Social Networking as Determinant of Online Friendship Quality and Trust: Case of Pakistan

Dr. Rubab Mussarat

Assistant Professor (Department of Mass Communication),
National University of Modern Languages, Lahore, Pakistan
Email: rubab.musarrat@gmail.com

Dr. Afsheen Masood

Assistant Professor (Department of Applied Psychology),
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

This study's major objective is to investigate the relationships between young adults' use of social media, degree of trust, and quality of friendship. A relationship between social media use, level of trust, and the calibre of online friendship was hypothesized. It was also hypothesized that young adults' use of social media and degree of trust are indicators of the strength of their friendships. 300 college students (150 men and 150 women) made up the sample. The sample's age ranged from 18 to 30 years (M = 22.10, SD = 2.11). The data was collected from University students, having online friendships. Friendship Quality Scale (Thien, 2012), Trust Scale (Yamagishi, 1986) and Social Media Usage and Attitudes Scale (Rosen et al, 2013) were used. The results revealed negative relationship in social networking and perceived quality of friendship and trust among online friends. The results of regression analysis reflected that social media is a significant negative predictor of the friendship quality and level of trust is a positive predictor of online friendships. There were marked gender differences in friendship quality and level of trust as boys showed up better friendship quality and greater level of trust than girls. However, future research, longitudinal in nature is suggested to keep into account intersection between youths' online and offline friendship experiences overtime in order to reveal the dynamics of online friendships.

***Keywords*:** Online Friendship, Level of Trust, Friendship Quality, Social Networking, Social Determinants.

1.   Introduction

Social media and social networking has transformed and redefined the relationships 'patterns including the friendships. The mode of communication is much more developed and enriched with technology and that is the very reason that implied meaning of friendship has changed now (Topus, 2010). The element of trust in online communities has not been probed much in empirical researches yet there are inconsistent findings about the role of virtual interaction in determining friendship quality. That is why virtual communication and interpersonal relationship quality is an area of pivotal interest these days among social scientists.

Trust emerges as more challenging phenomenon when this is realized that nature of online interaction and friendship formation is permeated with narrations of fake connections or forged presentations of the users. Consumers of online social networking sites can easily exploit personal information of others and can exhibit their fake identities thus beguiling their online maintained friends. Social networks are widely popular since they are effective mediums for disseminating information and thereby linking like-minded people. The smart phones based access of such mediums has further eased their access and more and more teens are using it as source of developing friendships and social circles. The online friendships quality has been construed as experienced closeness, trust, and understanding among friends, maintained through online communication mode (Marsden & Campbell, 2001; Chan & Cheng, 2004).

The classical depiction of Sullivan's interpersonal theory of personality (1953) leads us to understand that socialization needs of adolescents and teens make them build greater interaction with others than individuals of any other age group (Chambers, 2013).The focus of the current research study is specifically online friendship, which is developed online and that remains solely online; excluded here are other modes, including mixed-mode friendships, that implies adopting both online and offline modes to carry on friendships and stipulated offline friendships, that have been established in offline mode and may or may not be extended to online mode of communication (Walther & Parks, 2002). Chan and Cheng (2004) concluded

that the quality of online friendships increased more than the quality of offline friendships. However, trust has been a central topic of research in psychology and sociology for many years (Helbing 1994; Mollering 2002; Molm et al. 2000), psychology (Rotter 1967; Cook et al. 2005). Generally defining trust is the feeling that you can depend on someone or something (Moibus & Quoc-Anh, 2004).

Trust is a psychological state that involves having positive expectations about the intentions or behavior of another person (Rousseau, 2000; Lewicki, 2001). Online friendships may involve nil interpersonal real situations but according to Kelley et al. (2003) trust can never be gauged out effectively through virtual interactions and can solely be assessed in certain interpersonal situations. Trust leads to greater cooperation, information sharing, and stronger friendships. Trust is a hybrid phenomenon and this requires both elements of The Dyadic Model of Trust in Relationships. According to this model, trust is made up of two parts: the way that trust is typically expressed in a society, and the individual ways that people trust others (Meyerson, 1996).

Fukuyama (1998) developed a theory of trust based on the idea that cultural habits influence how much people trust family members and outsiders. Dawyer et al. (2007) found that online trust involves a willingness to share information, and that people's trust and usage goals affect what information they are willing to share on different websites. This can have a significant impact on the quality of their online friendships. There are discrepant evidences about friendship quality through online social interactions. According to Topus (2010), online friendships cannot be translated into productive and trustworthy relationships. Youth in the age range of (18-24 years) are using social media more heavily than previous generations (Duggan & Smith, 2013).

According to research, social media use may affect our personality, self-efficacy, friendship quality, and psychosocial wellbeing (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2014). Friendship is a pattern of relationship that virtually everyone experiences and it has significant function of promoting affection, intimacy and trust. Interpersonal relationships are markedly

dependent on such advance mediums of communication (Pempek et al., 2009; Quan-Haase& Young, 2010). Facebook makes it easy to communicate with many people at the same time. Social media can also help users stay up-to-date on the lives of people they haven't seen in a while, and reconnect with new and old friends (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

The main hypotheses investigated the relationship between social media use, level of trust and quality of friendship in social media users. Another hypothesis assessed social media use as predictor of level of trust and quality of friendship in social media users. Additionally, it was also hypothesized that social networking usage, perceived friendship quality, and degree of trust would differ between the genders.

2.   Objectives

- To explore the relationships between social media use, trustworthiness, and friendship quality among users of social media.
- To examine the relationship between self-concept, self-compassion and decision making in young adults.

3.   Theoretical Framework

Social capital is a theoretical concept that emphasizes the value embedded within social relationships and networks. It is composed of two main components: bonding social capital (relationships within one's close-knit group) and bridging social capital (relationships that span different groups). According to social capital theory, social connections are a resource that may help human capital grow and amass. For example, a stable family environment can encourage school success as well as the development of credentials and talents that are highly prized and rewarded. According to evolutionary theory, social capital is any aspect of a social interaction that promotes reproduction. Savage and Kanazawa (2002, 2004) claim that human inclinations for companionship in general and signs indicating higher amounts of social capital in particular have evolved.

As developed preferences for particular forms of social connections ought to have been chosen in the EEA, gender disparities reflecting the

division of labour in foraging cultures should be expected. Women, for instance, are likely to cherish and experience emotional fulfilment from belonging to tiny social networks that consist of intimate personal connections built upon strong social bonds. Because they help with childrearing and foraging, these kinds of partnerships would be particularly adaptive for women. Membership in bigger social networks, which would include warring parties, political alliances, and hunting groups, would be expected to benefit men more than women. Those kind of social capital that bestowed wealth and social standing would mostly favour men.

Recasting sociological theories of crime in terms of evolutionary theory, according to Savage and Kanazawa (2002), might reveal fresh perspectives on what discourages crime. The possibility of losing social ties can be a potent deterrent to illegal or deviant behaviour, according to theories on choice and social control, cultural deviance, and strain. It is predicted by evolutionary theory that social bonds and ties that were most strongly associated with reproductive success in the EEA are more likely to provide a deterrent effect against deviance and crime.

Women's intimate personal ties are particularly valuable, thus the fear of losing them would discourage them from engaging in behavior that may jeopardize them. Men seem to value their social capital more than women do, and the prospect of losing such resources would likely deter illegal or deviant behavior. Empirical research showing men's sensitivity to status loss or deterioration is consistent with this line of thinking.

It is relevant to this study because it helps define friendship quality, encompassing aspects such as emotional support, intimacy, reciprocity, and satisfaction. Moreover, trust is a central element in online friendships, so it explores how online interactions, information sharing, and the context of social networking contribute to trust formation.

## 4.	Method

The research design of this study was correlational design. The sample was comprised of (n=300) young adults. Data was collected from university students aged 18-25 years to participate in a study using social media. The

purposive sampling technique was used for this study. The social media use and level of trust were independent variables whereas quality of friendship was dependent variable.

4.1   Measures and Procedure

The demographic questionnaire consisted of age, gender and education. Another measuring tool namely Friendship Quality Scale (Thien, 2012) was used. It is a brief measure comprising 21 items with 4 subscales i.e. closeness, safety, acceptance and help. Questions are on 7 point Likert scales. Total score is computed by adding all the responses. The reliability of the scale is 0.82. Third measure used was Trust Scale (Yamagishi, 1986). The study used a 5-item questionnaire to measure participants' general level of trust in others.

The questionnaire was designed to assess two main factors that contribute to general trust: the belief that other people are honest, and the belief that trusting others is risky. The total score is obtained by adding all the responses. The reliability of the general trust scale is 0.80. Another scale measuring Social Media Usage and Attitudes Scale (Rosen et al, 2013) was employed. It is a measure comprising 11 items with 10 point Likert scale. The total score is obtained by sum of all the responses. The reliability of the scale is 0.79. For the present study young adults were taken as sample. The data was collected from the university students. Consent was taken from the individual participants.

Instructions on how to fill out questions, and participants were told that their privacy would be protected. Participants were informed of their ethical rights, which they could exercise to withdraw from the questionnaire if they so desired. After the administration of questionnaires, the data was analysed through statistical procedures. In order to conduct this study all ethical considerations were complied with.

5.   Findings

The objective of current study was to examine the relationship between self-concept, self-compassion and decision making in young adults. The three scales were used for data collection. Utilizing Cronbach's alphas, the

Reliability Analysis for each assessment measure was completed. Pearson product moment correlation was utilized to assess the relationship among demographics and study variables. Simple linear regression analysis was run for assessing that social media use and level of trust predict quality of friendship in social media users.

Table 5.1 *Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N=300)*

Scale	K	M (SD)	α	Range Potential	Actual
Social media Use	11	40.53 (5.22)	0.83	0-10	0.0-7.8
Trust	5	11 (2.33)	0.70	1-5	1.0-4.7
Quality Friendship	21	58.43 (.88)	0.82	1-6	1.0-5.0

Note: "k= no. of items; M=mean; SD=standard deviation; α= Cronbach's alpha".

Table 5.1 show that social media use scale yielded strong reliability that is 0.83, trust scale yielded strong reliability that is 0.70 and quality friendship questionnaire also yielded strong reliability that is 082.

It was hypothesized that there is probably a connection between using social media, level of trust and quality of friendship in social media users. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships. The results of correlation are given in table 5.2

Table 5.2 *Relationship between the Study Variables in social media users*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
Gender		.09	.06	.30	.15	.10	1.29	4.5
Age			.86**	-.52**	.057	-.05	22.10	2.11
Education				-.11	.053	-.06	1.89	.78
Social Media Use					-.52*	-.55*	38.21	3.23
Level Of Trust						.64*	12.45	2.44
Quality Of Friendship								

*Note. *p< .05.**p< .01.***p<.001.*

Table 5.2 showed significant negative relationship between social media use and level of trust, $r= -.52, p<.05$ show frequent use of social media is related with lower level of trust. Results also showed negative relationship between social media use and quality of friendship= -.55, $p<.05$, which means that more use of social media is associated with poorer quality of friendship. However, level of trust and quality of friendship were positively related to each other, $r=.64, p<.01$ showing that higher level of trust is related with higher quality of friendship.

It was hypothesized that social media use and level of trust were likely to predict quality of friendship in social media users. Simple linear regression analysis was run for assessing the study variables. The results of regression analysis are given in table 3.

Table 5.3 *Simple linear regression showing predictors of quality of friendship in social media users (N=100)*

		Quality of friendship	
		Model 2	
Variables	Model 1 B	B	95% CI
Social media use	-.09	-.09*	(1.00,1.00)
Level of trust	.03	.63*	(.99,1.00)
R^2	.54	. 56	
F	2.24**	6.17*	
ΔR^2	.30	26	
ΔF	2.80	1.80	

*Note: "*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; B = Unstandardized Co efficient; ΔR^2= R $_{Square change}$; ΔF= F $_{change}$; CI=Confidence Interval"*

Table 5.3 showed overall variance explained by the mode is 56% with $F(14, 88) =2.24, p=.01$. The findings showed that social media use negatively predicted the quality of friendship in social media users, B=-.09, $p=.05$, however level of trust positively predicted the quality of friendship in social media users.

6.   Discussion & Conclusion

The current study looked into the relationships between social media use, trustworthiness, and friendship quality among users of social media. The results of the correlation study revealed a strong inverse relationship between the use of social media and trustworthiness. Additionally, the results indicated an adverse relationship between social media use and friendship quality. These results contrast with those of a prior study by Sponcil (2014), which looked at college students' usage of social media and its effects on their interpersonal relationships and sense of self. Students responded to a survey that evaluated their use of social media, their ability to communicate with friends and family, and how social media has affected their perceptions of themselves. At least one social networking website was used by every student in the sample.

The findings revealed a favourable correlation between social media use and relationship quality. A study by Chan and Cheng (2004) investigated and compared the quality of online versus offline friendships. The findings showed significant difference in quality of friendship of online and offline. It was explored that online friendships became stronger and more meaningful over time, more so than offline friendships. After a year, online friendships were just as strong and meaningful as offline friendships. Results also showed positive relationship between level of trust and quality of friendship in social media users. The study found that social media can help people build stronger and more meaningful friendships, especially when people use it to communicate frequently and share personal information. This is perhaps because using social media makes it simpler to get to know individuals and feel at ease sharing information with them. It can also give users access to more social support.

Social media usage enhanced the calibre of user relationships. One reason for this is because (1) it is simpler to get to know somebody without actually meeting them face to face. (2) Online users are more at ease disclosing private information. (3) Users communicate more frequently online, which promotes increased social support (Baker & Oswald, 2010). The reason for low quality of friendship and low level of trust may be due to

unexpected unethical experiences on social grounds. Because now-a-day it is easy to make a fake profiles and to mislead the information of a person in-contact on social media. So due to this factor, the quality of the friendship and level of trust among participants was discovered as poor.

The study by Dawyer et al. (2007) is important because it highlights the importance of trust in online communication. When people trust a website, they are more likely to share personal information with it. This can be beneficial, as it can allow people to connect with others and build relationships. However, it is important to be aware of the potential risks of sharing personal information online, such as identity theft and fraud. Online connections are not easy to translate into productive and profitable relationships (Topus, 2010). Greenfield (2013) conducted a study to explore how Social media is affecting teens' concepts of friendship, intimacy.

A sample of 500 teens was taken. The findings suggested that young people feel socially supported by having large networks of on-line friends they may never see. Instead, many young people now derive personal support and affirmation from "likes" and feedback to their postings. "The whole idea behind intimacy is self-disclosure. Now they're doing self-disclosure to an audience of hundreds." Which sometime prone them to serious threat of personal information mislead.

The results also revealed that social media use negatively predicted the quality of friendship in social media users, however level of trust positively predicted the quality of friendship in social media users. According to Kelley et al. (2003), trust can be evaluated in specific interpersonal circumstances. Situations involving trust are marked by substantial interdependence (each partner's actions have a significant impact on the other) and are connected with improved communication, cooperation, and problem-solving. The reason for negative prediction may be due to not having cooperation of social media friends in time of needs. So as a result of lower level of trust, the participants showed not good quality of friendships.

7. Limitation & Recommendations

- Sample size was comparatively small. It reduces the external validity, so for the future studies the sample size should be increased so that results could be more generalized.
- Only young adults of university students were selected, sample should be taken from other age groups and general public for future research.

References

Baker, L. R., & Oswald, D. L. (2010). Shyness and online social networking services. *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships*, 27(7), 873-889. doi:10.1177/0265407510375261

Chan, D. K.-S., & Cheng, G. H.-L. (2004). A comparison of offline and online friendship qualities at different stages of relationship development. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 21, 305-320.

Cook, K. S., Yamagishi, T., Cheshire, C., Cooper, R., Matsuda, M., and Mashima, R. 2005. Trust building via risk taking: A cross-societal experiment. *Social Psychol. Quart.* 2, 68, 121–142.

Dwyer, C., Hiltz, S. R., and Passerini, K. 2007. Trust and privacy concern within social networking sites: A comparison of facebook and myspace. In Proceedings of the 13th Americas Conference on Information Systems.

Duggan M. and Smith A. (2013). "Social media update 2013", Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Fukuyama, F. 1995. Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity. Free Press, New York.

Helbing, D. 1994. A mathematical model for the behaviour of individuals in a social field. *J. Math. Social.* 19, 3, 189–219.

Lewicki, R. J., McAllister, D. J., & Bies, R. J. (2001). Trust and distrust: New relationships and realities. *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 438-458.

Likert, R. 1932. A technique for the measurement of attitudes. *Archiv. Psychol*. 140, 1, 1–55.

Meyerson, D., Weick, K. E., & Kramer, R. M. (1996). Swift trust and temporary groups. In Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers.

Mollering, G. 2002. The nature of trust: From geogsimmel to a theory of expectation, interpretation and suspension. *Social*. 35, 403–420.

Minas Michikyan, Jessica Dennis & Kaveri Subrahmanyam. 2014. Can You Guess Who I Am? Real, Ideal, and False Self-Presentation on Facebook Among Emerging Adults. Emerging Adulthood published online 24 April 2014. DOI: 10.1177/2167696814532442

Moibus, M. and Quoc-Anh, D. 2004.Social capital in social networks. http://www.earthinstitute. columbia.edu/cgsd/documents/rosenblat.pdf.

Molm, L. D., Takahashi, N., and Peterson, G. 2000. Risk and trust in social exchange: An experimental test of a classical proposition. *Amer. J. Social*. 5, 105, 1396–1427.

Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2009). College students' social networking experiences on Facebook. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30(3), 227-238. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2008.12.010

Rosen, L. D., Whaling, K., Carrier, L. M., &Rokkum, C. J. (2013). The Media and Technology Usage and Attitudes Scale: An empirical investigation. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 29, 2501–2511. Doi:/10.1016/j.chb.2013.06.006

Rotter, J. B. 1967.A new scale for the measurement of interpersonal trust. *J. Personality,* 35, 4, 651–665.

Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S., &Camerer, C. (2000). "Not so Different After All: A Cross-Discipline View of Trust," *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 393-404.

Sponcil, M. (2014). Use of social media by college students: Relationship to communication and self-concept [Manuscript]. *Journal of Technology Research*, 1-13. Retrieved from http://www.aabri.com/manuscripts/121214.pdf

Sullivan, H. S. (1953). The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry. New York: Cinegage learning inc

Topus, M. (2010). Building online relationships. USA: Cinegage Learning inc

Thien, L. M., Razak, N. A., &Jamil, H. (2012). Friendship Quality Scale: Conceptualization, Development and Validation. Paper presented at the International Conference on Measurement and Evaluation in Education, UniversitiSains Malaysia.

Quan-Haase, A., & Young, A. L. (2010). Uses and gratifications of social media: A comparison of Facebook and instant messaging. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(5), 350-361. doi:10.1177/0270467610380009

Walther, J. B., & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in; computer mediated communication and relationships. USA: Sage Publication.

Yamagishi, T. (1986). The provisioning of a sanctioning system as a public good. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 110-116.