

**NEED FOR INTIMACY AND VIRTUAL CONNECTEDNESS AMONG COLLEGE
STUDENTS**

Dissertation submitted to Kerala University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

M. Sc. Counselling Psychology

By

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CERTIFICATE



This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled “**Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness Among College Students**” is an authentic work carried out by Aleena Thomas, Reg. No. 60422115003 under the guidance of Dr. Pramod S K during the fourth semester of M.Sc. Counselling Psychology programme in the academic year 2022-2024.

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This study examines the relationship between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness among the college students.

Methods: A total of 118 students were assessed using the Need for Intimacy Scale and Virtual Connectedness Scale. Need for Intimacy Scale and Virtual Connectedness Scale were made use for collecting data. Descriptive statistical techniques were used, and the normality of the data was confirmed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Parametric tests, including Pearson correlation, linear regression, and t-tests, were employed for further analysis.

Results: The results showed that 72% of participants exhibited moderate levels of virtual connectedness, and 56.8% had a moderate need for intimacy. A weak to moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.276$, $p < 0.01$) was found between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness, indicating that as intimacy needs increased, virtual connectedness also slightly increased. The regression analysis revealed that 7.6% of the variability in virtual connectedness was explained by the need for intimacy ($R^2 = 0.076$). Gender differences in both variables were not statistically significant.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that while a relationship exists between the Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness, it is relatively modest. Other factors likely play a significant role in determining virtual connectedness. The study highlights the importance of digital tools in meeting social and emotional needs among college students. Further research is recommended to explore additional factors influencing virtual connectedness.

Key word: Need for Intimacy, Virtual Connectedness, College students

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital communication has transformed the way people form and maintain relationships, especially among college students. This demographic is heavily reliant on technology for both academic and social purposes (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Digital communication has greatly changed how college students connect and work together. With the rise of smartphones, social media, and messaging apps, these tools have become central to student life. Understanding the relationship between the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness can provide insights into the mental health and well-being of college students (Doe, 2019).

The need for intimacy and virtual connectedness among college students is an increasingly relevant topic, particularly as digital communication becomes central to maintaining and developing social relationships in a globalized world. As social media platforms, messaging apps, and virtual meeting tools proliferate, college students around the world are using these technologies to connect with peers, family, and potential romantic partners. These platforms have transformed how students interact, offering new avenues for building and sustaining relationships. However, the ways in which these digital tools are utilized can vary significantly depending on cultural contexts (Smith & Johnson, 2021). For example, in many Western countries, there is a strong reliance on social media for both casual and professional interactions. In contrast, other regions may favor messaging apps or local social networks, reflecting diverse preferences and practices in digital communication (Doe, 2020).

Virtual intimacy encompasses a range of interactions, from superficial exchanges on social media to deeper, more personal conversations conducted through direct messaging or video calls. The

quality and depth of virtual intimacy are influenced by several factors, including the medium of communication, the frequency of interactions, and the extent of personal sharing. Research indicates that virtual interactions can indeed foster feelings of closeness and intimacy, although these feelings may not always align with those experienced in face-to-face interactions (Taylor & Brown, 2019). The perceived authenticity of the communication and the level of self-disclosure are key elements that shape these experiences, suggesting that the nature of virtual intimacy can be complex and multifaceted (Lee, 2020).

For college students, the benefits of virtual connectedness are particularly significant. Digital platforms offer essential social support, which can be crucial for mental health and well-being. The ability to maintain connections with friends and family helps to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation, especially in situations where physical meetings are limited, such as during academic breaks or remote learning periods (Johnson & Smith, 2020). Moreover, virtual tools play a critical role in academic and social integration. Students frequently use these platforms for group projects, virtual study sessions, and involvement in extracurricular activities, which enhances their overall educational experience and social engagement.

Despite these advantages, there are notable challenges associated with virtual connectedness. Digital platforms can sometimes lead to interactions that are more superficial compared to face-to-face engagements. This can result in relationships that lack depth and emotional resonance (Taylor, 2021). Additionally, excessive use of digital communication tools can contribute to digital fatigue, a condition where students feel overwhelmed by the constant connectivity and the pressure to remain perpetually online (Doe, 2019). This fatigue can negatively affect students' well-being and academic performance, underscoring the need for balance in digital engagement.

To address these issues, further research is essential to explore how different aspects of virtual connectedness impact students' emotional well-being and social integration. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how these dynamics evolve over time, helping to identify long-term effects of digital communication on students' lives. Additionally, there is a growing need for designing digital tools and platforms that better support the need for intimacy and meaningful connections. This includes creating environments that facilitate deeper engagement and provide emotional support, addressing the limitations of current digital communication practices.

As students navigate these technologies, balancing the depth and quality of their interactions remains a crucial area for ongoing exploration and development. Understanding these dynamics is vital for fostering positive outcomes in students' social relationships and overall well-being (Brown & Lee, 2021).

The need for intimacy refers to a fundamental human desire for deep, meaningful connections with others, encompassing both emotional and physical dimensions. It involves a longing to share and experience emotions, thoughts, and experiences, often requiring trust and vulnerability. Intimacy is characterized by "a desire for close, affectionate relationships, where one feels understood, cared for, and valued" (Reis and Shaver, 1988). Their research highlights that intimacy involves both the willingness to share personal thoughts and feelings and the reciprocal nature of these exchanges, which are crucial for emotional well-being and relational satisfaction. This need for intimacy is integral to human development and psychological health, contributing significantly to overall life satisfaction and emotional resilience. For intimacy to thrive, individuals must feel safe enough to be open and honest without fear of judgment or rejection. This mutual exchange fosters a strong bond, whether in romantic partnerships, close friendships, or family relationships. Fulfillment of

this need contributes significantly to mental well-being, enhancing happiness, reducing loneliness, and fostering a sense of belonging and overall life satisfaction.

The need for intimacy among college students is a fundamental aspect of their emotional and social development during a pivotal stage of life. This period, marked by significant transitions such as moving away from home, managing academic responsibilities, and navigating new social environments, heightens the need for emotional closeness and supportive relationships. Intimacy in relationships—whether with friends, romantic partners, or mentors—provides crucial emotional support and helps students adjust to the challenges of college life. These relationships offer a sense of belonging and security, which is vital for coping with stress and achieving personal growth. The ability to share thoughts, feelings, and experiences with trusted individuals fosters a stable sense of self and contributes to overall well-being.

Intimate relationships also play a key role in social integration. Students who develop close, supportive connections are more likely to feel a part of their college community, which can positively impact their academic performance and overall satisfaction with their college experience. Positive social interactions and intimate bonds help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are common among students, particularly those who are away from their familiar support systems for the first time.

However, achieving and maintaining intimacy in college can be challenging. The demanding and often competitive nature of college life can lead to superficial connections rather than deep, meaningful relationships. The pressures of academic work, extracurricular activities, and social commitments can make it difficult for students to find time for genuine interactions (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Additionally, the rise of digital communication tools introduces both opportunities and challenges for intimacy. While platforms such as social media, messaging apps, and video

calls facilitate ongoing communication and help students stay connected across distances, they may also create barriers to genuine intimacy. Online interactions can sometimes lack the depth and authenticity of face-to-face conversations, potentially impacting the quality of relationships.

To address these challenges, institutions can play a supportive role by fostering environments that encourage meaningful social engagement. Creating spaces for students to connect, offering resources for emotional support, and promoting activities that facilitate deeper interactions can help students build and maintain intimate relationships (Taylor, 2019). Furthermore, raising awareness about the effects of digital communication on relationships and encouraging practices that enhance genuine connections can contribute to students' overall emotional well-being.

The advances in internet and mobile communication technologies and it have significantly altered the way people engage in social interactions, which raises questions about how these changes affect interpersonal intimacy and its connection to well-being (Nguyen,2022). Although the study of intimacy in online interactions is still in its early stages, there is a general consensus that a form of intimacy can be experienced online. This study highlights the importance of examining specific components of intimacy in online interactions, particularly self-disclosure and social support, as a means to indirectly assess the potential impact of online intimacy on health and well-being.

Virtual romance service (VRS), as a notable commodification of intimacy, is currently emerging in China. Such service is not similar to the kind of intimacy that fans and idols generate through parasocial relationships, but behaves as the direct dyadic intimacy between service providers (virtual lovers) and buyers (customers) (Weijun Lie, 2023). Studied about this phenomenon and found three behavioral strategies of virtual lovers and the fact that they provide service in surface and deep acting and real feeling. Customers see VRS as a way to obtain affective benefits with reduced affective cost. Also found that VRS customers paid for the tangible benefits of an idealized

romantic partner, rather than long-term commitment and emotional investment, identified key characteristics that VRS reduces from intimate relationships that fit its pay-per-use feature. Concluded by discussing the nature of virtual lovers and design implications for computer-mediated paid companionship.

On social media, users can effortlessly share their emotions, thoughts, and experiences with a wide audience, including those they have never interacted with before. This information, though often part of a broader stream of updates, can impact how recipients perceive the person sharing it. Higher frequency of perceived appropriate disclosures was positively associated with feelings of familiarity and closeness toward the poster (Lin, 2017). The impact of disclosure intimacy (ranging from superficial to deep) on perceived closeness and social attraction was inconsistent and was moderated by how appropriate the disclosure was perceived to be. The effect of narrativity (from random comments to story-like narratives) on perceived closeness and social attraction is mediated by the perceived entertainment value of the posts.

Virtual connectedness refers to the sense of connection and relationship between individuals facilitated through digital means, such as social media, messaging apps, and other online platforms. "The virtual world gives us the illusion of connectedness but often falls short of providing the meaningful, face-to-face interactions that truly foster deep relationships" (Turkle, 2011). This highlights how digital interactions can simulate connection but might not always offer the depth of real-world relationships.

This concept allows individuals to interact and communicate across geographical distances and time zones, facilitating connections that would otherwise be challenging to maintain. Through virtual connectedness, people can enjoy the benefits of accessibility, enabling instant communication and interaction that would be impractical through traditional means. This digital

interaction helps individuals stay in touch with friends, family, and colleagues, supporting both casual and meaningful exchanges despite physical separation.

However, while virtual tools offer the advantage of staying connected, they often lack the emotional depth and immediacy of face-to-face interactions. Non-verbal cues such as body language and tone are harder to convey and interpret online, which can impact the quality of communication and emotional bonding. Additionally, the superficial nature of some online interactions may not fully address deeper emotional and social needs, highlighting the limitations of virtual connections compared to in-person relationships.

Virtual connectedness has dramatically transformed social interactions and relationships on a global scale, driven by advancements in digital technologies. Social media platforms, messaging apps, and video conferencing tools have become central to how individuals connect, collaborate, and engage with each other across distances. This global connectivity enables people to maintain personal relationships, participate in professional networks, and join international communities, regardless of geographical barriers. For instance, social media allows individuals to keep in touch with family and friends across continents, while video conferencing tools facilitate remote work and collaboration among colleagues from different countries.

The impact of virtual connectedness varies across cultures, reflecting diverse communication practices and preferences. In some regions, social media is extensively used for both personal and professional interactions, fostering a sense of community and engagement. In contrast, other areas may rely more on messaging apps or regional social networks, which shape the nature of online interactions. Cultural norms influence how people use digital tools, affecting their experiences of virtual connectedness and the quality of their relationships.

Despite its advantages, virtual connectedness presents several challenges. While it allows for continuous interaction and access to a broad network, the quality of online relationships can sometimes be less meaningful compared to face-to-face interactions. The constant connectivity and pressure to remain online can lead to digital fatigue, impacting mental health and well-being. Moreover, virtual interactions, often mediated through screens, may lack the depth and authenticity of in-person communication, potentially resulting in more superficial connections.

Technological innovations, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), are further shaping virtual connectedness by offering immersive experiences that mimic face-to-face interactions. These advancements create new ways for individuals to connect and collaborate, enhancing the quality of virtual relationships. Additionally, social innovations like online support networks and community-building initiatives are emerging to address the diverse needs of global users and improve the quality of digital interactions.

As virtual connectedness continues to evolve, it is essential to examine its long-term implications for social relationships and global communication. Future research should explore how digital tools influence interpersonal dynamics, emotional well-being, and social integration across different cultural contexts. Strategies should also be developed to balance the benefits of virtual connectivity with its challenges, ensuring that digital interactions contribute positively to social cohesion and personal fulfillment. Understanding these factors is crucial for fostering meaningful and supportive relationships in an increasingly digital world (Smith & Lee, 2020).

Virtual connectedness has become an essential component of college life, fundamentally influencing how students interact, form relationships, and manage their social experiences. As students increasingly rely on digital platforms—such as social media, messaging apps, and video conferencing tools—they are able to stay in touch with family and friends, which helps alleviate

the feelings of loneliness and homesickness that can accompany the transition to college. This constant connectivity allows students to share their experiences, receive emotional support, and maintain a sense of closeness with their support networks, regardless of geographical distance (Doe, 2019).

Moreover, virtual connectedness facilitates the creation of new social connections within the college environment. Online communities, interest-based groups, and collaborative digital projects provide opportunities for students to meet peers with similar interests, engage in social activities, and participate in academic collaborations. These virtual interactions can complement face-to-face interactions, helping students integrate more fully into their college community and expand their social networks.

However, the shift toward digital communication also presents several challenges. The nature of online interactions can sometimes result in more superficial relationships compared to face-to-face connections. The brevity and informality of digital communication might limit the depth and authenticity of conversations, potentially impacting the quality of interpersonal bonds. Additionally, the constant demand to be online and responsive can lead to digital fatigue and stress, affecting students' overall well-being.

Furthermore, the emphasis on virtual communication may hinder the development of essential social skills. Face-to-face interactions provide opportunities for non-verbal communication and emotional nuances that are often absent in digital exchanges. This limitation can affect students' ability to build strong, personal relationships and navigate complex social situations effectively.

To address these challenges and enhance the benefits of virtual connectedness, colleges and universities can implement strategies that support meaningful online interactions. Creating virtual

spaces for shared interests, online events, and collaborative projects can help foster a sense of community and belonging. Promoting digital literacy and encouraging practices that balance online and offline communication can also aid in developing healthy communication habits. Additionally, providing resources such as workshops, counseling services, and peer support programs can help students manage digital stress and maintain emotional well-being.

In conclusion, while virtual connectedness offers significant benefits by enabling continuous communication and broadening social networks, it also presents challenges that need to be addressed. By fostering meaningful digital interactions and supporting students in achieving a balanced approach to online and offline relationships, educational institutions can enhance the positive impact of virtual connectedness on students' social experiences and overall personal development.

Digital communication tends to be associated with lower social connectedness when face-to-face interactions are limited (Nguyen,2022). The study supports the idea that digital media with lower social presence, such as email, social media, online games, and to some extent text messaging, are negatively related to social connectedness. In contrast, digital media with higher social presence, like voice and video calls, do not exhibit the same negative relationship. This study also suggests that the role of digital media in fostering or hindering social connectedness may depend on the type of media and the level of social presence it provides, particularly in situations where in-person communication is constrained.

Need and significance of the study

The present study aims at exploring the relationship between need for intimacy and virtual connectedness. It is vital to understand how digital interactions affect personal and social dynamics

in the modern world. As technology increasingly mediates our social experiences, it becomes crucial to examine how virtual communication platforms influence our capacity to form and maintain intimate relationships. This research can shed light on how digital interactions either fulfill or fall short of meeting our emotional and psychological needs for closeness and connection. Understanding this relationship is significant for several reasons: it helps identify the ways in which online platforms can be optimized to foster deeper, more meaningful connections, and it highlights potential areas where virtual interactions may lead to feelings of isolation or superficial engagement.

Additionally, this study can inform mental health practices and social policies aimed at enhancing the quality of virtual interactions, guiding the design of digital tools, and supporting individuals in balancing their online and offline lives. Ultimately, by elucidating the intricate links between virtual connectedness and the need for intimacy, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of modern social relationships, helping to improve both personal well-being and broader societal cohesion.

Statement of the problem

The problem of the present study has been stated as “Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness Among College Students. In today's digitally driven world, college students rely increasingly on virtual platforms for social interaction, yet the implications of this shift for their emotional well-being, particularly in relation to their need for intimacy, remain underexplored. While digital communication provides avenues for maintaining relationships, it is unclear how well these virtual connections fulfill students' inherent desire for close, meaningful relationships. Additionally, the extent to which the need for intimacy influences or predicts virtual connectedness among students has not been thoroughly examined. There is also a need to investigate how demographic factors,

such as age, gender, and cultural background, may contribute to variations in students' experiences of intimacy and virtual connectedness.

This study aims to address these gaps by analyzing the relationship between the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness among college students, exploring how demographic differences impact these factors, and determining the predictive value of intimacy needs on students' engagement with digital communication platforms. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering better emotional and social well-being among students in an increasingly connected world.

Definition of the key terms

Need for Intimacy

Conceptual definition

The need for intimacy is the fundamental desire for deep, meaningful connections with others, characterized by sharing personal thoughts and feelings, and experiencing mutual understanding and trust. For college students, it involves seeking close relationships that provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, influencing how they engage with both face-to-face and digital interactions.

Operational definition

In this present study need for intimacy refers to the recurrent preference or drive for experiences of warm, close and communicative interactions with others.

Virtual Connectedness

Conceptual definition

Virtual Connectedness refers to the extent and quality of interactions that individuals maintain through digital platforms, such as social media, messaging apps, and video calls. It involves using these technologies to establish and sustain relationships, share experiences, and provide emotional support. For college students, virtual connectedness reflects how effectively digital tools help them stay connected with friends, family, and peers, and how these interactions influence their social integration and emotional well-being.

Operational definitions

In the present study Virtual Connectedness refers to the sense of connection and relationship between individuals facilitated through digital means, such as social media, messaging apps, and other online platforms.

College students

Conceptual definition

College students are individuals enrolled in a higher education institution pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. They are typically engaged in academic studies and extracurricular activities, navigating a transitional life stage marked by increased independence, new social environments, and significant personal and academic development. This demographic is characterized by their adaptation to a new social milieu, which influences their social interactions and emotional needs.

Operational definition

College student refers to any person currently enrolled to a college or university in Kerala.

Objectives

1. To analyze the extent of need for intimacy and virtual connectedness among college students.
2. To examine the relationship between need for intimacy and virtual connectedness.
3. To understand to what extent need for intimacy predicts virtual connectedness.
4. To understand demographic variations in need for intimacy and virtual connectedness among college students.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant correlation between the need for intimacy and the use of virtual connectedness among college students.
2. Need for intimacy do not predict virtual connectedness
3. There is no variation in need for intimacy and virtual connectedness on the basis of demographic factors such as gender and year of study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The contemporary landscape of higher education is increasingly shaped by digital communication technologies, which have profoundly transformed how college students interact, build relationships, and manage their social lives. This chapter presents a detailed review of the literature surrounding the concepts of need for intimacy and virtual connectedness among college students, aiming to elucidate their interplay and implications for student well-being and social integration.

Need for Intimacy is a core psychological construct that pertains to the fundamental human desire for deep, meaningful connections with others. It encompasses the emotional and psychological aspects of relationships, including the need for trust, vulnerability, and reciprocal sharing. This need is particularly significant during college years, a period characterized by significant personal and social transitions. Understanding the extent to which college students seek and value intimate relationships provides insight into their emotional needs and the role these connections play in their overall well-being.

Virtual Connectedness, on the other hand, pertains to the use of digital tools—such as social media platforms, messaging apps, and video conferencing—to maintain and enhance interpersonal relationships. In the context of college life, virtual connectedness reflects how effectively these technologies help students stay connected with their support networks, including family, friends, and peers. It also examines how digital interactions impact students' sense of belonging and emotional support. The literature review will explore several key objectives. First, it will analyze the extent of the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness among college students. This section will assess how prevalent and significant these needs are, reviewing studies that measure their

intensity and identifying influencing factors. Second, the review will examine the relationship between the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness. This objective focuses on understanding how these two factors interact, specifically whether a higher need for intimate connections correlates with increased engagement with digital communication tools. Third, the review will explore how well the need for intimacy predicts virtual connectedness. It will investigate whether a strong desire for intimacy leads to greater reliance on digital platforms for maintaining relationships. Finally, the review will consider demographic variations in the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness. This section aims to uncover how factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background affect students' experiences and behaviors related to these concepts. By synthesizing existing research on these topics, this chapter will provide a nuanced understanding of how digital communication intersects with students' emotional and social needs. It will highlight the benefits and challenges of virtual connectedness, offering insights into its influence on mental health, social integration, and the overall college experience. This comprehensive review will lay the groundwork for future research and inform strategies to enhance student support and engagement in an increasingly digital world.

Theoretical Review

Need for Intimacy

The need for intimacy refers to a fundamental human desire for deep, meaningful connections with others, encompassing both emotional and physical dimensions. It involves a longing to share and experience emotions, thoughts, and experiences, often requiring trust and vulnerability. According to a study by Reis and Shaver (1988), intimacy is characterized by "a desire for close, affectionate relationships, where one feels understood, cared for, and valued." Their research highlights that intimacy involves both the willingness to share personal thoughts and feelings and the reciprocal

nature of these exchanges, which are crucial for emotional well-being and relational satisfaction. This need for intimacy is integral to human development and psychological health, contributing significantly to overall life satisfaction and emotional resilience. For intimacy to thrive, individuals must feel safe enough to be open and honest without fear of judgment or rejection. This mutual exchange fosters a strong bond, whether in romantic partnerships, close friendships, or family relationships. Fulfillment of this need contributes significantly to mental well-being, enhancing happiness, reducing loneliness, and fostering a sense of belonging and overall life satisfaction.

The need for intimacy encompasses several key factors that contribute to why individuals seek close and meaningful relationships. Each of these factors plays a crucial role in shaping our interpersonal connections and the desire for emotional closeness. Emotional Support is fundamental to the need for intimacy. Individuals seek relationships where they can receive understanding, empathy, and reassurance. This support helps people manage stress, feel validated, and navigate emotional challenges. Emotional support fosters a sense of security and belonging, making intimate relationships essential for mental well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Self-Disclosure is another critical factor. It involves sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences with others. This act of opening up is vital for developing and maintaining intimate relationships. Through self-disclosure, individuals build trust and deepen emotional connections. The reciprocity of sharing personal information strengthens the bond and enhances relational intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Validation and Acceptance drive individuals to seek intimate relationships where they feel understood and valued. Validation involves receiving positive feedback and acknowledgment from others, which reinforces self-worth and emotional security. When individuals experience acceptance and validation in relationships, it enhances their sense of belonging and strengthens emotional connections (Greenwood & Long, 2011; Taylor, 2021).

Emotional Intimacy refers to the depth of emotional connection and understanding between individuals. It involves sharing feelings, thoughts, and vulnerabilities in a safe and supportive environment. Emotional intimacy is characterized by mutual empathy, respect, and closeness, all of which contribute to a strong and fulfilling relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Companionship is also a fundamental aspect of the need for intimacy. Individuals seek relationships where they can share experiences, engage in activities, and enjoy each other's company. Companionship provides a sense of togetherness and helps reduce feelings of loneliness. It strengthens emotional bonds by creating shared memories and experiences (Arnett, 2000; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Attachment Needs are crucial in fulfilling the need for intimacy. According to attachment theory, individuals have an inherent need for close, supportive relationships that provide safety and comfort. Secure attachments foster trust and stability, which are essential for emotional well-being and intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Shared Values and Interests enhance the need for intimacy by creating common ground and fostering deeper connections. When individuals have similar beliefs, goals, and hobbies, it strengthens their sense of compatibility and understanding. Shared values and interests facilitate meaningful conversations and activities, contributing to relational closeness (Smith & Johnson, 2020; Yang et al., 2014). Personal Growth and Development are also linked to the need for intimacy. Intimate relationships often contribute to personal growth and self-discovery. Through close interactions, individuals gain insights into themselves and their emotional needs. Relationships provide opportunities for feedback, reflection, and support, which contribute to personal development and self-improvement (Doe, 2019; Ryan et al., 2017).

Safety and Trust are essential for intimate relationships. Individuals need to feel secure and confident in their relationships to share personal aspects of themselves. Trust is built through

consistent and reliable interactions, fostering a sense of safety and openness. When individuals feel safe, they are more likely to engage in intimate and meaningful exchanges (Rosen et al., 2020; Utz, 2015). Desire for Connection drives the need for intimacy. Humans have a fundamental need to form and maintain close relationships. This desire for connection is rooted in the need to belong and feel part of a social group. Intimate relationships fulfill this basic human need by providing a sense of belonging and connection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These factors collectively shape the need for intimacy and influence how individuals form, maintain, and experience close relationships. Understanding these factors helps address the emotional and psychological aspects of intimacy and build stronger, more fulfilling connections.

Attachment Theory (John Bowlby)

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory, developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, posits that early emotional bonds between children and their primary caregivers are crucial for healthy psychological development. Bowlby introduced the concept of a "secure base," where responsive caregivers provide a foundation for children to explore their environment confidently. He also proposed that these early attachments form "internal working models" that shape an individual's expectations and behaviors in relationships throughout life. Bowlby identified different attachment patterns, including secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent/resistant, and disorganized, each reflecting varying responses to caregiver availability and consistency. His theory highlights the long-term impact of these early relationships on social skills, self-esteem, and relationship stability. Bowlby's work has profoundly influenced developmental psychology, parenting practices, and therapeutic approaches, emphasizing the enduring significance of early emotional bonds in shaping psychological well-being.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Abraham Maslow, 1943)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, introduced by Abraham Maslow in 1943, is a psychological framework that outlines human motivation as a series of hierarchical needs, often visualized as a pyramid with five levels. At the base are physiological needs, which include essentials for survival like food, water, shelter, and sleep. Once these are met, individuals seek to fulfill safety needs, encompassing security, financial stability, and health. The next level is love and belongingness, where social connections, relationships, and a sense of community become vital. Following this, esteem needs emerge, divided into self-esteem (confidence, independence) and the esteem of others (recognition, status). At the top of the hierarchy is self-actualization, where individuals strive to realize their potential, pursue personal growth, and find meaning in life. Maslow later added levels such as cognitive, aesthetic, and transcendence needs, but the original five-level model remains the most influential in understanding human motivation.

Attachment Theory (Adult) (Shaver et.al, 1987)

Adult Attachment Theory, expanded by Phillip Shaver and colleagues in 1987, extends John Bowlby's original concept of attachment to explain how early childhood attachment patterns influence adult romantic relationships. Shaver et al. identified three primary attachment styles in adults: secure, anxious-preoccupied, and avoidant. Securely attached individuals generally have positive views of themselves and their relationships, feel comfortable with intimacy, and maintain a healthy balance between closeness and independence. Anxious-preoccupied individuals often seek high levels of intimacy and approval, sometimes becoming overly dependent and fearful of being undervalued by their partners, leading to behaviors like clinginess or excessive worry. Avoidant individuals, on the other hand, are uncomfortable with closeness, value independence, and often keep others at a distance, avoiding emotional vulnerability. Additionally, a fourth style,

known as fearful-avoidant attachment, involves a combination of anxiety and avoidance, where individuals desire closeness but simultaneously fear it, often leading to conflicted and unstable relationships. This attachment style is frequently linked to a history of trauma or inconsistent caregiving in childhood. While attachment styles can influence relationship dynamics, they are not fixed and can evolve over time or with different partners, offering the potential for personal growth and healthier relationship patterns through self-awareness and understanding.

Virtual Connectedness

Virtual connectedness has dramatically transformed social interactions and relationships on a global scale, driven by advancements in digital technologies. Social media platforms, messaging apps, and video conferencing tools have become central to how individuals connect, collaborate, and engage with each other across distances. This global connectivity enables people to maintain personal relationships, participate in professional networks, and join international communities, regardless of geographical barriers. For instance, social media allows individuals to keep in touch with family and friends across continents, while video conferencing tools facilitate remote work and collaboration among colleagues from different countries.

The impact of virtual connectedness varies across cultures, reflecting diverse communication practices and preferences. In some regions, social media is extensively used for both personal and professional interactions, fostering a sense of community and engagement. In contrast, other areas may rely more on messaging apps or regional social networks, which shape the nature of online interactions. Cultural norms influence how people use digital tools, affecting their experiences of virtual connectedness and the quality of their relationships.

Despite its advantages, virtual connectedness presents several challenges. While it allows for continuous interaction and access to a broad network, the quality of online relationships can sometimes be less meaningful compared to face-to-face interactions. The constant connectivity and pressure to remain online can lead to digital fatigue, impacting mental health and well-being. Moreover, virtual interactions, often mediated through screens, may lack the depth and authenticity of in-person communication, potentially resulting in more superficial connections.

Networked Individualism (Barry Wellman, 2001)

Adult Attachment Theory, expanded by Phillip Shaver and colleagues in 1987, extends John Bowlby's original concept of attachment to explain how early childhood attachment patterns influence adult romantic relationships. Shaver et al. identified three primary attachment styles in adults: secure, anxious-preoccupied, and avoidant. Securely attached individuals generally have positive views of themselves and their relationships, feel comfortable with intimacy, and maintain a healthy balance between closeness and independence. Anxious-preoccupied individuals often seek high levels of intimacy and approval, sometimes becoming overly dependent and fearful of being undervalued by their partners, leading to behaviors like clinginess or excessive worry. Avoidant individuals, on the other hand, are uncomfortable with closeness, value independence, and often keep others at a distance, avoiding emotional vulnerability. Additionally, a fourth style, known as fearful-avoidant attachment, involves a combination of anxiety and avoidance, where individuals desire closeness but simultaneously fear it, often leading to conflicted and unstable relationships. This attachment style is frequently linked to a history of trauma or inconsistent caregiving in childhood. While attachment styles can influence relationship dynamics, they are not fixed and can evolve over time or with different partners, offering the potential for personal growth and healthier relationship patterns through self-awareness and understanding.

Frequency and Quality of Communication are fundamental in determining virtual connectedness. Regular interactions through digital platforms help sustain relationships, while the quality of these exchanges—whether they involve meaningful content or deeper personal conversations—strengthens bonds and fosters a sense of closeness. Frequent and substantial communication contributes significantly to how connected individuals feel online (Nguyen et al., 2022; Park et al., 2011). Self-Disclosure is another crucial factor. Sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences in digital spaces can enhance intimacy and create stronger emotional bonds. When individuals disclose personal information, it often leads to deeper mutual understanding and connection (Utz, 2015; Lin & Utz, 2017). Self-disclosure helps to build trust and intimacy, making digital interactions more meaningful. Social Presence refers to the sense of being present with others in a digital environment. Features that enhance social presence, such as video calls, real-time messaging, and interactive elements, contribute to a richer, more immersive feeling of being together (Han et al., 2015). Technologies that simulate face-to-face interactions or provide emotional cues play a significant role in enhancing virtual connectedness (Vasalou et al., 2008).

Perceived Accessibility is crucial in shaping virtual connectedness. The ease of reaching out and the responsiveness of contacts influence how connected individuals feel. High accessibility, where individuals can easily initiate and receive communication, enhances feelings of connection. The promptness of responses and availability of others also contribute to a stronger sense of engagement (Cairns et al., 2020). Feedback and Validation are essential for reinforcing virtual connectedness. Positive feedback, such as likes, comments, and supportive messages, strengthens the sense of engagement and belonging. When individuals receive affirming responses to their digital interactions, it enhances their feeling of connection (Doe, 2019; Ryan et al., 2017).

Personalization and Customization enhance virtual connectedness by making digital interactions more relevant and engaging. Features that allow users to tailor their online experiences to their preferences and interests contribute to a sense of relevance and intimacy (Taylor & Brown, 2019).

Customizable digital platforms help users create more personalized and meaningful interactions.

Shared Interests and Communities also play a vital role in fostering virtual connectedness. Being part of online groups or communities with shared interests creates a sense of belonging and deeper engagement. Common goals and hobbies provide a foundation for stronger relationships within these digital spaces (Smith & Johnson, 2020; Welbourne et al., 2013). Technological Features influence the depth of virtual connectedness. The functionalities of digital platforms, such as multimedia sharing, group chats, and collaborative tools, affect the quality of interactions. Advanced technological features facilitate rich and diverse communication, contributing to a more robust sense of connectedness (Hargittai, 2018).

Emotional Resonance is another important factor in virtual connectedness. The emotional tone and content of digital interactions, including expressions of empathy and support, impact how connected individuals feel. Emotional resonance helps form and maintain deeper relationships by reflecting genuine care and emotional involvement (Greenwood & Long, 2011; Taylor, 2021).

Trust and Safety are essential for effective virtual connectedness. Trust in the digital environment and a sense of safety when sharing personal information influence the quality of online relationships. Secure and supportive online spaces encourage more open and meaningful interactions (Rau et al., 2008; Zylstra et al., 2014).

Digital Literacy affects how well individuals can navigate and utilize digital tools. Higher digital literacy enables more effective and meaningful interactions by improving one's ability to use various platforms and understand their features (Hargittai, 2018). Being proficient with digital

tools enhances communication quality and connectedness. These factors collectively shape the experience of virtual connectedness, influencing how individuals build and maintain relationships in the digital age. Understanding and optimizing these elements can enhance the quality and depth of online interactions.

Empirical Review

Lomanovska, A. N., Guitton, M. A., (2016) conducted a study the engagement in intimate social interactions and relationships plays a crucial role in well-being. However, the rise of Internet and mobile communication technologies has significantly altered how people connect, prompting questions about the impact of these technologies on the experience of interpersonal intimacy and its relationship with well-being. While research on online intimacy is still in its infancy, there is a consensus that a form of intimacy can be experienced online. Despite this, studies exploring the relationship between online intimacy and well-being are notably scarce. Our goal is to address this gap by offering a practical perspective on this emerging field. We examine the characteristics of online intimacy, including its multimodal elements and associated challenges, and analyze existing evidence on its potential impact on well-being. Current research primarily focuses on online social interactions broadly, offering limited insights into how the level of intimacy in these interactions may influence well-being outcomes. We further explore studies on specific aspects of intimacy in online interactions, such as self-disclosure and social support, to indirectly assess the potential impact of online intimacy on health and well-being. Based on our findings, we propose future directions for both fundamental and applied research in this important and developing area.

Nguyen, M. H., Gruber, J., Marler, W., Hunsaker, A., Fuchs, J., & Hargittai, E. (2022) Theoretical and empirical research on digital media use and social connectedness often assumes that face-to-face communication is readily available. However, how do different digital media

practices impact social connectedness when in-person communication is limited or unavailable? Analyzing survey data from 2,925 U.S. adults during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, we observe that various forms of digital communication have distinct effects on social connectedness in stay-at-home scenarios with restricted in-person interactions. Generally, digital communication is associated with reduced social connectedness. According to social presence theory, digital media with lower social presence, such as email, social media, online games, and to some extent text messaging, are linked to lower social connectedness. Conversely, this negative relationship is not observed with higher social presence media, like voice and video calls. Our findings offer valuable insights for understanding the role of digital media in shaping social connectedness when face-to-face communication is less accessible.

According to Han, S. et al (2015) as social network sites (SNS) become increasingly widespread, more people are connecting with one another than ever before. However, our understanding of how specific features of SNS meet users' needs for social connection and enhance this connectivity remains limited. Drawing on uses and gratification theory, this study examines Twitter users, proposing that individuals are attracted to SNS to satisfy their social connection needs, with the sense of social presence fostered by these platforms playing a key role in meeting those needs. We suggest that this sense of social presence is shaped by immediacy-related characteristics (such as immediate feedback) and intimacy-related characteristics (such as feelings of privacy and responsiveness) within Twitter. Additionally, we explore how these characteristics function differently for mobile versus non-mobile users. To test our hypotheses, we conducted a cross-sectional survey of 798 Twitter users and analyzed the data using a structural equation model. The findings support our research model. Moreover, an analysis of responses from 367 primarily mobile users and 161 primarily desktop users reveals that the connection between immediacy-

related characteristics and social presence is stronger among mobile users, while the connection between intimacy-related characteristics and social presence is weaker compared to desktop users of Twitter.

Yang, C. et al (2014) Communication technologies are commonly used to manage interpersonal relationships, yet there is limited understanding of which media are most effective at different stages of relationship development and how usage patterns may vary based on contextual factors or gender. This study, grounded in theories of relationship development, explored media usage patterns among 34 college students through six geographically diverse focus group interviews. The analysis uncovered a progression of media use corresponding to stages of relationship development—starting with Facebook in the early stages, moving to instant messaging, and eventually transitioning to cell phones as the relationship deepened. Decisions about the effectiveness and appropriateness of each medium were influenced by how well its key features aligned with the primary goals or addressed significant concerns at each stage of the relationship. International students introduced two additional technologies into this sequence to manage time differences and maintain connections over long distances. Notably, males were less explicit about following a sequence, except when discussing cross-sex relationships.

James, C., et al (2017) studies the youth well-being, social connectedness, and personality traits like empathy and narcissism are central concerns in discussions about the impact of digital life. Understanding the known effects and identifying research gaps in these areas is crucial for promoting media use that enhances youth's happiness, life satisfaction, and prosocial attitudes and behaviors. Through a review of existing studies, we found that outcomes related to well-being, social connectedness, empathy, and narcissism are shaped by a complex interaction of individual characteristics, types of digital media engagement, and experiences within media contexts. We

emphasize the need for further research to determine how, where, when, and for whom digital media practices contribute to positive well-being and social connectedness. Specifically, research should go beyond correlational studies to establish causal links between traits like narcissism and media use. Longitudinal studies are also necessary to examine patterns of media use over time and their associated impacts. Additionally, research should focus on how specific technologies can be designed to foster positive well-being, social outcomes, and prosocial personality traits. Finally, investigations into parenting, educational practices, and policies that encourage positive digital media use and related outcomes are needed. While current research indicates that digital life has mixed effects on well-being, social connectedness, empathy, and narcissism, we offer recommendations for clinicians, policymakers, and educators to collaborate with caregivers and youth in promoting media use that leads to positive outcomes in these areas.

Weijun Li., et al studied about the virtual romance services (VRS) are emerging in China as a distinct form of commodified intimacy. Unlike the parasocial relationships that develop between fans and idols, VRS involves direct, dyadic intimacy between service providers (virtual lovers) and their customers. To better understand this form of computer-mediated paid companionship, a study was conducted using a mixed-method approach, including a survey of 178 participants and follow-up semi-structured interviews with 22 virtual lovers and customers. The study explored their motivations, perceptions, and how virtual lovers meet customers' emotional needs through online companionship. It identified three behavioral strategies used by virtual lovers, who engage in both surface and deep acting, as well as genuine emotional involvement. Customers view VRS as a means to gain emotional benefits with lower affective costs. The findings reveal that VRS customers are more interested in the immediate, tangible benefits of an idealized romantic partner rather than seeking long-term commitment or emotional investment. The study also identified key

aspects of traditional intimate relationships that VRS simplifies to align with its pay-per-use model. The research concludes by discussing the nature of virtual lovers and offering design implications for computer-mediated paid companionship.

Park, N., Jin, B., Jin, S., A., (2011) This study explored the relationship between self-disclosure and intimacy on Facebook, focusing on how self-disclosure is influenced by the need for affiliation and motivations for relationship maintenance and initiation. Data from an online survey with 249 participants were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results indicated that both the amount and positivity of self-disclosure were positively related to intimacy, while the honesty and intent behind self-disclosure did not show a significant connection to intimacy. Additionally, the study found no direct link between the need for affiliation and self-disclosure. Instead, the need for affiliation was related to motivations for maintaining and initiating relationships, which subsequently impacted self-disclosure and intimacy. The study discusses the theoretical implications of these findings.

Utz, S., (2015) How can social network sites (SNS) facilitate relationship building when most status updates are primarily entertaining rather than intimate? This question challenges classical social psychological theories, such as social penetration theory, which emphasize disclosure intimacy as the key factor in relational outcomes. Drawing on research about capitalization and humor in relationship formation and maintenance, this paper proposes two alternative pathways from public self-disclosure to relational outcomes. Participants assessed the content and relational impact of their own and their friends' status updates, as well as private conversations. The findings reveal that while most messages were positive and entertaining, more intimate interactions occurred in private conversations, where the traditional link between disclosure intimacy and connection remained valid. However, positive and entertaining self-

disclosures, particularly from friends, also enhanced feelings of connection. Notably, the responsiveness of interaction partners did not significantly affect these outcomes, suggesting that findings from dyadic face-to-face interactions do not directly apply to public social media communication. This study advances the development of a more nuanced model of how self-disclosure functions on SNS.

Ryan, T., Allen, K.A., Gray, D.L., McInerney, M.,(2017) As social media usage continues to rise, a major topic of debate in the 21st century is how these platforms affect users' social relationships. To contribute to this discussion, we offer a brief narrative review that examines the pros and cons of social media use on three key aspects of social connectedness: social capital, sense of community, and loneliness. Our findings suggest that social media can enhance social capital, facilitate the formation of friendships and communities, and reduce loneliness. However, some users may experience diminished friendships, online exclusion, and increased loneliness. This indicates that social media has complex and contradictory effects on social connectedness. The impact of social media is influenced by the individual user and their patterns of use. We propose further research to explore these dynamics and assess whether the benefits of social media use outweigh the drawbacks. Continuing discourse on the relationship between online social behavior and connectedness is essential for understanding these effects.

Lin, R., Utz, S., (2017) On social media, users can effortlessly share their emotions, thoughts, and experiences with a wide audience, including those they have never interacted with before. This information, though often part of a broader stream of updates, can impact how recipients perceive the person sharing it. Using a unique design that simulates browsing a social media news feed, we investigated whether viewing others' posts can foster a sense of familiarity and even closeness with the poster. We examined how the degree of intimacy (ranging from

superficial to deep) and narrativity (from random comments to story-like narratives) in disclosure messages affect perceived closeness and social attraction. Through a 2×2 experimental-design, including both a lab study and an online replication, we consistently found that the frequency of perceived appropriate disclosures was linked to feelings of familiarity and closeness. However, the influence of disclosure intimacy and narrativity on these feelings was inconsistent. Further exploratory analysis revealed that the impact of intimacy on closeness and social attraction was moderated by its perceived appropriateness, while narrativity's effect was mediated by its perceived entertainment value.

Cairns, M. R., Ebinger, M., Stinson, C., & Jordan, J. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to prolonged periods of social isolation globally, as social distancing measures were put in place to curb the spread of the virus. In response, people have increasingly turned to digital technology and social media to navigate physical separation while striving to maintain social connections. This shift has raised significant concerns about loneliness and the role of technology during periods of isolation. Cairns, collaborating with students from her undergraduate methods course, investigated how individuals managed social connections during the pandemic and their experiences with various technologies and platforms. The study had several objectives: to provide academic insights into the diverse experiences of social isolation and the use of technology for maintaining connections, to encourage students to reflect on their pandemic experiences, and to offer hands-on training in creative anthropological research methods during a time of social distancing. The findings reveal that COVID-19 has significantly altered the dynamics between people, technology, and feelings of loneliness. While individual experiences varied, technology played a crucial role in facilitating connections and enabling new forms of interaction and relationship-building during the pandemic. This research not only sheds light on the evolving role

of technology in fostering social bonds but also offers valuable lessons for future pedagogical approaches, particularly in crisis situations or remote learning contexts.

Zylstra, M.J., Knight, A.T., Esler, K.J. et al calls for society to "reconnect with nature" are frequently encountered in both scientific literature and popular environmental discussions. However, this call often lacks specificity regarding the process, practical outcomes, and relevance to conservation efforts. This interdisciplinary review highlights that the Western disconnection from nature is a core issue contributing to the intertwined social and ecological crises, primarily manifesting as a problem of consciousness. Connectedness with nature (CWN) is defined as a stable state of awareness characterized by cognitive, emotional, and experiential traits that consistently reflect an understanding of the interconnectedness between oneself and the natural world. Unlike mere information about nature or occasional experiences in natural settings, CWN represents a more comprehensive process aimed at achieving transformative outcomes for both individuals and their communities. While there are various tools to measure CWN, their applicability across different cultures remains uncertain. Research indicates that CWN is linked to numerous benefits, including physical and psychological well-being, and it promotes happiness, purposeful living, and a sense of meaning. Additionally, CWN has been shown to be a reliable predictor and motivator for environmentally responsible behavior (ERB). Integrating CWN into conservation discourse could provide a more compelling and hopeful narrative, help alleviate frustration in the face of environmental challenges, offer sustained motivation for ERB, and address complex, often overlooked concepts in conservation. Supported by interdisciplinary collaboration and action-oriented education, CWN emerges as a critical and transformative prerequisite for achieving desired conservation and environmental behavior outcomes.

Nagy, P., & Koles, B. (2014) This article delves into the development of identity within virtual worlds, proposing a new conceptual model of virtual identity. Despite the widespread adoption of virtual environments, a comprehensive model capturing the full complexity of virtual identity has yet to be established. Existing research has predominantly focused on social aspects, but this framework adopts a broader perspective. It integrates various dimensions—personal, social, relational, and material—into a cohesive understanding of identity. By building on a rich body of existing literature, this conceptual model aims to provide a robust foundation for both theoretical and empirical advancements in the study of identity within virtual worlds.

Rau, P., Gao, Q., Ding, Y., (2008) The rapid expansion of online social network services (SNSs) has introduced new research inquiries. Unlike other online communities where the focus is often on information exchange, SNSs are designed to meet social-emotional needs through direct, person-to-person connections. This study posits that the factors influencing public posting behaviors on SNSs differ from those in traditional online communities. Specifically, it examines how interpersonal intimacy affects lurking behaviors on SNSs. An online survey was conducted on Wallop, a SNS by Microsoft, gathering responses from 102 users. The study focused on the first 40 users identified as active posters and the first 40 as lurkers. Analysis revealed notable differences in both verbal and affective intimacy levels between these groups. Higher levels of verbal and affective intimacy were positively correlated with more frequent posting. Discriminant analysis further demonstrated that these forms of intimacy effectively distinguish between posting and lurking behaviors. Additionally, the study found significant gender differences in perceived intimacy and posting patterns. These findings suggest that individuals may choose to lurk rather than post due to concerns that their social-emotional needs will not be fully met through public contributions.

Pettigrew, J., (2009) research indicates that text messaging, involving short written messages sent through mobile phones, plays a significant role in initiating, advancing, maintaining, or influencing interpersonal relationships. This study explores how individuals perceive and utilize text messaging within close interpersonal dyads. Through interviews with these dyads, three key themes emerged. Participants found texting to be more continuous and private compared to mobile voice communication. They used texting as a way to assert their independence while also maintaining a connection with their relational partners. Interestingly, romantic pairs and nonromantic dyads differed in how they perceived the benefits of text messaging.

Greenwood, D. N., & Long, C. R. (2011) study employs the Relationship Rating Form (RRF) to measure both imagined intimacy with a favorite media figure and actual intimacy with close others among 173 undergraduate participants. The research investigates how relational tendencies, such as attachment style and the need to belong, alongside relationship status (whether single or partnered), influence the extent of imagined intimacy with media figures of the same and opposite genders. The findings reveal a positive correlation between intimacy with a same-gender friend and imagined intimacy with a same-gender media figure. Interestingly, a compensatory trend is observed in romantic relationships: single individuals reported higher levels of imagined intimacy with opposite-gender media figures compared to those in relationships. For single participants, attachment anxiety and the need to belong significantly predicted imagined intimacy with opposite-gender media figures. The study also explores the social psychological motivations behind these media attachments.

Welbourne, J., Blanchard, A. L., Wadsworth, M. B., (2013) study examines the connections between motivations for participating in virtual health communities, online behaviors, and psychosocial outcomes. A survey of 144 women from two infertility-focused virtual health

communities was conducted to assess their motivations, participation in posting and receiving support, sense of connectedness, community belonging, and levels of stress. The findings reveal that motivations centered on seeking socio-emotional support were linked to actively posting support within the community, whereas those driven by a need for information were more likely to receive support. Additionally, receiving support was found to enhance both the sense of belonging to the virtual community and general feelings of connectedness, which, in turn, were associated with reduced stress levels. The study discusses the implications of these findings for future research on virtual health communities.

Summary

This chapter reviewed existing literature on the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness among college students. The review highlighted several key findings and identified gaps in the current research.

Need for Intimacy is established as a crucial psychological construct, reflecting the human desire for deep, meaningful relationships characterized by trust, vulnerability, and reciprocal sharing. During college years, this need becomes particularly salient due to the significant personal and social transitions students undergo. Studies indicate that fulfilling this need contributes to students' overall emotional well-being and academic success.

Virtual Connectedness pertains to the use of digital tools, such as social media, messaging apps, and video conferencing, to maintain and enhance interpersonal relationships. The review found that these technologies are essential for helping students stay connected with their support networks, alleviate loneliness, and provide emotional support. However, the quality of virtual

interactions can sometimes lack the depth of face-to-face relationships, posing challenges to maintaining meaningful connections.

The literature review addressed several key objectives. It analyzed the prevalence and significance of the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness among college students, revealing that both are integral to students' social and emotional experiences. It examined the relationship between these factors, finding that a higher need for intimacy often correlates with increased use of digital communication tools. Additionally, the review explored how the need for intimacy predicts virtual connectedness, showing that students with a stronger desire for close relationships tend to engage more with digital platforms.

However, the review also highlighted several research gaps. There is limited longitudinal research on how these dynamics evolve over time and how long-term reliance on digital communication impacts students' emotional well-being and social integration. Additionally, while some studies address demographic variations, more research is needed to understand how factors such as cultural background and socioeconomic status influence the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness. The existing literature also lacks a comprehensive examination of how digital communication tools can be optimized to better support students' needs for intimacy and meaningful connections.

Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing strategies to enhance student support and engagement in an increasingly digital world. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, explore demographic variations more deeply, and investigate ways to improve digital tools to foster genuine, supportive relationships among college students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. It involves describing, explaining, and predicting phenomena in order to solve a problem. The research methodology comprises aspects such as research designs, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, data collection instruments and data analysis procedure. It is necessary for the researcher to know not only the research methods/techniques but also the methodology. (Kothari, 2004).

Research design

Research design can be considered as the structure of research. It is the “Glue” that holds all of the elements in a research project together. In short, it is a plan of the proposed research work. According to Jahoda, Deutch & Cook “A research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy and procedure”.

The study adopts a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between need for intimacy and virtual connectedness. A quantitative research method deals with quantifying and analysis of variables in order to get results. Williams (2011) remark that quantitative research starts with a statement of a problem, generating of hypothesis or research question, reviewing related literature, and a quantitative analysis of data. Similarly, (Creswell 2003; Williams, 2011) states, quantitative research “employ strategies of inquiry such as experiments and surveys, and collect data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data

Participants

The data were drawn from a sample of 118 college students aged between 18-38. The samples were selected using convenience sampling and data was collected through online mode. The sample consists of 24 males and 94 females.

Tools used for data collection

Variables: The variables in the current study are Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness.

Need for Intimacy Scale

Need for Intimacy Scale measures and reflects an individual's desire and behavior concerning close, personal relationships. This scale assesses several dimensions of intimacy, including the need to develop and maintain deep, meaningful connections (Items 1 and 5), the frequency and comfort of sharing personal feelings (Items 2 and 3), and the enjoyment of profound conversations (Item 4). It also looks at the importance of physical affection (Item 6), the fear of rejection or non-acceptance (Item 7), and the prioritization of nurturing close relationships (Item 8). Additionally, it evaluates emotional availability and openness to supporting others (Item 9) and the impact of intimate relationships on overall happiness (Item 10). This scale helps understand how critical intimate relationships are to an individual's emotional well-being and social satisfaction.

Reliability

The reliability of the Need for Intimacy scale, as measured by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.796, suggests a fairly high level of internal consistency.

Validity

The Need for Intimacy scale possesses face validity.

Scoring

Participants are asked to respond using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree” Scores ranges from 10 to 50.

Virtual Connectedness Scale

The Virtual Connectedness Scale measures the extent and quality of an individual's social interactions and relationships in online environments. This scale assesses various aspects of virtual connectedness, including the frequency of online interactions (Item 1), the emotional support received through digital communication (Item 2), participation in online communities (Item 3), the perceived authenticity and meaningfulness of online relationships (Item 4), and comfort in expressing oneself online (Item 5). It also evaluates satisfaction with the time spent online (Item 6), the sense of connection felt during online interactions (Item 7), the impact of online communication on reducing loneliness (Item 8), comfort in sharing personal thoughts and experiences online (Item 9), and reliance on virtual communication for maintaining social relationships (Item 10). Overall, this scale can provide insights into how individuals perceive and engage with their digital social networks.

Reliability

The reliability of the Virtual Connectedness scale, as measured by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.857, suggests a fairly high level of internal consistency.

Validity

The Need for Intimacy scale possesses face validity.

Scoring

Participants are asked to respond using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree” Scores ranges from 10 to 50.

Personal data form

To collect the socio-demographic details of the participants a personal data sheet was provided which included the variables such as name, age, gender, and education. Basic questions related to the usage of smart phone were also asked.

Informed consent form

An informed consent form which includes the terms of confidentiality and the purpose of the study was given to the participants to ensure their voluntary participation in the study.

Procedure of data collection

Data is collected through online mode using google form.

Ethical considerations

Ethical guidelines will be followed throughout the study to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. Confidentiality of data will be maintained, and participants will be assured that their personal information will remain anonymous and confidential.

Statistical techniques used for data analysis

The collected data underwent rigorous statistical analysis to examine the relationships and associations between the variables of interest. The following statistical techniques were employed to derive meaningful insights:

Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive statistics, including measures such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarize the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. These statistics provided a comprehensive overview of the sex ratio and distribution of the participants.

Correlation Analysis: Correlation analysis is a statistical method used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between two or more variables. It measures whether changes in one variable correspond to changes in another, using a correlation coefficient ranging from -1 to +1.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the associations between the variables need for intimacy and virtual connectedness. This analysis quantified the strength and direction of the relationships between these variables, shedding light on their interconnections.

t-Test: A t-test is a statistical test used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups or between a sample mean and a known value. It helps assess whether observed differences are likely due to chance or if they reflect a real effect.

Here t-Test is conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between the under graduate and post graduate group and to find the equality of means of the variables need for intimacy and virtual connectedness.

Regression: Regression analysis is a statistical technique used to examine the relationship between one dependent variable and one or more independent variables. Its primary goal is to model and predict the dependent variable based on the values of the independent variables.

Regression analysis was performed to examine the association between the dependent variable virtual connectedness and the independent variable need for intimacy.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study evaluated the relation between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness in a sample of college students in Kerala. A total of 118 samples were selected and the variables of interest namely Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness were measured using Need for Intimacy Scale and Virtual Connectedness Scale respectively. For the purpose of data analysis, descriptive statistical techniques are used. The normality of data analysis was determined by the values of skewness and Kurtosis. Since the data is normally distributed suitable parametric tests were used for further analysis using appropriate software, ensuring accuracy and reliability.

The results obtained in the study have been presented in the tables and the results are discussed with respect to objectives and hypotheses.

Normality Test Results

Table 4.1: Test of Normality

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Virtual Connectedness	.986	118	.238
Need for Intimacy	.983	118	.133

The Shapiro-Wilk test is a statistical method used to determine whether a data set follows a normal distribution, which is an important assumption for many statistical analyses. In the table provided, this test was applied to two variables: "Virtual Connectedness" and "Need for Intimacy." For

"Virtual Connectedness," the Shapiro-Wilk test yielded a statistic of 0.986 with a degrees of freedom (df) of 118 and a significance (p-value) of .238. Similarly, for "Need for Intimacy," the test produced a statistic of 0.983 with the same degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.133. The p-values for both variables are greater than the commonly used threshold of 0.05. This indicates that there is no significant evidence to suggest that the distributions of these variables deviate from normality. In other words, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, which posits that the data are normally distributed.

The implication of these results is significant for the subsequent analyses. Many statistical tests, such as t-tests, ANOVAs, and linear regressions, rely on the assumption that the data are normally distributed. Since the p-values indicate that the normality assumption holds for both "Virtual Connectedness" and "Need for Intimacy," these variables are appropriate for analysis using parametric methods. Parametric tests are known for their robustness and precision when the assumption of normality is met, meaning that the findings derived from such tests will be more reliable and accurate.

In summary, the Shapiro-Wilk test results suggest that both "Virtual Connectedness" and "Need for Intimacy" are approximately normally distributed, justifying the use of parametric statistical methods in any further analysis. This is a crucial step in ensuring that the results obtained from the data are valid and can be confidently interpreted.

Extent of Virtual Connectedness

Table 4.2: Extent of Virtual Connectedness among the population

	Frequency	Percent
Low	15	12.7
Moderate	85	72.0
High	18	15.3
Total	118	100.0

The table 4.2 indicates that the extent of virtual connectedness among the participants varies across three categories: low, moderate, and high. Specifically, 12.7% of participants fall into the low virtual connectedness category, indicating that a small portion of the sample has a limited sense of connection in virtual environments. The majority, 72.0%, report a moderate level of virtual connectedness, suggesting that most participants experience a balanced and adequate level of connection in virtual spaces. Meanwhile, 15.3% of participants are classified as having high virtual connectedness, indicating a smaller but significant portion of the sample feels strongly connected in these environments. Overall, the data shows that while the majority of participants have a moderate level of virtual connectedness, there is still notable variation, with some experiencing very low or very high levels of connection.

The distribution of virtual connectedness among participants, ranging from low to high levels, can be explained by several factors. Digital literacy plays a crucial role; those with lower digital proficiency might experience less virtual connectedness (Hargittai, 2018). Social needs and preferences also impact this; individuals preferring face-to-face interactions might find virtual

communication less fulfilling, resulting in lower connectedness (Miller, 2020). The quality of online interactions is another factor, with deeper, more meaningful exchanges leading to higher connectedness (Vasalou et al., 2008). Additionally, the strength of one's online social support network can influence feelings of connectedness, with robust networks enhancing it (Nie, 2001). Personal circumstances, such as social isolation or academic stress, further affect virtual connectedness, as individuals facing these challenges may rely more on digital platforms for support (Rosen et al., 2020). Understanding these factors is essential for interpreting variations in virtual connectedness.

Extent of Need for Intimacy

Table 4.3: Extent of Need for Intimacy among the population

	Frequency	Percent
Low	1	.8
Moderate	67	56.8
High	50	42.4
Total	118	100.0

The table 4.3 reveals that the "Extent of Need for Intimacy" among participants varies, with the majority expressing either a moderate or high need. Specifically, only 0.8% of participants have a low need for intimacy, indicating that almost all participants value close relationships to some extent. A significant 56.8% of the sample falls into the moderate category, suggesting that over half of the participants seek a balanced level of intimacy, neither excessively low nor high. Meanwhile, 42.4% of participants report a high need for intimacy, highlighting a substantial

portion of the sample that strongly desires close, intimate relationships. Overall, the data suggests that the need for intimacy is an important aspect of the participants' lives, with most individuals expressing a moderate to high desire for close connections, which could influence their social interactions and relationships.

The fundamental human need for social connection explains why only 0.8% of participants report a low need for intimacy. Research indicates that the desire for close relationships is a basic psychological drive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This inherent need for connection likely accounts for the high percentages of moderate (56.8%) and high (42.4%) intimacy needs. The importance of intimate relationships for emotional support and psychological health further explains these results. Intimacy is crucial for feeling understood and valued (Reis & Shaver, 1988). This drive for close connections is significant during transitional periods, such as college life, when individuals are adjusting to new social environments (Arnett, 2000). Finally, individual differences in social and emotional needs contribute to the range of intimacy levels. Personal experiences and traits influence how much intimacy a person desires (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These factors together highlight why the majority of participants report a moderate to high need for intimacy, emphasizing the role of close relationships in their lives.

Correlation

Table 4.4: Correlation between Virtual Connectedness and Need for Intimacy

Variables	Virtual Connectedness	Need for Intimacy
Virtual Connectedness	()	
Need for Intimacy	0.276**	()

Note: **indicates significance at 0.01 level

The table 4.4 shows a Pearson correlation analysis between "Virtual Connectedness" and "Need for Intimacy," revealing a weak to moderate positive correlation with a coefficient of .276. This indicates that as individuals' need for intimacy increases, their level of virtual connectedness tends to increase as well. The relationship is statistically significant, with a p-value of .002, suggesting that this correlation is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The positive association implies that people who have a higher need for intimacy might be more engaged in virtual environments to fulfill their desire for close connections, or conversely, that increased virtual connectedness may enhance their need for intimacy. Although the correlation is not strong, it is meaningful and highlights a connection between how individuals seek intimacy and their engagement in virtual spaces. This insight could be important for understanding social behaviors in online environments and suggests that platforms fostering virtual connectedness may particularly appeal to those with a higher need for intimacy.

Regression

Table 4.5: Linear regression of Virtual Connectedness from Need for Intimacy

Variable	R	R Square	B Coefficient	Standard error (B)	Beta	t	Sig.
Need for Intimacy	0.276	0.076	0.339	0.110	0.276	3.094	0.002

The regression analysis reveals that "Need for Intimacy" has a statistically significant yet relatively modest impact on the dependent variable. The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.276 indicates a weak to moderate positive relationship between the need for intimacy and the dependent variable. This

means that as individuals' need for intimacy increases, there is a slight tendency for the dependent variable to also increase. However, the effect is not very strong. The R Square value of 0.076 shows that only 7.6% of the variability in the dependent variable can be explained by "Need for Intimacy." This relatively low R Square suggests that while there is a relationship, it accounts for only a small portion of the total variability, indicating that other variables may also significantly influence the dependent variable.

The B coefficient of 0.339 indicates that for each unit increase in "Need for Intimacy," the dependent variable increases by 0.339 units, assuming other variables are held constant. This coefficient represents the change in the dependent variable associated with a one-unit change in "Need for Intimacy." The standardized Beta coefficient of 0.276, which converts the B coefficient into standard deviation units, corroborates the weak effect size observed.

The t-statistic of 3.094 suggests that the B coefficient is significantly different from zero, and the p-value of 0.002 confirms that this result is statistically significant. This low p-value indicates that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Despite the statistical significance, the practical significance of this finding is limited due to the small R Square value. This suggests that while "Need for Intimacy" does have a measurable effect on the dependent variable, it is not the primary driver, and other factors likely play a more substantial role. Thus, further research is needed to explore additional variables that could explain the variability in the dependent variable more comprehensively.

The regression analysis shows a statistically significant but modest impact of "Need for Intimacy" on the dependent variable. The weak to moderate correlation ($R = 0.276$) and low R Square value (0.076) indicate that while there is a positive relationship, it explains only a small portion of the

variability in the dependent variable (Cohen, 1988). This suggests that other factors are likely more influential.

The B coefficient (0.339) and standardized Beta coefficient (0.276) indicate that the effect of need for intimacy is consistent but limited in size (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Although the effect is statistically significant (t-statistic of 3.094, p-value of 0.002), the practical significance is low due to the small R Square value (Field, 2013). This implies that while need for intimacy plays a role, it is not the primary driver of the dependent variable, and other variables are likely more significant.

t-Test

Table 4.6: Independent sample t-Test on gender difference in variables

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Virtual Connectedness	Female	95	30.84	7.241	0.207	0.836
	Male	23	31.17	5.123		
Need for Intimacy	Female	95	36.72	5.307	1.393	0.166
	Male	23	34.91	6.564		

The table presents the results of a t-test comparing Virtual Connectedness and Need for Intimacy between females and males. For Virtual Connectedness, females had a mean score of 30.84 with a standard deviation of 7.241, while males had a mean of 31.17 with a standard deviation of 5.123. The t-value of 0.207 and p-value of 0.836 indicate no statistically significant difference between

the genders in Virtual Connectedness. Similarly, in the case of Need for Intimacy, females scored slightly higher with a mean of 36.72 and a standard deviation of 5.307 compared to males, who had a mean of 34.91 and a standard deviation of 6.564. However, the t-value of 1.393 and p-value of 0.166 suggest that this difference is not statistically significant. These findings indicate that gender does not have a significant impact on levels of Virtual Connectedness or Need for Intimacy in the sample studied. Despite minor differences in mean scores, the high p-values suggest that any observed differences are likely due to chance, rather than a true difference between the genders.

This implies that both males and females may have similar needs and behaviors in these areas, challenging common stereotypes, though further research with larger and more diverse samples would be necessary to generalize these results.

Gender Ratio

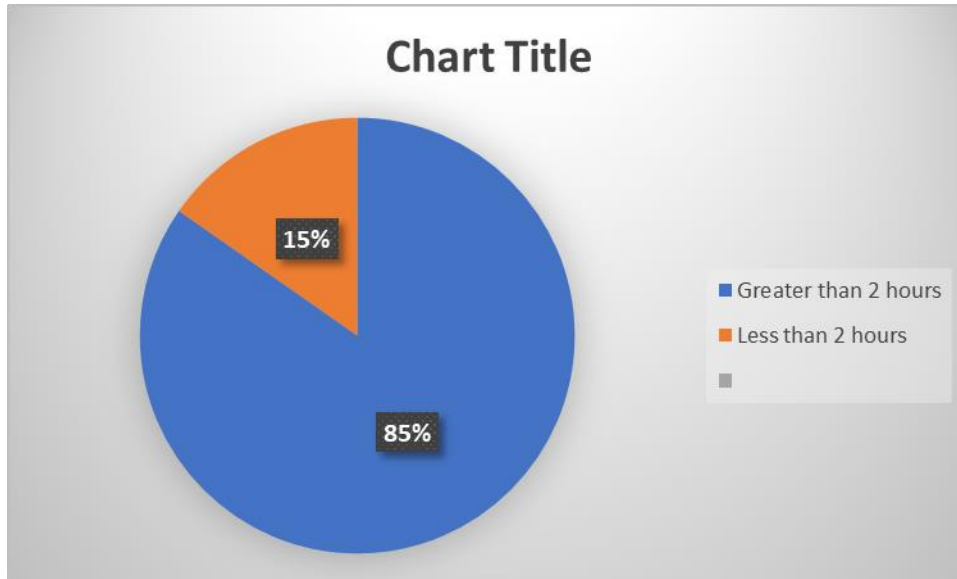
Table 4.7: Gender ratio among the participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	95	80.5	80.5	80.5
Male	23	19.5	19.5	100.0
Total	118	100.0	100.0	

The table 4.7 presents the gender distribution among a sample of 118 college students, showing that 95 (80.5%) are female and 23 (19.5%) are male. This distribution indicates a significant gender imbalance, with a notably higher proportion of female students compared to male students. The percentages reflect the composition of the sample, with females comprising the majority and males

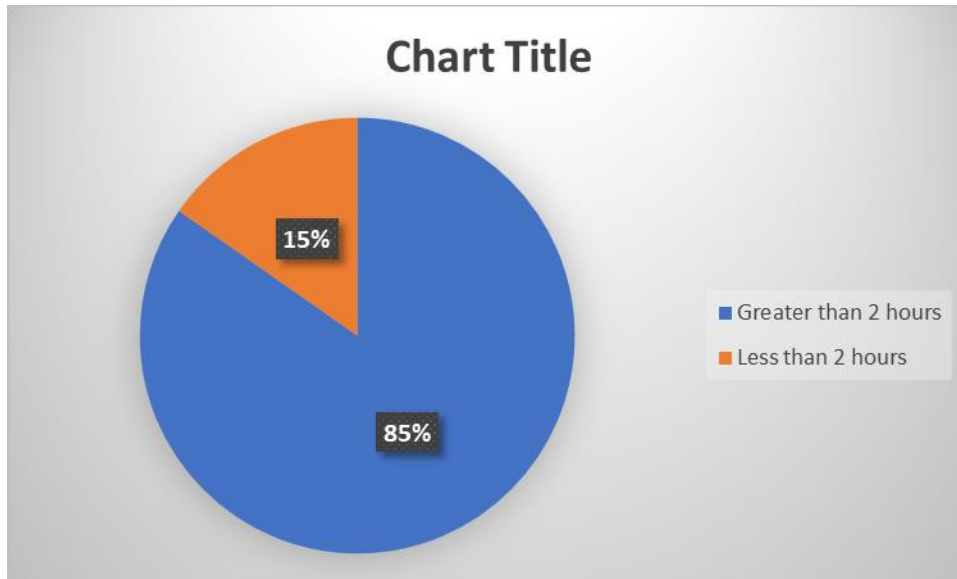
making up a smaller segment. The cumulative percentages confirm that all respondents have been included in the totals.

Figure 4.1: Whether the participant owns a smart phone/ laptop/ other gadgets



The pie chart shows the distribution of participants based on whether they own a smartphone, laptop, or other gadgets. The blue segment, which constitutes 85% of the chart, represents participants who own these devices. The orange segment, making up 15%, represents those who do not own such gadgets.

A large majority of the participants (85%) own a smartphone, laptop, or other gadgets, indicating widespread access to technology among the group. This suggests that most individuals are likely to have regular access to digital devices, which could be essential for communication, work, education, or entertainment. The 15% who do not own such gadgets represent a smaller group that may face barriers to accessing digital resources. Understanding this distribution is important for considering the digital divide and its implications on accessibility, productivity, and inclusion in various contexts such as education or remote work.

Figure 4.2: Average screentime Per day of the participants

The pie chart displays the screen time of participants, divided into two categories: "Greater than 2 hours" and "Less than 2 hours." The blue section, which represents 85% of the chart, corresponds to participants who spend more than 2 hours on screens, while the orange section, making up 15%, represents those who spend less than 2 hours on screens.

The chart reveals that a significant majority of participants (85%) engage in screen time for more than 2 hours daily. This suggests that extended screen usage is common among the participants, potentially due to work, entertainment, or educational activities. The smaller group (15%) who limit their screen time to less than 2 hours may indicate those who either have less screen-dependent lifestyles or are actively managing their screen usage. This distribution is crucial for understanding the digital habits of the group and can have implications for health, productivity, and overall well-being.

Observations

The study provides several important insights into the participants' experiences with virtual connectedness and their need for intimacy. The data shows that a substantial majority of participants exhibit moderate to high levels of virtual connectedness. Specifically, 72% report a moderate level of virtual connection, while 15.3% experience a high level of connectedness. This widespread engagement with digital platforms suggests that participants are integrating these tools effectively into their daily lives. Factors contributing to this variation in virtual connectedness include digital literacy, individual social needs, and the quality of online interactions. Those with lower digital proficiency or a preference for face-to-face communication may feel less connected virtually, whereas meaningful online interactions and a robust social support network can enhance feelings of connectedness.

In terms of the need for intimacy, the results indicate that the vast majority of participants have either a moderate (56.8%) or high (42.4%) need for close relationships, with only 0.8% reporting a low need for intimacy. This reflects a strong desire among participants for emotional closeness and support, which is consistent with research highlighting the fundamental human need for intimate connections. The high levels of intimacy need among participants can be attributed to the transitional nature of college life, where individuals are adjusting to new environments and seeking supportive relationships.

The regression analysis shows a statistically significant but modest relationship between the need for intimacy and virtual connectedness, with an R Square value of 0.076. This indicates that while the need for intimacy does influence virtual connectedness, it explains only a small portion of the variability, suggesting that other factors also play a significant role. The B coefficient and standardized Beta coefficient further reinforce this weak effect size. Despite the statistical

significance, the practical impact is limited, pointing to the need for further research to explore other variables that might better explain the variability in virtual connectedness.

Gender differences in virtual connectedness and need for intimacy were found to be statistically insignificant, with both males and females showing similar levels of these attributes. This finding challenges common stereotypes and suggests that gender does not markedly influence these aspects of digital and emotional engagement. Additionally, the majority of participants own digital devices and engage in significant screen time, which highlights the pervasive role of technology in their lives. A large percentage of participants (85%) spend more than 2 hours per day on screens, reflecting the centrality of digital interactions in their daily routines.

Overall, these observations provide a comprehensive view of how college students navigate virtual connectedness and their need for intimacy, underscoring the importance of digital tools in their social and emotional lives.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the current study was to examine the relationship between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness among college students in Kerala. The sample size of the present study was 118 college students, both males and females, selected using the convenience sampling technique. To measure the variables of interest, existing standardized measures such as Need for Intimacy Scale and Virtual Connectedness Scale. Informed consent and personal data sheet are also collected from the selected participants. After data analysis, parametric tests such as the Pearson correlation method and linear regression analysis are used for the statistical analysis of the data. The results obtained by the analysis are discussed comprehensively with respect to objectives and hypotheses.

Major findings and Conclusions of the Study

- The analysis showed that 72.0% of participants reported a moderate level of Virtual Connectedness, suggesting that most students feel adequately connected in virtual environments.
- A smaller group (15.3%) reported high Virtual Connectedness, indicating strong virtual engagement, while 12.7% had low Virtual Connectedness, showing limited virtual involvement.
- Most participants expressed a moderate (56.8%) or high (42.4%) Need for Intimacy, with only 0.8% reporting a low need, highlighting the importance of close relationships for the majority of students.
- The Pearson correlation analysis showed a weak to moderate positive correlation ($r = .276$) between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness, with a significant p-value of .002.

This indicates that as the need for intimacy rises, virtual connectedness slightly increases, suggesting that students with higher intimacy needs may engage more in virtual interactions to fulfill these desires.

- The linear regression analysis revealed that Need for Intimacy explains 7.6% of the variance in Virtual Connectedness ($R^2 = 0.076$). The B coefficient of 0.339 indicates that each unit increase in Need for Intimacy leads to a 0.339 unit increase in Virtual Connectedness. While the relationship is statistically significant ($p = .002$), the effect size is relatively small, as confirmed by the standardized Beta coefficient of 0.276.
- The analysis showed no significant gender differences in Virtual Connectedness or Need for Intimacy. Females had a mean score of 30.84 in Virtual Connectedness versus 31.17 for males ($p = .836$), and a mean score of 36.72 in Need for Intimacy versus 34.91 for males ($p = .166$). These results suggest gender does not significantly affect these variables in this sample.

Implications of the study

The implications of this study are far-reaching, touching on various aspects of digital behavior, mental health, education, and technology design. The positive correlation between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness suggests that individuals with a higher desire for close relationships may increasingly turn to digital platforms to satisfy these social needs, particularly in situations where offline interactions are limited. This insight is significant for understanding the evolving role of digital environments as spaces where meaningful social interactions can occur. For developers and designers of social networking sites, these findings highlight the importance of incorporating features that facilitate intimate, personal connections—such as private messaging, group chats, or support communities—thereby catering to users with varying levels of social needs.

In educational and counseling settings, recognizing the role of virtual connectedness in students' social lives can inform interventions that promote balanced online and offline social interactions. Counselors might focus on helping students who rely heavily on virtual platforms for intimacy to develop healthy, fulfilling offline relationships as well.

The study also challenges traditional gender-based assumptions about digital engagement, revealing that male and females in the sample exhibit similar levels of Virtual Connectedness and Need for Intimacy. This has important implications for content creators and digital marketers, suggesting that they should avoid relying on gender stereotypes and instead focus on creating broadly appealing content. The relatively low R^2 value found in the regression analysis points to the need for further research to uncover additional factors that influence virtual connectedness, such as personality traits, emotional intelligence, or the quality of offline relationships. Understanding these factors could lead to more comprehensive strategies for enhancing social connectedness, both online and offline.

Mental health professionals might also find these findings relevant, as they indicate that individuals with a high need for intimacy may be more susceptible to seeking connection through virtual means, which could have varying impacts on their well-being depending on the nature of these interactions. Finally, higher education institutions could use these insights to better support student engagement in virtual learning environments, ensuring that digital platforms foster a sense of community and connection that meets students' social and emotional needs. In summary, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the interplay between social needs and digital behavior, offering valuable guidance for stakeholders across multiple fields in creating more supportive, inclusive, and effective digital and educational environments.

Limitations of the study

- The study was done in a limited sample of 118 college students, which is relatively small compared to the general population.
- The gender ratio was not proportional.
- The findings were based on self-reported data and may have been susceptible to response biases.
- The study did not account for potential confounding variables that could influence the relationship between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness. Factors such as personality traits, social anxiety, quality of offline relationships, or the specific types of digital platforms used (e.g., social media, messaging apps, online games) were not controlled for, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Suggestions for future research

- Since the current research is done with only 118 samples, study by widening the sample size may yield more outcomes.
- Longitudinal research designs are recommended to better understand how the relationship between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness evolves over time.
- Future research should consider exploring additional variables that may influence or mediate the relationship between Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness. Factors such as personality traits, social anxiety, the quality of offline relationships etc

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APPENDICES

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I, Aleena Thomas, currently pursuing MSc Counselling Psychology from Loyola College of Social Sciences, Trivandrum. You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted as part of my dissertation on the topic "Need for Intimacy and Virtual Connectedness among College Students" which is conducted under the guidance of Dr. Pramod SK. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Your participation in this study will remain confidential. All data collected will be anonymized and stored securely. Only the researcher and authorized personnel will have access to data. Your responses will be used for research purposes only and will not be disclosed to any third parties.

Thank You in Advance

Personal Data Sheet

Name:

Age:

Name of the college:

Gender: Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Other

1. Do you own a mobile-phone/ laptop/ other gadgets?

Yes

No

2. Average screentime per day

Less than 2 hours

Greater than 2 hours

3. Purpose of usage

Study

Entertainment

Communication

Business

Gaming

Shopping

Photography/ Videography

Health monitoring

Need for Intimacy Scale

1. I feel a strong need to develop close, intimate relationships.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I regularly share my personal feelings and thoughts with others.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I try to find emotional support from close friends or family when I'm upset.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I enjoy having deep and meaningful conversations with others.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I feel a strong need to feel connected and close to others.

1 2 3 4 5

6. I often seek physical affection (hugs, touch) from those I am close to.

1 2 3 4 5

7. I fear being rejected or not accepted by others who I care.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I prioritize maintaining and nurturing my close relationships.

1 2 3 4 5

9. I am emotionally available and open to those who need my support.

1 2 3 4 5

10. My happiness largely depends on the quality of my intimate relationships.

1 2 3 4 5

Virtual Connectedness Scale

1. I frequently interact with friends and family through social media or messaging apps.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I feel emotionally supported by my online connections.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I actively participate in online communities or groups related to my interests.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I believe my online relationships are meaningful and genuine.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I am comfortable expressing myself through digital communication tools. (eg: Social media)

1 2 3 4 5

6. I am satisfied with the amount of time I spend connecting with others online.

1 2 3 4 5

7. I often feel a strong sense of connection when interacting with people online.

1 2 3 4 5

8. My online interactions help reduce feelings of loneliness.

1 2 3 4 5

9. I am comfortable sharing personal experiences and thoughts with my online friends.

1 2 3 4 5

10. I depends heavily on virtual communication to maintain my social relationships.

1 2 3 4 5