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Building Social Relations on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Many studies stated that in the early days of the internet, online usage caused people to feel depressed and lonely. However, some recent research has shown that the internet can help individuals build social relations. Social media has made it easier for individuals to connect with other individuals through social networking and media, especially Facebook. Facebook is one of the most widely used social networking sites: 72.7% of Indonesia's total internet users use Facebook (APJII, 2020). The presence of social media includes Facebook, which has changed the patterns of interaction and individual communication. The purpose of this study is to examine how the internet can replace the role of face-to-face communication in establishing friendships and maintaining social relations in this digital era. Therefore, writers will use CMC Perspective and Social Information Processing theory to answer these questions. Netnography was done on *the Bening* Society community Facebook account. This study's results indicate that Facebook has been able to shift the role of face-to-face communication in building social relations, especially in building friendships and maintaining friendships. It was further described that netizens felt more comfortable building and developing social relations through the internet in this case, especially through the social media application Facebook, because it was considered "cheaper" and more accessible.

Keywords: *Internet, social relations, digital, computer-mediated communication, Facebook.*

INTRODUCTION

The presence of the internet in human life has brought many changes. One of these changes is the way humans communicate and establish social relations. Communication between individuals is mainly done through the internet in this digital era. Therefore, the internet's current function is no longer a medium of information but has shifted into a communication function. Through the internet, individuals can fulfill their needs for information and social relationships (Van Deursen & Helsper, 2017). Several survey data have shown that internet users open social media more: as the 2020 APJIKI survey results state, 85% of internet users use the internet for social media sites.

The development of internet technology, especially the birth of social networking sites, has made communication via online media more accessible than face-to-face communication. The existence of social media platforms encourages individuals to share information and receive social support. Many considered that social interactions through online media were of a worse quality than face-to-face communication (Jeffrey et al., 2011).

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This condition is due to the lack of social support that individuals get from online media, such as the lack of non-verbal cues and unclear individual identity. Even past research states that communication via online media cannot maintain social relationships (Litt et al., 2020). However, several studies have shown that interactions through internet technology can make the quality of social relationships as good as relationships built through face-to-face communication, and make it easier to establish and maintain friendships (Wang & Herrando, 2019; Bueno Alastuey, 2011). The most visited sites are social media and networking sites. Facebook was ranked first as the most visited site, beating the Google search engine site. A study says that 92% internet users access social media platforms every day; 62% of children access the internet for social media sites, while as many as 43% access online games, and 23% access for "dating" purposes. In adults (age 18 and over), as many as 81% use Facebook at least once a day (Curtis et al., 2019; Norton Online Living Report, 2010).

The popularity and widespread use of social networking sites has finally become a popular communication choice for teenagers. Lenhart's research on "How Youth Communicate Every Day" shows that 51% of adolescents aged 12-17 communicate via the internet by accessing social networking sites (Madden et al., 2013). Only 29% of teens share with their friends face to face communication. This research is reinforced by a study conducted by Pelling and White (2009) on adolescents aged 17-24 years who show that they visit social networking sites four times, sometimes even more. This research shows how cyberspace (through social networking sites) has shifted the role of face-to-face communication in adolescent social life.

The internet does not only function to search for information. The rise of social networking sites like Facebook has made the function develop. The internet is a means of searching for information, but now the internet functions are more dominant in building communication and social relations with cyberspace communities. Facebook has become the most popular social networking site among internet users, mostly in young people (Habes et al., 2018; Candrasari et al., 2020). Facebook is the most accessed site when individuals use the internet, including the seeking of information from network friends (Shearer & Grieco, 2019; Yaakop et al., 2012). Facebook has many support tools for individuals wanting to communicate, make friends, and even maintain pre-existing social relationships (Derbel, 2017). This study aims to reveal how Facebook can play a role in communication and social interaction, especially in building social relationships and face-to-face communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overall, social interactions in Indonesian society are in the form of a community, which is a relationship formed from a pure, natural, and eternal inner relationship. The ties of blood and descent, kinship, and closeness due to the similarity of religion and belief are the basis for the formation of relationships (Effendi, 2016; Akobiarek & Puyok, 2024).

Information and communication technology (internet) have changed interactions and communication among the Indonesian people, especially netizens, whose numbers continue to increase. The internet, especially social media, has influenced the social and cultural life of the community. On social media sites, the basic human needs for interaction and socialization can be fulfilled, as described in the theory of Determinism Technology which examines human communication with technology. Technology will change human life, mainly the culture of society. Technology will change at the macro-level of people's lives and affect individual psychology at a micro-level and in regard to interpersonal relations (Langrish, 2020; Thurlow et al., 2004; Sait & Sattar, 2018).

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The presence of social media includes Facebook, which has changed the patterns of interaction and individual communication. Facebook provides flexibility for its users to share identities and provides social attention which makes it a medium that can give its users satisfaction (Adnan & Mavi, 2015; Syahputra, 2018). Two factors cause individuals to use Facebook, namely the need for ownership and self-presentation (Kircaburun & Baştuğ, 2016). Another study states that Facebook users who have a high self-confidence for narcissism will have a higher online activity (Mehdizadeh, 2010). In addition to self-presentation, Facebook is also widely used by individuals to build social relationships. A study shows that using Facebook positively impacts a person's social attitude better than playing online games (Junco, 2011).

Some CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) researchers examine how CMC characteristics influence the interaction patterns of their users. Although many have criticized how CMC is ineffective at building social relationships because of the loss of nonverbal cues, individuals nowadays use CMC to communicate, including expressing their feelings easily and comfortably (Sumner & Ramirez Jr., 2017; Hamid et al., 2022). As in the Social Information Processing Theory, individuals can interact comfortably in cyberspace even though there are very few nonverbal cues. Walther wrote that this condition could occur because individuals can find other ways to express their emotional feelings through the text created (Walther, 2011).

Today, technology (the internet) dominates people's lives. When the internet can provide "socialization" facilities through its social media facilities, the relationship is lost based on kinship, knowing each other physically, regionalism, cooperation in neighboring, and hospitality. This social interaction mediated by the internet easily connects everyone, even though they don't know each other closely. The form of individual relationships is no longer physical but is through an interface represented by devices (communication technology).

As research conducted by Pollet et al. (2011) shows that individuals who use instant messaging and social networking sites have more significant group support, good group sympathy, and more friendships than those who do not use social media. Furthermore, the study revealed that respondents who spend their time using social networking sites have more online friends and often make contact every week, but only through online means. This phenomenon shows that social media has made netizens spend their time surfing the internet. Even some netizens consider social media to be a "friend" with which to spend their time.

One study shows that for optimistic groups to see the internet, and the internet is seen as a medium to increase social interaction (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). Several studies on CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) have shown that CMC is not necessarily less personal than face-to-face communication. Furthermore, it has shown that contact without mediation is minimal by geography and proximity, meaning that face-to-face communication cannot reach geographically different individuals and is limited to processing and storing messages.

One ethnographic study concluded that communication on the internet complements genuine relationships already established. This study uses a netnographic method (Hamman, 1999). While research conducted by Parks and Roberts (2013) stated that even though the frequency and duration in online relationships are fewer, the interaction and communication that exists in online in improving individual relationships is more familiar and can be well built upon.

This condition has also changed the past, which stated that the internet will make users feel lonely; nowadays, more internet users greet their friends through the cyberspace. This phenomenon draws the author's attention to how the internet, especially Facebook, will replace interpersonal and face-to-face communication for building and maintaining social relations.

METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research methods that examine a virtual reality, especially that which is related to social media use. This study uses a netnographic method. This netnography method is relatively new in social research. Netnography is the same as ethnography in general. The netnographic method examines a group of people in a virtual world or virtual community. The subject of this research is the Muslim community on Facebook who have intense interaction and communication among members. The account name for the community group is “Bening Society”. The “Bening Society” is an account that has Muslim female members who were initially customers of the Bening hijab product brand. The researcher chooses the “Bening Society” account to be the subject of research because it fulfills the requirements as written by Kozinet. To become a research subject, an individual have an active community account, and each member must interact with the other. Furthermore, researchers joining the community have made observations on every post and communication made by the “Bening Society” community. Researchers observe and analyze posts and conversations that appear on the Bening Society's Facebook account page. Also, to strengthen the research data, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the admin and “Bening Society” account holders and several “Bening Society” members who fit the criteria of this study.

Determination of Data and Data Sources

As described above in this netnographic study, researchers are required to be involved and interact with each other. Researchers must engage in virtual reality because the aim of the study is to examine social media, especially social networking sites (Facebook).

Based on these criteria, researchers follow a Facebook account with many followers and post frequently in the Facebook account. The "Bening Society" community has been around since 2012 in a community of women of a productive age. They were initially incorporated due to the similarity of their "profession," namely, an online businessperson. Then the community developed into a container for young women of a productive age to share information and experiences. Uniquely this community is a community that does not have male members, although it is open. Currently, this community has as many as 5050 members and is active.

Researchers have observed that this community is busy updating statuses and that every member is engaged in responding. It appears that there is a process of communication and interaction that is built-in even though members do not know one and the other physically.

In his book *Netnography*, Kozinets describes several criteria that determine which types of communication or online communities can be considered appropriate subjects for research. There are criteria for selecting charges for research subjects in social networking sites, namely: (1) focus on research questions or topics; (2) based on high "traffic" posts; (3) based on the number of different messages (comments); (4) posting in more detail; (5)

interactions between members or non-high members as needed in the study (Bowler Jr, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research data shows that Facebook makes it easy for users (informants) to build communication and social relations through several stages, namely accepting the friendship. The second stage is self-disclosure among Facebook users, and the third stage supports each other. Next, the researcher will explain the two steps of building social relations.

Accepting Friendship

This study shows that besides accepting friends who were previously known to be offline, many informants also received friend requests from Facebook. The informant looks open to friend requests from people he just saw on Facebook. However, there are "prerequisites and stages" carried out by informants to consider accepting friend requests from people who have not been known before.

In mediated communication, physical presence is not an absolute requirement for Facebook users to get to know each other, followed by contact between them. When the informant meets a stranger through a friend request, there are several ways to recognize a stranger's identity. The first is to see personal information on their Facebook profile, where the informant can see the names and photos of their new friends and other personal information such as gender, education, place of residence, marital status, employment, and religion (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, as cited in (Baym, 2011) about the concept of profiles that exist on social networking sites (Baym, 2011). That profile is a form of the individual homepage on social networking sites. Most profile content contains a brief biography of the owner of a social networking site account. From this personal information, the informant can consider whether to accept the friend request.

As stated by the third informant below: "*I see his profile* ...". Likewise, the following fourth informant reveals almost the same thing as third informant about how he received friend requests from people he did not know:

> *"I usually check first from the profile or the wall, and mutual friends and anyone else can I consider. But if you are completely alien, the face doesn't clear; you don't have to ignore it."*

The ninth informant also stated the same thing, namely:

> *"... and his profile, whatever the wall is."*

Information from the profile ("about me") has at least provided information about netizens' identities relating to name, gender, and face, or seeing the physical form of the stranger by looking at his profile photo or photos on people's Facebook pages. Thus, from the profile, netizens can recognize "figures" from strangers asking for friendship. Although the profile page's identity seems concise, it is sufficient to know the stranger's identity for netizens. Netizens do not need complete and detailed personal information to initiate communication and interact in the virtual world.

In this study, the way informants recognize foreigners in Facebook-mediated communication is to look at their mutual friends. That is, the informant sees who the informant's Facebook friends had become Facebook friends from the stranger. By knowing mutual friends, informants will usually have the confidence to accept friendship invitations. As said by the third informant, namely:

"I see who his friend is; the wall is just about everything."

Including the ninth informant's expressions:

"I see who his friend is, and his profile, what are the walls, …"

This shows that the informant felt safe and comfortable when his Facebook friends became friends with people he had not known before. Even though his Facebook friends could not see the stranger, his Facebook friends could "just come from" to get his Facebook friends. Apart from this, the phenomenon of finding "mutual friends" shows that informants put trust in their Facebook friends because they feel there are elements of closeness in strangers knowing their Facebook friends well. Besides, the phenomenon of "mutual friends" also emphasizes a sense of family, one that embodies Indonesian society's characteristics. Family ties create a sense of togetherness between individuals who are bound in a social system. This condition makes each individual have the confidence in the people around him. Therefore, the information provided by the people closest to them is usually considered trustworthy.

The third way to recognize the person you know is by looking at the Facebook wall page's contents. From the posts shared on the Facebook wall page, the informant can "recognize" the stranger's profile, considering that the posts shared on the Facebook page are influenced by the Facebook account owner's face. The wall posts show that personal characteristics of the account owner and walls can help other people to recognize the Facebook account owner. The bars in the form of verbal sentences can be seen from the posts in the way of photos. The image uploaded by the account owner on his Facebook wall page can help other people assess or perceive "what" the Facebook account owner's character is. This study also shows that the Facebook owner's pictures will make it easier for informants to recognize friends asking for friendship. The fifth informant in his consideration to accept a friend request states the following:

"In addition to looking at the profile name, I also recognize from the photos on their Facebook at a glance."

The statement can explain that a profile photo at least helps Facebook users to recognize other Facebook users. When the informant feels that he recognizes the image on a wall page, the informant readily accepts the friend request. This means that the photos uploaded on a Facebook account are one consideration for netizens receiving friendship invitations. Tong et al. (2008) states that messages in posts on Facebook will also attract people to read them. Individuals use the information available on the wall to make judgments about other people (Tong et al., 2008).

Self-Disclosure

Researchers observed from the Bening Society Facebook account shows how Bening residents may feel comfortable expressing their feelings when feeling anxious or sad. This can be seen in several posts on the Facebook wall page where there is an outpouring of Bening people's hearts about children, family, and work. Further, self-disclosure is also seen on the site when Bening residents share stories about success or feelings of joy. This fact illustrates that informants feel easy (without burden) in carrying out self-disclosure. This is based on the definition of self-disclosure. According to Morton (as cited in Gainau, 2009), self-disclosure is an activity in which to share feelings and information familiar with others. Self-disclosure can be both descriptive and evaluative.

Besides this, researchers can also see self-disclosure from Bening residents' posts about the heart's outpouring. The words that appear illustrate the empathy of fellow Bening residents. This is also the case with the Bening Society community. They are accustomed to talking about many things, ranging from Muslim, feminine, family, social, religious, and even political issues. The strong bond that exists between Bening residents encourages the emergence of openness between them. The exposure can show how they can express each other's thoughts or contents in the Bening community forum. Even informants get close friends who can invite them to talk from heart to heart. As the following informants say:

> *"There was a dunk of friends from this group who became close to being a place to confide in me as much as we like—only started as limited as buyers and sellers."*

The ninth informant also says the same thing:

> *"In Bening, you get family and friends to share stories, like to get new insights."*

This phenomenon shows that Facebook can make users build exemplary communication and relationships to feel more open. As explained by Zheng et al. (2010) an online connection is said to be of acceptable quality if among its members messages can be openly shared. Some notes show emotional closeness, openness, mutual trust, and that individuals can communicate about many things.

This openness was not only because of the closeness between Bening residents but also because all Bening Society residents were women. In the cyberspace, women tend to be more likely to self-disclose information than men. The results of this study also emphasize this statement, especially when involved in a community of all female members so that the informant feels safe and comfortable to tell anything. As the third informant says below:

> *"In the group, all girls, Ms. Even to our friendship on Facebook, I don't accept friendship guys on Facebook. I don't know much like that, including me. I don't want any men on my FB. We often chat. Also, see their daily lives on Facebook. From there, you can know which are good and which are not right."*

Several studies have supported this statement. Research conducted by Larsen states that adult women express their feelings more often on messages written on social networking sites (Larsen, 2007). Things are very different when in face-to-face communication. Women

tend to be problematic in conducting face-to-face communication, especially when meeting strangers.

For decades, self-disclosure an essential factor for building closer relationships. In face-to-face communication, self-disclosure only occurs when individuals already know each other well (Clark et al., 1986). What is different in this study is that Facebook users can open themselves freely, including expressing their hearts, even though Facebook users don't know each other. Facebook has made its users open themselves up comfortably to express their emotions and get responses from others (Walther et al., 2009). Self-disclosure is more likely to be done on Facebook, significantly when Facebook account owners update their status on the Facebook wall page. The updating status on Facebook provides opportunities for openness and transparency, which aims to build intimacy and intimacy between individuals (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Mutual Support

There is an absence of "distance" among netizens in communicating via Facebook. As in face-to-face communication, when individuals meet with strangers, there will be "distance" between them so that the communication process feels "stiff" and limited, as is seen on the Bening Society community on Facebook. The communication process occurs intensely and continuously, even though the community members only meet through Facebook. As stated by the following eighty informants:

> *"Yeah ... we all started to know him in this group. What I like about this group is its solidarity."*

The data shows that in addition to the Bening residents, there are friends that exchange solidarity and mutual support. This fact shows the strong ties that occur in the Bening Society community. Haythornthwaite (2007) in Baym (2010) states that the bond is vital when individuals involved in a relationship are often in contact with, self-disclose, and support individuals. In contrast, the bond is weak if it is not usually connected with other online individuals (Baym, 2010). The form of support given by Bening members when one of the members of the "Bening Society" community experiences a disaster will strengthen each member. Likewise, when members of the "Bening Society" want to get information about trusted online sellers, they do not hesitate to share information with each other. In addition, they also share information about children's education, parenting, hobbies, and others.

DISCUSSION

This study obtained several factors that Facebook users can use to receive friend requests from unknown people to avoid things that are not desirable. This study found that several factors were considered by informants when they would receive friendship from other parties who did not previously know. These factors are to see:

1. The identity of the profile.
2. Mutual friends.
3. The contents of the Facebook wall page.

Facebook has changed communication behavior in humans. As explained in the CMC, environmental space is when individuals communicate with other individuals mediated by electronic technology. CMC has reduced the need for individuals to meet face to face to

connect, and instead allows people to face each other virtually through a computer screen (Griffin, 2012). CMC can also improve multimedia communication in nature, namely through communication that involves various elements of feeling and the use of our five senses. This research has explained how Facebook users experience that intensity of communication among community members (Bening Society) to create close relationships even though they have not known each other before. The length of time in which Facebook users communicate and interact encourages openness between them. As Sheldon's research found, that there is a positive correlation between the time spent using Facebook and the level of social relationships (Sheldon et al., 2011).

CMC interactivity makes the computer a responsive and reflective tool. CMC has good synchronicity, meaning that communication is fast and can also obtain feedback quickly. Finally, CMC is hypertextual, meaning that communication is not linear (one way). CMC's characteristics have made it easier for internet users (social media and Facebook) to feel comfortable in building communication and fostering social relationships in the world. Netizens find it easy to make friendships and open up to other individuals, even though they don't meet physically or if they are geographically far apart.

This study indicates that women have more openness when they communicate and interact with their friends in cyberspace. Facebook has provided opportunities for users to share reciprocally, such as through face-to-face communication.

The existence of the internet has succeeded in giving birth to social media applications to make it easier for users to interact and communicate. The loss of individual identity and non-verbality is not a barrier for users to interact and communicate in cyberspace. This research also reveals that netizens easily accept friendship requests by looking at a makeshift identity on the Facebook profile. This condition is very different when individuals communicate face-to-face. In face-to-face communication, the individual will judge from the visible and attached non-verbal factors to other individuals to assess whether the relationship can be built or not. Individuals consider many factors in communicating with other individuals in face-to-face communication.

As in this research, it found that by not going through "introductions," Facebook users can become members of the online community only through the same hobbies and gender. As members of the community, they can immediately communicate intensely, and in a while, the friendship becomes as close as if they had met physically.

The Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT) reveals that with a long time and the opportunity to interact, one can form relationships between individuals in an online environment. Seeing the intensity of communication on the “Bening Society” Facebook community account has made every member believe that they have new, good friends. Conversations that occur in each post or even a "like" on a post become social information for each community member to assess new friends in the community. In the end, members of the "Bening Society" community feel they are in the right neighborhood and in line with their wishes.

This form of support can be in the form of netizens' attention to other netizens. One mode of attention is the way that routine informants read the status of updates on the “Bening Society” community Facebook page, as well as each member’s personal Facebook page. To show support to his Facebook friends, especially those who are members of the “Bening Society”, the informant actively comments on his friend's status or just gives a "Like" sign on his Facebook friends' group. Thus, friendships are maintained in the cyberspace. Like

a human social character, there is symbiotic mutualism when individuals want their social relations to be well maintained.

The form of support here is not only emotional support but is also information support. Emotional support has been seen in how the Bening members pay attention to have a good understanding of each other. At this stage, informants also obtained informational approval from those who were part of the “Bening Society” community. This condition is a form of informational support. Informational support is not just the sharing of knowledge of hobbies, parenting, or tips, but can also be advice or instructions about things as a form of problem-solving. Both ways of support made the ties between the Bening Society members stronger. This phenomenon shows that friendship on Facebook contributes to social support, especially emotional and informational support. Results of previous research show that the number of Facebook friends is proven to provide greater social support, especially when people experience more pressures in life and friends on Facebook are more aware of their presence to be able to provide social support (Nabi et al., 2013)

Baim (2010, p. 75) also wrote that there was said to be a robust online community if there were shared resources and support among the community (Baym, 2011). Social support contained in an online community will provide many benefits for community members. Community members will find it easier to adjust, deal with problems better, and improve performance. Informants also felt such conditions as citizens (members) of the “Bening Society” community. The new Bening members' fast process in adjusting to the "environment" of the “Bening Society” community includes also obeying the existing regulations in the community; those who join the community have similar interests and interests.

This form of mutual support can also be seen when Facebook users upload their status on their wall in the format of expressions of their feelings or thoughts and then quickly get a response in the form of comments or "like" signs from their Facebook friends. Facebook users feel some friends listen to them, and there is support from these friends, even though they are separated by distance. This then gave birth to an emotional bond between Facebook users, even though they were not physically close. Thus, physical presence is not an absolute requirement in communication (mediated) because it is present in cyberspace. Thurlow et al. (2004, p. 48) described that social reality is described as a level of personal contact and a feeling of closeness (familiarity) in the communication process (Thurlow et al., 2004).

Besides this, when Facebook users post messages on their Facebook wall, the response expected by Facebook users is in line with their expectations. The results of research conducted by Freeman show that 70% of the responses given to Facebook user's messages are in line with their expectations (Jiang et al., 2013). That is a positive response, and there is emotional support for posts. Users cannot control which of their Facebook friends will read the update status, which is a different condition to face-to-face communication. In face-to-face communication, the communicator can see who is paying attention and who is not.

Also, Facebook, like social media, can reach "audiences" quite broadly. This means that Facebook's message is not limiting the recipient and getting anyone who becomes his Facebook friend. So, in communicating on Facebook, it is possible for individuals to "not feel alone (lonely)" because there will always be a response from their Facebook friends. Thus, individuals still feel as if there are "friends nearby." The form of the answer given by Facebook friends is a form of social support. Social support will make the bond of friendship between informants (Facebook users) quite firm and close, as social support is a form of information that raises the attention and affection of others (Li et al., 2015). Another definition states that

social support is an interpersonal transaction that involves feelings, affirmations, support, and encouragement to other parties (Leung & Lee, 2012). It has been suggested that the data of this study show that informants, when sharing information related to personal life and communication in general at the same time, immediately receive a response from other Bening residents. Thus, social support among clear citizens is good enough. It is natural for emotional closeness even though individuals many have never known each other or have never physically met. This condition is in line with previous research which states that Facebook users get greater social support from their network friends than from offline friends (Oh et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that in this digital era, Facebook has shifted the dominance of face-to-face communication in building social relations. Facebook has proven capable of being a vehicle for its users to build social relationships. This is because Facebook has provided features that make it easier for users to make friends, build friendships, and even open up. Through the old Facebook, individuals no longer feel lonely because Facebook makes it easier for users to make old friends and new friends in the cyberspace. Facebook has also become a means for users to express themselves. Facebook users can freely express what they feel in a different way to when communicating face-to-face. In face-to-face communication, not all individuals can open up to others. Building social relationships in the cyberspace feels easier, even though netizens don't know each other before and have never met physically. The following research should explore other social media platforms to get a more complete picture of social media's role in building relationships between individuals as social beings.

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