

The Anatomy of Friendship



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Foreword by Anthropologist Anne Kirah

Friendships are complex and multi-layered. From acquaintances we like to spend the occasional evening with, those we see rarely but hold in high regard, to the closest of friends with whom we share our deepest secrets – our friends all play different roles in our lives.

How we keep in touch with these friends is as varied as the relationships themselves, with mobile phones and the internet having a huge impact on our ability to both make and maintain relationships.

But how are these technologies changing our friendships?

When we first started using the internet to communicate, via email and instant messenger and 'virtual friendships' formed, there were concerns it would signal the demise of face-to-face communication. Time has proven however, that rather than heralding the end of the art of social interaction, technology has led to deeper, more varied and wider social circles than ever before.

Through social networking sites like Live Spaces, we can share our daily experiences with a global audience; with instant messaging services like Live Messenger, we can both see and speak to friends and family on the other side of the world whenever we like; and we are now even meeting people online and migrating this contact to the real world.

As this report demonstrates, cyber friendship circles are here to stay and as technology develops, the wider and richer they will become.



54 is the Friendship Number

The average Briton today currently has 54 friends, 21 more than just two years ago. The rise is attributed to the explosion in social networking sites and communication phenomena such as email and instant messenger. Of these friends, only one in six is considered a 'close' friend and the remaining 45 are seen as social friends.

Anne Kirah: "In cultures where geographic mobility is limited, friendships tend to be fewer and we are more focused on forging life long friendships within the community. It is also natural for people to gain and lose friends at transitional times in their life, be it changing schools and starting new jobs."

"The average Briton makes 406 friends in their lifetime but loses 352 of them"



Friendship Focus

Whether it's through school, university, socialising or first jobs, it seems the younger you are, the more friends you will make each year.

Last year, 18-24 year olds made the most friends, an average of 10 in total compared to 45-54 year olds who made four new friends last year.

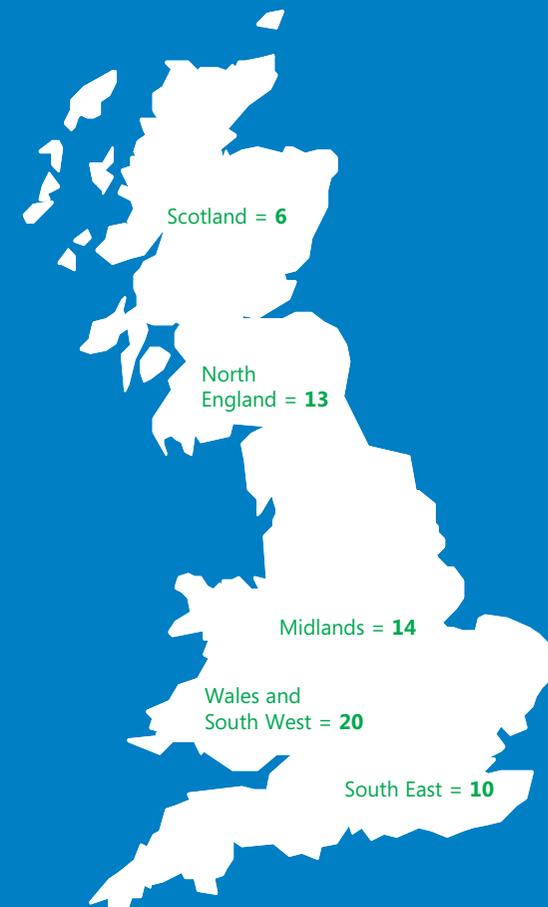
Delving in to the regional divide, people in Wales and the South West are the friendliest in the UK making on average 10 new friends each year. Scotland is the least friendly region making 6 friends a year on average.

Anne Kirah: **"Scotland is more remote in comparison with the other regions and hence less likely to have high speed internet access, making it harder to make friends online. The Midlands and the South West have areas of significant economic growth and this could be an explanation as to why there are a higher number of friends being made in these areas."**

"45% of the population make between 2 and 5 friends a year"

Friendly Regions in the UK

Average no. of new friends in a year



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Keep it in the **Family**

As the saying goes, you can choose your friends but you can't choose your family, yet it seems many Britons actually consider family members amongst their closest friends.

Over one third of Brits (38%) regard their mum a close friend and close behind are brothers and sisters with 36% and 37% respectively.

Out of all family members, men are most likely to consider their brother a close friend (38%) compared to 43% of females who would state their mum.



“When it comes to the gender debate, men are actually friendlier than women making an average of six new friends last year compared to women who made only four.”



Age-Old Friends

The study reveals that while friendships can be made in minutes, many last a lifetime with more than two in five (42%) of those questioned stating they have known their best or close friends for over 16 years.

Long Distance Friendships

Through the rise in internet usage and in particular social networking and blogging sites, it has become increasingly easy to maintain friendships spanning cities, crossing time zones and covering continents. In fact, while half of Brits (50%) admit that most of their friends live in the same town or city as them, a staggering quarter of the population (25%) have friends who live in a different area in the UK and one in two have friends who live abroad.

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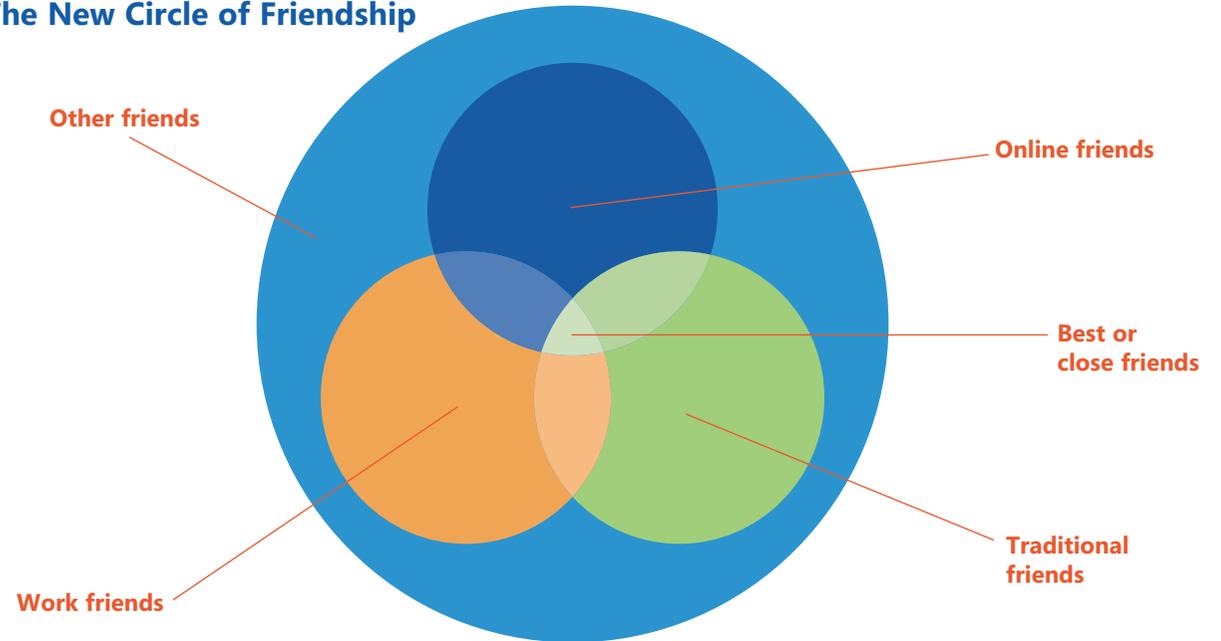
The Rise of the Cyber-friendship Circle

Busy work and social lives mean it has become harder to catch up with friends face-to-face with only 17% of Brits regularly seeing their close friends in person. The rest of the time, technology is used to stay in contact, seeing our friendship groups merging into a wider 'cyber friendship circle'.

- Over three quarters (77%) of people in the UK use technology to maintain their friendships
- Over half (51%) of the population use instant messenger such as Windows Live Messenger (formerly MSN Messenger) to stay in touch with their friends
- 31% of the population communicate with their friends via a blog, space or social networking site
- Almost one third (31%) of the population have made friends online and in some cases, have never met the person that they are friends with
- The most popular methods for making friends over the internet is through email (22%), followed by blogging (21%) and then instant messenger (18%)

Anne Kirah: **“The internet can be used as a way of forming and maintaining relationships and as the internet becomes more integrated into our daily lives, it becomes a tool for both young and old.”**

The New Circle of Friendship



Traditionally the circle of friends used to be made up of a series of concentric circles with close friends in the centre (the inner circle) and wider acquaintances on the outside (the outer circle). However with the online world now immersing itself into our everyday lives we're seeing a new circle of friends evolve.

The 'cyber friendship circle' now takes into account the wider geographical radius of friends and sees online friends becoming equally as important as those made through work or school.

Our 'close' or 'best' friends can now be made up from three main groups - online, work and traditional.

“A third (30%) of the over 65s use instant messenger to contact friends”

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The **Green** Cross Code

Increasingly the internet is being used to communicate with friends but with this, we must always ensure our online safety. Children in particular must be taught how to be 'internet savvy':

- never give out personal information
- be aware that people can find you even if you think you are being careful
- look for red flags, (people telling you secrets or telling you they are in love with you without ever having met)
- always tell an adult immediately if you have any worries or concerns

“4% of Brits state that they have made their closest friends through the internet”



Blog Off

While people are increasingly using blogs to discuss opinions and relate news, only 1% of Brits would use a blog to share gossip or important information (such as the birth of a child, an engagement, a new job etc) with others. Nearly a third (32%) of people in the UK would prefer to gossip face to face, while one in five (20%) prefer to do it over the telephone.

Work **Mates** are New Play Mates

Over half of those surveyed (51%) make their closest friends through work compared to nearly a quarter of Brits (24%) who forge friendships at big lifetime events such as marriages or moving house. School and university are prime stages for making friends too with 43% of people cementing friendships through education.

For men, the most common place to make friends is through outside interests such as sport with almost one in two (47%) stating this is where they develop their closest friendships.

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Gender Divide

Men are not only friendlier than women but they also forge longer-lasting friendships with almost a third (32%) having known their close friends for over 20 years compared to just over a quarter of women (27%).

When examining our friendship groups it seems that increasingly we have a mixed circle of friends. Over half (54%) of Brits have an equal number of male and female friends and a small 3% of the population have solely friends of the opposite sex.

“One in ten (10%) females admit to solely being friends with the same sex”

“Interestingly a quarter (24%) of men who meet friends via the internet, do so through internet dating sites, compared to just one in ten (11%) women

Men

5% only friends with the same sex

Made average of six friends last year

32% of men have known their close friends for over 20

24% of men made friends through internet dating sites

47% made friends through outside interests / sport

Women

10% only friends with the same sex

Made average of four friends last year

27% of women have known their close friends for over 20

11% of women made friends through internet dating sites

30% made friends through outside interests / sport

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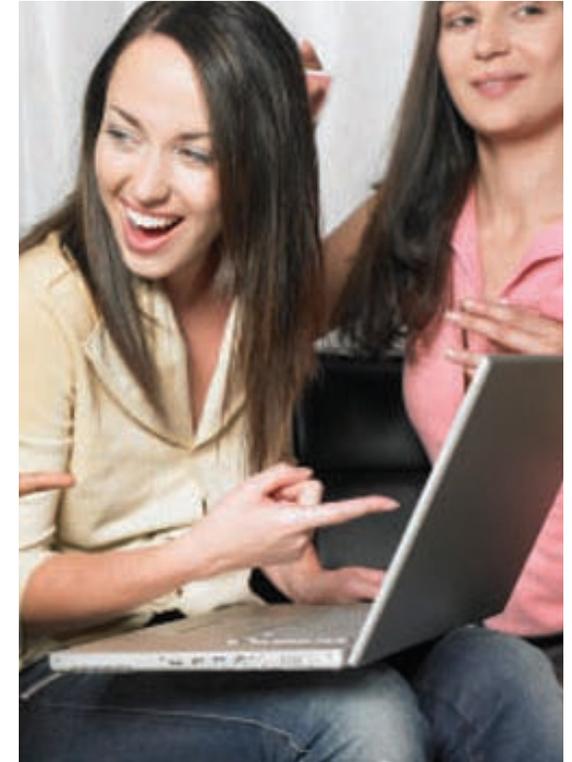
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Windows Live commissioned ICM to conduct the Anatomy of Friendship report. 1000 people were questioned during September and October 2006.

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