Can you form true bonds on social media?

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Finding genuine relationships — friends or lovers — in general, is hard. While you might find a good friend or true lover by hanging out with him or her in person, people often wonder if having a network of contacts on social media, who you have never met, can be called friends, too. Are social media relations as deep and meaningful as longstanding friendships in the real world?

With the soaring popularity of such platforms, people tend to communicate less in person and more online. According to a recent American study, 76 per cent teenagers use social media. While some might assume that online relationships are transient, fleeting and shallow, others feel that sometimes you can be more honest with a social media friend, than communicating with someone directly. That’s because, though the mediums are different, the bond you share with someone online is as intense as it would be with someone you meet. “Social media and dating apps are excellent avenues to find new companions. But often, it is equated to finding a friend with benefits. If you find someone who seems genuine, make sure you don’t get physically or financially involved. Be it friendship or love, it’s best to take things slow,” says Dr Rohann Bokdawala, psychiatrist.

TRUST IS THE KEY

Even when you communicate with someone on a digital medium, there’s still human interaction. If you like talking to someone on social media and share common interests and topics you’re passionate about, you may have found a true relation. Anuradha Tiwari has been friends with Saemah Khan for over a decade. They connected on a social networking site via a mutual friend and their bond turned into long-lasting friendship. “Saemah is like a sister to me. When we interacted for the first time, we argued over a mutual friend’s post. But later, we clicked and became best of friends. We met for the first time at a station for five minutes, and bonded well. We’ve been by each other’s side through thick and thin. Her family loves me and vice versa,” says Anuradha, who feels that trust, time and patience are the key ingredients for finding the right bond on social media.

Experts say it’s important to trust your gut when you are bonding with a person on social media. If you like talking to him or her, be frank about who you are. You can’t start a friendship or bond based on pretenses. Saemah says that their mutual understanding and willingness to hear each other out worked when they connected on a social networking site. Explaining how they trusted each other, Saemah adds, “When we realised that we don’t judge each other for what we say or opine, the trust strengthened. I feel every bond, whether it’s with someone you meet regularly or a social media contact, takes time. So, we started meeting occasionally and our friendship bloomed with every meeting. I loved her honesty and our wavelength matched.”

IS IT LOVE?

While some find true friends on social media, some find true love and subsequent life partners, too. Pooja Advani, a PR professional, connected with Omkar Pawaskar on social media in 2015. They fell in love and eventually, got married. “We met after chatting for a month on the site. The first meeting was awkward for both of us, but we got along in subsequent meetings. We realised that our choices in terms of food and music, and expectations from life, were similar. We were always transparent in the relationship when we chatted on social media, and that reflected when we met, too,” says Pooja.

DON’T PLAY AROUND

It’s important to stay patient and not play around with sentiments on social networking sites if you want to find a true relationship. “When you start a relationship online, you have doubts. I was sceptical when Rahul and I started talking, because some men I connected with offered to meet me in my building at midnight after a 5-minute conversation. There were some who asked for my personal number a few seconds after connecting on social media. But Rahul did none of this. He gave me the time to get comfortable talking to him and opening up to him. We developed trust and a strong bond, and now, we are married,” says Tanya Chopra.

If your areas of interest are common and your wavelengths match, striking a bond isn’t difficult. Celebrity manager Mona Jaswani found one of her closest friends four years ago on a photosharing social network. They bonded over their common spiritual beliefs. “We connected over spirituality, something which is quite unconventional when it comes to the younger generation. After knowing each other for a while, we realised that both of us were looking for a companion to connect with on the spiritual front. We didn’t exchange numbers and continued to chat on the site for months. The first time he invited me to meet was at a satsang (prayer meeting). I was surprised. We started going on walks and the topics we discussed included Lord Shiva, work and fitness,” she says.
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