Judith Staudner: Opinion essay

The 21st century is the century of social networking. It is the century of Facebook. In the western world almost everyone aged between 15 and 40 has it, loves it, needs it and virtually ceases to exist without it. You cannot argue the fact that these sites are a great tool to keep in touch with friends. But can you actually make real friends online?

Personally I do not think it is possible to find real friends through the internet. There are online dating agencies and at least one internet platform for every issue imaginable these days. The problem, however, is the same with all of these sites. You might share the sorrows of the person at the end of the line, but you can never know if they are who they claim to be or if it is all pretense. Thus all online communication sites contain the same risks of meeting someone who does not exist outside the chatroom.

Another difficulty that comes with online friendship is that once one is in touch with somebody via the internet for a longer period of time, certain expectations as to the personality and to the looks of the other person are raised. These hopes can be easily destroyed by one single real-life rendez-vous. First of all, online photos might not do justice to reality, and secondly, and this leads me to the next point I am trying to make, body language has a large impact on our perception.

Thus my next argument is that one can spend months talking to someone online creating a certain image of them. But when meeting that person face to face, they might use gestures that seem revolting to oneself. It might happen that it becomes unbearable to be in a room with someone one has confessed one's problems to for weeks.

Nevertheless we live in a time where social networking is important. But I think it is rather used between people who really know each otheroutside the virtual world. Social networks are used as a tool to stay in touch with friends, not to make new ones. I, for one, use them in such a way and would never ever accept a friend request on Facebook from someone I do not know.