

Connecting Beyond the Screen: Exploring Loneliness and the Preference for Having Virtual Friends in Urban Populations in Indonesia

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Abstract

Loneliness is a prevalent issue among urban populations, often leading to social withdrawal, or *hikikomori*, and leading to virtual friendships as alternative sources of connection. This study used a multiple-methods approach to explore the virtual friendship phenomenon in Indonesia, combining quantitative analysis of loneliness, *hikikomori* tendencies, and intentions to form virtual friendships, with qualitative insights into the characteristics of an ideal virtual friend. Data from 153 participants aged 25–35 showed significant correlations between all aspects of *hikikomori* ($p < .001$). A t-test revealed that individuals who had engaged in virtual friendships reported significantly higher loneliness ($t = 9.2134$, $p < .001$) measured using SELSA-S. Qualitative analysis showed that the most valued traits were being a good listener with unconditional acceptance. These findings highlight the need for public mental health initiatives, particularly in Indonesia, to address loneliness through digital and face-to-face interventions, in line with national efforts to strengthen community-based mental health support.

Keywords: urban citizen, isolation, loneliness, virtual friend

Abstrak

Kesepian adalah masalah yang lazim di antara populasi perkotaan, sering mengarah pada penarikan sosial, atau *hikikomori*, dan mengarah pada persahabatan virtual sebagai sumber koneksi alternatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan multi-metode untuk mengeksplorasi fenomena persahabatan virtual di Indonesia, menggabungkan analisis kuantitatif kesepian, kecenderungan *hikikomori*, dan niat untuk membentuk persahabatan virtual, dengan wawasan kualitatif tentang karakteristik teman virtual yang ideal. Data dari 153 peserta berusia 25-35 menunjukkan korelasi yang signifikan antara semua aspek *hikikomori* ($p < ,001$). Uji-t mengungkapkan bahwa individu yang telah terlibat dalam persahabatan virtual melaporkan kesepian yang jauh lebih tinggi ($t = 9,2134$, $p < 0,001$) yang diukur menggunakan SELSA-S. Analisis kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa sifat yang paling dihargai adalah menjadi pendengar yang baik dengan penerimaan tanpa syarat. Temuan ini menyoroti perlunya inisiatif kesehatan mental masyarakat, khususnya di Indonesia, untuk mengatasi kesepian melalui intervensi digital dan tatap muka, sejalan dengan upaya nasional untuk memperkuat dukungan kesehatan mental berbasis masyarakat.

Keywords: masyarakat perkotaan, isolasi, kesepian, teman virtual

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INTRODUCTION

Urban areas are characterized by high population density, which theoretically increases opportunities for social interaction. Valle et al. (2007) found that individuals aged 20–40 living in urban environments interact with approximately 20 people daily, largely due to the dense population that leads to frequent encounters. However, a high frequency of social contact does not necessarily equate to lower levels of loneliness. According to Kato et al. (2017), forming close interpersonal relationships can be particularly challenging in urban life, making urban residents more susceptible to loneliness. This feeling tends to be more pronounced among individuals who have migrated from communal or family-oriented living environments to live independently in the city. Relocating, especially when living alone, often demands psychological adjustments and can intensify feelings of isolation. This issue warrants significant attention, considering that data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (2023) show that 83.04% of Indonesians aged 15–59 are classified as migrants who have relocated from their place of origin for purposes such as employment, pursuing education, and improving their quality of life. Kato et al. (2017) also highlighted that solitary living in urban settings increases vulnerability to loneliness and related mental health issues. Furthermore, the number of people residing in a household has been shown to influence levels of loneliness.

Kato et al. (2017) also introduced the concept of *hikikomori* or social withdrawal—deliberate isolation from social relationships and interactions—a phenomenon increasingly observed among urban populations. *Hikikomori* is strongly associated with worsening mental health and elevated loneliness. Therefore, the sheer volume of urban interactions does not guarantee protection from loneliness. This is supported by Berezan et al. (2019), who reported that individuals with high loneliness scores may still feel isolated even when surrounded by family, friends, or romantic partners. In the context of online interaction, Berezan et al. (2019) further noted that loneliness can drive individuals to pursue more online relationships while reducing their engagement in face-to-face social interactions. One emerging coping mechanism is the search for virtual friends. Froding et al. (2012) define virtual friends as purely online relationships, with little to no in-person contact.

In Indonesia, virtual friendships have grown in popularity to alleviate loneliness. These relationships are often initiated through social media, online games, or friend-finding applications such as Line, WeChat, and MiChat, which connect users based on proximity. In addition to voluntary friendships, many Indonesians also turn to paid virtual friendship services. According to a digital news article by Riana (2022), one Instagram account offering virtual companionship services is @sy***. The services include “sleep calls”, morning wake-up calls, emotional support, meal reminders, and virtual dating. Prices range from IDR 5,000 for a morning wake-up call to IDR 650,000 for unlimited virtual dating and sleep call services for seven days. Another account, @su***, charges IDR 15,000 for a 60-minute interactive session.

Riana (2022) also reported that one respondent used a virtual friend service to cope with loneliness, especially during the pandemic. The respondent had experienced betrayal and exclusion by their school peers. Another respondent turned to virtual friends to vent frustrations, feeling unheard by real-life friends. This finding aligns with the research by Valkenberg and Peter (2007), which discovered that individuals with high levels of social anxiety in the real world tend to choose virtual interactions and perceive the virtual world as a more valuable space for intimate self-disclosure. Furthermore, the Social



Compensation Hypothesis explains that individuals are likely to increase both the quantity and quality of their interactions in the virtual world to establish connections and friendships as compensation for the lack of such interactions in the real world (Valkenberg & Peter, 2007; Smith et al., 2021). This hypothesis has been supported by previous research in Indonesia by Erica et al. (2024), which found that Indonesian citizens with high levels of loneliness are more likely to cultivate positive relationships with virtual friends in cyberspace to enhance their subjective well-being.

While virtual friendships are becoming increasingly common among young people, studies examining the relationship between urban loneliness and the tendency to engage with virtual friends are still scarce in Indonesia. Hence, research on this topic is crucial to understanding urban Indonesians' psychological dynamics and the role of virtual friendships in mitigating loneliness. Based on these explanations, this study investigates urban residents' tendency to interact with paid and unpaid virtual friends and their correlation with perceived loneliness. It also seeks to identify demographic patterns (age and gender) and desired characteristics of an ideal virtual friend among individuals experiencing loneliness. The research hypothesis is formulated as follows: 1) there is evidence of the *hikikomori* phenomenon, as indicated by correlations between friendship quality, family interaction frequency, and loneliness levels, 2) friendship quality, frequency of interaction with family, and the number of household members negatively correlate with loneliness, 3) loneliness positively correlates with the intention to engage in virtual friendships, 4) the higher the level of loneliness, the greater the intention to form virtual friendships, and 5) there is a significant difference in loneliness levels between individuals with virtual friendships and those without.

METHOD

This study employed a multiple-methods approach by combining quantitative and qualitative research designs. Data was collected using a self-report questionnaire distributed digitally through non-probability convenience sampling. Participants completed the questionnaire online, which was divided into three sections.

The first section collected demographic data, including the number of close friends (inner circle), household members, and the frequency of contact with parents or close family members. The second section inquired about participants' experiences with virtual friend services, their intention to engage with virtual friends, the characteristics of their ideal virtual friend, the preferred age and gender of a virtual friend, and their desire for in-person meetings with virtual friends.

The final section measured participants' levels of loneliness using the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults – Short Version (SELSA-S) developed by DiTommaso et al. (2014). Loneliness was measured using the short version of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults – Short Version (SELSA-S), comprising 15 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The scale was adapted into Bahasa Indonesia by Putri & Kusdiati (2023) following a cross-cultural adaptation method developed by Beaton et al. (2000). The adaptation process involved a forward and backwards translation, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha. The adaptation process resulted in t-values = 6.04–11.49; loading factors = 0.52–0.88; and Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81. The items are divided into three subscales: five items related to family relationships, six to romantic relationships, and four to friendships. In this scale, lower scores indicate higher levels of loneliness.



Therefore, in the data analysis process, the item scores were reverse-coded so that higher scores reflect more favourable outcomes (i.e., lower loneliness).

Qualitative data analysis of the characteristics of an ideal virtual friend was conducted using an inductive/bottom-up thematic analysis approach. This method followed the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). In this process, themes were identified purely based on the data collected and were not categorized according to any pre-existing theory. The selection of this method was guided by the primary aim of exploring the spontaneously emerging characteristics of an ideal virtual friend as perceived by participants, while minimizing potential researcher bias related to theoretical interest in the area or topic. The thematic analysis process comprised six phases: data familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, writing up the analysis results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 159 participants initially completed the questionnaire. However, six responses were excluded due to invalid data, including residence outside urban areas, refusal to provide consent, or incomplete responses. As a result, 153 participants were included in the final analysis, consisting of individuals aged 25–35 years ($M = 28.03$, $SD = 3.3$), with 62 male and 91 female participants. The following are the descriptive statistics based on the collected data:

Table 1.
Descriptive Results

Indicator	n	%	Mean	Median	SD
Frequency of contact with parents or close family members					
Everyday	50	32.68	-	-	-
4-6 times per week	17	11.11	-	-	-
1-3 times per week	34	22.22	-	-	-
Less than 1 times per week	52	33.99	-	-	-
Number of household members	-	-	2.71	2.0	1.93
Number of close friends	-	-	3.71	3.0	3.4
Have ever used virtual friend services					
Yes	68	44.44	-	-	-
No	85	55.56	-	-	-
Have an intention to engage with virtual friends					



Very interested	40	26.14	-	-	-
Interested	42	27.45	-	-	-
Somewhat interested	21	13.73	-	-	-
Slightly interested	25	16.34	-	-	-
Not interested	17	11.11	-	-	-
Strongly not interested	8	5.23	-	-	-
Gender of ideal virtual friend					
Same as participant	69	57.50	-	-	-
Different than participant	51	42.50	-	-	-
Age of ideal virtual friend					
Younger than participant	12	9.75	-	-	-
Same as than participant	42	34.14	-	-	-
Older than participant	69	56.09	-	-	-

Most participants reported contacting their parents or closest family members less than once a week ($N = 52$), with the least frequent category being contact 4–6 times per week ($N = 17$). Regarding household members and the number of close friends (inner circle), participants had an average of 3 household members and 4 close friends, rounded up. Based on the descriptive data, it was found that although most participants had never interacted with virtual friends, they tended to be interested in trying to connect with virtual friends. The intention to connect with virtual friends also showed a strong positive correlation with all aspects of loneliness and overall loneliness. This supports the second hypothesis, where the higher the loneliness level, the higher the intention to connect with virtual friends. The strongest positive correlation was found between the intention to connect with virtual friends and aspects of loneliness related to social relationships. This finding is also consistent with the characteristics of the ideal virtual friend most frequently mentioned by participants, which include the ability to listen, share concerns, and provide advice regarding issues faced. From this, it can be seen that when someone's need for social connection is unmet, they tend to seek fulfilment through virtual means.

Regarding virtual friendships, most participants had never interacted with a virtual friend ($N = 85$). Still, they expressed an intention to do so, with 42 participants indicating they *want* to engage in virtual friendships and 40 participants indicating they *strongly want* to engage in virtual friendships. Most participants preferred to have virtual friends of a different gender ($N = 69$) and of an older age than themselves ($N = 69$). 186 descriptions of ideal virtual friend characteristics were collected, which will be categorized and summarized in Table 2.



Table 2.
Virtual Friend Characteristics

Coding based on ideal virtual friend characteristic	Verbatim	n (%)
A good listener who accepts others as they are	<i>"Dapat menerima dan acknowledge perasaan saya, bukan yang malah menggurui/menentang/memberikan argumen terhadap apa yang saya rasakan."</i>	57 (30.6)
	<i>"Yang bisa menjadi teman curhat dan cerita keluhan di tempat kerja tanpa judging."</i>	
Entertaining	<i>"Bisa diajak bercanda/tidak terlalu serius."</i>	17 (9.1)
	<i>"Humoris dan nyablak sih, karena saya orang nya agak pendiam bila di tongkrongan dan hanya mengikuti alur dari pembicaraan orang. Sebaiknya diselingi topik pembicaraan yang menuju ke jokes."</i>	
Have the same interest	<i>"Sama-sama menyukai jenis olahraga yang sama, termasuk sepak bola dan basket."</i>	22 (11.8)
	<i>"Punya ketertarikan terhadap game Mobile Legends."</i>	
Experienced and knowledgeable	<i>"Bisa menambah wawasan saya di bidang yang saya kurang paham seperti ekonomi, sosial politik, tapi tidak menggurui."</i>	10 (5.4)
	<i>"Mungkin yang pintar bahasa supaya bisa sambil belajar."</i>	
Has free time	<i>"Available pagi dan malam sebelum berangkat kerja dan mau tidur, temenin ngobrol sampai ketiduran."</i>	24 (12.9)
	<i>"Engga sibuk sendiri, bisa meluangkan waktu ngobrol bersama heart to heart"</i>	
Positive traits	<i>"Rational, open-minded, insightful, empathetic"</i>	25 (13.4)
	<i>"Ramah, ga sombong, ga suka pamer, rendah hati"</i>	
Willingness to pursue a deeper relationship	<i>"Berperan sebagai adik yang mau mengandalkan saya untuk masalahnya."</i>	3 (1.6)
	<i>"Girlfriend material"</i>	
Provides support and feedback on certain issues.	<i>"Seperti psikolog bisa mendengarkan dan kasih saran dan masukan yang bijaksana."</i>	26 (13.8)



*“Bijaksana dan bisa kasih masukan
kalo lagi ada masalah dan ga ada tmn
curhat”*

To analyze the qualitative data regarding the characteristics of an ideal virtual friend as expected by participants, this study employed a coding technique based on emerging themes from participant responses. This coding process identified eight main themes, as shown in Table 2. Based on this data, it can be concluded that the most frequently mentioned characteristic of an ideal virtual friend is a good listener and accepting of others as they are ($N = 57$), followed by someone who can provide support and advice when facing problems ($N = 26$). Most participants desired someone who is a good listener, accepting, and can provide support and advice regarding their issues. This statement is based on the findings of Riana (2022), which suggest that one of the reasons people use virtual friend services is to open up and share their life hardships. This aligns with the Social Penetration Theory, which explains that individuals who reveal their authentic selves (self-disclosure) tend to increase relationship empathy and trust between individuals (Mangus et al., 2020). This finding also aligns with research on virtual friendships by Erica et al. (2024), which demonstrates that individuals tend to experience greater happiness when their virtual friendships are characterized by depth and positive relationship quality.

Furthermore, this finding aligns with participants' preferences, where most wanted a virtual friend older than themselves. The characteristics of the ideal virtual friend found in this study also demonstrate that despite many services offering virtual friends who can act as romantic partners, the majority of participants focused on the virtual friend's ability to listen, accept them as they are, and offer support and advice regarding their problems.

The relationships between variables were analyzed using Pearson's correlation. The variables examined included the number of household members, the number of close friends, the frequency of contact with family, the intention to engage with virtual friends, and all aspects of loneliness measured by the SELSA-S. The correlation coefficients are presented in the correlation table below.

Table 3
Pearson's Correlation Result

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Household members	2.92	2.45							
2. Close friends	3.97	3.64	.50** [.38, .60]						
3. Family contact frequency	2.50	1.25	.40** [.27, .52]	.30** [.18, .42]					
4. Intention to engage with virtual friend	4.21	1.54	-.43** [-.55, -.29]	-.41** [-.53, -.27]	-.58** [-.68, -.47]				
5. Loneliness (Family domain)	20.43	10.61	-.54** [-.65, -.42]	-.45** [-.57, -.32]	-.74** [-.81, -.66]	.67** [.57, .75]			
6. Loneliness (Romantic domain)	28.02	9.74	-.45** [-.56, -.31]	-.35** [-.48, -.20]	-.58** [-.67, -.46]	.61** [.50, .70]	.71** [.62, .78]		
7. Loneliness (Social domain)	15.41	7.74	-.53** [-.63, -.40]	-.48** [-.59, -.34]	-.73** [-.80, -.64]	.75** [.67, .81]	.86** [.82, .90]	.68** [.59, .76]	
8. Loneliness (All domain)	63.86	25.65	-.55** [-.65, -.43]	-.46** [-.58, -.33]	-.75** [-.81, -.67]	.74** [.65, .80]	.94** [.92, .96]	.88** [.84, .91]	.92** [.89, .94]

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.



Correlation analysis showed a significant relationship across all variables tested. The strongest negative correlation occurred between family contact frequency and overall loneliness. This is in line with the second hypothesis and the findings of Kerestes et al. (2019), which explain that strong relationships with family, especially with parents, form the foundation of mental health and individual happiness. Family contact frequency was also negatively correlated with connecting with virtual friends.

Contact frequency significantly correlated with the number of close friends and household members. In other words, the less frequently a person contacts their family, the fewer close friends and household members they tend to have. Additionally, all three variables were negatively correlated with aspects of loneliness. This finding supports the first hypothesis regarding the phenomenon of hikikomori, where there is a tendency for urban populations to isolate themselves from social environments, both family and close friends. This also supports the theoretical basis of Kato et al. (2017), who explained that hikikomori behaviour increases feelings of loneliness. Another finding concerns the correlation between family contact frequency and the number of close friends, where more frequent contact with family is associated with having more close friends. This contradicts the general societal assumption that people with many friends must lack time for their family.

Therefore, it can be interpreted that the more frequently someone maintains contact with their family, the lower their intention to use virtual friends. One explanation for this finding is that if a person has a good relationship with their family, they do not need virtual friends to fulfil their psychological needs. The strong negative correlation between family contact frequency and all aspects of loneliness further supports this.

Furthermore, a significant positive correlation was found between loneliness levels and the intention to connect with virtual friends. This indicates that the higher a person's loneliness level, the higher their intention to communicate with virtual friends. This is consistent with the third hypothesis. A path model is used to examine the correlation result further.

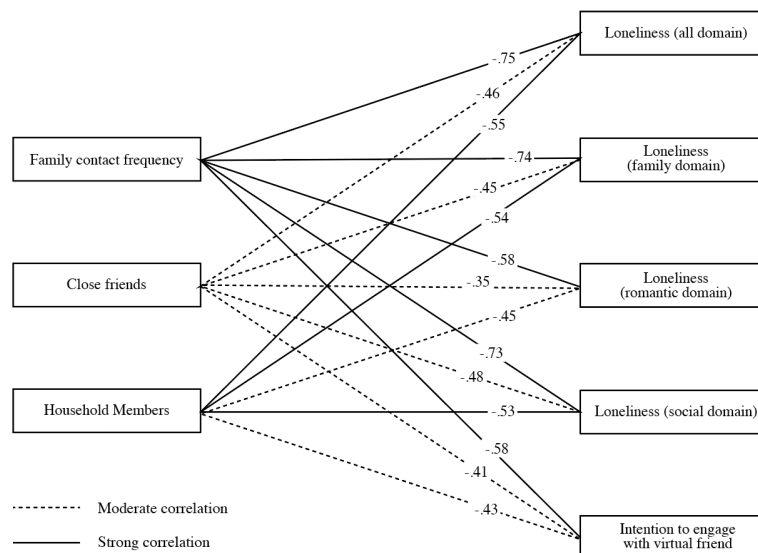


Figure 1. Path Model



This analysis was then continued using linear regression to examine the role of loneliness levels and the increase in the intention to connect with virtual friends. Based on the linear regression analysis, loneliness had a significant effect on the intention to connect with virtual friends, supporting the fourth hypothesis.

Intention to engage with virtual friend based on loneliness

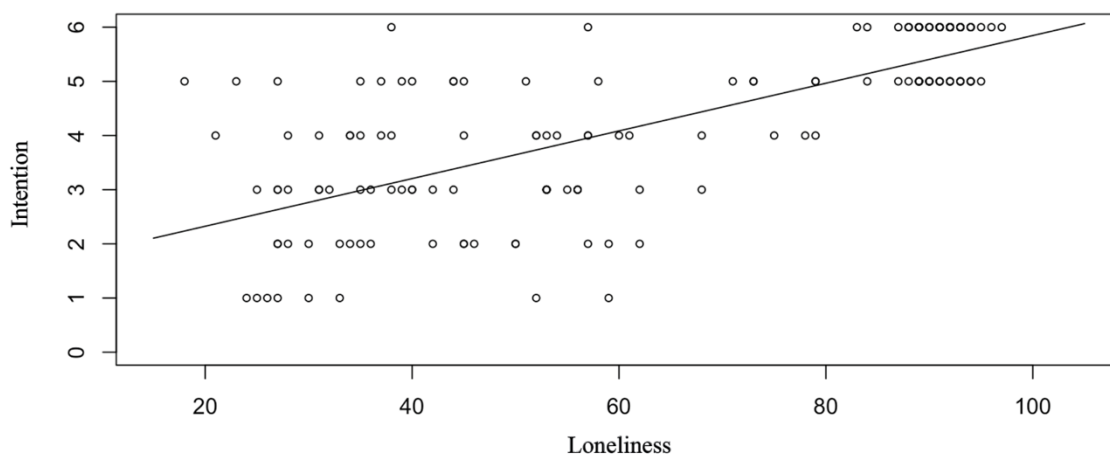


Figure 2.

Linear Regression of The Intention to Connect with Virtual Friends Based on Loneliness Levels.

To address the fourth hypothesis, a linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between loneliness levels and the intention to engage with virtual friends. The study revealed a significant positive effect of participants' loneliness levels on their intention to connect with virtual friends. Specifically, for every one-point increase in loneliness, there was a corresponding increase of 0.044 points in the intention to engage with a virtual friend. Based on this regression model, 0.4% of the variance in the intention to engage with virtual friends could be explained by the level of loneliness ($R^2 = 0.004009$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.003688$, $p < .001$).

Lastly, to answer the fifth hypothesis, an independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to examine the differences between groups who have and have not interacted with virtual friends. Based on this analysis, it was found that there was a significant difference between the average loneliness levels of participants who had interacted with virtual friends ($M = 80.97059$, $SD = 20.28746$) and those who had not ($M = 50.16471$, $SD = 20.87539$). Therefore, the effect of the experience of interacting with virtual friends on loneliness levels shows a significant difference between those who have and have not interacted with virtual friends ($t = 9.2134$, $d = 0.607$, $SE = 3.344$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [24.19758, 37.41418]). From this analysis, it was found that there was a significant difference between the average loneliness levels of participants who had interacted with virtual friends. This result shows that those who had interacted with virtual friends had higher loneliness levels than those who had not. This supports the fifth hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the groups who had and had not interacted with virtual friends. This finding aligns with Berezan et al. (2019), who found that high loneliness levels increase online social relationships. Riana (2022) also found that people who frequently interact with virtual friends feel lonely and desire a friend to share their concerns.



The findings of this study offer practical implications and recommendations for improving the mental health quality of the Indonesian population, in alignment with the *Mental Health Action Plan* initiated by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), through the implementation of social intervention programs facilitated by *Posyandu Jiwa* (Indonesian Community-Based Mental Health Services). One such intervention could involve developing or integrating digital peer-support platforms into existing local mental health outreach programs. These platforms would provide safe virtual companionship for individuals experiencing social withdrawal, particularly in densely populated urban areas. Additionally, public awareness campaigns could be launched to promote healthy online relationships, reduce the stigma surrounding loneliness, and encourage self-disclosure and emotional openness by emphasizing the value of authenticity, as reflected in the qualitative findings of this research.

However, this study has several limitations. One of them is the measurement of loneliness, which was only conducted at one point and may be subject to bias due to mood, traumatic experiences, the quality of social and interpersonal relationships, and other psychological factors that can influence fluctuating feelings of loneliness. Thus, the loneliness levels obtained in this study only apply when the questionnaire is completed. This is also in line with Berezan et al. (2019), who stated that loneliness is a dynamic condition that can change anytime. In addition, various societal phenomena, such as the pre- and post-pandemic periods, may contribute to fluctuations in levels of loneliness. Therefore, future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to observe changes in loneliness over time and its relationship to connecting with virtual friends. This recommendation is proposed because fluctuations in loneliness levels may influence an individual's intention to initiate and maintain relationships with virtual friends. The *hikikomori* phenomenon in this study was only measured through correlations between the number of household members, close friends, and family contact frequency, based on Kato et al. (2017). However, there is currently no measuring tool for the *hikikomori* phenomenon in urban populations. Therefore, future research on *hikikomori* could consider designing such a measurement tool to make the findings more valid. Regarding the sampling method, this study used convenience sampling and an online self-report questionnaire, so there was no selection process or guarantee that participants filled out the questionnaire seriously or according to their actual conditions. Additionally, there is a possibility of demand characteristics, where participants were aware of the research purpose from the outset, and the influence of social desirability regarding loneliness levels was low.

Despite these limitations, this study can serve as a foundation for future research on loneliness in urban populations by considering various supporting variables. This study can also serve as a basis for future research to find the best ways to meet the psychological needs of urban populations to reduce loneliness levels. Furthermore, the high frequency of urban populations expressing the intention to connect with virtual friends provides additional insights into the characteristics of urban society. The characteristics of the ideal virtual friend found in this study can serve as feedback for urban populations to build better friendships. Regarding virtual friends, although the concept of a virtual friend described by Froding et al. (2012) refers to online friendships, most participants desired face-to-face meetings with these virtual friends. This is in line with the findings of Kourtiti et al. (2021), who found that individuals living in urban areas desire strong social relationships as an essential aspect in shaping the city's soul. From this, it can be



concluded that participants generally seek virtual friends not only because of the features of the online world, but because they genuinely need real friends.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description of the ideal virtual friend provided by the participants, it can be concluded that the quality of virtual friends desired by urban populations is that they can listen well and accept them as they are. Participants also seek virtual friends who are not limited to romantic relationships, but rather those who can form meaningful connections with them. Based on the testing of the first hypothesis, it was found that *hikikomori* exists in Indonesia, as evidenced by the correlation between friendship relationships, frequency of family contact, and loneliness levels. In the second and third hypotheses, it was found that friendship relationships, frequency of family contact, and the number of household members were negatively correlated with loneliness. Additionally, loneliness levels were positively correlated with connecting with virtual friends.

There is a significant relationship between loneliness levels and the intention to connect with virtual friends, where higher loneliness levels are associated with an increased intention to communicate with virtual friends. This finding supports the fourth hypothesis. Regarding the differences between groups, it was found that there was a significant difference in loneliness levels between those who had and had not interacted with virtual friends. This finding supports the fifth hypothesis.

Based on these findings, future research could explore how to improve the quality of interactions in urban communities to further reduce loneliness levels. Additionally, concerning the relationship with virtual friends, Berezan et al. (2019) found that one way to reduce feelings of loneliness is by eliminating the boundaries between the virtual and real worlds through face-to-face meetings. Therefore, these findings can provide insights for virtual friend service users and various communities to organize face-to-face meetings to build deeper and higher-quality relationships. In conclusion, these findings support the development of virtual friendship services focusing on emotional support, not just romanticisation. Therefore, the Indonesian government and service providers can collaborate to create a platform with psychological assistance features. Further research could also accommodate a longitudinal and experimental design to test the effectiveness of hybrid interventions (e.g., online support groups with monthly face-to-face meetings) to reduce loneliness. I want to thank colleagues from Universitas Multimedia Nusantara and the faculty members of the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia, for their valuable support while preparing this manuscript.

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