

Research Paper

## From Clicks to Connection: Social Media, Mindfulness, and the Quality of Online Friendships

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examined how mindfulness and social media usage predict quality of online friendships among emerging adults. Digital communication increasingly shapes interpersonal relationships. On this backdrop, the current study aimed to understand whether mindful awareness enhances the depth and satisfaction of friendships formed through social networking platforms. Data were collected from 306 emerging adults in Kolkata using standardized measures of mindfulness, social media usage, and friendship quality. Results indicated that females showed significantly higher mindfulness than males, but social media usage and friendship quality showed no gender differences. Both mindfulness and social media usage demonstrated significant positive correlations with online friendship quality, and together accounted for 41.6% of its variance. Mindfulness and social media use were inversely related, however, the association was not significant. Mindful awareness and intentional engagement with social media can positively shape the quality of digital friendships. Mindful digital habits in contemporary digital social environments can promote safety and mental health.

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness, Social Media Usage, Online Friendship Quality, Emerging Adults, Digital Relationships*

**R**ooted in Buddhist philosophy over 2,600 years ago, mindfulness was originally cultivated as a way of living that transcends human desire and alleviates suffering. As this concept travelled from East to West, it evolved into a powerful stress reduction technique. Over time, mindfulness has taken centre stage as a means to cultivate presence and awareness in the here and now. By focusing on the present moment, unencumbered by past regrets or future anxieties, mindfulness helps to declutter the mind, mitigate stress and anxiety, and enhance our mental and relational well-being. This practice enables us to tap into our inner resources, foster more meaningful connections, and live more intentionally.

The advent of social media in the mid-2000s, marked by the launch of platforms like MySpace and Facebook, revolutionized the digital landscape as a key component of Web 2.0, which emphasizes user-generated content. As social media gained traction, academics

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and researchers quickly took notice, scrutinizing its potential negative effects, including distraction, sleep deprivation, decreased attention span, altered neural pathways, and disconnection from reality. Despite these concerns, the impact of social media over the past two decades has been phenomenal. It has not only become a primary means of social interaction but also created a global community where people can connect, share, and collaborate without geographical, temporal, or financial constraints, fostering a world where individuals can unite based on shared interests and passions.

As social creatures, humans thrive in networked societies, where connections are key to unlocking our true potential. The rise of social media has revolutionized human relationships, enabling friendships to form and flourish in the digital realm. These online friendships, built on shared interests and passions, transcend geographical boundaries and offer a sense of community and belonging. While the lack of physical proximity can be a limitation, online friendships provide a platform for like-minded individuals to connect and share ideas, often with a degree of anonymity that can facilitate openness. However, the digital nature of these relationships can also lead to multitasking, with individuals juggling multiple conversations and topics simultaneously. This can result in a lack of mindfulness, leading to communication gaps, misunderstandings, and ultimately, low-quality friendships that may not be as deep or satisfying as those nurtured in the physical world.

### ***Research On Mindfulness***

Mindfulness has been effectively utilized in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) therapy, yielding promising results across diverse populations. Studies have shown significant reductions in stress and mood disorders, accompanied by increased self-compassion, spirituality, and empathetic perspective-taking (Birnie et al., 2010). Research suggests that mindfulness encompasses two distinct domains: meditative mindfulness and socio-cognitive mindfulness. Notably, socio-cognitive mindfulness has been found to correlate strongly with both affective and cognitive empathy, whereas meditative mindfulness is linked only to affective empathy (Trent et al., 2016). This distinction highlights the broader scope of socio-cognitive mindfulness. Furthermore, the integration of hermeneutics – the philosophical interpretation of texts – and mindfulness provides a foundation for cultivating empathy in therapeutic practitioners. As empathy often requires learning and refinement, experience can sometimes lead to decreased empathy towards clients (Hick et al., 2008). Therefore, incorporating mindfulness and hermeneutics into therapeutic practice can help mitigate this trend.

Mindfulness has emerged as a valuable coping skill, enabling individuals to navigate the complexities of stress and daily life circumstances. Defined as the awareness of internal and external experiences in the present moment, mindfulness is viewed by experts as both a trait characteristic and an acquired skill. This dual perspective highlights its potential to mitigate stress across various developmental stages. Extensive clinical research has demonstrated the efficacy of mindfulness in addressing numerous social and physical issues. However, despite its promise, the role of mindfulness as a trait in fostering resilience in the context of friendship formation and maintenance remains underexplored in social and clinical research (Walter & King, 2013).

### ***Research On Social Media***

According to Murray and Waller (2007), social media platforms serve as virtual communities that facilitate connections among individuals. These online spaces enable users to engage in various activities, such as blogging, posting, and sharing images with their

network of "friends." The significance of social media in modern communication is underscored by its widespread adoption, with a notable 93% of adolescents in the USA utilizing these platforms for daily interaction (Kearney, 2012). However, the rapid proliferation of social media has also raised concerns about its potential impact on young people's mental health (Angelini, 2024).

Research by Firth et al. (2019) highlights the dual-edged nature of the internet, which has not only enhanced access to information and communication but also led to long-term changes in brain structure and function. Specifically, excessive internet use has been linked to attention and memory problems, as well as cognitive impairments resulting from altered neural pathways. This impact is particularly pronounced in children and adolescents, whose brains are more malleable and susceptible to environmental influences. Furthermore, studies have shown that social media use is positively correlated with narcissism and alexithymia, while negatively associated with empathy, particularly cognitive empathy (Martingano et al., 2022).

Social media also allows people to surreptitiously gain knowledge about their lives by going through their social media page, an act often called 'creeping' or more commonly 'stalking'. This act helps in building an impression via social media (Ledbetter, 2016). Social media enables users to discreetly gather information about others' lives by browsing their profiles, a behavior often referred to as "creeping" or "stalking," which can shape impressions and perceptions (Ledbetter, 2016). On the positive side, the internet offers numerous benefits, including easy access to information, long-distance communication, diverse entertainment options, and online shopping convenience (Adiyanti et al., 2019). Social media also facilitates connections with both close and distant acquaintances, providing a sense of freedom to share and feel supported, which can contribute to overall well-being. However, this openness also leaves users vulnerable to negative experiences like trolling, cyberbullying, and dehumanization. Research suggests that sharing emotions on social media can have both positive and negative outcomes, and its impact on well-being is highly dependent on individual usage and context (Kross et al., 2021). Positive effects of the internet include the simplicity with which information can be accessed, the chance to communicate with those who are located far away, the accessibility of a wide range of entertainment options, and the convenience of buying online (Adiyanti et al, 2019). People can more easily connect to those they are already close to as well as to those to whom they are distantly acquainted with, and can have a freedom to share, and feel supported, which is one of the measures of well-being. But this also opens the way for trolling, cyberbullying and dehumanization. It may be safely said that, sharing of emotions on social media can have both positive and negative outcomes. Hence, social media's outcome on well-being is not absolute in any direction. It largely depends on who is using it and how it is used. (Kross et al., 2020).

### ***Research on Digital/Online Friendships***

Friendships have the following six characteristics: (A) the degree of validation and caring that characterizes friendships; (B) companionship and recreation; (C) the degree of help and guidance that characterizes friendships; (D) intimate exchange: the degree to which a friendship is characterized by the sharing of personal information; (E) conflict and betrayal: the degree to which a friendship is characterized by disagreements, arguments, and mistrust; and (F) conflict resolution: the process by which disagreements in friendship relationships are settled (Adiyanti et al, 2019). Friendship quality was highly correlated with accurately perceiving the other's traits, motives, and goals and having a normative view of the friend's

personality. Friends who viewed each other favourably and shared their internal desires and motives shared greater strength of friendship than those who didn't. Friendship quality also received a boost up if the person perceived their friend to have a similar personality type as them (Huelsenitz et al., 2020).

High degrees of intimacy, prosocial behavior, and other positive traits, and low levels of rivalry, conflicts, and other negative traits, are characteristics of a high-quality friendship. Having high-quality friendships may lessen children's tendencies to imitate the behavior of shy and withdrawn friends, according to Berndt and Murphy (2003). The main means of forming friendship bonds online are social media apps which allow both mass sharing and one-to-one communication between individuals. Research reveals that adolescents with better quality friendships tend to use social media to connect more to their friends and was much less susceptible to the negative effects of online communication due to the supportive backbone of good quality friendships to rely on (Selfhout et al., 2009). More use of social media and networking has been found to increase the quality of friendships online especially for adolescents (Desjarlais & Willoughby, 2010). Chan and Cheng (2004) found that though there is a difference in the way online and offline friendships start to develop but after the preliminary period of 6 months to 1 year, they almost have the same trajectory and relies highly on interdependence, understanding and commitment. What online friendships lack in physical exposure, they make up in the frequency of interaction. However, studies also suggest that online friendships have less efficacy in reducing susceptibility to social pressures than offline friendships suggesting that offline friendships have a better quality than the virtual ones (Scott et al., 2021).

### ***Research on Mindfulness, Social Media and Online Friendship Quality***

Research has shown that mindfulness, or being present and attentive in the moment, positively impacts friendship quality in individuals (Akin et al., 2016). Additionally, mindfulness has been found to moderate the effects of friendship quality on mental health outcomes, such as depression and eating disorders, particularly in adolescents (Bernstein et al., 2023). Studies have also highlighted the importance of interpersonal mindfulness, which is uniquely associated with better friendship quality (Pratscher et al., 2018). Specifically, interpersonal mindfulness moderates the link between co-rumination and friendship quality, while perspective-taking and psychological need satisfaction mediate the relationship between interpersonal mindfulness and friendship quality. Furthermore, mindfulness skills can foster resilience in friendships, with higher mindfulness levels associated with lower maintenance difficulties (Walter & King, 2013).

Social media and mindfulness seem like opposing concepts since studies have found that people who were severely addicted to social media had less mindfulness and also use an emotion-focused approach to deal with stress rather than a problem-solving approach (Sriwilai & Charoensukmongkol, 2016). When live in a world where we are always online and accessible, it leads to lower mindfulness and lower well-being, which can develop an issue of impulse control within the users leading to addiction (Du, Kerkhof & van Koningsbruggen, 2021). But, the two concepts can work together to enhance our lives. For instance, mindfulness can help us be more intentional and present when using social media. Instead of mindlessly scrolling through our feeds, we can approach social media with a mindful attitude, paying attention to our thoughts and feelings as we engage with user-generated content and mindfully control what we share. Mindfulness was found to significantly reduce stress that came from compulsive social media usage (Apaolaza et al.,

2019) and has significantly inverse relation to addictive use of social media (Sriwilai & Charoensukmongkol 2016; Sun, 2022).

Mindful awareness has been found to be negatively correlated with problematic social media usage or social media addiction. Overuse of social media is linked to poor productivity at work, unhealthy social connections, sleep issues, low life satisfaction, and depressive, anxious, and jealous feelings (Sun & Zhang, 2021). People who are too much focused on social media may lose touch with their current surroundings thus making way for depression. Often people scroll through social media in a habitual manner, mindlessly, which makes them unaware of their present surroundings paving the way for depressive symptoms. Leaning on social media for emotional support also distances a person from offline socialization behaviour and increases both depression and social anxiety in individuals, found Jones and others (2022). People tend to feel left out on social media even after spending long hours and such feeling may lead to maladjustment. Trait mindfulness is able to reduce the feeling of being left out and hence maladjustment to social situations (Poon & Jiang, 2020).

The increasing popularity of new social media, particularly social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, encourages long-term ethical consideration of the evolving nature of online friendships (Vallor, 2012). Research has indicated a strong correlation between teenagers' use of social media and the quality of their friendships. Adolescents' use of social media was favorably connected with their level of online social support, online self-disclosure, and friendship quality. The first is that adolescent use of social media can impact their online social support network, which in turn can impact the quality of their online friendships. The second is that teenagers' usage of social media can influence how transparent they are online, and that transparency can subsequently influence the quality of friendships through online social support (Wei et al., 2017). Adolescents who used social media were shown to have better quality friendships, which helped them develop their sense of self (Wang et al, 2021). Social contacts today happen a lot online since internet-connected devices are so common in daily life. Nonetheless, it might be especially crucial to look at the differences between relationship environments online and offline for young people who are socially fragile.

According to Kearney (2012), virtual friendships in the cyber-space allow people to construct their psycho-social development. Social media on the internet has become a significant setting for friendship and social growth in youth and the transition to adulthood (Manago & Vaughn, 2015). "Friend" is a term used loosely in social media. In fact, the most popular social media site, Facebook is quite ambiguous on what "friend" means. "Friend" is a word that has been to mean any social connection. But perhaps when social media calls these connections "friends", people have a tendency to attach the normative expectations of friendship on to it, even if the relationship cannot be traditionally termed as a "friendship". (Ledbetter, 2016).

The main means by which human flourishing is attained are "complete" friendships based on virtue. Here, reciprocity, empathy, self-awareness, and shared life—four essential components of "virtue friendship"—are discussed in connection with social media on the internet. These four characteristics are mirrored in the ways that online social media enhances and supports friendship, especially when it is used to augment in place of real-person encounters (Vallor, 2012). The term "friend" on social media sites normally allows permission for people to view each other's social media pages. The process of "friending"

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on social media allows people to view photos, posts and place comments on each other's walls. When Facebook, the most popular social media website first launched in the internet, it targeted people in the age group of 18 to 22 years. But, very soon, Facebook became very popular and started incorporating a much wider social base (Kearney, 2012).

Since its inception, the use of social media has been used as a medium of communication by the members. The most common activity on social media includes posting comments on photos or posts of others. There has been a reduction in the use of group or private messages and blog posts in social media according to Kearney (2012). There has also been a curiosity regarding whether people mainly use social media to retain previously formed friendships or to initiate new ones. It was revealed that it is more often for maintaining relationships than forming new ones. Research has however, revealed that adolescents with better quality friendships tend to use social media to connect more to their friends and are much less susceptible to the negative effects of online communication due to the supportive backbone of good quality friendships to rely on (Selfhout et al., 2009). Availability on social media was positively connected with perceived friendship quality—both directly and indirectly. Additionally, friends who used other-oriented social media more frequently expressed greater satisfaction with their friendships, and the findings demonstrated the presence of peer influence mechanisms on social media (Angelini et al., 2024).

More use of social media and networking has been found to increase the quality of friendships online, especially for adolescents (Desjarlais & Willoughby, 2010). Self-disclosure is one of the best ways to garner social support in a social media-mediated environment but the concept of “context collapse” often interferes with the willingness to share. Hence, those people with huge social diversity in their profiles often use mechanisms like privacy controls to fragment their social interactions. (Ledbetter, 2016). People who are adept in forming relations often benefit more from social media interactions.

A concept that unites various aspects of friendship on social networking sites is called customized sociality. According to research, young people and emerging adults have more alternatives for autonomy while also having access to practical and effective methods for relatedness. Among the benefits are the ease with which one can foster intimate friendships and the improved availability of social capital and social knowledge, all of which contribute to the kinds of social support that make life in a mobile world happier. The temptation of fleeting pleasures like friendship and social snacking, the pressure to navigate self-promotional presentations broadcast by small networks of contacts, and the difficulty of fostering happiness in a society that appears to define one's value and level of satisfaction with life more and more in relation to appearance, accomplishment, and popularity are some of the risks that young people face (Manago & Vaughn, 2015). The quality of friendship and social media self-efficacy significantly affected adolescent online resilience which is the ability to survive in difficult, risky, and dangerous situations, according to Anasuyari and Latifah (2023).

Today, social interactions frequently occur online, given the ubiquity of internet-connected devices. However, it's crucial to examine the differences between online and offline relationship environments, particularly for young people who are socially vulnerable (Scott et al., 2021). Research by Chan and Cheng (2004) suggests that while online and offline friendships develop differently initially, they follow a similar trajectory after 6-12 months, relying on interdependence, understanding, and commitment. Nevertheless, offline friendships appear to be more effective in reducing susceptibility to social pressures,

indicating higher quality compared to virtual friendships. Interestingly, Scott et al. (2021) found that social vulnerabilities are negatively correlated with friendship quality among young adults who primarily interact offline or both online and offline. In contrast, social vulnerabilities don't significantly impact friendship quality among those who mainly communicate online. Furthermore, research has shown that emotions expressed on social media can influence users' emotional states, with exposure to sad messages potentially leading to posting similar content. Online friendships are becoming the new normal. Most teenagers use social media for daily interactions, communication, and connection with peers. Given that forming relationships is a crucial aspect of adolescence, it's no surprise that social media's interactive features attract young people, providing a platform for connection and community building (Angelini, 2024). The seven defining characteristics of social media - asynchronicity, permanence, publicness, availability, lack of cues, quantifiability, and visualness - are revolutionizing teenagers' peer interactions, creating new experiences and expectations. With digital media growth, social media usage is increasing rapidly. On average, users spend 2.45 hours daily on social media, with 47% of usage driven by a desire to connect with friends and family. Research suggests that high social media usage can enhance online friendship quality. Rather than debating whether social media is 'good' or 'bad' for relationships, it's essential to consider both perspectives and understand its neutral role in shaping contemporary peer relationships, as noted by Angelini (2024).

**Hypotheses:** Based on the perceived gap in literature it is hypothesized that:

H<sub>A</sub>: Mindfulness and social media usage individually and jointly impact the quality of friendship formed digitally.

### METHODS

Data was collected from 356 emerging adults in and around the city of Kolkata, West Bengal, India. After applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, the final sample consisted of 306 participants, distributed across men and women. There was an overall sample of 138 men and 168 women.

#### Tools

- **The Mindfulness Awareness Attraction Scale (MAAS)** (Brown & Ryan, 2003): MAAS is a 15-item scale consisting of statements about everyday experience. The participant is required to mark on a Likert Scale of 1-6 from Almost Always (1) to Always Never (6). To score the scale, a simple mean of the 15 items is computed. Higher scores reflect higher levels of mindfulness. MAAS possesses satisfactory internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ).
- **Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (SNUQ)** (Gupta & Bashir, 2018): SNUQ is a 19-item self-report measure marked on a 5-point Likert Scale from 'Always' to 'Never'. It encompasses four dimensions: academic, socialization, entertainment, and informativeness and the the Friendship Quality on Social Network Sites Questionnaire (FQSNSQ) (Verswijvel, et al., 2018) which is a 16-item questionnaire measuring 5 dimensions of friendship quality – satisfaction, companionship, help, intimacy, and self-validation each checked separately for each dimension. It uses a 5-point Likert Scale format ranging from Totally Disagree (1) to Agree (5). Satisfaction has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93, Companionship has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, Help has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91, Intimacy has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, Self-validation has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

**Procedure**

This study adhered to rigorous ethical standards for data collection. Participants were fully informed about their roles and provided informed consent. Data were collected via a questionnaire with clear instructions provided both verbally and in writing. To ensure data quality, all questions were compulsory, requiring participants to answer each item before proceeding. A total of 300 valid datasets were retained from an initial 356 after applying exclusion criteria, such as random responding, and removing statistical outliers using range, deviation statistics, and box-whisker plots. The final dataset was analyzed using descriptive statistics, product-moment correlation, and regression analyses, facilitated by SPSS v.26 for data coding, analysis, and visualization.

**RESULTS**

**Table 1: ANOVA analysis involving the variables across gender groups**

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	SS	df	MS	F	p
FQ	Male	138	57.203	8.552	173.069	1	173.069	2.136	0.145
	Female	168	58.714	9.353					
Mindfulness	Male	138	2.992	0.671	2.018	1	2.018	4.521*	0.034
	Female	168	3.155	0.666					
SMU	Male	138	73.478	15.312	57.494	1	57.494	0.219	0.64
	Female	168	72.607	16.893					

\* $p < 0.05$

The one-way ANOVA table reveals that for mindfulness, there is a significant difference between genders ( $F = 4.521$ ,  $p = 0.034$ ), where males ( $M = 2.992$ ,  $SD = 0.671$ ) scored lower than females ( $M = 3.155$ ,  $SD = 0.666$ ). However, for the variables of Friendship Quality (FQ), and Social Media Usage (SMU), no significant gender differences were found ( $p > 0.05$ ). Specifically, for FQ, the male ( $M = 57.203$ ,  $SD = 8.552$ ) and female ( $M = 58.714$ ,  $SD = 9.353$ ) similar scores were noted. For SMU, males ( $M = 73.478$ ,  $SD = 15.312$ ) and females ( $M = 72.607$ ,  $SD = 16.893$ ) also did not differ significantly.

**Table 2: Correlation matrix for the variables**

Variables		FQ	Mindfulness	SMU
FQ	<i>r</i>	<b>1</b>	.409**	.382**
	<i>p</i>		0.000	0.000
Mindfulness	<i>r</i>		<b>1</b>	-0.108
	<i>p</i>			0.060
SMU	<i>r</i>			<b>1</b>
	<i>p</i>			

\*\* $p < 0.01$

The correlation matrix above presents the relationships among Friendship Quality (FQ), Mindfulness and Social Media Usage (SMU). In the matrix, significant positive correlations were observed between FQ and Mindfulness ( $r = .409$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and FQ and SMU ( $r = .382$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that higher levels of Friendship Quality are associated with greater mindfulness and social media usage. No significant relationships were found between SMU and Mindfulness (all  $p > .05$ ). Though SMU and Mindfulness are not correlated, there exists a negative correlation between the two, indicating an inverse relationship.

**Table 3: Regression analysis between FQ as the criterion and Mindfulness as predictor**

Variable	b	SE	$\beta$	t	p	95% Lower	95% Upper
Mindfulness	5.488	0.702	0.409**	7.814	0.000	4.106	6.871

\*\* $p < 0.01$

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between mindfulness and friendship quality. Mindfulness was found to be a significant predictor of FQ ( $\beta = 0.409$ ,  $t(304) = 7.814$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The  $\beta$  indicates that mindfulness positively and significantly predicts FQ.

**Table 4: Regression analysis between FQ as the criterion and SMU as predictor**

Variable	b	SE	$\beta$	t	p	95% Lower	95% Upper
SMU	0.213	0.030	0.382**	7.200	0.000	0.155	0.271

\*\* $p < 0.01$

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between SMU and FQ. SMU was found to be a significant predictor of FQ ( $\beta = 0.382$ ,  $t(304) = 7.200$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The  $\beta$  indicates that SMU positively and significantly predicts FQ.

**Table 5: Multiple Regression analysis between FQ as the criterion and other predictors**

Variables	b	SE	$\beta$	t	p	95% Lower	95% Upper
Mindfulness	3.396	0.739	0.253**	4.597	0.000	1.943	4.85
SMU	0.185	0.026	0.333**	7.099	0.000	0.134	0.237

\*\* $p < 0.01$  Criterion: FQ D-W statistics: 1.8  $F = 73.544$ \*\*  $R^2 = 0.422$  Adj.  $R^2 = 0.416$

The above table presents the results of a multiple regression analysis with Friendship Quality (FQ) as the criterion variable. The model, including the predictors Mindfulness and Social Media Use (SMU), was statistically significant ( $F = 73.544$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), accounting for 41.6% of the variance in FQ (Adj.  $R^2 = 0.416$ ). The Durbin-Watson statistic (D-W = 1.8) indicates an absence of autocorrelation, supporting the validity of the regression estimates.

Mindfulness emerged as a significant positive predictor of FQ ( $\beta = 0.253$ ,  $t = 4.597$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), with higher mindfulness scores associated with better friendship quality. Similarly, SMU demonstrated a significant positive association with FQ ( $\beta = 0.333$ ,  $t = 7.099$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that increased social media use positively contributes to friendship quality. Thus, all three predictors: Mindfulness and SMU were significant, with positive standardized  $\beta$  coefficients.

This supports our alternative hypothesis that mindfulness and social media usage both individually and jointly predict better friendship quality.

## DISCUSSION

The current study has found that both mindfulness and social media usage predict online friendship quality. Our results have shown that though there is no significant relationship between social media usage and mindfulness, the relationship between them is inverse, i.e. with the increase in social media usage there may be a decrease in mindfulness of the individual though the effect would not be significant. This is supported by the study made by You and Liu (2022). Du et al. (2021) found out that excessive social media not only leads to lower mindfulness but can also be a result of lower mindfulness. Kang et al. (2025) found in a study conducted in 29 hospital in Hunan Province of China found that lower levels of mindfulness led to higher social media usage, possibly even social media addiction.

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The use of social media can benefit several facets of psychological development including self-esteem, social competence, and friendship closeness. Several research have looked at how online communication affects teenagers' online friendship development and their interest in possible online friends (Antheunis et al., 2007; Peter et al., 2005). Those that interacted online more regularly created online friendships (Peter et al., 2005). Koutamanis et al. (2013) found out that instant messaging (a feature of social media) with online partners help the users to develop social skills in the larger perspective. This fact is also reflected in our study as we find that there is a strong positive correlation between social media usage and online friendship quality ( $r = .382, p < .001$ ).

A special correlation exists between mindful awareness and the interpersonal result of friendship quality, found Pratscher et al. (2018). A study conducted on 600 adolescents in Punjab, Pakistan by Sher et al. (2024) found out that positive correlation exists between friendship quality and mindfulness. Walter & King (2013) that mindfulness made early life friendships easier to maintain, in a study conducted on 222 college students in North Dakota. Our study also predicts that's Friendship Quality is significantly and positively related to Mindfulness ( $r = .409, p < .001$ ).

Pratscher et al. (2017) found that interpersonal mindfulness is linked to better friendship quality, even after controlling for the impact of co-rumination. Our study supports this finding, suggesting that mindfulness predicts enhanced friendship quality. This is likely because mindful communication, whether online or offline, enables individuals to respond thoughtfully after careful consideration, fostering deeper connections. In contrast, the digital world poses unique challenges to mindfulness due to the multitude of simultaneous stimuli, which can undermine thoughtful interaction and relationship-building. Lee and Lim (2016) highlighted that maintaining friendships across different online social networks can vary significantly. Fast-forward to the present, social media friendships have become the norm for emerging adults, rather than just an alternative. This shift underscores the evolving nature of relationships in the digital age.

Aristotle noted that meaningful friendships are rare, while Elder (2014) suggests that true friendships can be formed digitally. Reliable and user-friendly private messaging platforms can foster private friendships. Social media's potential for serendipitous connections is a significant appeal. To reap social benefits, it's crucial to view messages as invitations for conversation, not just announcements. Assessing individuals online with empathy and objectivity is a valuable skill. This perspective is supported by Di Gennaro and Dutton's (2007) findings that the internet plays a key role in reshaping social networks and that online friendships are shaped by users' digital choices rather than technological determinism.

## CONCLUSION

We've entered a digital era where technology is rapidly transforming every aspect of life. Digitalization has impacted various facets of society, from finance to social interactions. As a result, our communication methods have also become digitalized. Despite this shift, the fundamental human instincts that drive relationships, including friendships, remain unchanged. Digital relationships can be just as valuable, enjoyable, and supportive as those in the physical world.

Distractions have always been present in our environment, influencing how we navigate situations. These distractions can stem from past experiences, current conditions, and environmental factors like noise and light. However, the rise of digitalization and social

media has introduced new dynamics. Social media platforms, with their vast array of user-generated content and discussions, can be particularly distracting. This can make it easier to be unmindful in online interactions, potentially leading to less satisfying relationships and misunderstandings. Despite the changed context, the fundamental principles of human friendships remain the same, and mindfulness is still essential for building strong connections. While spending more time on social media can increase opportunities to connect with others, it's essential to prioritize meaningful interactions over mere quantity. The depth and quality of relationships depend more on the effort and mindfulness we bring to our interactions, rather than the amount of time spent online. To truly nurture friendships, it's crucial to be present and aware in our online interactions, rather than just relying on technology to bridge the gap.

While social media has been linked to negative effects like sleep deprivation, distraction, and information overload, it also offers immense benefits. As a networked society, we can harness the power of social media to connect with others worldwide, free from geographical constraints. By embracing social media's potential and practicing mindfulness, we can foster meaningful connections, build diverse relationships, and create a more positive online experience. This balanced approach can help us build a better, more connected future for ourselves and future generations.

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