

Description of Intimate Friendship Among Blackpink Fans Using Rant Accounts on Social Media X

Ilmi Fauziyyah Zahra¹, Suwarti²

Ilmifauziyah1234@gmail.com¹, suwarti@ump.ac.id²

Faculty of psychology, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto^{1,2}

Abstract. Social interaction has now expanded to social media, including the X platform, which enables the formation of intimate friendships. This study aims to describe the experience of intimate friendship among Blackpink fans who use rant accounts on the X social media platform. The approach used is qualitative with a descriptive phenomenological method. Data was collected through a survey of 101 participants to categorize the intensity of relationships (high, medium, low), followed by in-depth interviews with three representative participants from each category. The results show that participants in the high category demonstrated full trust and openness, even exceeding that of real life friends. Participants in the medium category had consistent interactions and stable relationships. Meanwhile, participants in the low category felt less capable of maintaining online communication, but their friendships developed through more meaningful offline interactions.

Keywords: Intimate friendship, social media X, Blackpink fans

1 Introduction

In the modern era, social interaction has evolved beyond physical interactions to encompass virtual interactions facilitated by various social media platforms, notably X. Sosial media X is a platform, that characterised by its microblogging functionality, which imposes a character limit of 280 on the content published by its users. This content encompasses ideas, concepts, and personal perspectives. A distinctive attribute of the social media platform X is its capacity to transcend geographical and temporal constraints, facilitating the expeditious dissemination of information on a global scale. This characteristic renders it remarkably accessible and expeditious for its users, enabling seamless connectivity across diverse over the world [1].

Presently, X occupies sixth position among Indonesian internet users in terms of the most widely used social media platform. Despite the prevalence of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, and Telegram in Indonesia, recent data indicates a significant number of users of the X media social platform. According to Statista in 2024, Indonesia is ranked fourth among countries with the highest number of X users worldwide, with a total of 24.8 million users [2].

The primary benefit of the social media platform X is its provision of a medium through which its users can express themselves by sharing their thoughts on a variety of subjects, primarily in the form of written content [3]. The X media platform offers a variety of features that facilitate

seamless interaction among users. A multitude of accounts is established for the purpose of engaging in discourse on a myriad of subjects they are interested in. These accounts encompass a wide spectrum, including personal accounts (PA), business accounts (BA), study accounts (Studite), fan accounts (FA), and rant accounts (secondary accounts), among numerous others. At present, the most prevalent accounts on the social media platform X (Twitter) are those dedicated to K-Pop [4].

Blackpink fans are individuals who have an interest in Blackpink, a girl group from the K-pop music industry. A recurrent pattern among Blackpink fans is the tendency to offer mutual support among one another [5]. Moreover, the Blackpink fan community exhibits a positive relationship among its members on the social media platform X. This phenomenon can be attributed to the influence of the Blackpink girl group. This phenomenon can be attributed to the infrequent activity level exhibited by Blackpink, a notable instance being their prolonged hiatus. Consequently, it is not uncommon for Blackpink fans who utilize fan accounts (FA) to establish rant accounts, which offer a more private and unregulated platform for expressing diverse perspectives.

In essence, a "rant account" or more precisely, a "secondary account" refers to a social media user's additional account, distinct from their primary account, utilized for social media interactions [6]. A notable benefit of these accounts is that individuals can articulate their thoughts and emotions with a high degree of openness. This level of authenticity is further enhanced by the fact that only individuals considered to be within the individual's inner circle are privy to the content shared on these accounts. A notable benefit of these rant accounts is the increased freedom of expression they afford their users, allowing individuals to articulate their thoughts and emotions with a degree of uninhibitedness that is not always possible on other social media platforms. This increased level of authenticity can have a positive impact on the relationships of the users, as those who are close to them are more likely to be aware of their thoughts and feelings [7].

This finding aligns with DeVito's in 1986 assertion that intimacy can encourage individuals to disclose personal information [8]. Derlaga & Berg in 1987 also demonstrate that individuals exhibit a greater propensity to be more candid with those in their immediate social circles, including family members, romantic partners, close friends, and individuals with whom they share a personal affinity [9]. Admirers of the South Korean girl group Blackpink who utilize rant accounts on the social media platform X also endeavour to establish a conducive environment for themselves, thereby facilitating the articulation of matters that are, on occasion, sensitive and confidential.

According to the findings of Pathak & Pathak-Shelat in 2017, the formation of virtual groups or communities can indeed foster a sense of unity among their members, despite the presence of geographic and demographic boundaries [10]. This phenomenon is exemplified by the case of Blackpink fans in Indonesia who utilize the social media platform X. Individuals who already experience a sense of intimacy and frequently engage with each other, often developing a virtual friendship, are typically followers of a rant account [7].

Preliminary study was conducted by researchers on a group of three participants who self-identified as Blackpink fans and who used rant accounts. The results of the preliminary study indicated that when interacting with their friends, the three participants experienced a sense of validation, being heard by others, and a sense of trust. These sentiments may emerge due to the presence of close acquaintances within the user's social network, who often exhibit a high degree

of emotional attachment to the user. This attachment fosters a sense of ease and comfort when utilizing and uploading tweets on the account. The three participants had also convened in person with their close friends from the rant account. Furthermore, intimate friendship relationships have been shown to exert a detrimental influence on the subjects involved. This influence is believed to be a result of the friendship environment itself and the misunderstandings that are created.

This finding aligns with the theory of Intimate friendship, which can be conceptualized as a bilateral, mutual, and intimate relationship [11]. The aforementioned emotions, including a sense of validation, empathy, trust, and common interests, have been identified as integral components of the intimate friendship dynamics delineated by Sharabany in 1994 [12]. As posited by Sharabany, the emotional responses experienced by participants, including a sense of validation, acknowledgment, and trust, are all encompassed within the conceptual framework of intimate friendship [12].

A seminal study on intimate friendship on social media X was conducted by Firual and Hariyadi in 2022 [13]. In this study, intimate friendship was defined as the independent variable X, and it was posited that intimate friendship can encourage individuals to continue to disclose personal information. Lin's in 2016 research on social media X pertains to the concept of ambient intimacy, which posits that the degree of intimacy experienced can be influenced by the frequency of exposure to the target's social media content, thereby fostering a sense of closeness [14].

Research on intimate friendship is also frequently conducted on other social media platforms, with intimate friendship itself becoming the X variable of self-disclosure. A review of the extant literature reveals a consensus among four studies on the positive relationship between intimate friendship and self-disclosure. The findings indicate that as intimate friendship and trust levels increase, self-disclosure also increases [15, 16, 17,18]. This is an intriguing topic for further research, particularly in the context of intimate friendships among Blackpink fan accounts on social media platform X. A team of researchers will be presenting a study on individuals who maintain close-knit friendship relationships as Blackpink fans who utilize rant accounts on the social media platform X.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Intimate Friendship

2.1.1 Definition of Intimate Friendship

Intimate relationships are defined as warm feelings that can lead to closeness with specific individuals in one's life [19]. Intimate friendship is defined as a relationship that allows individuals to depend on their close friends. This dependence begins with an initial interest in or concern for a particular matter and is characterized by a willingness to share personal thoughts, experiences, and feelings with each other [20]. Intimate friendship can be characterized as a bilateral, mutual, and intimate relationship [18]. Sharabany in 1994 also considers intimate friendship to be a configuration of various elements, including self-disclosure, trust, happiness, and other intimacy-related phenomena that are interconnected and commensurate [12].

2.1.2 Elements of Intimate Friendship

According to Sharabany, the concept of intimate friendship encompasses eight distinct aspects, namely (12): 1) Honesty and spontaneity, characterized by the absence of pretence and the expression of candidness regarding one's thoughts and feelings; 2) Sensitivity and understanding, which pertain to the capacity of individuals to respond empathetically to their peers in various circumstances; 3) Closeness, denoting the degree of intimacy and compatibility that characterizes a friendship; 4) Exclusivity refers to the uniqueness of a relationship quality; 5) Giving and sharing entails the exchange of material goods. 6) Acceptance and sacrifice signify an individual's capacity to embrace all the characteristics possessed by a friend; 7) Same activities denote the engagement in shared pursuits; 8) principle is that of trust and loyalty, which refers to the condition of maintaining secrecy and defending each other.

2.1.3 Factors of Intimate Friendship

As posited by Myers in 2012, the concept of intimate friendship can be understood through the lens of three interrelated factors [21]. The first component is attachment style, defined as the presence of a profound emotional bond, thereby engendering a sense of significance, and yielding favourable outcomes. The second component is similarity, characterized by the perception of mutual interest. The third component is self-openness, denoting the capacity for intimate and profound connections, fostering a sense of closeness and vulnerability.

2.2 Blackpink Fans Rant Account Users

Blackpink fans are individuals who have an interest in Blackpink, a girl group from the K-pop music industry. A recurrent pattern among Blackpink fans is the tendency to offer mutual support among one another [5]. Moreover, the Blackpink fan community exhibits a positive relationship among its members on the social media platform X. This phenomenon can be attributed to the influence of the Blackpink girl group. This phenomenon can be attributed to the infrequent activity level exhibited by Blackpink, a notable instance being their prolonged hiatus. A notable distinction between Blackpink and other groups is their infrequent release of new songs and comebacks, a practice that is more prevalent among other groups [22]. A "rant account" is defined as a secondary account, which is used by a social media user to interact on social media itself [6]. Rant accounts are often used by users to express anger through means such as tweeting complaints, cursing, ranting, and nagging [7].

3 Method

This study uses a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology describes the meaning of a concept or phenomenon as experienced by several individuals [23]. According to Fiantika [24], phenomenology is the way humans understand the real world, allowing everything to be clear as it is. The qualitative data analysis process in this study will employ descriptive analysis developed by Amedeo Giorgi [25]. The analysis steps include a thorough reading of the interview transcripts, separation of meaning units, transformation of meaning units into psychological meanings, writing structural descriptions, and obtaining the essence of the participants' subjective experiences with general and specific themes [25].

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling. In this study, the researchers first conducted a survey of Blackpink fans who use rant accounts on social media X. The survey was distributed using the intimate friendship scale developed by Sharabany [12] and later adapted by Rizal and Rizal [11]. This scale consists of 38 items. The objective of the survey was to categorize participants into three distinct groups: high, medium, and low. The researchers sought to enrol a minimum of 100 participants who met the following criteria: 1) the subjects of this study are Blackpink fans who utilize rant accounts on a daily basis, 2) they exhibit a high level of engagement on social media platform X, with a minimum of five tweets published per day, 3) they derive enjoyment from interacting with mutuals and other users by responding to each other's tweets, 4) when completing the questionnaire, they are able to briefly describe their close friends on their social media accounts.

Furthermore, the researcher selected three participants to be interviewed, each of whom had obtained the highest scores in their respective categories. This selection endeavoured to achieve a profound and exhaustive comprehension of the characteristics of intimate friendship within each category. The objective of this study is to utilize the eight aspects elucidated by Sharabany [12] and the three factors of intimate friendship as delineated by Myers [21]. The interview process was conducted virtually via Google Meet, utilizing a set of 15 primary inquiries, each accompanied by probing questions.

4 Result

The survey's findings indicated that 16% of the participants exhibited a low level of intimate friendship, 70% demonstrated a medium level, and the remaining 16% displayed a high level of intimate friendship. Subsequently, the researchers conducted interviews with three participants, categorizing their responses as high, medium, or low. The interview was conducted with three participants, each representing a distinct category. This approach was adopted to facilitate a comprehensive and nuanced characterization of the intricacies of intimate friendship across varying levels of friendship intimacy. The following is a description of the participants who were interviewed.

Table 1. Participant Description

Participant	Gender	Age	Desc	Score	Category
N	Male	23	Job seekers	147	High
B	Female	24	Private employee	132	Medium
E	Female	23	Student	107	Low

The researchers then proceeded to analyse the data derived from the interviews. The data analysis in this study was conducted using a descriptive approach, employing a phenomenological method developed by Amedeo Giorgi. The analysis was conducted in the following manner: first, the interview transcripts were meticulously reviewed; second, the units of meaning were isolated; third, the units of meaning were transformed into psychological meanings; fourth, structural descriptions were written; and fifth, the essence of the participants' subjective experiences was identified through the presence of general and specific themes [25]. From this analysis, the researcher obtained results in the form of both general themes and specific themes.

Table 2. Theme List

Participant N	Participant B	Participant E
Safe Space for Self-Expression		
Openness without threat of judgment	Trust based on social distance	Not being judged
Emotional Closeness		
Quality of supportive responses	Frequency similarity creates consistent interaction	Continuing into the real world
Forms of Friendship Support		
Care and sacrifice	Mutual active support	Physical presence support
Shared Interests		
Light but meaningful interaction triggers	Basis of relational compatibility	Interest as a reinforcement of relational closeness
Dynamics of Closeness Intensity		
Respect for personal space	Relationship stability	Grows stronger through physical presence

4.1 Safe space for self-expression

Each participant has differences in the scope of this theme, as each participant comes from different categories and levels. For participant N, who has a high level of intimate friendship, it was found that participant N feels comfortable and unhesitant to open because of the trust they have in their friend, due to the friend's supportive attitude and lack of negative responses. Participant N avoids confiding in real-life friends because they are concerned about receiving negative responses or perceptions.

Furthermore, Participant B, who has a low level of intimate friendship, was found to be comfortable expressing themselves because their close friend comes from a different background, making Participant B feel safer sharing personal stories without worrying about the information spreading. Then, Participant E, who had a low level of intimate friendship, showed a “careless” attitude toward the possibility of negative responses from others. In addition, their close friends also showed a non-judgmental attitude, which made Participant E feel freer and more comfortable in expressing themselves.

Each participant also revealed the level of openness in expressing themselves to their friends. Participant N, who had a high level of intimate friendship, stated that he was completely open to his close friends and had no secrets. Participant B, who had a medium level of intimate friendship, stated that he was open to his close friends, especially regarding family issues, but there were some things that he kept to himself. Additionally, Participant E, who has medium intimate friendship, stated that they are open with their close friends, but topics such as romance and childhood experiences are not shared with their close friends. The remaining information is kept to themselves or shared with their middle school friends, such as in the context of romance.

4.2 Emotional closeness

The second theme identified by the researchers was related to emotional attachment. Each participant differed in terms of this theme, as each participant came from a different category and level. Participant N, who had a high level of intimate friendship, felt more comfortable sharing deep stories with their close friend than with friends in real life. As a result, the positive advice given by their friend was considered meaningful and worthy of consideration in decision-

making. Furthermore, Participant B, who has a medium level of intimate friendship, feels that they and their friend are on the same wavelength, making their communication enjoyable and intense, marked by exchanging stories almost every day.

A different finding was observed in Participant E, who had a low level of intimate friendship. The relationship with their friend was not limited to digital interactions but had developed into a real-world friendship. The in-depth discussions or deep talk made Participant E feel comfortable because they allowed for mutual sharing without any burden or pressure.

4.3 Forms of support in friendships

The third theme identified by the researchers was related to the forms of support that occur in friendships, with each participant differing in the scope of this theme. Participant N, who had a high level of intimate friendship, demonstrated a high level of concern, even willing to take the time to remain available to respond to their friend's messages, despite being in a busy situation. In return, their friend showed reciprocity by defending Participant N during a social media conflict. Participant B, who had a medium level of intimate friendship, expressed concern if their friend chose to remain silent and not share, as their friend also showed similar concern when the participant exhibited signs of sadness.

Furthermore, slightly different from participants N and B, participant E, who has a low level of intimate friendship, shared an experience where their friend faced difficulties, and participant E provided direct physical support. This occurred because participant E and their friend transitioned to a real-world relationship.

4.4 Similar interests

The fourth theme identified by researchers was related to similar interests in friendships, with participants differing in the scope of this theme. Participant N, who has a high level of intimate friendship, was found to share common interests, such as being fans of Blackpink, having similar music tastes, and sharing similarities in clothing style and preferred clothing colours, enabling them to engage in light-hearted conversations that strengthen their friendship.

Additionally, Participant B, who has a medium level of intimate friendship, and their friend often discuss topics related to Blackpink together, including hyping up the idol group in their conversations, which leads to frequent interaction between the two. Furthermore, Participant E, who has a low level of intimate friendship, and their friend often attend various events related to Blackpink together and hang out together because both enjoy going to cafes.

4.5 Dynamics of closeness intensity

The last theme found by researchers was related to shared interests in friendships, with participants showing differences in this area. Participants N, who had a high level of intimate friendship, demonstrated an attitude of respecting their friends' personal space, especially when their friends did not want to talk or were busy with work, even though their friends did not actually feel bothered. Additionally, participants N expressed a desire to build long-term friendships and meet in person, which reflects the dynamics of their friendships.

Furthermore, participant B, who has a moderate level of intimate friendship, revealed that there is no awkwardness between them when they meet in person, and although opportunities to meet in person are limited, they maintain their relationship through good communication, as evidenced by the absence of conflict between participant B and their friend. Additionally,

Participant E, who has a low level of intimate friendship, has a high level of attachment when the friendship develops into a real-world friendship. Participant E stated that the friendship they have developed has improved since they began interacting in the real world, as the participant feels less skilled at building closeness online.

5 Discussion

This study aims to uncover the nature of intimate friendships among Blackpink fans who use rant accounts on social media platform X. The researchers also examined the nature of intimate friendships based on the high, medium, and low categories that had been established. The researchers identified five major themes encompassing various aspects and factors of intimate friendship, namely: 1) safe space for self-expression, 2) emotional closeness, 3) forms of support within the friendships, 4) shared interests, and 5) the dynamics of closeness intensity.

The research results indicate that each participant had different experiences in interpreting a safe space for self-expression in friendships on rant accounts, which was closely related to the level of intimate friendship they had. Generally, a safe space in this context is understood as a psychological condition that allows participants to show openness in sharing personal matters without fear of negative responses, judgment, or the spread of information. This theme relates to aspects of honesty and spontaneity, trust, and loyalty, as well as factors regarding self-disclosure.

Participants with a high level of intimate friendship were found to be fully open without hiding anything. Participants shared about life issues, including openness about their sexual orientation, which none of their real-world friends knew about. This openness arose due to a strong sense of trust in their close friends. This trust was built through consistent interaction experiences and supportive responses from their friends, who never judged them.

This is in line with research conducted by Rahmayanti and Ediyati [26], which found that the stronger the online friendship, the higher the level of self-disclosure. Additionally, similar research was conducted by Lestari Laturrahmi [27], which revealed that when individuals have a high level of trust, they become very open with their online friends, even more so than with their offline friends.

Unlike participants in the high category, participants in the moderate intimate friendship category showed that comfort in sharing stories was based on social distance from real life. Their close friends came from different backgrounds, which created a sense of security because the information shared was considered unlikely to spread to other social circles. Interacting with online friends from different social backgrounds can help individuals feel more connected and supported [28]. According to his research, this occurs because individuals gain greater emotional benefits as they feel freer from direct social pressure [28].

Meanwhile, participants who were also in the low intimate friendship category showed different dynamics. Their openness was more influenced by a personal attitude of “careless” about the possibility of negative judgments from others. In addition, their close friends showed non-judgmental listening, so they felt free to express themselves. This aligns with research conducted by Chen and Xu that empathetic and non-judgmental listening makes someone feel accepted, not just approved of, and allows them to be more open in sharing their feelings and thoughts [29].

Safe space is not just about how often someone shares, but also who receives the story and how they respond. In other words, a safe space is the result of a combination of supportive interpersonal experiences and subjective perceptions of social risk in friendships. The most significant factor influencing the creation of a safe space is trust; without trust, participants cannot be open (self-disclosure) in online friendships. Additionally, this trust is supported by supportive responses, social distance, and non-judgmental listening from the participant's friends as reinforcers, thereby fostering self-disclosure among participants.

This second theme emerged from the experiences of the three participants, showing that emotional closeness develops differently depending on the level of intimate friendship. This emotional depth is evident in how they respond to stories, provide support, and the extent to which advice is accepted as a basis for decision-making. This theme relates to aspects of attachment, exclusivity, and factors related to attachment style.

Participants with a high level of intimate friendship stated that personal stories and positive advice from close friends felt far more meaningful than support from real-life friends. This highlights the quality of support in highly intimate relationships. Previous research by Shabahang [30] suggests that some individuals feel more comfortable and receive greater emotional support from online friends than from real-life friends, especially when discussing sensitive and private topics. This may also be related to the high level of trust among participants in the high category, enabling such advice to be taken seriously and serve as a basis for decision-making, reflecting deep emotional involvement.

However, this condition can also lead to excessive emotional dependence on online friends. Participants tend to rely on online friends for emotional validation and guidance, which can potentially weaken their ability to deal with problems independently. Previous studies have shown that self-disclosure and strong trust in online relationships can trigger social media addiction and emotional dependence [31]. Therefore, it is important for participants to maintain a balance between online relationships and emotional independence to prevent negative impacts on mental health.

Participants with moderate levels of intimate friendship describe their emotional closeness through similar frequencies, which can create intense communication. This illustrates that the regularity of daily interactions and shared emotions create emotional closeness, even though the depth of this relationship has not yet reached the level of closeness of participants in the high category. Previous research on online communication was conducted by Abdillah [32], who revealed that there is a positive relationship between the intensity of online communication and warmth in friendships. The higher the intensity of communication, the greater the level of warmth in friendships, where warmth in friendships includes emotional availability, genuine caring, and support, which are certainly related to emotional closeness.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that the consistency and intensity of digital communication have been proven to create a warm and cohesive emotional space. Additionally, this is also related to the Social Penetration Theory proposed by Taylor and Altman [33], where closeness is formed through consistent interaction and increased depth of communication. Increased intimacy in a relationship is a consequence of the increasingly intense process of sharing personal information between individuals in the relationship.

This is slightly different from participants in the low categorization who revealed that emotional closeness emerged after digital friendships developed into real-world relationships, allowing for deep talk without feeling burdened or pressured. This aligns with Amelia and Wibowo's

research [34], which found that the decision to meet offline begins with the process of building trust, and when meeting in person, the relationship becomes closer because both parties already know and trust each other emotionally. This closeness grows further in the real world, and the participants' emotional closeness also increases.

Thus, emotional closeness in intimate friendships has the deepest level of closeness, ranging from accepting advice to influencing decision-making among high-category participants, through enjoyable daily interactions among medium-category participants, to real-life meetings that strengthen bonds among low-category participants. Support in friendships is one of the themes of this study, as it is an important aspect of intimate friendships, reflected in emotional attention, concrete actions, and empathetic responses to a friend's circumstances. The results of this study indicate that the form of support demonstrated by participants is influenced by the level of closeness in the relationship and the context of the interaction, whether digital or in person. This theme relates to aspects of giving and sharing, acceptance, and sacrifice.

The support that emerged based on the research results for high-category participants showed forms of support that were intense both emotionally and digitally. Participants demonstrated a form of time sacrifice, namely being willing to be present whenever their friends needed them, even in busy situations, which showed emotional availability as a form of high concern. Previous research has been conducted and found that virtual friendships on platforms like Twitter are based on mutual support motives and unwritten rules that encourage prosocial behaviour, including sacrificing time and attention for online friends [27].

In addition, his friend also showed reciprocal support by defending the high-category participant when he experienced conflict on social media. This shows the reciprocal support that was created between the two. This is in line with the research by Rahmawati and Nurhamida [35], which found that there are five forms of support in virtual friendships, namely instrumental, informational, emotional, self-reinforcement, and social networking. This study highlights that the most prominent form of friendship support is the reciprocal relationship between instrumental support (such as practical tips or actions) and emotional support (such as empathy). Both forms of support are evident in the friendships of high-category participants, such as emotional support through listening to each other's heartfelt confessions even when busy, and offering advice to one another.

In contrast, among participants in the moderate intimate friendship category, support is demonstrated through affective and reflective concern when sharing stories. When a friend does not share a story, the participant feels anxious, indicating emotional sensitivity to the friend's situation. Dinar's research [36] confirms that strong online social support reduces social anxiety and facilitates self-disclosure by sharing one's feelings with trusted friends. When participants in the moderate category feel anxious, they are not only reactive but also proactive, leading to immediate anxiety when communication stops. Life update about their friends is very meaningful to them; when their friends are unreachable, this can lead to social anxiety.

Meanwhile, participants in the low category demonstrate more tangible forms of support through direct physical actions, such as helping friends facing academic challenges or assisting during times of crisis. This is possible because the relationship that initially formed online has developed into an offline relationship. This aligns with Desjarlais [28], who found that online friendships that develop into direct interactions tend to create space for instrumental support, which is support based on concrete actions such as physical support that cannot always be provided in relationships formed solely online.

This shows that the support provided in the participants' friendships varies from participant to participant. However, basically all three apply support with a two-way relationship, even though the forms of support vary. Participants in the low category for this theme showed the highest level of friendship support compared to the other two participants because their relationships extend into the real world. However, the digital friendship support of participants in the low category is not visible.

In this study, although the forms of support provided by participants vary, all three demonstrate two-way engagement that strengthens emotional bonds between individuals. Such relationships can create a sense of belonging, reduce psychological stress, and boost self-confidence. Research by Thoits [37] supports this finding, stating that reciprocal social support can be a primary source of emotional reinforcement, helping individuals manage stress and improve mental well-being.

The next theme relates to shared interests, which often serve as the foundation for the formation of deeper friendships. In this study, the theme of shared interests was found among all participants, although the form and intensity of their connections varied according to the level of intimate friendship each participant had. This theme relates to shared activities and similarities.

This study focuses on Blackpink fans, where all three participants shared common interests with their respective friends, namely being Blackpink fans, and their interactions began from this shared interest. Although the relationship originated in the digital world, shared interests bridged openness, closeness, and even participation in real-world activities. Additionally, this demonstrates that individuals tend to form closer relationships with people who share similar interests or perspectives [38].

Other studies also reinforce this finding. In their research, Liddiniyah and Maryam [39] found that shared interests significantly contribute to the formation of friendship quality, as they allow individuals to feel more understood and emotionally connected without having to explain themselves too much. Thus, shared interests not only serve as a bonding element but also have a strong binding force in strengthening the emotional dimension of friendships, whether they occur online or offline.

However, among participants in the high category, similarities were also found beyond shared interests in Blackpink, such as in style and music preferences, which led them to frequently discuss these topics with one another. Additionally, participants in the low category showed that they often participated in activities related to K-pop directly because their relationships had developed into real-world friendships. They also shared similarities in the process of completing final assignments, where they had a common desire to work together and shared the same goals.

The fifth theme that emerged in this study is the dynamics of closeness intensity, which shows how closeness in friendships can develop differently among participants, depending on the level of attachment and the transition of interactions from the virtual realm to the real world. Among participants with high levels of intimate friendship, the dynamics of closeness are characterized by mutual respect for personal space and a strong desire to maintain long-term relationships. Although their communication occurs digitally, the relationship remains close due to unconditional acceptance and ongoing emotional support. Previous research has noted that comfort in online friendships can be maintained, especially when individuals have had positive experiences in forming online relationships in the past. Individuals have a desire to form long-term relationships because of these positive experiences [40].

Meanwhile, among participants with moderate levels of intimate friendship, relationship dynamics appear stable due to smooth communication and the absence of conflict. Their relationships are characterized by a balance between emotional closeness and non-binding interactions, which provide a sense of comfort even when they rarely meet in person. When conflicts are rare, individuals find it easier to share sensitive or personal issues with one another, as there is no fear of negative responses or rejection [12]. This allows the relationship to proceed with mutual trust and comfort, ensuring that the relationship remains stable.

Participants with low levels of intimate friendship showed higher intensity of closeness after the relationship moved to the offline realm. Participants acknowledged that they had difficulty building relationships online due to limitations in expressing emotions through digital media. However, after the relationship continued in the real world, the intensity of closeness increased significantly, marked by shared activities and direct physical support. In a study by Rahmawati and Nurhamida [35], it was found that friendships that began online could experience an increase in closeness when continued in face-to-face interactions because more communication channels were used and emotional expressions were easier to convey.

Overall, these results underscore that the dynamics of closeness intensity in friendships are not only influenced by communication frequency but also by how the interaction medium is used and to what extent the relationship develops from virtual to real-world. This reinforces the concept that closeness in digital friendships is dynamic and influenced by each individual's interpersonal experiences.

6 Conclusion

The results of the study on the three participants—high (participant N), medium (participant B), and low (participant E)—show that all three have different levels of intimate friendship. This study has five themes; safe space for self-expression, emotional closeness, forms of support in friendships, shared interests, and the dynamics of closeness intensity. Participants in the high category demonstrated unlimited trust and openness toward their friends, resulting in relationships that were extremely intimate, surpassing those of real-world friends. However, the relationships of participants in the high category carry the risk of dependency and lack of independence, leading to negative psychological impacts. On the other hand, participants in the moderate category also have consistent interactions almost every day and maintain stable relationships without conflicts, allowing participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories. Furthermore, participants in the low category admitted they were not skilled at online communication, but they had close friends whose relationships developed in the real world. Participants admitted they did not have intense interactions with their friends, but they often engaged in activities together, making them closer to one another.

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