

Impact of Social Networking Sites Addiction on Loneliness among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The study delves into how social media addiction (SNSA) and feelings of loneliness correlate, among adults aged 18-25 years old with the main aim to ascertain if heightened SNSA leads to increased loneliness levels in this age group. The research employed convenience and snowball sampling methods to recruit participants, and two standardized tools were used: the Social Networking Addiction Scale (SNAS) by M.G. Shahnawaz and Usama Rehman to measure SNSA and the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) to assess loneliness levels. Statistical methods for both inferential and descriptive analysis were used. The findings revealed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between SNSA and loneliness ($r = .177, p < .05$). This indicates that as SNSA increases, loneliness levels also rise. However, the weak correlation suggests that other factors like traits or existing mental health issues might also play a role, in this association. These results underscore the impact of spending much time on social media and the importance of implementing measures to encourage more positive online habits in young adults. Further research should investigate influencing factors and causal mechanisms to gain insight into how loneliness and social networking site addiction are linked.

Keywords: *Social Networking Addiction, Loneliness, Correlational Study, Mental Health*

Social Networking sites

Using social networking sites is one of the most common activities in the current world. A psychological phenomenon, loneliness is especially common among young individuals attempting to navigate the challenges of contemporary life.

According to early research, lonely people first used the Internet before turning to S.N.S. (Shotten, 1991). Concerns about Problematic Social Networking site use (PSNSU), a complex disorder marked by a lack of control over SNS-related behaviors that leads to continued use despite negative consequences, have grown in tandem with the growing popularity of SNS in global society (Griffiths, 2013; Musetti et al., 2021).

It has been proposed that using social networking sites (SNS) makes people feel more alone and isolated today. Online communication, however, is inferior to in-person human

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connections, which might result in loneliness (Kraut et al., 1998; Turkle, 2011). However, some contended that using SNS may lessen loneliness by improving existing relationships and favoring new ones (Gross, 2004; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

According to a recent theoretical model, there is a bidirectional and dynamic relationship between loneliness and SNS use, with loneliness rising when using SNS to avoid offline social relationships and falling when using SNS to build new relationships or broaden existing ones (Nowland et al., 2018).

There are various ways that loneliness can show up, including emotional loneliness, which is the absence of close relationships, and social loneliness, which is the loss of a social network. Overuse of social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook and Twitter, which are primarily created for social contact, is explicitly referred to as social networking addiction, which is a subtype of social media addiction.

Loneliness

A vital component in comprehending social media and excessive use of SNS is loneliness. It is defined as a subjective negative emotional experience arising from a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships. According to Murphy and Kupshik (1957), loneliness is described as a feeling of lack in one's social ties. According to Heinrich and Gullone (2006), loneliness is the perceived difference between one's desired and real social ties. Research indicates that lonely people frequently feel misunderstood and that their connections lack purpose, even though loneliness may be correlated with both the number and quality of relationships with others (Lim et al., 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a crucial component of research that evaluates and condenses the state of knowledge on a subject. The 'Social networking sites on loneliness among young adults' is the main emphasis of this study. It analyzes numerous studies that focus on various aspects of social networking sites like withdrawal. The literature review throws light into the areas that have been widely explored and discussed till now. The literature review was conducted with the help of journal articles and other articles that were obtained through a search in Google Scholar and Science Direct.

Marciano, L., & Viswanath, K. (2023) conducted a study on social media use and adolescents' well-being: A note on flourishing among 1,429 Swiss adolescents. By meeting the basic needs identified by the Self-Determination Theory—relatedness, autonomy, and competence—this study seeks to explore how social media activities may help teenagers thrive. The results have shown that inspiration through social media content improves flourishing levels in adolescents. Increasing love and compassion for others is one way that active posting and interaction with hedonistic or inspirational social media content has enhanced well-being.

Bianca Fox (2019), Loneliness and social media: A qualitative investigation of young people's motivations for use, and perceptions of social networking sites. Data for this project was gathered using semi-structured interviews and an online survey. The results show that all SNSs—text-based, image-based, or hybrid—can equally increase loneliness by exposing users to pictures of extreme happiness, beautiful bodies, unrealistic lifestyles, bullying, and increased exposure to negative content or damaging criticism.

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“The Effect of Loneliness on Social Networking Sites Use and Its Related Behaviors” was carried out by Samira Ranaeyi, Mohammad Reza Taghavi¹, and Mohammad Ali Goodarzi, (2015). Examining the impact of "loneliness" on social networking sites (SNS) usage, and associated behaviors is the goal of this study. In this study, 156 Shiraz University students freely took part. The Reasons for Online Use Scale was used to evaluate the pros and cons of using SNS, while the Scale of Internet habits was used to evaluate online habits. According to this study, the reasons why people use SNS and the amount of time they spend there are the same for lonely and non-lonely people.

Alessandro Musetti, Christian Franceschini, and Tania Moretta (2023) investigated the usage of social networking sites and loneliness in young adults who had poor versus good sleep quality: Gender's moderating role. For those with poor versus good sleep quality, it looked at the potential moderating effects of gender as well as the associations between loneliness and PSNSU symptoms. An online survey comprising self-report measures of loneliness, PSNSU symptoms, and sleep quality was filled out by 763 young individuals. Compared to people with good sleep quality, those with poor sleep quality reported feeling more alone and scoring higher on every PSNSU dimension.

Jean-Francois Coget Yutaka Yamauchi Michael Suman (2002), conducted a study on ‘the Internet, social networks, and loneliness.’ By a 2000 survey sample of 2096 Americans. The findings are that Internet users who socialize online are lonelier than those who do not, controlling demographic variables and social interaction variables. Internet use is marginally linked to a lower degree of loneliness, but there is little evidence that in-person interactions are being replaced by virtual ones.

Osman Erol, and Nese Sevim Cirak (2019), report a study on ‘Exploring the Loneliness and Internet Addiction Level of College Students Based on Demographic Variables.’ The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that predict college students' degrees of Internet addiction and to investigate their loneliness and Internet addiction with demographic data. Information was gathered from university students at a Turkish public university. According to the findings, students in lower classes felt more alone than those in higher levels, and younger individuals felt noticeably more alone than older participants.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

To understand the impact level of social networking site addiction on loneliness among young adults.

Hypotheses

- H1 There is a high level of social networking site addiction among young adults.
- H2 There is a significant prevalence of loneliness among young adults.
- H3 There is a significant positive association between social networking site addiction and loneliness among young adults.

Research Design

This study's correlational research approach aims to investigate the connection between young adults' loneliness and social networking addiction at a single point in time. The quantitative research method is gathering quantitative or numerical data and using statistical procedures to analyze it.

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Sample

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling are the sample techniques employed in this study. The sampling methods are both non-probability sampling techniques where the samples are chosen according to convenience and are spread out among the sample group. The sample taken for this research is adolescents who belong to the age group 18 to 25 years.

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame refers to the method employed by the researcher to utilize a set of elements to choose a sample from the overall population. The sample was oriented in South India and the age range of 18-25 years is in this study. Most of the responses obtained were from young adults, residing in and around the states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chennai, Karnataka, and other states of India.

Inclusion Criteria

The following are the inclusion criteria applied in this study:

1. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 are the study's sample.
2. The Indian young adults.
3. The study is open to adolescents of any gender.
4. To take part in the study, participants had to have a basic understanding of the English language.

Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria for the present study are as follows:

1. Individuals with a diagnosed severe mental health condition (e.g., clinical depression,) that may indirectly affect loneliness were not included to avoid confounding variables.
2. Participants who were not literate were not included in the study.
3. People from remote areas were not included in the study.

Instruments

Two instruments were used to study the impact related to social networking addiction and loneliness among adolescents in India.

1. **Social Networking Addiction Scale:** M.G. Shahnawaz and Usama Rehman developed the Social Networking Addiction Scale (SNAS), a psychometric instrument intended to assess social networking site addiction, especially in young adults and adolescents. Respondents are asked to assess their agreement with a variety of items using a Likert-type scale, with one denoting "strongly disagree" and five denoting "strongly agree." It is especially helpful for studies on mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and loneliness, as well as academic challenges brought on by excessive social media use.
2. **The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3):** One of the most popular and reliable tools for gauging people's subjective experiences of social isolation and loneliness is the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3). Version 3 is the most recent and improved version of the scale, which was created by Daniel W. Russell and associates and has undergone multiple changes. There are twenty items on the scale. Every item expresses a loneliness-related emotion or viewpoint. The frequency of loneliness-related events is measured using a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 represents never, 2 seldom, 3 occasionally, and 4 frequently. Higher loneliness is indicated by higher scores.

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Data Collection

The data collection process utilized Google Forms to administer two distinct questionnaires. By utilizing Google Forms, it efficiently gathered responses from participants in a digital format.

Variables

- **Independent Variable** - Social Networking Sites
- **Dependent Variable** - Loneliness

Ethical Safeguards/Considerations

The research was conducted with ethical considerations and protections in place. Before asking individuals to complete the questionnaires, their consent was sought during the data-gathering procedure. All participants received an overview of the study and were informed of any possible risks. Participants were also informed of the study's confidentiality and that their answers and personal data would only be utilized for research and academic reasons.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Inferential and descriptive statistics were both used in the data analysis. IBM SPSS 26 was utilized. The obtained raw data was coded before analysis. The statistical tests conducted are descriptive statistics such as mean, and standard deviation and inferential statistics are Pearson correlation and independent sample t-test.

Table 1 Relationship between Social Networking Sites Addiction and Loneliness using Pearson Correlation

	SNSA	Loneliness
SNSA	-	.177*
Loneliness	.177*	-
Mean	97.26	51.45
Standard Deviation	22.075	5.541

** $p < 0.05$ level (2- tailed)

As illustrated in Table 1, the result shows a weak positive correlation between Social Networking site addiction and Loneliness ($r = .177$, $p < 0.05$ level).

Hence, Hypotheses have been accepted. This indicates usage of social networking sites leads to an increase in levels of loneliness.

Table 2 Mean difference between High and Low Social Networking site addiction using Independent Sample t-test

SNSA	F	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
LOW		37	48.49	7.175	3.930	148	
	13.62						
HIGH		113	52.42	4.521	3.141	45.7	.003

* $p \leq 0.05$ (2- tailed)

Table 2 indicates that the p-value corresponding to these test statistics is $< .05$, so we can conclude that there is a significant difference between the high and low groups in terms of social networking site addiction.

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The results demonstrate a weak yet statistically significant positive correlation between social networking site addiction and loneliness ($r = .177$, $p < .05$), as shown in Table 1. This indicates that as addiction to social networking sites increases, self-reported levels of loneliness also rise. Table 2 further reveals a significant difference between individuals with high and low levels of social networking site addiction, with a p -value below .05. This result suggests that individuals with higher social networking site addiction scores experience loneliness at higher levels than those with lower scores. Together, these findings support the hypothesis that social networking site addiction is associated with increased loneliness.

DISCUSSION

The following inferences can be drawn based on the statistical analysis conducted on the obtained data. There is a significant positive correlation between Social Networking sites and Loneliness by the Pearson correlation and t -test. This means usage of social networking sites leads to an increase in levels of loneliness. The results indicate a statistically significant mean difference in SNSA scores between individuals with high and low social networking site addiction levels. Specifically, the high addiction group ($M = 52.42$) reported significantly higher SNSA scores than the low addiction group ($M = 48.49$).

This finding suggests that the extent of social networking site use may be positively associated with addictive behaviors and tendencies. It also supports the hypothesis that addiction to social networking sites is positively related to loneliness. Despite the weak correlation, the association remains statistically significant, indicating that social networking site usage may play a role in shaping user's experiences of loneliness.

Additionally, the significant difference found between high and low groups suggests that users with higher addiction levels may experience loneliness more acutely. In summary, this study provides evidence that social networking site addiction correlates with higher levels of loneliness.

CONCLUSION

The combined data from both tables support the hypothesis that social networking site addiction is linked to loneliness. While Table 1, suggests that the overall relationship is weak, Table 2 emphasizes that those with higher levels of social networking site addiction are significantly more likely to experience loneliness than those with lower levels of addiction. This combination of findings implies that social networking site addiction may not dramatically increase loneliness for all users, but it does indicate that higher addiction levels are associated with an increased risk of loneliness.

Additionally, the significant difference highlighted in Table 2 indicates that the loneliness effect might be more pronounced among users with high addiction levels. However, the weak correlation in Table 1 suggests that the relationship between social networking site addiction and loneliness may be influenced by other factors, such as individual differences in social needs or pre-existing mental health conditions. These findings contribute to the understanding of how social media usage may impact mental health, particularly for users with higher addiction levels. Future research could explore causal mechanisms or additional factors, such as personality or mental health status, to further clarify this relationship.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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