monthly Active Users measures the number of people who have been active on Facebook during a 30-day period.³

User Age Distribution on Facebook in Bangladesh



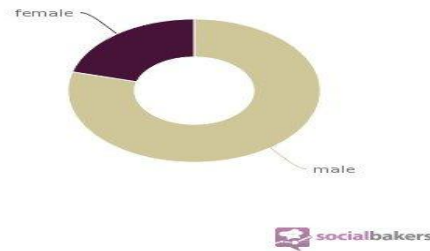
Source: www.socialbakers.com, retrieved on May 29, 2013

The largest age group is currently 18-24 with total of 18,31,120 users, followed by the users in the age of 25-34.⁴

³ www.socialbakers.com, retrieved on May 29, 2013

⁴ Ibid.

Male/Female User Ratio on Facebook in Bangladesh



Source: socialbakers.com, retrieved on May 29 2013

There are 79% male users and 21% female users in Bangladesh.⁵

Various Findings of the Study

Social Networking Sites have become a significant part of each day to communicate with old and new friends and get and share information with others. Although Facebook is used to develop and maintain personal relationships, the open nature of friendship is not acquainted with the real life friendship. This study solemnly tried to explore the users, their activity and the practice of variables which are important to maintain friendship. The findings of the study are given bellow,

Users of Facebook

Most popular Social Networking Site Facebook users are mostly young adults and male female under age 30. Young adult male and female ages 18 to 22 are the influential users of Facebook. There are no significant differences in the usage of Social Networking Sites based on race and ethnicity, household income, education level, or whether the internet user lives in an urban, suburban, or rural environment. It is moderately noticeable that regarding gender differences, women have been significantly more likely to use social networking sites than men.

Frequency of use

According to our survey findings the frequency of use for users of social networking sites

Nature of Use	Percentage
Several times a day	65 %
About once a day	15 %
3-5 days a week	10%
1-2 days a week	05%
Every few weeks	3%
Less often	2 %

⁵ Ibid.

Users Activity on Facebook

Social Networking Sites have a number of common features. These include the ability of users to create a list of “friends,” update their “status,” to comment on other users’ statuses and content, to indicate that they like another user’s content, and to send private messages. We asked survey participants to report on the frequency at which they perform these various activities on Facebook on an average day:

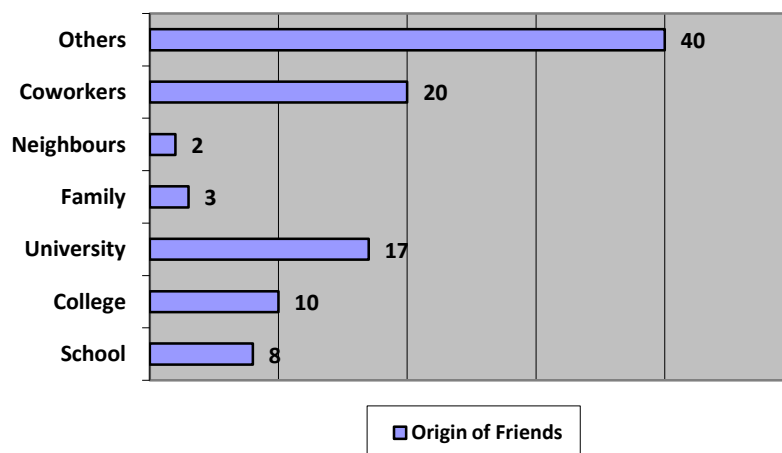
- 80% “Like” another user’s content.
- 72% comment on another’s post or status.
- 55% comment on another user’s photos.
- 45% of Facebook users update their own status.
- 25% chat with friends.
- 10% send another user a private message.

Facebook and Friendship

Facebook offer people with the chance to make friendship with their overall network of family members, coworkers, and other associations. In addition, various attractive applications have been offered to broaden the horizons of Facebook friendship. Those who are listed as friends may certainly be friends in the Facebook virtual world, but they may be very unimportant or very casual connections between people who have never have met in person. It is a worsening issue that as a result of using Facebook to make friendship network in the virtual world people may become more isolated and substitute less meaningful relations for real social support. Here below are some findings of this study on Facebook friendship.

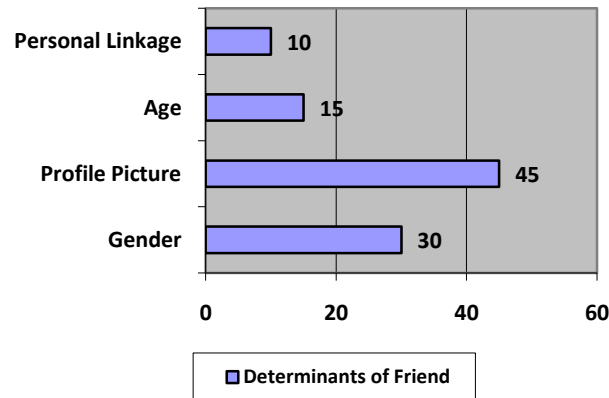
Average Number of Facebook ‘Friends’ by Relationship Origin

The average number of Facebook users’ friends by origin of the relationship. For instance, the average Facebook user has 40% friends from others sources.



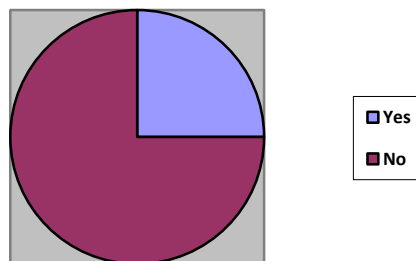
Determinants of Friends

The average numbers of Facebook users' determine friends by profile picture are 45% and by considering gender is 30%.



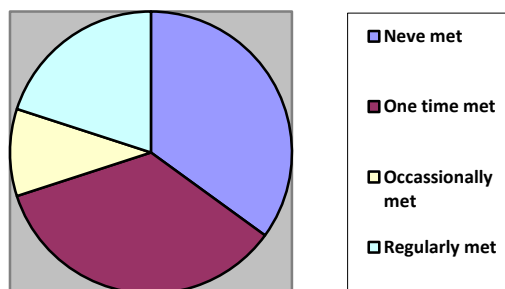
Disclose Personal Information

25% of the average Facebook users disclose personal information like mobile number, mail and email address at Facebook profile, 75% users don't disclose personal information.



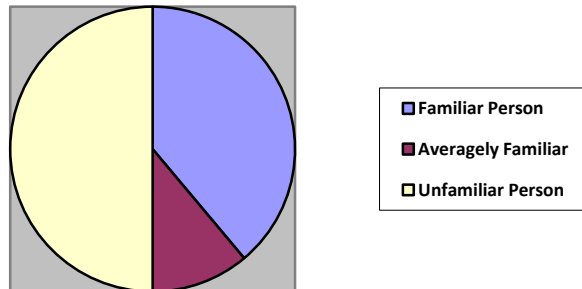
Facebook Friends Met in Person:

The average Facebook user has never met in-person with 35% of their Facebook friends. An additional 35% are people they have only ever met in-person once, 10% met in-person occasionally and rest of the 20% are people who have regular communication.



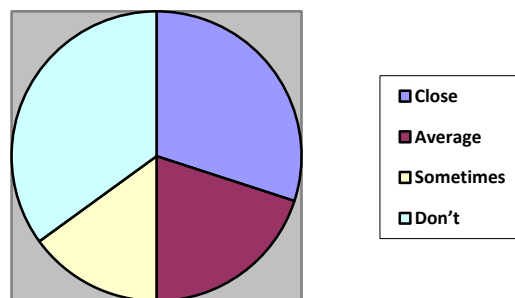
Facebook Friends who are Unfamiliar Person

The average Facebook user has closely familiar with 35% of their Facebook friends. An additional 20% are averagely familiar and 45% are totally unfamiliar person.



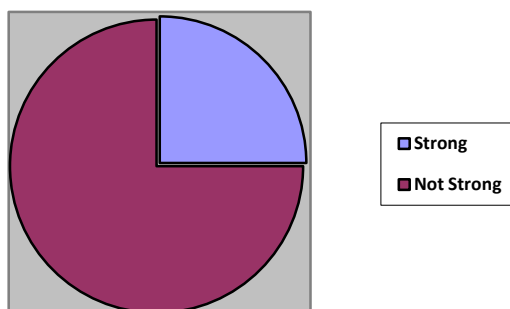
Facebook Used to Maintain Contact

30% of the average Facebook users closely maintain contact with friend's trough Facebook, 20% users maintain averagely contact with friend and 50% of the average Facebook users don't maintain contact with friend's trough Facebook.



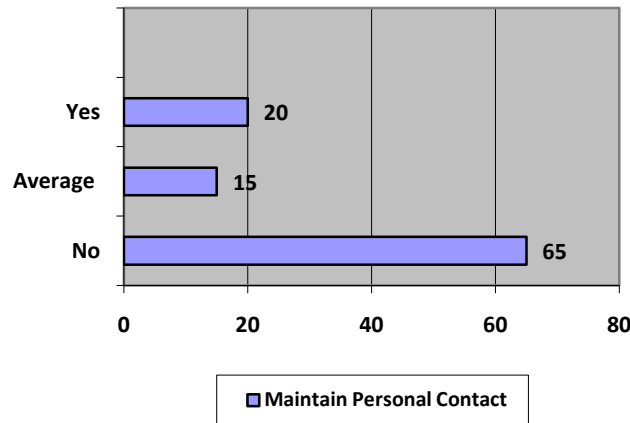
How Strong is the Facebook Relationship?

75% of the average Facebook users feel that Facebook relationship is not strong and 25% users think that Facebook relationship is strong.



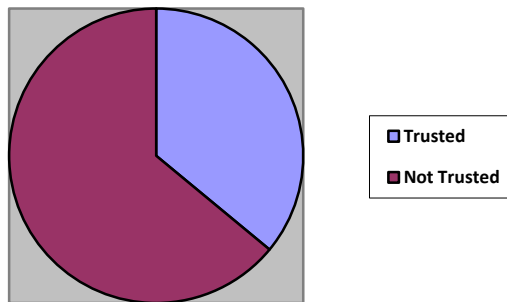
Personal Contact with Facebook Friends

65% of the average Facebook users don't have any personal contact with friend's, 20% users have personal contact with friend and 15% of the Facebook users have average personal contact.



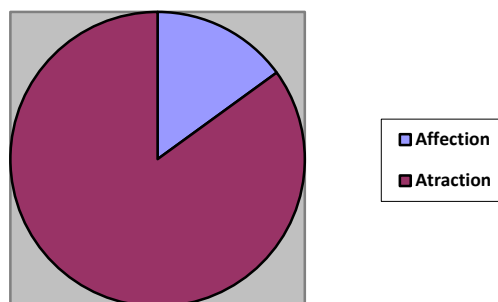
Facebook Users Trusting of Friends

36% said that most people can be trusted and 64% of them said that most people cannot be trusted.



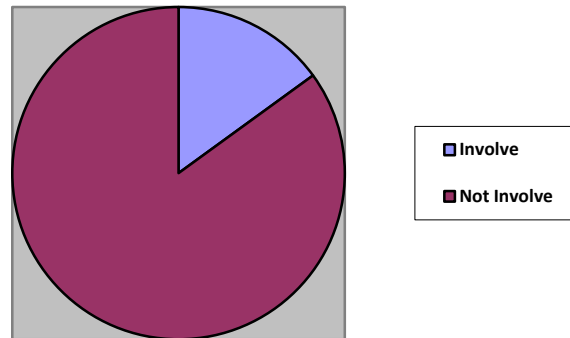
Feelings about Facebook Friends

15% said that they have affection for Facebook Friends and 85% said that they have attraction.



Facebook Users Engagement with Local Community

85% of the average Facebook users are not directly involved with local community, on the other hand only 15% of the average Facebook users are directly involved with local community.



Analyses

The prime purpose of this study was to explore the dynamics of Facebook friendship and build a comparison between virtual friendship and real life friendship. This study also tries to understand characteristics of the people's Facebook friendship.

Friendship is a more engaged, open attitude social connection, which emphasizes on trust, mutual respect and gentlemanly “chivalrous” behavior. Generally friendship helps us to develop and become more virtuous as our friends inspire and help us. Notably, this is an ongoing process, friends gain self-knowledge and are able to observe friends more than them, and to observe actions more than own and discover them. Aristotle argues that friendship (philia) is the key to human happiness.

The paradigm case of friendship for Aristotle is a relationship that is mutually recognized and taking place between two adults of equal standing. While all other relationships are inferior to this one, Aristotle agrees that relationships between e.g. the non-virtuous may also be called friendship but of a lesser kind, as pointed out above. The most important aspect of friendship is spending time together, preferably engaging in theoria as this is the hallmark of the good friendship (Froding and Peterson, 2012).

Generally, friendship exists for three reasons: a) virtue b) usefulness c) pleasure. When virtue is the reason, friendship exists for the sake of friendship; where both like each other and cherish each other for some creditable values in the other's personality. You wish to be the friend of that person for the sheer personality that he/she has. It has a magic in itself. It attracts you. And it is mutual (Ravichandran, 1999).

Aristotle argues that there are three main qualities that determine whether someone qualifies as a friend: excellence, pleasantness and usefulness. He then moves on to saying that these translate into three types of friendships, which often overlap.

1. friendship based on mutual admiration
2. friendship based on mutual pleasure
3. friendship based on mutual advantage

(Froding and Peterson, 2012)

Virtual friendship cannot fully meet these criteria it does not qualify as genuine friendship. By virtual friendship, we mean the type of friendship that exists on the internet, and hardly ever or never is combined with real life interfaces. Our point is that for a relationship to qualify as genuine friendship it is not enough to merely interact online.

Froding and Peterson (2012) argue that virtual friendship is analogous to certain, questionable, forms of alternative medicine: social community sites are potentially harmful since what is described as a route to social success may in fact turn out to be a toxic substance leading to isolation, just as some alternative medical substances harm rather than cure the patient.

Real friends are fast friends (in the original sense of steadfast or firm), whereas virtual friends are fast friends in the manner of fast food: quick, cheap, and possibly unhealthy. The “friends” on social networks often include an array of close and not-so-close friends and family members; past and present acquaintances, co-workers, and neighbors; old flames and schoolmates; friends of friends, business contacts, fans and admirers; and various joiners, stragglers and strangers (Schaub, 2011).

One factor that makes Facebook friendship potentially harmful to personal relationships is the heightened sense of disinhibition they may foster. Cognitive disinhibition is a personality or temperamental trait in which people are insensitive to future consequences of their decisions (Zuckerman, 1979). For the users of social networking sites, disinhibition may lead to risky usage behaviors and privacy practices that compromise personal relationships.

Online networking, texting, and other forms of constant electronic connectivity have contributed to the decline of friendship, both in its deep form and in its more general form of “friendliness” (which is listed by Aristotle as one of three virtues of association, along with truthfulness and wit)’ (Schaub, 2011).

However, our main concern with Facebook friendships is that pertains to genuine admiration and love which requires honesty. Facebook friends must tell the truth about themselves and, equally, be able to see the other as he or she is without decorating the friend.

However, that is not to say that social community sites are entirely without value, in all possible scenarios. If managed properly, they can of course offer very concrete benefits, in an instrumental sense. For example, a social community site might indeed be a very good place to meet people with whom you could become the friend of at a later stage as you advance from interacting online to meeting in real life. Further to this, it is a useful way to maintain already existing relationships, both when the friends are short on time or are geographically separated.

The most important thing what should we realize that friendship which has no moral values what so ever, and may even be harmful, whereas friendship which has at least some value, in virtue of being honest and mutually useful.

Facebook does allow us to reconnect with people whom we have regrettably lost touch with, it also puts us in the sometimes uncomfortable position of friending someone whom we have not spoken with, or perhaps even thought of, in twenty years (Condella, 2010).

Facebook friendship is like certain questionable forms of alternative medicine. This type of friendship is potentially harmful. Facebook users believe that virtual friendship is a route to deep and meaningful interaction. In fact it is a toxic substance leading to a feeling of betrayal, i.e. the friendship does harm rather than cure social isolation. In other words, Facebook friendship as a fast-track to meaningful social relationships and social inclusion is in fact an false impression as these relationships, whatever else they may do not contain the necessary components of genuine friendship.

Conclusion

To conclude based on this study, we have found that virtual friendship does not qualify as genuine friendship. Virtual friendship exists on the internet and is never combined with real life interactions. It is certainly universal that the highest form of friendship cannot be enjoyed solely by interacting online, as argued above. The foundations of such a friendship are good without qualification. The real type of friendship requires a real life component and has qualities.

The findings of this study demonstrates that there is little validity, less closeness, not as much of trust, a smaller amount respect of Facebook

friendship compare to real life friendship. The size of the Facebook friends is larger or smaller than real friendship but very less affection and responsibility.

Everything in this world can be used for a bad intention as well as for good. It is us who can make the difference and utilize social networking sites wisely for the benefit of developing social bonds across the geographical borders (Das and Sahoo). The complete and excellent friendship can only obtain when both are fine, gracious and excellent in every aspect of their relationship. So we should be careful about friendship and will make a conscious difference between real life and virtual life.

Cocking and Matthews argue that, ‘within a purely virtual context the establishment of close friendship is simply psychologically impossible’. Cocking later developed this claim further and argued that, ‘certain features of text-based online contexts largely rule out the development of close friendships exclusively in those contexts (Froding and Peterson, 2012).

On the Aristotelian analysis, for a friendship to count a morally valuable, and hence virtuous, it must contain the following elements: it must be mutually recognized, the friends must engage in *theoria* (i.e., the contemplation that takes place between virtuous agents), and the love and admiration they feel for each other must be based on virtue (Froding and Peterson, 2012).

True friendship, however, involves action as much as it does conversation, and this, I believe, is where Facebook runs up against it. No matter how much and how often we communicate with each other, friends must physically be there for each other as well. And while it may be possible to be there for someone in a — “virtual” sense, I am not convinced that virtual presence alone is enough to form or even maintain a friendship over a long period of time. Nor am I convinced that an exclusively virtual friendship has the power of making me, or anyone else, a better person. The best of friendships, in the final analysis, must be firmly rooted in the real world, especially if we expect them to contribute in significant ways to our own, personal happiness (Condella, 2010).

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