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## **THE TRANSFORMATION OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA AGE**

### **Трансформация дружбы в эпоху социальных сетей**

**Research Purpose:** Based on an analysis of the evolution of digital platforms, this study aims to identify the key drivers and consequences of the transformation of the concept of «friendship» – from a public, quantitative model on social networks to a private and segmented experience on messaging apps – and to determine how this shift affects the quality and dynamics of social connections.

The digital landscape has profoundly reshaped our understanding and practice of friendship. Early platforms like Facebook promoted a broad, quantitative concept of a «friend», a term that could include close confidants and distant acquaintances alike. This model fostered wide but often superficial networks. Recently, a clear shift has emerged towards more private digital environments, such as closed chats in Telegram and similar messengers. This work analyses that transformation, arguing that online friendship is evolving from a public performance of connection towards a more private, curated, and segmented experience.

This analysis seeks to identify the key drivers and implications of this shift from broad social networks to private platforms. It explores what this trend reveals about the changing quality and dynamics of friendship itself, suggesting it reflects a growing desire for more authentic and secure communication. The examination is grounded in established academic work concerning the sociology of digital communication.

Observed user behaviour and scholarly analysis support the thesis of a significant transformation. Platforms like Facebook often function as repositories for what sociologists call «weak ties» – a digital Rolodex for maintaining passive contact with a broad social circle. On such platforms, friendship can diminish into a form of passive consumption, where observing curated life updates replaces active engagement.

In contrast, private chats on platforms like Telegram are increasingly treated as the «backstage» of social life. Users value these spaces for their perceived privacy and freedom from algorithmic curation. The migration to such chats represents a strategic

adaptation, a way for users to reclaim control over their social sphere and escape the performative pressures of mainstream social networks

Within these closed groups, friendship is sustained through constant, informal, and multi-faceted communication – sharing memes, coordinating daily life, and offering support in real-time. This creates a digital environment that more closely mirrors the trust and exclusivity of strong offline friendships.

In conclusion, this analysis demonstrates that digital friendship is a dynamic concept, continuously evolving in response to technological affordances. The transition from the «friends» model on Facebook to closed chats on Telegram marks a significant maturation of online sociality. It indicates a user-driven move towards spaces that prioritise depth, privacy, and genuine interaction over mere breadth of connection. The future of digital friendship, therefore, appears to lie not in accumulating contacts, but in nurturing connections within carefully bounded, private digital spheres. This leads to three key findings:

1. The concept of a «friend» online is shifting from a quantitative metric to a qualitative one, defined by privacy and the intensity of interaction.

2. Users are strategically migrating to private platforms to reclaim control from algorithms and escape the performative pressures of public networks.

3. These private digital spaces foster a form of communication that more authentically replicates the trust and multifaceted nature of strong offline friendships.

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## **THE DIGITAL MIRROR: HOW TECHNOLOGY IS REWRITING OUR HUMAN IDENTITY**

### **Цифровое зеркало: как технологии меняют нашу человеческую идентичность**

We live in a special time, a period of great change where technology is reshaping our entire society. The digital world is no longer just a tool we use; it has become a part of our everyday existence. The study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how technology is acting as a digital mirror, fundamentally altering human behavior.

The internet has become a universal library that is open to everyone. Knowledge and opportunities that were once available only to a privileged few are now within reach for many more people [1]. Besides, technology has completely changed our ideas about community and the workplace. Distance doesn't matter as much anymore. This global connection allows us to learn about different cultures and broadens our horizons.