



DIGITAL FRIENDSHIP MODULE SUMMARY

#DABEI-Geschichten – an initiative by Deutsche Telekom AG



LIFE IS FOR SHARING.

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#DABEI-Geschichten – an initiative by Deutsche Telekom AG
Barbara Costanzo, Vice President Group Social Engagement
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 140, 53113 Bonn, Germany

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CONTACT

engagement-bonn@telekom.de

DIGITAL FRIENDSHIP

Digital Friendship – Digital Loneliness

Digital friendships have become indispensable. Every day, countless friendships are made on social media. A friend request on Facebook, a swipe to the right on Tinder - it has never been easier to make contacts. But how important are digital friendships? Will it soon be possible to make friends in the app store? And how can smartphones help people overcome their loneliness?

What is Friendship?

The yearning for true friendship is as old as mankind itself. But what makes a true friendship? And how many real friends do you have? We asked several people these questions.

"To me, true friends are the people I like to spend my time with and who I meet regularly."

"I think, true friends are the people that stand by you, even when nobody else does."

"If I count Facebook and Instagram friends, I have more than 900 friends. Most of them are not true friends, though. A true friend is there for you anywhere, anytime. You could ring their doorbell even in the dead of night and they would embrace you with open arms."

When is a Friend a Friend?

Everyone defines friendship differently. Science has the following definition for friendship:

Some researchers see friendship "as a voluntary and personal relationship based not only on support and trust, but also on sympathy."

Analog and Digital Friendships

A recent study on friendship has revealed that: a person has, on average, three true friends. For some, true friends are only the people they meet personally and regularly. Others are however, also cultivating more and more digital friendships. These are contacts that are mainly made and maintained in social media.

What is Digital Friendship?

Digital friendship is a special kind of friendship that allows us to feel very connected to others without actually, personally, knowing them. Such friendships arise for example, when a connection is made exclusively through a common interest and the subsequent exchange is very intense (for example, a fan club on Facebook). Sometimes the people around us have trouble understanding why we want to interact with digital friends so often. It is easier to exchange ideas about certain topics with strangers. This gives a digital friendship a whole new quality.
Digital Friends = True Friends?

Lisa (21) and Marie (19) met each other via social media. They both share common hobbies: sports, fitness and healthy food. The two are inseparable, chatting and telephoning at least once a day.

"At the beginning, we were skeptical: a smartphone friendship? This cannot go well", remembers Marie. "But we proved all of our critics wrong.", laughs Lisa. "For six years now, we've been supporting each other in all kinds of situations. It feels so good to get a like for new recipes or ideas.

Now we tell each other everything. Marie has really become a great friend.” says Lisa.

FRIENDS ON THE INTERNET

Can you Download Friends?

Lisa and Marie are not isolated cases. Today, many contacts are made by smartphone.

In this chapter, you will learn how to make digital friends. The possibilities are vast and range from digital “fake friends” to real contacts. Digital fake friends are friends who are not human and yet seem to be.

A Love Subscription?

“And where is your boyfriend/girlfriend?” This question annoys many singles. To avoid it, there are apps that fake real relationships.

Examples for such digital fake friends are apps such as the “Invisible Girlfriend” and “Invisible Boyfriend”. The user gets to select a name, age, appearance and personality for their fake partner.

Depending on the subscription, users receive SMS, voicemails, greeting cards, flowers or even small gifts from their virtual partner. Even if they do not really exist, the digital fake friends look deceptively real to the outside world.

Replika – My Friend from the App Store

Replika is a chatbot, an artificial intelligence (AI) that tries to create a digital copy of your personality. The principle behind it: Replika asks questions that you answer. This helps Replika to get to know you better. Its goal: to be your partner, friend and therapist all in one. The more the bot learns from you, the more familiar the conversations seem.

“How are you Feeling Today?”

The “Woebot” is, similar to Replika, a chatbot. He was developed for people with depression and anxiety. Users can talk to the virtual therapist per Facebook chat. In contrast to a real therapist, the Chatbot is always available and its goal, among other things, is to promote positive thinking.

“Share your Worries”

If you want to share your worries with real people you can do that by calling mental health helplines. Here, users can anonymously confide in an expert and share their fears and worries with him.

Friendship at First Click?

Every fourth German has looked for a partner on the Internet. Dating apps and platforms play an important role in this. The selection is huge. On the following pages you will find an overview of apps, platforms and forums for making contacts. No matter if you are looking for friendships, partnerships or like-minded people - with the right apps and platforms you will find what you are looking for.

Making Friends

- 25friends
You want to get to know new people from the comfort of your own home? It is possible with “25friends”. First, you answer questions about yourself and your interests. Then you receive personalized contact suggestions. You can also create meetings or joint “Get2gethers”.
- Yellow
“Yellow” is an app for children from 13 years of age. Although its goal is only to help children make new friends, its principle is similar to the Tinder dating app. Like Tinder, “Yellow” also offers children friendship suggestions that match their interests. Then the children decide by swiping to the left or right: “Do you want to accept or reject this friendship request?” So far, the app is only available in Australia, Great Britain, the USA and Switzerland.
- Spotted
There are some encounters you just cannot forget. “Spotted” makes it possible to make contact with people you have already met in real life. Thanks to its GPS function, it is easy to find passing encounters. If there is mutual interest, users can then contact each other in the chat.
- lebensfreunde.de
On “lebensfreunde.de”, people aged 50 and over have the opportunity to meet people for friendships, travel, sports or for hours together as a couple”

Finding a Partner

- Tinder
“Tinder” is now one of the most popular dating apps. After registering, the users receive contact suggestions. With a swipe to the right they express their interest in the proposed person. A swipe to the left means: “I am not interested.” Only when both persons swipe to the right do they get a so-called “match”. They can then contact each other.
- Unverblümt.de
Unlike on “Tinder” & co. singles introduce themselves on “unverblümt.de” with a video. The advantage over photos: photos are often reworked. But that is not as easy with videos. Thus, unpleasant surprises can be avoided at the first meeting.
- Gleichklang.de
On “gleichklang.de” people with alternative lifestyles look for new acquaintances or a partner for life. A special feature of gleichklang.de is the personality test. In it, questions can be found about one’s own convictions such as for example, environmental consciousness, spirituality or animal protection. Members then receive partner suggestions tailored to them based on the principle of similarity.
- Schatzkiste
“Schatzkiste” (“Treasure Chest”) is a dating service for people with disabilities. The special thing about “Schatzkiste”: People do not have to search for a partner alone, but are accompanied by employees from “Schatzkiste”. First meetings always take place on the premises of “Schatzkiste”. There are now forty regional “Schatzkisten” in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Meeting Like-Minded People

- Orpha Selbsthilfe (“Orpha Self-Help”):
People with rare diseases often cannot find people similar to them to talk to. In the “Orpha Selbsthilfeforum” (Orpha Self-Help Forum) they can search for like-minded people and exchange ideas.
- artnight.com
“artnight.com” is a platform for people who enjoy artistic activities. The app suggests so-

called “art nights” in your city. These are evening painting workshops in bars or cafés. But not only works of art are created at the workshops. New friendships are too!

- meinetrauer.de
On “meinetrauer.de” (“mymourning.de”) people who have lost a loved one can share their experiences. In the mourning forum they can talk to like-minded people about their mourning and their feelings.

Meeting New People Safely

Do you already have experience with online dating? If you want to make contact online, you should follow some safety tips.

- Tell others about your date!
Tell good friends or your family that you are going to meet an online contact.
- Do not disclose your address!
Never give an online contact your exact address. Do not upload photos that provide information about where you live.
- Use a pseudonym!
Do not reveal your real name in the chat at first. Instead, select a pseudonym or fake name.
- Inform yourself about your contact!
Make sure that your online contact is not a fake. Call or video-chat with him or her.
- Choose a public place for your meeting!
Meet your online contact in public only.

Stay in Contact

- 50plus
“50plus” is an app where people aged 50 and over meet. They can make new friends or find a partner for life. In chats and forums, they can exchange information on various everyday topics.
- Senior Surfer
In the “SeniorSurfer” chat, seniors can share and exchange their own experiences with digitization. In addition, video courses help them use Excel, mail programs or similar programs.
- Wege aus der Einsamkeit e.V.
“Wege aus der Einsamkeit” is an association for seniors. Its goal is to inform them about the advantages of digitization. In the course of periodic discussion, participants learn how to use tablets, smartphones and other electronic devices safely. These can then be used to establish social contacts.
- Meetup
The “meetup” platform offers its users the opportunity to join a group with similar interests. It does not matter whether it is outdoor activities, family reunions or educational opportunities. Those who have not yet found like-minded people can create their own network.
- A Story Before Bed
Grandparents can use this app to get in touch with their grandchildren. They read a digital children's book from the app's library and simultaneously create audio and video recordings of themselves. With this app, children can listen to and watch the recordings of their grandparents - no matter how far away they are.
- KAMA
The app “KAMA” is a social network developed especially for seniors. Its goal is to unite all generations. “KAMA” is based on social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. It is easy to use and self-explanatory.

Refugees, Smartphones and Social Media

Without smartphones, escape would hardly be possible for refugees. Smartphones support refugees on their long journey from crisis areas to safe countries.

There are many reasons for using smartphones: refugees use the GPS function on their smartphones to orient themselves in foreign countries and regions and to find one another. They inform themselves in Facebook groups about dangers along the way and stay in contact with the family members they left behind. Smartphones are also used by refugees to learn languages. In addition, they often use their phones to visit the “Handbook Germany” information platform, which is supported by the Deutsche Telekom AG.

FALSE FRIENDS

False Digital Friends

False friends exist in both worlds - the analog and the digital. There are many different kinds of false friends on the Internet: they range from cyberbullies to cyberstalkers. In this chapter you will learn how to protect yourself from false friends on the Internet.

Digital Bullying

Bullying is an important issue not only among adults, but also among young people. Cyberbullying is a special kind of bullying. Cyberbullying is when someone repeatedly bullies or harasses others on social media. For the perpetrators, the decisive advantage is anonymity. They can insult their victims without revealing their own identity.

Cyberbullying– Who can Help?

In addition to stopbullying.gov there are many other places where cyberbullying victims can get help. For example, the online platform Cyber Help. The site provides victims with information and educational videos that can help them.

How to React to Cyberbullying

- Stay calm
If you have been a victim of cyberbullying yourself, it is important to stay calm. Do not rush into anything and take the time to observe at which intervals the virtual attacks take place. Talk to parents, friends or other trusted third parties about the incidents.
- Document Bullying Attacks
Document the bullying attacks. For example, take screenshots of the relevant messages, chats and posts. This can help you find the perpetrators. Don't answer insulting messages hastily. Involve someone you trust.
- Delete, Report, Block
In social networks you can delete and report pictures and posts at any time. You can also block people who send you unwanted messages. That way they cannot contact you again. If you know the phone number of the perpetrator, you can permanently block his/her calls.
- Privacy & Co.

Reveal as little public information about yourself as possible! In addition, select secure passwords and change them regularly.

Digital Stalking

Like cyberbullying, cyberstalking is a crime in which perpetrators stalk and persecute their victims via the Internet. Unlike cyberbullying, cyberstalkers are primarily concerned with being close to their victim. There are many reasons for cyberstalking: They range from unfulfilled love to hate.

How to React to Cyberstalking?

- Deactivate your GPS functionality
Do not post photos of places you often visit on the Internet. That makes it easy for the cyberstalker to find you. You should also deactivate your GPS function.
- Avoid public WLAN networks
Avoid public and unsecured WLAN networks. Cyberstalkers could intercept your private emails, chats and pictures.
- Update your antivirus software
Make sure your antivirus software is up to date. Cyberstalkers often use security holes to access information about you.
- Cover your web or phone cam
IT security experts warn: web and phone cams can be activated remotely. Many victims of cyberstalking therefore tape up their cameras. This protects them from the eyes of the cyberstalker.

DIGITAL LONELINESS

Lonely Together?

Whether you are moving or changing jobs: everyone has experienced moments of loneliness. How exactly is loneliness defined? And what role do our digital friends play in this?

What is Loneliness?

Loneliness - what is it anyways? According to the Psychology Today, loneliness is the negative feeling of being separated and isolated from other people. People who are lonely often feel excluded, isolated and unloved.

Today, people often use their smartphones to escape the feeling of loneliness. Therefore, a distinction has to be made between analog and digital loneliness.

Analog and Digital Loneliness

Whether at the bus stop or in our own bedrooms - smartphones are our constant companions. We use them to make contact with other people and feel close to them despite being separated. This is also called "ambient awareness". Critics are skeptical of this intimacy. Thanks to social media, we are constantly connected and never alone - and yet sometimes we feel lonely. Maximilian Dörner calls this "digital loneliness".

WhatsApp and Relationships

Carolin (27) and Jonas (29) have been together for almost two years. A tiresome, controversial issue in their relationship is WhatsApp. Jonas is often online and active in many group chats. That is why his smartphone rings almost every minute. Caroline is annoyed and feels neglected by Jonas. She wants him to leave some of the group chats.

What do you think about leaving groups? What can Jonas do to improve the situation? And how can he leave the groups without hurting his friends' feelings?

Leaving Group Chats

Leaving a group chat

If you want to leave a group chat, you can do this in WhatsApp via the function "Leave group". The problem: the remaining group members will be informed that you have left. This is often perceived as rude. It may signal disinterest to the remaining chat participants.

Tip

Announce that you are leaving beforehand and explain your reasons. Say goodbye to your digital friends politely. Keep in mind that leaving group chats can still have a negative impact on your relationships.

Reading Emotions Digitally

Daniel (9) suffers from Asperger syndrome. It is a form of autism. People like Daniel have problems reading and understanding the feelings of others. It is therefore difficult for them to make and maintain friendships. The "Zirkus Empathico" app consists of many different training games. With them, Daniel learns to recognize and name his own feelings and those of others by means of short videos. Thanks to the app, Daniel succeeds in interpreting his own emotions and those of others better and better. This has allowed him to make his first real friends. With apps like these, autistic people can participate more in social life.

Phubbing

The average smartphone user looks at their smartphone more than 200 times a day. For Tom (42), this figure is probably much higher. Even when having dinner with friends, he cannot part with his digital companion. This behavior is called "phubbing". The term is composed of "phone" (short for smartphone) and "snubbing". By paying more attention to his smartphone than to his friends, Tom is offending them with his behavior.

Tom's girlfriends often tells him: "Put down your smartphone so you have more time for your offline friendships again." She specifically suggests a "digital diet" ("digital detox").

Alone or Together?

Do our digital companions make us lonely despite being constantly connected? Or are they a bridge for interpersonal relationships?

Connected and yet Still Lonely?

- **A lack of time**
Those who spend a lot of time in social media do not have as much time for personal contacts. A quick coffee date to talk about the day? - Nowadays, this is often done conveniently by messenger or post. This can result in people neglecting their personal contacts.
- **Feeling left-out**
A picture of the party last night that you weren't invited to - posted by a good friend. Some social media posts can trigger feelings of being excluded. Especially when many other friends can be seen on the pictures. This can even endanger long-lasting friendships.
- **A perfect world?**
Social media usually only shows the good things in life: your last holiday or dinner with your friends. How many posts have you seen where someone talks about being fired? It is precisely because most posts always make such a perfect impression that some people feel under pressure.

Connected Together

- **Connected worldwide**
Digital media connects us. It has never been so easy to communicate with people all over the world.
- **Accessible all the time**
Our smartphones make us accessible all the time. Whether early in the morning, in the afternoon or in the middle of the night - thanks to smartphones, we are never alone.
- **Meeting new people**
Through digital media, relationships often develop that would probably never have come about in the analog world. Digital tools offer many opportunities to meet new people, especially for people who are shy.

I am not Lonely!

The Internet and social media can be a bridge for friendships and social relationships. Digital connectivity has many advantages. In social media, moments can be shared with people who are very far away from us. Sharing, liking and commenting can transform loneliness into happiness. In this module, you learned about the many ways that digital media connects people. And if you follow our tips, you don't have to fear false friends on the Internet.