
Juan Gabriel García Huertas
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5317-781X>
jg.garcia.prof@ufv.es
Universidad Francisco de Vitoria

Pablo Garrido Pintado
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6111-6715>
pablo.garrido@ucm.es
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

José Antonio Moreira
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0147-0592>
jmoreira@uab.pt
Universidade Aberta

Submitted
March 30th, 2021

Approved
November 13th, 2021

© 2022
Communication & Society
ISSN 0214-0039
E ISSN 2386-7876
doi: 10.15581/003.35.1.233-245
www.communication-society.com

2022 – Vol. 35(1)
pp. 233-245

How to cite this article:
García Huertas, J. G. & Garrido
Pintado P. & Moreira, J. A. (2022).
Is true friendship possible on
Facebook? A study from the
psychological perspective of Laín
Entralgo. *Communication & Society*,
35(1), 233-245

Is true friendship possible on Facebook? A study from the psychological perspective of Laín Entralgo

Abstract

The present work aims to analyse the meaning of the concept of friendship through the study of the work of the doctor and philosopher Pedro Laín Entralgo. The initial hypothesis of the study is that the concept of friendship has been used instrumentally by social media networks, and that these do not offer the conditions necessary to fully experience true friendship. To verify this, we focused on the study of the psychological dimensions of friendship proposed by the author, identifying a series of variables and conducting an analysis by means of a survey of university students who are active users of the platform. With these results the descriptive statistics were extracted and a nonparametric analysis was performed of the variables to determine if Facebook does in fact offer the conditions necessary for to experience true friendship in its psychological dimensions. As the results show, to experience true friendship on social networks is difficult, given that the nature of the interactions between users of the platform are not appropriate for this experience. In calling this different type of relationship friendship Facebook benefits from an attractive hook which leads users to generate contacts as a form of currency which benefits the business model of the social media platform. The concept of true friendship is altered, deformed and displaced in favour of other types of relationships.

Keywords

Friendship, psychological wellbeing, psychology, social networks, technology, social media, anthropology.

1. Introduction

The use of social networks by human beings is not a phenomenon of the late 20th century if we understand these as simply a series of links between a set of individuals. As noted by Requena (2012), the characteristics of these links and associations offer interpretations of the social behaviour of the participants. Current technology, dominated by digital social networks, has merely intensified the use and number of these relations and contacts (García, G rtrudix & G rtrudix, 2015).

Many of the current social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, among others) are founded on a particular understanding of human relationships (Allen, 2012; Reece & Reece, 2016; Fuchs, 2021). This is the case with Facebook which since its very

beginnings has been based on the concept of friendship (Vallor, 2012; Bryant & Marmo, 2012; Elder, 2017; Farci *et al.*, 2017).

The true meaning of friendship has been the subject of anthropological study for centuries (Desai & Killick, 2010; Beer & Gardner, 2015). Given the new technological era in which we live, it is necessary to undertake a profound reflection on the notion of friendship, with new questions about its meaning and conceptualisation. Identifying its real meaning, in this case on the psychological plane, may help to discern if it is possible or not to experience friendship through mobile telephone applications, social media networks or software programs.

Amistad notes that the Greek word *philia*, which shares a root with the verb *phileîn*, meaning “to love,” encompasses a broad range of relationships or friendship based on feelings of fondness, affection or love. Thus, in this exposition, we will only take into consideration “the type of relationship between friends we call friendship” (Calvo, 2003, p. 29). This is the most common social relationship between individuals (Blieszner & Adams, 1992) characterised by reciprocity, proximity and intimacy (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Schneider, 2000).

According to Laín Entralgo (1985), friendship is a peculiar loving relationship in which communication is an indispensable element in this experience. In his book, *Sobre la Amistad* (Laín, 1985), the same author offers a profound reflection on the nature of friendship on four planes: aesthetic, metaphysical, sociological and psychological. From this last plane, the psychological, we will draw the fundamental elements for the present research.

On all these four planes there are three basic concepts which are essential to the experience of friendship: confidence, benevolence and beneficence. We should understand confidence as the giving and receiving of an intimate part of the other, benevolence as the action of seeking the good of another and beneficence understood as performing an action which is beneficial to the other in a disinterested way.

Given the nature of these characteristics, they necessarily lie in the shadow of something much broader: love. As mentioned above, this does not refer to *eros* but rather to *philia*. This type of love, as authors such as Fromm (1994) have noted, is not passive, but rather continuously active and not incidental.

The items analysed in the present study must be understood as essential elements of true friendship when this is considered in terms of the concept of love as *philia*, requiring actions for the disinterested benefit of the other without the pursuit or desire of personal gain, with goodwill and wishing well to each other.

Argyle and Henderson (1984) established the existence and prevalence of various rules of friendship which lay the foundations for future studies. The initial studies focussing on the online environment are exploratory in nature and point to a variation in the form in which relational tasks are conducted (Bryant, Marmo & Ramírez, 2011). In subsequent research, Bryant and Marmo (2012) established five categories of rules of friendship in social media networks: channels of communication, deception and control, maintenance, negative consequences for oneself and for a friend. These authors concluded that users of social media possess a different set of rules for different types of friendships, and found significant differences between relationships with close friends, occasional friends and acquaintances.

The expansion of digital technologies, especially the internet, has caused a significant change in human relations (Raake & Bonds-Raake, 2008; Wilson, Goslin & Graham, 2012). Communication tools have developed rapidly, incorporating multimedia elements and facilitating the interactive exchange of information (Berlanga, García & Victoria, 2013; Vivar, 2009). However, some authors point to the difficulty in measuring the quality of relationships which are conducted online (Vidales & Sádaba, 2017).

There has been a significant increase in the number of internet users. It is currently estimated that some 59% of the global population are users of social media networks (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021). In 2009, over 70% of young people over the age of 15 in Spain

were users of some type of social media (Espinar & González, 2009). By 2020, there were 29 million users of social media networks in Spain, according to We are Social (2021). After YouTube and WhatsApp, Facebook continues to be the most used social media network, with some 79% of users having an active account.

While it is certainly true that other social media platforms use the notion of friendship, Facebook has used friendship as the fundamental principle of its interface (Márquez, 2019), along with other related concepts such as camaraderie, proximity or sympathy. In this context, Serrano (2016, p. 16) notes that the social engine of Facebook is affectivity: “the key is that friendship in the broadest sense, as an initial sphere of affectivity which can be expanded or contracted, is the word around which the entire network is articulated and which gives it coherence.” Thus, this is a concept which today may be confused with friendship. When we speak of someone we know, for example, for whom we have certain affectivity (affection?), we may refer to them as a friend. This much broader notion of friendship is the fundamental basis of Facebook.

Facebook permits users to present themselves through a personal online profile, visit the profiles of others and accumulate friends who can post comments on the pages of others (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007). Thus, in Facebook, our network of friends becomes a type of commodity through which the platform offers its services for free. After initial registration, Facebook shows a selection of photographs of people we may know and below this the number of friends we have in common. Of course, this is not the only avenue to expand our network of contacts.

For Facebook, friendship and the experience of friendship is the key to the operation of the platform (Wang *et al.*, 2010). For Márquez (2019, p. 940) this is “a myth that many people have come to perceive as normal [...] but imposes and normalises a very specific idea of friendship which in no way reflects the true complexity of this characteristic form of human relationship.” These conclusions have been contested by other theorists who, while recognising that Facebook may have trivialised the concept of friendship, believe it has not changed the true nature of friendship as an intensive, intimate and important psycho-social aspect of human life (Amichai-Hamburguer, Kingsbury & Schneider, 2013).

For Dunbar (2018, p. 34), “Friendship is the single most important factor influencing our health, well-being, and happiness. Creating and maintaining friendships is, however, extremely costly.” Facebook, as a platform, is powered by friendship and, while providing users with improved tools, it ultimately objectifies and commodifies the term (Márquez, 2019).

The concept of friendship is accompanied and preceded by love. Fromm (2014) defines different types of love to which Laín Entralgo referred in studying various authors. He refers to fraternal love, understood as love that is directed towards all others, maternal love as the nurturing of life with altruism and generosity and self-love, not to be confused with egotism which does not lead to a love of others. All of these encompass or include a series of conditions which can be considered necessary for the present study.

In this research project we will study the degree to which true friendship can be experienced in its psychological dimension on the social network platform Facebook, guided and based on the reflections of Laín Entralgo. Laín’s concept of true friendship is drawn from the philosopher Aristotle, among others, who affirmed that “when one loves for interest or utility, one is really merely seeking personal benefit” (Aristotle, 1981).

Knowing that friendship occupies an important place in the social network Facebook, and that for young people it is a meeting place with friends and peers (Linne, 2018), it is legitimate to ask whether the necessary conditions really exist in this digital environment to fully experience this relationship.

On the psychological level, friendship has four sub-dimensions (use hyphen in all places or not). The presence of all four is necessary to be able to speak of a full experience. It is interesting to study them individually to know to what degree each one of them is present.

We can even know which items of each subdimension are present in the social network and thus quantify their presence.

In the same way that we analysed the psychological dimension, it is interesting to find out whether the degree of experience of friendship is the same or varies according to the sex of the person who experiences it. For this reason, a statistical test is carried out to determine whether the sex of the respondents influences the answers obtained.

The present study raises the novelty of an anthropological approach to friendship in social networks compared to the usual technological and sociological perspective. On this occasion, we start from the study of classical authors and the interpretation of the doctor, historian, essayist and philosopher Pedro Laín Entralgo.

2. Materials and methods

The aim of the present study was to determine if, from the perspective of the psychological dimension of friendship, the users of the Facebook social media network experience, or can experience, true and meaningful friendship. The study of the work of Pedro Laín Entralgo (1985) helps to extract the concept of friendship as a construct and from this, the various dimensions and indicators which will allow us to identify the principal characteristics of friendship.

Our study focuses on Facebook given that it is a mature social network which, while currently threatened by the increasing popularity of new platforms such as Instagram, Twitter or Tik Tok, continues to be the leading social network. According to the report *The Global State of Digital* produced by Hootsuite and *We Are Social* (2020), the network currently boasts some 2,271 million users throughout the world. According to figures from Semrush, Facebook is the third most visited website globally, with 15,52 billion monthly visits, exceeded only by Google.com and Youtube.com.

We seek to validate the following hypotheses and achieve the following objectives:

- H1. It is possible to fully experience friendship within the social network Facebook.
- H2. It is possible to experience friendship within the 4 psychological subdimensions of friendship.
 - O1. To know, within the psychological level of friendship, which items are present in the social network.
 - O2. To find out whether gender has a decisive influence on the experience of friendship on Facebook.

To measure the degree of the experience of friendship it is necessary to define clearly the various subdimensions which make up the psychological dimension of friendship and, from these, extract the necessary indicators. These subdimensions are friendship as a peculiar loving communication, friendship as communication between singular individuals, friendship as communication with mutual goodwill among friends, and finally, friendship as a quality which fulfils and leads to personal growth (Laín-Entralgo, 1985). Quantifying these subdimensions using their indicators will allow us to determine to what degree true friendship is being experienced and whether the necessary conditions are in fact present on social media for true friendship to be experienced.

Among the indicators outlined above, confidence is of particular importance. In the field of psychology, confidence is understood as that which permits personal experiences to become shared experiences. The degree of confidence with others indicates the extent of the experience of true friendship. In relation to Facebook, the aim is to determine the extent to which users share significant levels of confidence with their contacts/friends. Giró (2011) noted that adolescents give particular importance to their friendships, along with communication, intimacy, affect and confidence. Furthermore, the subdimension is complemented by the sensation of having given something they had or made or given something of themselves in a disinterested way, that is, sharing (Azpiazu, 2010).

Along with this is the notion of giving, understood as the feeling of having been given or received something, and may encompass receiving what one does, who one is or what one has. Within the second subdimension, that is, communication between singular individuals, there is the important indicator of character, understanding that in order to experience friendship the relationship must be balanced, an excessively forceful character may make some of the other necessary aspects of friendship inaccessible. However, Herrera *et al.* (2010) caution that certain aspects, such as timidity or shyness, can be significant obstacles to socialising. In attempting to classify this item, we must identify the tendency towards balance if the relationship is a form of true friendship.

In the third subdimension, communication as an instrument for the mutual benefit of friends, we should confirm that this is reciprocal and that the goodwill towards another or received from another has a spiritual and/or material plane. Zaldívar (2009) has noted how the mutual gratification of both parties is an important psychological necessity. This indicator was incorporated into the questionnaire in a dual direction, with the possibility it takes place on both the spiritual and/or material plane.

For the fourth subdimension, friendship, understood as communication which fulfils and leads to personal growth, the aim is to determine if the actions of Facebook users make them feel better or more fulfilled, understanding a direct relation between an increasing sensation of wellbeing and the contribution to the connection with others that supposes true friendship. Where this is not the case, these actions may refer to simple camaraderie. In their study, Bohórquez and Rodríguez (2014) noted how young people need to feel that a friendship improves and has a positive influence on them as people.

With the descriptors of the psychological dimension, we created a descriptive survey, documenting the conditions and providing a description (Wimmer & Dominick, 1996) with closed questions on the quantitative and qualitative variables. The nominal quantitative variables for the weighted questions 1 to 5 and, on the other hand, the qualitative variables which refer to the gender of the participants in the survey.

We used a convenience sampling with an initial number of 307 participants, students of Audio-visual Communication and/or Journalism at public and private universities in Madrid, divided by gender. We established a confidence interval of 95% and previously established an experimental group of 15 students to whom we submitted the test questionnaire to verify it was coherent or if changes were necessary for any of the questions. The test group only indicated vocabulary changes for a better understanding of the questions asked.

The field work was carried out in the months of March and April of 2020 and a statistical analysis was made of the data using the SPSS Statistics 25 software.

The questionnaire on the psychological dimension consisted of 5 weighted questions using a scale from 1 to 5 from lowest (1) to highest (5). Except for the question relating to character, where the middle response (3) refers to the desired balance, as described below, the questions correspond to the factors necessary for each subdimension mentioned above. These five questions were designed to determine the degree of confidence, mutual benefit, character, giving and personal growth of people.

The results of a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of the descriptors showed non-normal distribution, thus requiring nonparametric testing, specifically the Mann-Whitney U-test to compare the variables.

The percentages of the results of the survey offered a general vision which were later subjected to a series of tests described below.

For the first subdivision, we proposed an initial research hypothesis (H₁) regarding the variable confidence and gender: that gender influences the survey results regarding confidence. We also proposed a similar second hypothesis regarding the variable giving and gender; hypothesis two (H₂) being: that gender influences the survey results regarding the experience of giving.

For the second subdivision, in relation to gender and character, a third research hypothesis (H3) was: that gender influences the survey results regarding character.

For the third subdivision, in relation to mutual benefit, our fourth hypothesis (H4) was: that gender influences the experience of mutual benefit on the Facebook social media platform.

And finally, for the fourth subdimension of the psychology of friendship, our fifth hypothesis (H5) was: that gender influences the survey results with regard to the experience of personal growth.

3. Analysis and results

3.1. Analysis and results. Confidence

The first factor in the experience of true friendship between individuals is confidence. To measure this, participants were asked about the importance of the confidences they share. The aim is not to determine the number of confidences but rather their importance and influence on developing a friendship. According to Domínguez (2002), confidence is, along with freedom, an essential prerequisite to the experience of true friendship.

Some 32.67% of participants reported that they do not share confidences via Facebook, while 30.67% report having shared unimportant or trivial confidences. 23.33% reported having shared minor confidences and 10.67% reported sharing important confidences. Finally, 2.67% of participants reported having shared very important confidences with some of their contacts on social media.

Table 1. Friendship as peculiar loving communication. Confidence.

Answer	Percentage
1 – I do not share any confidences	32.67%
2 – I share some unimportant or trivial confidences	30.67%
3 – I share minor confidences	23.33%
4 – I share important confidences	10.67%
5 – I share very important confidences	2.67%

Source: Own elaboration.

Comparing these results by gender, we find that 35.16% of men do not share any confidences on social media, 25.78% share some unimportant or trivial confidences, 23.44% share minor confidences, 12.50% share important confidences and 3.13% share very important confidences.

Among women, some 30.81% report they do not share any confidences on social media, 34.30% share some unimportant or trivial confidences, 23.26% share minor confidences, 9.30% share important confidences and 2.33% share very important confidences.

With these results a correlation analysis was performed to determine the relation between the variable gender and the degree of confidences shared. Given that the quantitative dependent variable confidence did not show normal distribution, a nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted.

With a significance level of 5%, the p-value was 0.978 (p-value > 0.05). As this is higher than 0.05, we determined that gender does not have a significant influence on the variable confidence.

Thus, taking as valid the results of responses 4 and 5, we accept that these levels of confidence indicate the experience of true friendship on Facebook. That is, participants who reported sharing important or very important confidences, responses 4 and 5, total 13.34%. This result is strikingly low, indicating that over half of participants do not share confidences of any kind or those of trivial or minor importance on social media.

3.2. Analysis and results. Giving

This is understood as the act of giving disinterestedly without any expectation of receiving something in return and may refer to material or immaterial things. The participants were asked if they had given something they had or made or given something of themselves, in a disinterested way, to their contacts on social media.

38% of participants reported they had never given anything via Facebook, and 36.67% reported giving something on some occasions in a disinterested way. Some 15.33% reported that they habitually gave to some of their contacts, 9% reported giving habitually with many of their contacts while 1% reported giving a lot to all of their contacts.

Table 2. Friendship as peculiar loving communication. Giving.

Answer	Percentage
1 – I have never given anything	38%
2 – I occasionally give something	36.67%
3 – I give something to some of my contacts habitually	15.33%
4 – I habitually give something to many of my contacts	9%
5 – I give a lot to all of my contacts	1%

Source: Own elaboration.

By gender, 36.72% of men reported never having given anything, 33.59% reported doing so on occasion, while 16.41% do so habitually with some of their contacts and 10.94% do so habitually with the majority of their contacts. Some 2.34% reported giving a lot to all of their contacts.

Among women participating in the study, 38.95% reported never having given anything, 38.95% reported doing so on occasion with some of their contacts and 14.53% do so habitually with some of their contacts. 7.56% of female participants reported doing so habitually with the majority of their contacts while none reported giving a lot to all of their contacts.

With these results a correlation analysis was performed on the results to determine the relation between the variable gender and giving. The p-value was 0.34 ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$) and we determined this was a null hypothesis as the results show no significant differences due to gender in the variable giving on the Facebook social network.

3.3. Analysis and results. Character

This subdimension is defined in terms of a balanced character. Some 0.33% of participants reported they believe their contacts have too strong a character, 27.33% believe their contacts have a good character, with spirit and personality, 55% reported their contacts have, in general terms, a balanced character while 11% believe their contacts are generally easy going and 6.33% believe their contacts have a weak character.

Table 3. Friendship as communication between singular individuals. Character.

Answer	Percentage
1 – My contacts have too strong a character	0.33%
2 – My contacts have a good character, with spirit and personality	27.33%
3 – My contacts have a balanced character	55%
4 – My contacts are generally easy going	11%
5 – My contacts have a weak character	6.33%

Source: Own elaboration.

Observing these results by gender, among men, 0.78% believe their contacts have too strong a character, 25% believe their contacts have spirit and personality, 52.34% believe their

contacts have a balanced character, 12,50% believe their contacts have an easy-going character and 9,38% believe their contacts have a weak character. For women, none (0%) reported believing their Facebook contacts had too strong a character, 29,07% believe their contacts have spirit and personality, 56,98% believe their contacts have a balanced character, 9,88% believe their contacts are easy going and 4,07% believe their contacts have a weak character.

With these results a correlation analysis was performed to determine the relation between the variable gender and character. The p-value obtained was 0.08 ($p > 0.05$) showing that the gender of the user does not have a significant influence on the variable character.

3.4. Analysis and results. Mutual benefit

The concept of “mutual benefit” refers to both the material and spiritual plane. In order to be mutual, this feeling must be both felt personally and transmitted to the other (Laín Entralgo, 1985). Based on this premise, participants of the study were asked how many contacts they had shared or experienced mutual material or spiritual benefit.

The results show that 22% of participants report never having shared or experienced any mutual benefit. Some 46.67% report having experienced this with some of their contacts, 17% report sharing or experiencing mutual benefit with approximately half of their contacts and 13.33% with a large number of their contacts. A mere 1% reported sharing or experiencing mutual benefit with all of their contacts.

Table 4. Friendship as communication for mutual benefit. Mutual benefit.

Answer	Percentage
1 – I do not share or experience mutual benefit	22%
2 – I have shared or experienced mutual benefit with some of my contacts	46.67%
3 – I have shared or experienced mutual benefit with approximately half of my contacts	17%
4 – I have shared or experienced mutual benefit with a large number of my contacts	13.33%
5 – I have shared or experienced mutual benefit with all of my contacts	1%

Source: Own elaboration.

Analysing these results by gender, 28,91% of men reported not sharing or experiencing any mutual benefit. Some 38,28% reported they did experience mutual benefit with some of their contacts, 16,41% with approximately half their contact and 14,06% with a large number of their contacts and 2,34% reported experiencing mutual benefit with all of their contacts.

Some 16,86% of women participants reported not sharing or experiencing any mutual benefit. 52,91% reported they did so with some of their contacts, 17,44% with approximately half their contacts, 12,79% with a large number of their contacts and 0% reported experiencing mutual benefit with all their contacts.

A correlation analysis was performed on these survey results to determine the relation between the variable gender and mutual benefit. The p-value obtained was 0.287 ($p > 0.05$), and we determined this was a null hypothesis as the results show no significant differences due to gender in the variable mutual benefit on Facebook.

3.5. Analysis and results. Personal growth

For this subdimension the aim was to determine if the interaction of the survey participants with their contacts on social media lead to personal growth. A total of 33,67% of participants reported they have no interaction with their contacts on Facebook which leads to personal growth, 21,33% reported the interactions they have do not lead to personal growth, 28,67% reported that some of their actions with contacts lead to personal growth, 13,67% believe the majority of their interactions with contacts on social media lead to personal growth and some 2,67% believe that all of their interactions with contacts contribute to their personal growth.

Table 5. Friendship as a relationship leading to personal growth. Personal growth.

Answer	Percentage
1 – I have no interactions that lead to personal growth	33.67%
2 – My interactions do not lead to personal growth	21.33%
3 – Some of my interactions lead to personal growth	28.67%
4 – The majority of my interactions lead to personal growth	13.67%
5 – All of my interactions lead to personal growth	2.67%

Source: Own elaboration.

By gender, 33.59% of men reported they had no interactions with their Facebook contacts which lead to personal growth, 18.75% that the interactions they have do not lead to personal growth, 26.56% report that some interactions contribute to personal growth, 16.41% report that the majority of their interactions on Facebook contribute to personal growth and 4.69% believe that all their interactions with Facebook contacts lead to personal growth.

For women, some 33.72% reported they had no interactions with their Facebook contacts which lead to personal growth, 23.26% that the interactions they have do not lead to personal growth, 30.23% report that some interactions contribute to personal growth, 11.63% report that the majority of their interactions on Facebook contribute to personal growth and 1.16% believe that all their interactions with Facebook contacts lead to personal growth.

The p-value obtained in the Mann-Whitney U-test was 0.460 (p-value > 0.05) and we determined this was a null hypothesis as the results show no significant differences due to gender.

Table 6. U Mann Whitney resume. Experience of psychological friendship.

Confidence	Giving	Character	Mutual benefit	Personal growth
P = 0,978 p-value > 0.05	P = 0,34 p-value > 0.05	P = 0,08 p-value > 0.05	P = 0,287 p-value > 0.05	P = p-value > 0.05

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of the study indicate the absence of the conditions necessary for the experience of true friendship on the social media platform. From a global perspective of the subdimensions analysed, referring to friendship as peculiar loving communication, of the two necessary elements (confidence and giving), neither score highly enough nor have the intensity required to be taken into consideration. Regarding confidence, 14.83% of participants affirmed they are aware of sharing important or very important confidences as elements which strengthen the experience of true friendship.

In the case of the second subdimension (giving), the results were equally low. Just 10% of participants reported giving to many or all of their contacts and doing so habitually. The remaining 90% reported doing so occasionally or not at all (38%). This clearly indicates that the experience of giving is not a habitual practice on social media platforms. The combined analysis of both subdimensions, confidence and giving, clearly show that, on Facebook, users do not experience friendship as a peculiar loving communication.

These results are applicable to the digital environment of the Facebook social media platform; however, these cannot be extrapolated to real life, where it is probable that interactions with contacts will vary or never in fact take place with many of them. Thus, as affirmed by Soache (2018), “the virtual is constitutive of the real rather than its opposite.

Virtuality is therefore presented as an alternative register or manifestation of the real, taking form in cyberspace, virtual worlds, virtual reality technologies and simulation software.”

The second subdimension was friendship as communication between singular individuals. Using the item character as a levelling factor, the results point towards the need for a balanced character to experience true friendship. In this aspect, some 55% of participants reported that their contacts have this type of character. This figure, one of the highest among all the items consulted, remains only slightly more than half of all the surveyed participants. We can therefore conclude that, while this is a comparatively high percentage, it does not express or describe the general situation.

For the third subdimension, friendship as communication for mutual benefit among friends, only 14.33% of participants responded forcefully. We can therefore determine that this is not a highly relevant aspect in the experience of digital friendship on social media platforms.

And finally, the fourth dimension, friendship as a relationship leading to personal growth, does not show any particularly significant or outstanding results. Just 14.83% of participants report that almost all of their interactions lead to or are associated with aspects of personal growth.

Of the four subdivisions presented in the five indicators, only that referring to the balanced character of personal contacts show results which may point towards the possibility of experiencing true friendship through Facebook. Thus, the results of our research appear to suggest that the possibilities of experiencing true friendship on Facebook are remote. Although it is difficult to extrapolate this to real life, it does invite a profound reflection on the use of the concept of friendship in social media networks. Furthermore, on the psychological plane of human experience, the findings point to the difficulty in experiencing true friendship on Facebook.

Confidence, giving, mutual benefit and personal growth, necessary for the establishment, strengthening and experience of true friendship, are not sufficiently present on social media for the surveyed university students.

The analysis of the correlations between gender and the reported results for the various subdimensions do not show significant differences, indicating that this is not a variable which conditions the results obtained.

This statement coincides with the theories of Serrano (2016) and Márquez (2019) who consider friendship on the social network to be a myth that does not go beyond the initial sphere of affectivity. On the other hand, it contrasts with the theories of Amichai-Hamburger, Kingsbury and Schneider (2013) who, although they recognise that Facebook may have trivialised the concept, it has not altered its true nature.

The results of the study therefore allow us to affirm that the psychological experience of true friendship does not exist on social media platforms. We can thus conclude that the use by Facebook of the term friendship to refer to contacts on the platform is misleading, and that social media platforms harness the concept of friendship as an instrument to reduce the possible psychological barriers to communication and contact between users and do so purely for financial gain far from any real experience of true friendship.

Given the proposed objectives, we can conclude that none of the items analysed reach the necessary percentage to affirm that they are present in the experience of friendship on Facebook.

Likewise, we can affirm that the experience of friendship on Facebook is not influenced by the gender of those who practice it.

As for the hypotheses put forward, both are shown to be negative hypotheses. The elements necessary for a full experience of true friendship are not shown in sufficient percentage to be considered. This leads us to the negative H₁.

For H2, none of the four sub-dimensions presents items in sufficient percentage to consider their existence in Facebook.

Thus, the results of our research indicate that friendship within the context of social media platforms is merely a symbolic projection, a myth used to foment relationships between users which are largely poor or instrumental in nature and far from any full experience of true friendship.

References

- Adams, R. G. & Blieszner, R. (1992). *Adult friendship*. New York: Sage. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3nXcCaX>
- Allen, M. (2012). Gaining a Past, Losing a Future: Web 2.0 and Internet Historicity. *Media International Australia*, 143(1), 99–109. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/1329878X1214300112>
- Amichai-Hamburger, Y., Kingsbury, M. & Schneider, B. H. (2013). Friendship: An old concept with a new meaning? *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 29(1), 33–39. <https://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.05.025>
- Argyle, M. & Henderson, M. (1984). The rules of friendship. *Journal of social and personal relationships*, 1(2), 211–237. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/0265407584012005>
- Aristóteles. (1985). *Ética Nicomachea*. Madrid: Gredos.
- Azpiazu, B. (2010). El mayor apoyo en la adolescencia: la amistad. *Encuentro Educativo*, 5(2), 8–30. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2KWMuhO>
- Bagwell, C. L. & Schmidt, M. E. (2011). The friendship quality of overtly and relationally victimized children. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 27, 2, 158–285. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2WLkBMi>
- Beer, B. & Gardner, D. (2015). Friendship, anthropology of. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 9, 425–431. <https://www.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12076-8>
- Berlanga-Fernández, I., García-García, F. & Victoria-Mas, J. S. (2013). Ethos, pathos y logos en Facebook. El usuario de redes: nuevo “rétor” del siglo XXI. *Comunicar: Revista Científica de Comunicación y Educación*, 21(41), 127–135. <https://www.doi.org/10.3916/comunicar>
- Blieszner, R. & Adams, R. G. (1992). *Adult friendship* (Vol. 3). New York: Sage. <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781483325675>
- Bohórquez, C. & Rodríguez, D. (2014). Percepción de amistad en adolescentes: el papel de las Redes Sociales. *Revista Colombiana de Psicología*, 23(2), 325–338. <https://www.doi.org/10.15446/rcp.v23n2.37359>
- Bryant, E. M., Marmo, J. & Ramírez, A., Jr. (2011). A functional approach to social networking sites. In K. B. Wright & L. M. Webb (Eds.), *Computer-mediated communication in personal relationships* (pp. 3–20). Peter Lang. <https://www.doi.org/10.3726/b12772>
- Bryant, E. M. & Marmo, J. (2012). The rules of Facebook friendship: A two stage examination of interaction rules in close, casual, and acquaintance friendships. *Journal of social and personal relationships*, 29(8), 1013–1035. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2WQJc2c>
- Calvo, T. (2003). La concepción aristotélica de la amistad. *Bitarte: Revista Cuatrimestral de Humanidades*, 30, 29–40. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3rwT3bp>
- Desai, A., & Killick, E. (Eds.) (2010). *The ways of friendship: Anthropological perspectives*. Cambridge: Berghahn.
- Domínguez, C. (2002). *Los registros del deseo, del afecto, el amor y otras pasiones*. Bilbao: Desclee.
- Dunbar, R. I. (2018). The anatomy of friendship. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 22(1), 32–51. <https://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2017.10.004>
- Elder, A. M. (2017). *Friendship, robots, and social media: False friends and second selves*. New York: Routledge.
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C. & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of computer*

- mediated communication*, 12(4), 1143-1168. <https://www.doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x>
- Espinar, E. & González, M. (2009). Jóvenes en las redes. Un análisis exploratorio de las diferencias de género. *Feminismos*, 14, 87-106. <https://www.doi.org/10.14198/fem.2009.14.06>
- Fromm, E. (2014). *El arte de amar*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Fuchs, C. (2021). *Social media: A critical introduction*. New York: Sage.
- García, F., Gértrudix, F. & Gértrudix, M. (2014). Análisis de la incidencia de la dieta de servicios digitales en la utilidad y confianza de la información en internet en los jóvenes universitarios. *Communication & Society / Comunicación y Sociedad*, 27(1), 59-81. <https://www.doi.org/10.15581/003.27.1.59-81>
- Giró, J. (2011). Las amistades y el ocio de los adolescentes, hijos de la inmigración. *Papers*, 96(1), 77-95. <https://www.doi.org/10.5565/rev/papers/v96n1.157>
- Herrera, M., Pacheco, M., Palomar, J. & Zavala, D. (2010). La adicción a Facebook relacionada con la baja autoestima, la depresión y la falta de habilidades sociales. *Psicología Iberoamericana*, 18(1), 6-18. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/3rrpF6N>
- Hootsuite & We Are Social (2021). *Digital 2021 Global Digital Overview*. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report>
- Laín Entralgo, P. (1985). *Sobre la amistad*. Colección Austral. Espasa Calpe.
- Linne, J. W. (2018). Las órbitas de contactos en Facebook. Intimidad, sociabilidad y amistad en adolescentes de sectores populares en Buenos Aires. *Comunicación y sociedad*, (32), 171-190. <https://www.doi.org/10.32870/cys.voi32.6924>
- Losada, J. M. (2015). *Nuevas formas del mito: Una metodología interdisciplinar, estudios reunidos y presentados por José Manuel Losada*. Berlin: Logos Verlag.
- Márquez, I. (2019). "Roland Barthes y tú ahora sois amigos": Facebook y el mito de la amistad. *Signa: Revista de la Asociación Española de Semiótica*, (28), 937-957. <https://www.doi.org/10.5944/signa.vol28.2019.25100>
- Raacke, J. & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008). MySpace and Facebook: Applying the uses and gratifications theory to exploring friend-networking sites. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 11(2), 169-174. <https://www.doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2007.0056>
- Reece, B. & Reece, M. (2016). *Effective human relations: Interpersonal and organizational applications*. Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Requena, F. (2012). *Análisis de redes sociales: orígenes, teorías y aplicaciones*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones sociológicas.
- Schneider, B. (2014). *Friends and enemies*. New York: Routledge.
- Serrano, V. (2016). *Fraudebook: lo que la red social hace con nuestras vidas*. Madrid: Plaza y Valdés.
- Soache, S. (2018). De lo virtual a lo real: los efectos de la plataforma Youtube en estudiantes de grados 8 y 11. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/3ppWSO2>
- Vallor, S. (2012). Flourishing on Facebook: virtue friendship & new social media. *Ethics and Information technology*, 14(3), 185-199. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/s10676-010-9262-2>
- Vidales, M. & Sábada, C. (2017). Connected teens: Measuring the impact of mobile phones on social relationships through social capital. *Comunicar: Revista Científica de Comunicación y Educación*, 53, 19-28. <https://www.doi.org/10.3916/C53-2017-02>
- Vivar, J. M. F. (2009). Nuevos modelos de comunicación, perfiles y tendencias en las redes sociales. *Comunicar: Revista Científica de Comunicación y Educación*, 17(33), 73-81. <https://www.doi.org/10.3916/c33-2009-02-007>
- Wang, S. S., Moon, S. I., Kwon, K. H., Evans, C. A. & Stefanone, M. A. (2010). Face off: Implications of visual cues on initiating friendship on Facebook. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 26(2), 226-234. <https://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2009.10.001>

- We Are Social (2020). Annual study of social networks 2020. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/37OHzbM>
- Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (1996) *La investigación científica de los medios de comunicación. Una introducción a sus métodos*. L'Hospitalet de Llobregat: Bosch Casa Editorial.
- Wilson, R. E., Gosling, S. D. & Graham, L. T. (2012). A review of Facebook research in the social sciences. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 7(3), 203–220.
<https://www.doi.org/10.1177/1745691612442904>
- Zaldívar, D. (2009). *Amistad, apoyo social y bienestar*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3psT52m>