

## Uncovering the Ties between Social Media and Loneliness

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### ABSTRACT

Social Media has become one of the vast used service in the past few decades. The growth that has been there for Social Media and various platforms have been quite massive when equated against any other form of media. The study was designed to comprehend the relation between Social Media Use and Loneliness and also the impact of using social media on loneliness amongst College Students. **Methods and Materials:** The present research was oriented in a cross-sectional, descriptive - correlational research method. Study was administered college students enrolled in Delhi. The sample included a total of 234 candidates with 117 males and 117 females each. The stratified random sampling was considered to be the criteria for the selection of equal ratio of candidates from every strata(zone) as to diversify the sample among the major zones viz. North, South, East, West and Central. The data was gathered via appropriate data collection tools and via self-administration by the candidates. The questionnaire included a Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (19 item, 5-point Likert Scale) and UCLA Loneliness Scale (20 item, 4-point Likert Scale). **Results:** Study inferred that no significant difference was present between males and females in terms of loneliness as well as in social media usage. Significant correlation was present between social media usage for socialization and loneliness ( $r = 0.134, p < 0.05$ ); social media usage for entertainment and loneliness ( $r = 0.151, p < 0.05$ ). **Conclusion:** Present study concluded that Social media is associated with the loneliness amongst the college students in Delhi. The mental health professionals, peers, parents, college faculty must also ensure that such individuals are heard of and looked upon for their best of interests.

**Keywords:** Social Media Use, Loneliness, College Students, Young Adults

Social Media has become one of the vast used service in the past few decades. The growth that has been there for Social Media and various platforms have been quite humongous when compared with any other form of media. Social media has been a boon when it comes to connecting with family, friends and acquaintances. It has made mostly every aspect of life easier, whatsoever it may be. There are various broad categories under which the platforms can be grouped. They can mainly be categorized as browsing, interacting and broadcasting. Social media is changing the lifestyle and daily routine of people, as well as reshaping the well-being and spiritual fulfilment of individuals. The young adulthood specifically the age group 18-24 is the time devoted to the development of

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## Uncovering the Ties between Social Media and Loneliness

self-identity as well as formulating an opinion about the world and social media plays a crucial role in both.

Oxford states **Social media** as a collective term used for a bunch of websites and applications that enable users to create, consume or broadcast content as a part of social networking. These are especially a group of computers – built applications or websites that had been built for the purpose of growing one's virtual networks, a specific domain where one could share his/her ideas, opinions, views, and also to acknowledge various opinions viz agreements or disagreements regarding the same through sharing of specific information.

**Loneliness** as per the *American Psychological Association (APA)* can be defined as the affective and cognitive discomfort or uneasiness from being or perceiving oneself to be alone or otherwise solitary. It is basically the lack of social interaction that induces the feeling of emptiness, or shallowness in an individual. It has already been proven to grow in more diversified and drastic mental health issues like Anxiety (especially Social Anxiety), mild or even severe forms of Depression, low self-esteem, and other serious health related risks.

The purpose of this study was to build a concrete evidence for the relationship between social media use and loneliness. The shift in the lives post the arrival of smartphones and the concept of social media plus high-speed internet embarked some benefit brought more to the table than anyone could have imagined. Outrage feed versus calming feed example (by Tristan Harris) is also a pioneer in the need for attention, stating that if Facebook has to come up with a choice between Outrage feed and calming feed, it would most likely choose Outrage one as it will generate more likes, comments and attention. A radical issue that grows out of the race for attention is the Phantom Syndrome. In terms of psychology, it may be suggested as the race to the bottom of the brainstem and which specific platform can get there first. Snap-streaks are an addictive example for this, sharing photos, videos of every small daily routine that one is up to, majority share their passwords with friends when occupied with work schedule so as to keep the streak going, younger generation get inspired by the celebrities and as a result their ways of living suffer due to that having a major toll on their mental health.

Masthi, N.R.R., et al., (2021) investigated the relationship between health status of students and their social media usage. The study aimed to find out the burden that social media addiction had on individuals. The findings were suggestive that around a-third of participants had severe addiction to social media with majority having moderate addiction; significant amount of association was found out between social media addiction and the physical, psychological and behavioural changes.

In Symbiosis, Pune research was executed to inspect the credibility for social media to make the youth lonely and unsociable with a sample of 205 students (Rajanarayanan, S. and Mehta, M., 2020). The findings were that youth expected social media to be highly engaging, and that they must put extra efforts to make friends in real life in comparison to social media, they often seek support from friends made on social media, and the friends made via social media are easier to trust.

An analysis was formulated to confirm whether a relation exist amid social media use disorder and loneliness with Lebanon residents (Youssef, L., Hallit, R., Kheir, N., Obeid, S. and Hallit, S., 2020). The findings were strong correlation between loneliness and social

## Uncovering the Ties between Social Media and Loneliness

media use disorder along with other mental health illnesses that were a part of the study. Also, strong relationship was found in between loneliness and insomnia; and between loneliness and alexithymia.

Shettar, M, et al., (2017) directed a study to check relationship between Facebook addiction and Loneliness on post- graduate students. The findings were that part of sample was certainly addicted to Facebook and those few individuals also did experience Loneliness. A moderate correlation between the two variables did confirm the hypothesis.

Yang, C. (2016) performed a comparison study on undergraduate students from a U.S. mid-southern university. The findings advised that interactive and browsing activities over Instagram were associated with little to no loneliness but broadcasting over Instagram was related to extreme loneliness. The findings implied that social networking sites were both positively and negatively correlated to loneliness depending on how one uses the platform.

Savci, M. & Aysan, F. (2016) administered a groundwork to investigate the relationship between Impulsivity, loneliness and social media usage with students from Firat university. The findings were frequency of using social media increased as the level of impulsivity increased, level of loneliness increased once social media usage was increased and the loneliness increased when there was a rise in impulsivity. Thus, suggesting a positive correlation in all the three cases.

Pittman, M. (2015) in his study tried to grasp however partaking on social media affects loneliness from 2 universities in Pacific Northwest. The findings advised as social media use had increased the loneliness decreased, except for Facebook no correlation was found. No significant difference was found for either creating/consuming social media. Hence, the study contrasted previous studies during a manner as previous studies advised that use of social media make individuals additional isolated, however, this study advised that it would not be forever the case.

Subathra, V., Nimisha, M. and Hakeem, M.N.L. (2013) organized a study to see the extent of social network addiction. The findings indicated that social media as a matter of reality did took a toll on children's academic achievements, some lost their sleep thanks to their addiction to social media and virtually however not all were obsessed on social media chatting to a medium.

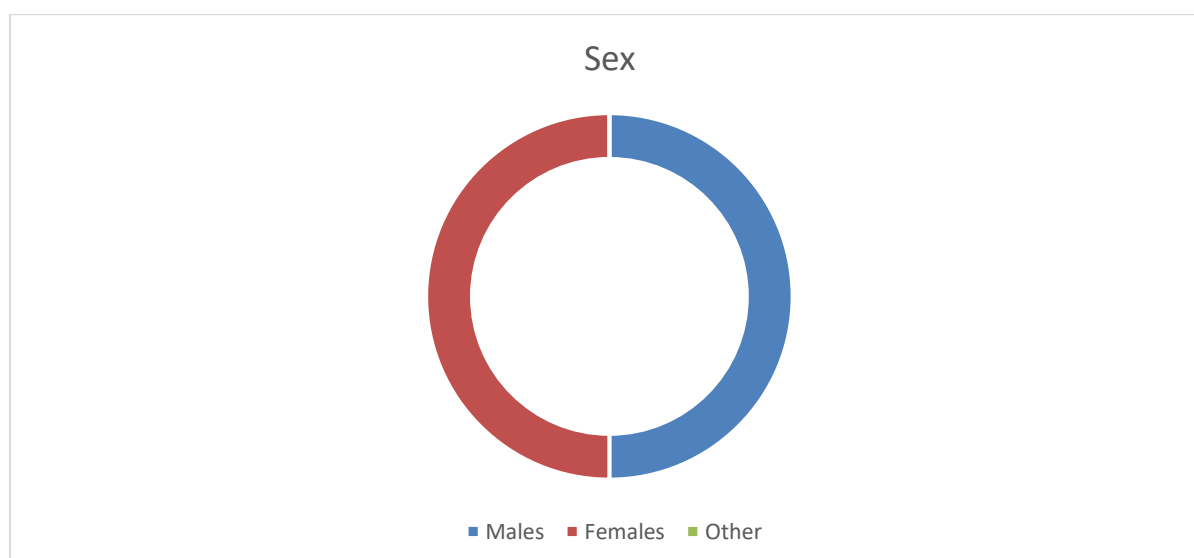
### *Null Hypothesis*

- i) NO significant difference among males and females in terms of: -
  - a) Social media use; b) Loneliness
- ii) NO significant correlation between Social Media Use and Loneliness

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

The study was designed to comprehend the connection between Social Media Use and Loneliness and also the impact of using social media on loneliness amongst College Students aged 18-24. The present research was oriented in a cross-sectional, descriptive - correlational research method. Study was administered college students enrolled in Delhi. The sample included a total of 234 candidates with 117 males and 117 females each. The stratified random sampling was considered to be the criteria for the selection of equal ratio of candidates from every strata(zone) as to diversify the sample among the major zones viz. North, South, East, West and Central.

## Uncovering the Ties between Social Media and Loneliness



### ***Data Collection Tools***

The tools used for the study was a Google Form comprising of basic Socio-demographic details, along with Social Networking Usage Questionnaire for measuring the various aspects of using Social Media and UCLA Loneliness Scale to measure Loneliness levels of the participants.

#### **1. Social Networking Usage Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was prepared by Gupta, S. and Bashir, L.; 2018 in order to measure the social networking usage of an individual with the help of 4 factors namely academic(7items); socialization(6items); entertainment (4 items) and informativeness (2 items). There were 19 items in the scale with a 5-point Likert Scale to choose the answer from for each item. The Reliability as calculated by the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ( $r$ ) was 0.830. For the validity criteria, scale went through content validity by the expert panel; Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA); Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) all the way up till the Convergent Validity value ranging between (0.593 to 0.894) at 0.01 level of significance as the Pearson's coefficient of correlation.

#### **2. UCLA Loneliness Scale**

The scale by Russell, D, Peplau, L. A. & Ferguson, M. L. ;1978 was a 20-item scale considered measuring one's personal feelings of loneliness and furthermore feelings of social isolation. The total score varied in between 0-60 with higher score suggesting more lonelier individual in real life. The Reliability for this scale test-retest reliability over a 1-year period was ( $r = .73$ ), internal consistency coefficient was 0.96 at 0.01 level of significance. Construct validity, concurrent validity were also significant for this Scale.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

Along with introduction of the study, an informed consent was presented attached with the form to the selected students that were part of the study. The participants were assured that their personal information and responses were to be kept confidential and were being utilized for research purposes only. After obtaining responses, the gathered data was evaluated via suitable descriptive (Frequency, Mean and SD) and inferential statistics – Independent sample T-test for comparing means, person's correlation ( $r$ ) test based on the objectives of the study using SPSS version 16.

**RESULTS**

**Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Variables (N = 234)**

Variable	Mean(M)	Standard Deviation (S.D)
Social Media Use	64.69	11.04
Academic	23.33	5.26
Socialisation	15.77	3.77
Entertainment	15.11	2.81
Informative	10.47	2.41
Loneliness	21.75	14.40
Time spent on Social Media	1.29	1.07

Table 4.1 represents the descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) for all the variables included in the research

**Table 4.2(i): Group Statistics of Social Media Use for Males and Females**

	Sex	N	Mean(M)	Standard Deviation (S.D)	Standard Error of Mean(S.E <sub>M</sub> )
Social media use	Male	117	63.93	11.95	1.10
	Female	117	65.44	10.04	0.93

**Table 4.2(ii): Independent Sample t-test for gender differences in Social Media Use**

SOCIAL MEDIA USE	t- value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	-1.048	232	0.296

Table 4.2(i) & (ii) shows group statistics and independent sample t-test for males and females in terms of social media usage. The results imply that male and female students perform similar in the social media usage at the college level.

**Table 4.3(i): Group Statistics of Loneliness for Males and Females**

	Sex	N	Mean(M)	Standard Deviation (S.D)	Standard Error of Mean(S.E <sub>M</sub> )
Loneliness	Male	117	20.78	15.65	1.45
	Female	117	22.72	13.03	1.20

**Table 4.3(ii): Independent Sample t-test for gender differences in Loneliness levels**

LONELINESS	t- value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	-1.03	232	0.30

Table 4.3(i) & (ii) shows group statistics and independent sample t-test for males and females in terms of Loneliness.

		Academic	Socialization	Entertainment	Informative	Time Spent
Loneliness	Pearson Correlation	.093	.134*	.151*	.052	-.037
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.157	.041	.021	.427	.571
	N	234	234	234	234	234

## Uncovering the Ties between Social Media and Loneliness

The results imply that males and females do not differ in their loneliness levels at the college level.

Therefore, using social media for the purpose of socialization and Loneliness had a weak but significant correlation. The use of social media for Entertainment purpose and Loneliness also had a weak yet statistically significant correlation.

The Null Hypothesis in the case of correlation was partly false and hence rejected.

Thereafter, Alternate Hypothesis was accepted in the case of correlation amongst entertainment and loneliness; likewise for socialization and loneliness.

### **DISCUSSION**

The critical findings of the study were NO significant difference was found between males and females in terms of Social Media Use; in terms of Loneliness. This implied that male and female students perform similar in the social media usage and loneliness levels at the college level. Using social media for the purpose of socialization and Loneliness had a significant correlation. The use of social media for Entertainment purpose and Loneliness also had statistically significant correlation. The Null Hypothesis in the case of correlation was partly false and hence rejected. Thereafter, Alternate Hypothesis was accepted in the case of correlation amongst entertainment and loneliness; likewise for socialisation and loneliness.

The study has reference with the previous literature. A study from Ghana (Karikari, et al., 2017) via the Chi -square difference test concluded that no significant difference was found in between both the genders and it the inference was drawn suggesting that males and females show similar effects when it comes to the social media use. Rotenberg and Macdonald (2004) in their study on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> standard students (middle childhood) concluded that no significant gender difference were observed. A study comprising of Belgium students of seventh grade formulated that no significant difference was present in between girls and boys in terms of loneliness (Bossaert, et al., 2012). In the study involving first year college students from Southern U.S (Lou, et al., 2012) it was concluded that Facebook intensity had a significant impact on loneliness which had no sufficient support from the motive for which Facebook had been used. It was inferred that increased frequency of Facebook usage led to a decline in the loneliness level of the participants of the study.

In the Indian context, a study from Yenepoya University involving post-graduates (Shettar, et al., 2017) determined that Facebook addiction had a significant correlation with loneliness as per the Pearson's correlation which further inclined over the relationship between the two variables.

The present study had also shown that socialization via social media was correlated to loneliness suggesting that those interacting via social media may be less anxious then those indulging in face to face conversations, but it further increases the likelihood for social isolation which again is a concerning problem in itself. Present study had also shown significant correlation for the individuals using social media as a source of entertainment and their related loneliness levels. This suggests that these individuals were always hooked on to the dopamine hit they got via consumption of social media, and in absence of the same they felt lonely. It could also be possible that the individuals had been addicted to the social media so severely that they had started to miss the kick in their real lives; started to look out

## Uncovering the Ties between Social Media and Loneliness

for such possibilities as shown via these social streaming platforms further adding on to their perceived or actual loneliness. The other two variables that were part of total social media usage viz, using social media for academic and informative purposes had no significant relationship or correlation with loneliness which is pretty obvious as these variables had nothing to do with loneliness to begin with. The total time spent on social media did not have any significant correlation with loneliness either which could be explained as intensity for consuming social media had no impact or link with the loneliness, it was the purpose for which the social media was being used.

A number of implications from the current study could be drawn for the practical use, and future research. In academics no link to loneliness was established by the study which is suggestive of the possibility that in the pandemic situation, social media platforms are go-to for the interactive teachings. The informative usage of social media like campaigns through social media platforms need to be conducted as it may help in bringing awareness regarding loneliness as the majority of the population have smartphones nowadays. People indulging on social media for socialization and entertainment are less aware regarding the useful purposes like academia and informative and are required to get acknowledged that their actions might hint towards increasing loneliness amongst themselves. Although the loneliness levels were not at the peak for the college students still awareness via the faculty members, and the peers or close family could possibly help in getting over them or else it may develop over a period of time leading to other related disorders such as social anxiety, depression, etc. Study is made specific to the Indian standards and the cultural differences of other countries have been avoided; the study being culturally appropriate could help in implementing for future research work in the Indian sub-continent.

### CONCLUSION

Social Media usage had been liable for numerous mental health issues amongst college students in recent times, issues such as Loneliness. The association between the two variables viz. social media usage and loneliness accounts more likely for the purposes such as posting content and primarily the broadcasting activities. The findings of the present study were that using the social media for socialization, and for the purpose of entertainment were significant factors liable for the perceived loneliness levels amongst the college students. The mental health professionals must emerge in a way to ensure that firm measures are imposed for the likelihood of these students and every other individual binging on the social media for any related drives. Besides this, the peers, parents, college faculty must also ensure that such individuals are not shadowed of, but are looked upon in their best of interests.

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## Uncovering the Ties between Social Media and Loneliness

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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