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## A Battle of Friendship Via Social Media

Social media is the foundation of communication in the world we live in today. Not only do we have access to communicate locally, but it is essentially a key to the rest of the world. We have access to communicate and interact with people that aren't exactly right in front of us. And sometimes these interactions can turn into friendship, and possibly a relationship. It is common to be skeptical of online relationships, the fear of talking to someone that claims to be someone else. I used to be very skeptical of the idea of online friendships until two years ago. I began to bond with people my age around the country over the same interests in music groups. I have had the privilege to actually meet a few of my closest friends around the state, and even from across the country. Nonetheless, there has always been a contrast between "online" and "offline" relationships and making it common to degrade the validity of these friendships simply because of the barrier between the people and the screen. Based on the research that I've collected, I have found that the validity of social media making relationships is strong.

Throughout my research process, I noticed it was a challenge to find information that is relevant or close to the present year. A majority of the sources were dated to be over 10+ years old. While the conventional wisdom of online relationships has been a sparking topic for the past couple of decades, it is important to note that the ways we interact with each other have changed even in the past few years. From the sources I have seen, there is a good proportion between believing that social media can truly form relationships and those who say otherwise. Because social media is embodied in our everyday lives to maintain contact with our peers and the rest of the world, it is safe to assume that we are exposed to new people every day. A key element to making any friendship work is finding alike interests. People are more likely to build stronger bonds with people who share certain interests. Personally speaking, this is true because that is exactly how I found those people online that soon became my close friends, because of our same taste in music. Presenting our interests is one of the essential elements of social media. Whether it's through music, books, cars, there is almost anything on the media that people can find a connection to and find others who feel the same that eventually, builds a bond. Although most of the time people do not have the actual opportunity to see these people face to face, the screen barrier does not hold back the connection. I also found that online friendships can vary between different social media platforms. In a study, they found that people were more likely to build stronger bonds through websites such as MySpace and Facebook than those who did through video games where people have access to talk to other people. While MySpace and Facebook aren't as commonly used by teenagers today, this information can still be applicable to platforms used by teenagers today such as Instagram and Twitter. However, the media highly exaggerates the idea of online friendships and relationships, which was turned into a TV show from MTV called "Catfish". Almost every episode contains a series of people who have talked to people online and end up meeting these people in person and turn out to be people who aren't who they said they were. These kinds of shows can and have affected the way people see the idea of social media making friendships, but it is important to know that these stories are exaggerated by the television media that only covers such a small percentage of friendships that didn't up to working out.

However, some sources have shown that the stigma through making internet friendships is still well-founded. Many who would argue that those who develop links between social media are

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really "isolates" who live "fantasy lives" and construct empty, anonymous worlds. Some studies have shown that these internet ties can cause neglect towards offline friendships, or the commonality of identity conflict and confusion. Nevertheless, more studies have shown the positive effects of social media on making friendships. Research shows that the internet also promotes new friendships and connections that may not have been possible otherwise. UCLA research has also found that the internet is slowly becoming the medium of choice for people to connect with others. For example, in response to the 9/11 attack, more than 100 million Americans used the Internet to communicate with people all over the world. The research has shown that it is not the idea of being face to face that makes the intimacy important, but the mental sense in which interaction happens may render both meaningful and tangible such types of direct and indirect exchange. Frequent and positive communication between people of different backgrounds, deep and long-term relationships, and trust are the qualities that make us feel connected to others. Individuals view communication as fundamental to their lives in online or offline environments.

Whether people want to believe it or not, social media can form friendships. Many people begin to assume that because we cannot see them face to face they are automatically talking to someone who's lying behind the screen. No matter what people believe, it is possible. It doesn't change the connection between people. But I am still curious to know where the line draws between a mutual connection and an actual friendship. People see it differently, and some interests may build stronger relationships than others.