

Why Do Social Media Make People Feel Lonelier Instead of Connecting with Them?

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Abstract

The article aims to fulfil the requirement by identifying how social media is enhancing loneliness among people instead of connecting people. Increasing social media usage among teenagers, school students and college students is highly effective in their education. Furthermore, social media posts enhance the thoughts of comparison among people which negatively affects their mental health. Different features and posts of different social media platforms seem very interesting for students as well as adults who enhance the gap in their friendships and relationships. People start to spend more time on social media instead of having conversations with family members and friends and that enhances loneliness among them.

Various secondary methods are used and identified that extreme social media usage has some crucial psychological impacts. There are many previously published articles that give accurate information about the impacts social media has on people's health. A few themes are created based on the findings where all the collected information is described with proper citation. It is identified that social media brings isolation and separates friends as well as family members which causes feelings of loneliness among people. Collected information and results are descriptively discussed in this study for a better understanding of the findings.

Keywords

Loneliness, Psychological Health, Social Media, Technological Devices.

INTRODUCTION

Background of Research

Social media is one of the biggest factors in life nowadays which are known as the connectors among different types of people. The number of social media users is increasing rapidly in the world which has several effects on the health and mental health of people. It is identified in the figure that the number of social media users has been increasing every year. There were **about 3.9 billion** social media users in 2020 which has increased to **4.59 billion** in 2022 [1]. Apart from that, it is expected that the number of social media users in the world will be **5.85 billion** in 2027. Along with the number of social media users, several health issues are also increasing among people.

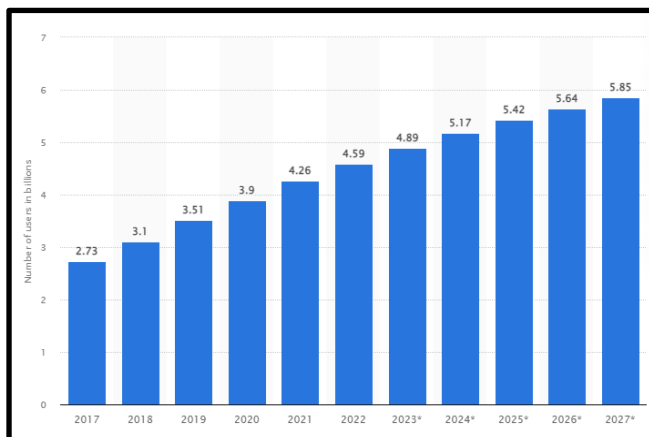


Figure 1: Number of social media users worldwide in the ten years [1]

The number of **social media platforms** or **SMPs** with interesting features is also increasing to attract more users. It is identified that social media capitalises on isolation and makes people engaged with their mobiles and other devices. This led to a lower conversation with friends and less number of friends which is a reason that people start to feel lonely [2]. Considering this, the study examines the effects of social media usage on relationships and psychological factors people. Mainly, identifying the accurate reason that social media leads to the feeling of loneliness is the purpose of this study.

Aim and objectives

The study is focused on completing the requirement of identifying the reason behind enhancing loneliness by using social media instead of connecting with people. Considering this, specific goals are,

- To identify the state of social media users worldwide in recent times
- To investigate the effects of social media usage on the psychological health of people
- To demonstrate the connection between social media usage and increasing loneliness

Significance of the study

Social media usage and its effects on the psychological health of people is a common topic but most of the studies only include the importance of social media for enhancing general knowledge and communicating with people. This particular article will give an introduction to the negative sides of social media usage. Investigating and evaluating the connection between social media usage and enhancing

loneliness among people enhances the significance of this study.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study design

Study design refers to the specific approach for conducting a research study with proper structure and specific types of data. There are four types of study designs which are "primary qualitative", "secondary qualitative", "primary quantitative" and "secondary quantitative". The researcher has adopted the "*secondary qualitative design*" for this following study as it requires less time as well as helps to maintain the significance. Qualitative and subjective data will be collected as per the requirement for which secondary sources will be used [3]. In secondary methods, observing reports leads to quantitative data and reviewing articles and journals leads to qualitative data. A brief discussion about the selection of specific methods of data collection is presented below.

Data collection

Different sources that are used for data collection are "primary sources" and "secondary sources". Specific sources are used with particular purposes as per the characteristics of the sources. Original data, realistic activities and time consumption are the particular characteristics of primary sources whereas secondary data, previously published literature and less time consumption are the characteristics of secondary sources [4]. *Secondary methods* are used in this study for completing the requirement of a secondary qualitative study. Reviewing articles and journals is simpler and easier than surveying people which also helps to collect relevant and subjective data [5]. Data are collected from several scholarly articles and news journals which are thematically presented and then briefly discussed for improving the understanding of the findings. Interpreting relevant data not only ensures the accuracy of data but also enhances the significance of a research study.

Specific criteria

Some particular criteria or standards for conducting this research article were,

- ❖ Selecting articles that were published after 2018 for gathering recent data
- ❖ Interpreting data without manipulating them for ensuring reliability
- ❖ Avoiding doctoral dissertations for collecting relevant data only
- ❖ Including proper citation of all the information and data

Data analysis

Secondary qualitative will be collected by reviewing journals and different articles. There are two particular systems of analysing secondary qualitative data which are systems analysis and thematic analysis. Creating themes based on the results and findings is more significant for

interpreting collected data properly than a systematic process. Therefore, the researcher has used the *thematic analysis* process in which themes are created under which relevant data are evaluated [6]. Generating themes and evaluating all the findings descriptively for making them understandable for the readers enhances the significance of this study.

RESULTS

State of social media usage in recent times

Social media has gained immense popularity and acceptance in recent years due to its advantages and flexibility. This can be referred to as a comprehensive term consisting of various platforms to connect, interact, collaborate and share knowledge. Business organisations use social media for marketing purposes and expanding the existing business as well as promoting a new business or product. On the other hand, general people use these platforms to interact and engage with one another. There are numerous social media platforms to use for interacting, sharing content and knowledge and enhancing collaboration, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat. It has been identified that a major portion of people uses Facebook and YouTube regardless of gender or age, while other social media platforms are widely used among younger adults [7]. These social media platforms enable people to advertise numerous products or services share their experiences and find out their desired goods.

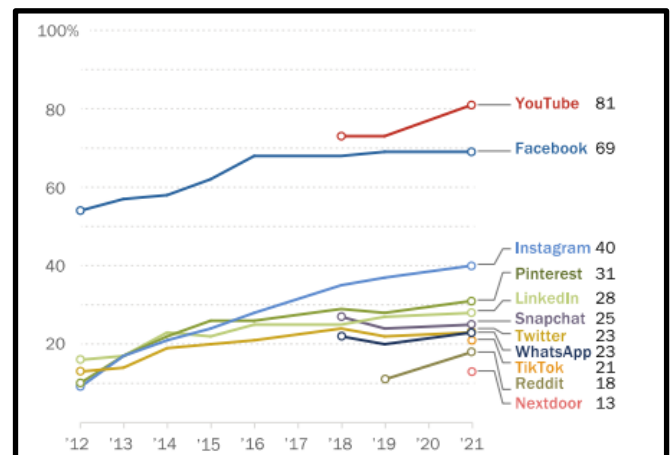


Figure 2: Use of different social media platforms among adults[7]

The emergence of digital technology and population growth along with increasing usage of the internet has enhanced the usage of social media platforms in recent years. Nowadays, people are more indulged in their online activities and spend regular time. Around 50% of the regular users of social media platforms have claimed that they use these platforms for interacting and keeping collaboration, while spare time filling and developing new knowledge or learning new experiences are other reasons for increasing the use of social media [8]. The state of social media has improved highly in recent years due to increasing usage among youths

and teenagers. However, it has been observed people of all age's use these platforms more or less as there are opportunities for accessing different types of platforms, including news, business, communication and interaction, dating platforms and several other platforms.

There are numerous social media platforms available on the internet and Facebook and YouTube have become the most popular among them. Facebook has been identified to be the first-ever social media platform to cross one billion active users, which has increased to 2.89 billion active users monthly [9]. On the other hand, the US and China rank top for having the highest number of "high-profile social media platforms". It has been estimated that these platforms will reach 3.96 billion users by 2022. Generation Z is more indulged in developing personal identity through branding via social media networks [10]. Thus, these social media platforms have provided immense opportunities to all types of people including customers, business enterprises and common users seeking communication and collaboration. These platforms have become one of the most common methods of connecting and collaborating with family, friends as well as unknown persons. In addition, for business organisations, these platforms provide several types of opportunities including promoting, marketing and connecting with stakeholders, suppliers and partners and have become an addictive factor for people, especially teenagers.

Impact of social media usage on the psychological health of people

Extreme use of social media platforms can cause a high impact on the emotional and psychological health of the users. Social media platforms have been primarily designed for excessive usage and allow users to do almost everything, including reading news, interacting with known as well as unknown people, sharing experiences, developing creative content and increasing collaboration. Extreme usage of these platforms can have a severe impact on psychological health by causing sleep deprivation, depression, ADHD symptoms and anxiety [11]. People of all ages, especially children and teenagers are suffering from emotional impacts and "mental illness" due to excessive usage of social media platforms and it can also cause to reduce the satisfaction of life. Throughout the world, around 50% of all issues of "mental illness" and issues are due to excessive usage of these platforms.

In social media, status and quality of life are measured by the number of "likes" and having fewer "likes" can increase the feeling of loneliness or refusal, which creates psychological issues for the users. People use social media for connecting with people, however, these applications and platforms cannot reduce stress but rather than increasing reading anxiety and causing depression [12]. In addition, social media has been observed to increase dissatisfaction, loneliness and frustration which eventually impacts highly on the psychological health of users. Social media has created a new psychological fear, "fear of missing out" or FOMO, which is similar to isolation and can affect self-esteem and identification. Isolation, anxiety and depression are among

the most common impacts of social media networks.

There are severe other conflicts associated with social media usage that can create challenges regarding psychological satisfaction and development. These issues include cyber-bullying, cyber crimes, and self-absorption by sharing "innermost thoughts" and feelings, which can create barriers to "real-life connections". However, increased usage of social media has been identified to have a different impact on different people as per their individuality [13]. Almost all social media networks have been designed to maintain excessive usage and be addictive along with involving the emotional and psychological aspects of users. It has been observed that around 81% of the USA teenagers are on regular social media platforms, while the rate of adults using these sites is 69%, which is comparatively low [14]. In addition, teenagers are more psychologically vulnerable and impactful due to their developing and enthusiastic nature.

Therefore, it can be stated that excessive usage of social media platforms and increased involvement can cause to crucial impact on mental and psychological impact on users. Additionally, as teenagers are more involved in these platforms, they are more likely to be trapped into depression, anxiety and mental illness due to cyber bullying and other factors associated with social media platforms. Social media has been identified to have a deeper connection with anxiety and mood changes along with increasing addiction among adolescents [15]. Thus, these platforms pose a direct impact on the mental well-being and psychological health of the users along with causing health defects.

Connection between social media usage and loneliness

The use of social media has increased rapidly in recent years, mainly for teenagers and adults. People use several types of technological devices for interacting with people and enhancing collaboration with family and friends. On the other hand, social and lonely, both types of people seek collaboration and support through using these devices and platforms. Extreme use of social media has been observed to have a direct connection with increasing negative mental and psychological experiences, which correlates with increasing loneliness [16]. In addition, excessive use of social media and associated negative experiences tend to increase feelings of loneliness. It has been identified that the quality of virtual relationships consists of a direct connection with loneliness. "Problematic social media usage" has been identified to have a direct correlation with reducing satisfaction and thus, increasing loneliness [17]. Technological devices enable users to interact with other people, read news, gain experiences and develop new knowledge. Regarding this, using social media networks to attain news and attaining negative information eventually enhances the loneliness of the users.

In modern society, social media has become inevitable for regular activities regardless of gender and age, though younger adults are the main user group of social media networks. Additionally, the emotional and psychological development of younger adults remains in progress and

negative experiences via social media impact their mental health and increase their loneliness. These platforms have been primarily regarded to be an opportunity to prevent loneliness by enhancing collaboration; however, their potential impact on psychological and emotional health has eliminated this fact [18]. Excessive usage of social media networks increases depression and anxiety among people of all ages and it has been observed that spending regular time on these sites can impact mental well-being. The first-ever investigation into the connection between social media usage, reduced well-being and increased loneliness has shown significant insights.

In this experimental study, psychologist Melissa G. Hunt collected data from Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat and conducted a comprehensive study. Additionally, results suggest that the main impacts of increased social media usage are *loneliness, anxiety and depression* [19]. Thus, social media has a direct connection with increasing loneliness as well as impacting well-being and increasing anxiety and depression. On the other hand, several types of people use social media networks for different purposes and it has been observed that the rate of increasing loneliness is high among individuals already lonely and seeking mental support from the virtual world. Hence, it can be stated that the negative impacts of social networking sites are more vulnerable for people who are already depressed. Social media usage has a direct connection with affecting self-esteem, hyperactivity and inattention, especially among adolescents [20]. Apart from this, people mainly use these platforms for collecting information on various aspects and incidents and not every time, the available information is positive, which increases the depression and loneliness of the users.

DISCUSSION

In the following study, the impact and collection of social media usage with increasing loneliness have been explored and the results have been interpreted by conducting a thematic analysis. The usage of social media platforms or SMP has become inevitable for Generation Z due to its advantages and opportunities. Utilising SMPs provides numerous types of opportunities and different advantages for different types of users. Throughout the world, there are almost 5 billion internet users and among them, 59% use SMPs in 2022 [21]. The increased use of the internet and social media has made it impossible to imagine life without SMPs in modern society. Business organisations use SMPs for marketing and promotion purposes, while the general public uses these platforms for interacting and connecting with people, learning new aspects, gaining knowledge and news, sharing content and experiences and increasing collaboration.



Figure 3: The state of advertising and marketing via social media[22]

It has been observed that a significant number of people indulged in regular time spent on social media activities including “spare time filling”, developing collaboration and gaining knowledge. In addition, among these users, the main user group is younger adults and teenagers and the use of technological devices, such as smart phones, iPhones or tablets has increased as these devices enable to access various platforms for dating, operating business, accessing news and information and connecting with friends and family. These platforms have become sources of inspiration and branding and business organisations spend a significant amount of investment for advertising via SMPs. This investment has been recorded to be 132 billion Dollars in 2020 [22]. In addition, this spending has been estimated to reach 200 by 2024, which indicates the increased significance and usage of SMPs for business purposes. Several SMPs have been outlined, including YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram and among these sites, YouTube and Facebook have been identified to be the most popular and widely accepted mediums for social networking.

The adolescents and teenagers of the modern generation are much more focused on developing an identity via these SMPs and business organisations improve collaboration with stakeholders. Using SMPs for gathering relevant information associated with customer demands and market trends has been identified to increase business sustainability [23]. On the other hand, teenagers and adolescents use these platforms for avoiding loneliness, interact with new people and gain knowledge. Additionally, SMPs have been designed for maintaining extreme usage and entertainment and are addictive in nature, which influences users to spend more time being indulge in online activities. The prevalence of cyber bullying has increased due to the excessive use of SMPs and that has been identified to be a major reason for increasing “psychological distress” among young girls [24]. On the other hand, spending extra time on social media sites has been observed to have a direct influence on increasing ADHD symptoms, anxiety, depression and sleep deprivation.

Excessive usage of these sites can reduce sleep and increase depression and anxiety to a significant rate and also inserts the feeling of being reduced or lonely. It has been observed that SMPs increase depression and anxiety and indirectly influence addiction to substance use, school dropouts and disruption of social connections [25]. The

increased significance of the internet and digital platforms have influenced SMPs to become inevitable for the modern generation and this usage consists of several negative consequences, such as reducing real-life connections and increasing psychological conflicts and distress. On the other hand, using these sites for a long duration and indulging in regular online activities increases the loneliness of users, especially teenagers and adolescents as their psychological development remains in progress. Psychologist Melissa G. Hunt has conducted an experimental study, which has provided significant outcomes addressing the disruptive impact of SMPs on increasing loneliness and decreasing satisfaction.

It has been observed that there are several types of users on the SMPs who use these sites for different reasons and there are also depressed and lonely people who seek mental comfort. People suffering from distress and depression and adolescents are among the most vulnerable groups affected due to the increased use of SMPs. Experiencing negative aspects and information on these sites impacts self-esteem and also influences cyber bullying. There are numerous cases where people have injured themselves and also committed suicides, especially young girls due to cyber bullying via online platforms [26]. It has been observed that undulating crucially with these sites can influence to conduct of risky activities and ultimately end up being bullied and victimised. In addition, these practices have increased the loneliness of people who are already distressed and exploited. Hence, it can be stated that SMPs consist of a direct connection with increasing loneliness and psychological stress along with causing physical harm.

People indulge in Social networking for keeping collaborating, developing new knowledge and sharing experiences and also collecting news and information. Consequently, negative factors associated with the available information pose a negative impact on the mind as well as on psychological health. Reducing or limiting the usage of SMPs can decrease depression and anxiety along with improving well-being [27]. However, generation Z is thoroughly indulged in using SMPs as their regular activities and has been focused on creating identity through these sites. The excessive use of online sites and collaborative platforms can reduce well-being and increase depression which poses a direct connection with increasing loneliness and mental stress. Adolescents and younger adults are the main groups being impacted mentally and psychologically and end up being more lonely than ever.

Social media has become inevitable for the modern generation and has the potential to improve well-being. The emergence of digital technology and technological devices has increased the usage of SMPs and it has been observed that loneliness has become similar to an epidemic among active users of social media. Excessive indulgence in virtual relations can reduce real-life social connections and eventually influence people to become lonelier. Digital technology allows people to collaborate and forms an illusion

of connection but increases loneliness [28]. Thus, it has been proven that social media develops mental stress, anxiety, depression and sleep deprivation and ultimately pushes people toward loneliness.

CONCLUSION

The present study has been carried out to assess and illustrate the influence of social media to make people lonelier. A secondary data collection method has been used and the findings of this research indicate that social media and associated sites have become crucially significant in the modern era. In recent years, the increased use of technological devices and the internet has increased this significance and excessive use of social media platforms or SMPs can impact the emotional, psychological and mental health of users. Social media has been observed to have a direct correlation with being lonelier and these sites have been designed for managing excessive use and entertaining people.

These sites influence and attract people to spend more time and affect their real-life collaboration. It has been observed that people of all ages use social media sites and young adults and teenagers are mainly impacted. This study has provided effective insights into the negative impacts of excessive usage of SMPs and several types of mental and psychological issues have been identified, including depression, sleep deprivation and anxiety. Cyber bullying and FOMO or “fear of missing out” have been identified to be the major psychological impacts that have a high influence on increasing loneliness.

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