

# Facebook can help college students with lower confidence build relationships

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Facebook can help first-semester college students maintain relationships with high school friends and assist them in creating new friendships, according to new research from Binghamton University, State University of New York. When it comes to making new friends, those with higher confidence in their social skills have less to gain from relying on Facebook, while people with lower confidence in their social skills have more to gain from a reliance on the social media platform.

"Transitioning from high school to college can be stressful for many students. To help them adjust to life in college, it is critical for them to maintain connections with pre-college friends and to form new relationships," said Surinder Kahai, associate professor of management information systems at Binghamton University's School of Management.

For the study, Kahai and fellow researcher, SUNY College at Old Westbury's Yu Lei, focused on first-semester college students by surveying undergraduate college students, mostly sophomores, about their experiences with different channels used to maintain and grow relationships.

Accounting for Facebook's effect on relationships versus the impact of more traditional media (face-to-face interaction, phone calls, etc.), researchers also incorporated how each student's social self-efficacy (confidence in their [social skills](#)) affected the use of both Facebook and traditional media to build and maintain relationships.

"You've known your high school friends for a long time. You're not shy in front of them and you can act naturally," said Kahai. "But when it comes to making new friends in college, your ability to be social and open yourself up to new people will matter. If you have low self-efficacy, you may need to rely more on [social media](#) to make up for less face-to-face interaction."

In terms of how "best" to use Facebook to maintain and build new relationships, some of the findings include:

- Facebook can compensate for the lower use of traditional media to maintain relationships with close friends from high school.
- Facebook works best when supplementing traditional media when it comes to making new college friends.
- Students with high self-efficacy have more to gain from prioritizing traditional media over Facebook when making new college friends.
- Students with low self-efficacy have more to gain from prioritizing Facebook use over traditional media when making new college friends.

Kahai said the findings are relevant to university officials and counselors helping new students adjust to college life.

"New college students often stress about trying to maintain their high [school](#) friendships while struggling to develop new ones. These findings can

help counselors advise students on how to balance the use of social media and [traditional media](#) to enhance their new and older friendships," said Kahai.

Kahai believes that any long-distance relationship can be maintained with the right use of media, which served as some of his motivation to conduct this study.

"If there is an intent to continue the relationship, you can make it happen. Whether you use [phone calls](#), snail mail or Facebook, if you want to maintain a relationship, you can," he said.

And with the growing presence of social media in the lives of [college](#) students, Kahai recommends to stop focusing on the "is social media good or bad?" debate.

"It's here, it's not going away. It's a part of society now," said Kahai. "The results of our study suggest that instead of asking whether or not Facebook builds relationships and social capital, we should be focusing on finding the conditions in which it does."

**More information:** Surinder S. Kahai et al, Building social capital with Facebook: Type of network, availability of other media, and social self-efficacy matter#, *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ijhcs.2019.05.013](#)

Provided by Binghamton University

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