



The Role of Social Media in Reducing Loneliness among Senior Citizens in Lamki Chuha Municipality of Kailali District, Nepal

Tilak Prasad Sharma ^a ✉

✉tilak20013@gmail.com

^a Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, Mahendra Ratna Campus

Article Info

Abstract

Received: August 17, 2024

Accepted: September 18, 2024

Published: October 22, 2024

Senior citizens get encouraged by social media to engage in local community centered events so as to feel less isolated and connected. In Nepal, the number of old people is increasing very fast. The studies objectives to assess how effective social media is in mitigating the issue of serious loneliness among senior citizen. A descriptive cross-sectional survey research design was used, employing a structured questionnaire. The sample included 121 elderly citizens. As they were drawn upon to gather quantitative data: In social media use frequency an increase of one unit would decrease loneliness by 0.35 units strongly related to this also, In fact, Increased perceived social support decreased loneliness by 0.50 units thereby depicting a strong negative correlation, younger individuals have been found to be more prone to being alone than older. The conclusion from that social media was shown to reduce depression among the elderly. Additionally, according to findings, there is need for the elimination of technical barriers as well as creation of digital support networks in order to enhance wellbeing for the elderly.

Keywords: Loneliness, senior citizen, social support, social media, mental health

Introduction

Loneliness has been a huge problem among senior citizens as the world population ages, harming their mental and emotional health. Because of the emergence of digital platforms, senior citizens currently have more possibilities for staying connected with their communities.

In the outcome, Nepal's senior citizenry is fast rising; according to the 2021 census, 2.97 million senior citizens were counted, which 38.2 percent greater than that of 2011 is. This age group in the present period contributes 10.21 percent of the total population of the country (CBS, 2022). Internet usage in Nepal reached 15.40 million people (49.6% of the total population) and active social media users were 13.50 million (43.5% of the population). Social media users have increased by since the start of this year, it has gone up by 13.9 percent and 65 percent of who are adults have used them. By January 2024, 87.0 percent internet users in Nepal are also active on social networks. Gender analysis reveals that women constitute 43.6 percent among social media users while men dominate the scene at 56.4 percent (Data Reports, 2024).

This has provided for more and increased social support networks for senior citizens as the sense of loneliness is reduced through the use of social media. Most senior citizens use social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, among others; these have assisted the senior citizen in finding friends, relatives, and other peers. Social networking is applied extensively for communication purposes and gathering social support among adults, especially senior citizen individuals (Chopik, 2016).

In both situations, it was discovered that the impact of social media use by the older generation on their quality of life and their satisfaction with length of days was positive. In this research design, we did some case studies followed by focus group interviews and a field survey. Having a great deal of life satisfaction in various areas is associated with a high level of satisfaction with social media. The results suggest social media might be something unique and different that holds special utility for older adults beyond non-specific opportunities for connectivity across age groups, congenial networking, or service provision. (Ractham, P., Techatassana

Soontorn, A., & Kaew Kitipong, L. (2022). Besides, virtual communities and support groups make individuals feel they are not alone and enable senior citizens to share experiences and experts, thereby reducing feelings of loneliness (Chopik, 2016).

Laifa, M., Akrouf, S., & Mammeri, R. (2018) found that senior citizens are now able to make and even further develop their social networks irrespective of the physical and geographical barriers, given the honesty and forgiveness of modern modes of social media. For instance, voice calls and video calls are real-time face-to-face communication that can be easily done using features such as Skype and WhatsApp, especially in maintaining close relationships with family members and friends (Baker et al., 2018).

Social disconnection and loneliness consequences have been equated to the unspecified social cost of all antecedents, including obesity, hypertension, inactivity, and smoking fifteen cigarettes daily. Due to the role transitions, bodily alterations and social attitudes linked to aging, elderly individuals are vulnerable to social seclusion (National Academies of Sciences, 2020).

Nevertheless, increasing research indicates that social media and other digital technologies might provide a viable way to address this problem. It has been demonstrated through research that keeping connected with families and friends via the internet is related to wellness; therefore supporting that going online can be beneficial for aged persons (Karaoglu et al., 2021). In addition to this, social media technology makes it possible for users to interact with other individuals or groups beyond physical encounters creating an avenue for strengthening bonds and attainment of identity and purpose (Fotteler et al., 2023).

In tackling social exclusion and estrangement, the public health system, elder services networks, as well as healthcare sector entities have made progress but the journey is still long (Kanbay et al., 2023). The use of social media leads to enhanced social support networks and reduces loneliness among the elderly. According to research evidence, enhancing interaction with social media is beneficial to older persons' mental health outcomes chiefly through facilitating social links and offering psychological assistance.

The elderly can stay in touch over differences irrespective of the geographical through social media platforms. Reducing isolation is important with this population, as the majority feels lonely and displays connectivity. Social media is thought to increase social connection and well-being in older adults, according to research. As far as societal relationships are concerned, they have played a significant role in keeping it alive for the older people and always ensured that they stay connected with their children, grandchildren or any other person regardless of distances (Petersen et al. 2023). Social relations however are vital for such individuals since there are high chances of feeling alone which might result to an individual becoming isolated from the rest. In one of the recent studies, social media usage among elderly individuals has been found to lead to enhanced social connection and life satisfaction levels.

Social networks aid significantly in raising and improving social support while at the same time reducing loneliness among senior citizens. Furthermore, researchers also discovered that the average time spent online by older adults tends to have positive effects on them. The reason behind this is that it plays a role in bringing people together and offering solace most times. Thus this paper contends that it is important to maintain as well as widen aging individuals' networking through virtual platforms.

Having multiple channels of communication with loved ones—texts, photos, and videos, for example—allows them to meet their emotional needs and reduces feelings of loneliness.

Research indicates that regular use of social media for communication is associated with reduced feelings of loneliness because it improves loneliness perception. Text, images, and videos are among the best ways of keeping several forms of communication open with your loved one for mental health. The physical company of friends may help to alleviate the effects of loneliness and meet their emotional requirements. Other systematic studies indicate that the more frequently people engage in social media, they tend to report better social support from friends and family, hence resulting in a decrease in loneliness (Fu and Xie, 2021).

Besides, social media provides senior citizens with the opportunity of asking others in their community questions and receiving as well as providing advice to each other, thus enhancing their social relations. Interchangeable social roles, whereby older adults can receive assistance and contribute to assisting others, can enhance the older adults' utilization of technologies and their perceived belonging to the relevant social networks (Kuoppamaki et al., 2022).

Among the different social media types, it influences loneliness even more negatively in senior citizen people, who are often faced with health or mobility issues restricting their actual interpersonal communication. Social media helps thus to overcome these barriers by fostering the levels of online communication, allowing senior citizens to stay and build further new interactions with existing or new common interest groups (Fu and Xie, 2021).

A key issue that may exclude meaningful older persons' participation on the social network platform is the lack of necessary technical literacy or resources among the latter. Such dissimilarities might cause rage and lack of curiosity in virtual relationships (Moore & Hancock, 2020). In a similar examination, the influence of perceived self-efficacy on related use of information, level of loneliness, esteem, and itself amongst older people was examined. They observe that a study done by scholars revealed that senior citizens who post high levels of self-efficacy every time they use social media are well-informed, are less alone, and have high self-esteem. This underscores the importance of this group in acquiring social media skills to boost the general well-being of clients (Chen & Gao, 2022).

It's a fact that they are going to stay ahead until that general tendency becomes clearer because no one can hope for any changes on this matter and so no one can also hope for any changes in social life itself. In addition, too much usage of social media may actually make people more depressed than they were without these networks (Guzman et al., 2023). This research implies that prudent use of social media can be helpful to those promoting the mental health of senior citizens.

Thus, a certain link can be noticed between these two factors positively indicating that social media promotes social support and reduces isolation among older individuals. In particular, this digital engagement allows them to maintain and extend their social networks, thus enhancing the quality of their lives and their psychological well-being.

Materials and Method

Research design

The purpose of this study was to employ a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design in order to analyze the effect of social media on alleviating loneliness among the old. In this context, social media behaviors and their influence on feelings of loneliness among older adults represent descriptive research areas that respond well to precise and detailed information gathering. The current state, actions and relationships are emphasized by the designer so as to present a full picture of senior citizens' use of social media and how it helps them fight against loneliness.

Study area

Therefore, since people from all over the world are engaging in social media regularly and the target population is diverse, Lamki Chuha Municipality Kailali district of Nepal was chosen for the particular study. This study targets senior citizens 60 years and older. To address the above issues, a random sample of 121 senior citizen people was chosen.

Inclusion criteria

Elderly people who are above the age of 60 and are users of various forms of social media were the focus population for this research. On the other hand, those who preached against use of any kind of social network as well as those unable to fill out questionnaires due to dementia were not part of the study.

Data collection methods

Using a self-created structured questionnaire, the researchers gathered quantitative data that looked into social media use, demographic information, social support, and loneliness scores through validated measures.

Data collection procedures

Respondents were interviewed at their homesteads face-to-face. Participants were informed about the purpose of study, potential risks as well as benefits and measures for protecting their information.

Data analysis

Regression models were used to assess how social media usage, socio-demographics and loneliness are related. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was employed in order to determine the strength and direction of the relationships.

In this study, a descriptive research design is used to establish the relationship between elderly people's use of social media and their loneliness experiences. This study seeks to explore the association between social media use and loneliness without making direct cause-and-effect assumptions. Descriptive method allows for collecting detailed information on these two variables, which can then be analyzed in order to identify patterns and connections between senior citizens' use of social media and their mental wellbeing.

Results

Data on the demographic status of respondents, including age, gender, educational attainment, marital status, living arrangement type, social media usage, and preferred social media platforms, is presented in Table 1. The majority of respondents (37.2%) are between the ages of 60 and 64, and 65-69-year-olds are the next largest category, accounting for 24.8% of responses, followed by 70 to 74-year-olds (16.5%) and 75 to 79-year-olds (13%). A lower fraction of respondents, 8.3 percent, are 80 years of age or older. The implication from this information is that it pays more attention to some younger people than others. The gender distribution is fairly even, with slightly more male respondents (52.1%) than female respondents (47.9%). In terms of educational level, the majority of respondents have a primary school certificate (33.1%), followed by a secondary school certificate (24.8%), an upper secondary school certificate and above (21.5%), and no formal education (20, 7%). The marital status of respondents reflects general patterns among older adults: 55.4% were married, 28.9% were widowed, and 15.7% were single or divorced. The overwhelming majority of respondents (90 percent) reside together with their families, this suggest that there are strong family ties.

Table 1: *Socio-demographic attribute of the respondent*

Age group	N	%
60-64	45	37.2
65-69	30	24.8
70-74	20	16.5
75-79	10	8.3
80+	16	13.2
Gender		
Male	58	47.9
Female	63	52.1
Level of education		
No formal education	25	20.7
Primary	40	33.1
Secondary	30	24.8
Higher secondary and above	26	21.5
Marital status		
Married	67	55.4
Widowed	35	28.9
Single/Divorced	19	15.7
Living arrangement		
Living alone	12	9.9
With spouse/family	109	90.1
Social media usage		
Daily	50	41.3
Weekly	40	33.1
Occasionally	31	25.6
social media platform		
Facebook	76	62.8
YouTube	34	28.09
TikTok	11	9.09

Of the total number of users, 50 (41.3%) are active on social media every day. The social media users have 40 (33.1%) of all users who check their social media accounts once a week. In addition, 31 respondents

(25.6%) occasionally use social media. The most frequently seen interactions are daily ones, then next comes weekly and after that irregular usage. Facebook is the most popular social networking platform among users, as shown by 76 (62.8%) respondents who stated that it was their favorite option. YouTube is the second most popular platform, with 34 users (28.09%). Despite its low reputation when juxtaposed with famous social media platforms like Facebook or YouTube, TikTok is being utilized by 11 individuals (9.09 percent).

Table 2: Regression analysis on the impact of social media use on social support and loneliness

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	t	p
constant	2.30	0.45	-	5.11	<0.001
Frequency of social media	-0.35	0.08	-0.45	-4.38	<0.001
Perceived social support	-0.50	0.10	-0.40	-5.00	<0.001
age	-0.02	0.01	-0.10	-2.00	0.046
Gender (1=male,0=female)	-0.10	0.06	-0.08	-1.67	0.098
Education level	-0.20	0.07	-0.15	-2.86	0.005
Marital status(1=married)	-0.15	0.05	-0.12	-3.00	0.003
Living Arrangements	-0.25	0.09	-0.18	-2.78	0.006

Note: dependent variable = loneliness SE B = is the standard error of the coefficient; Beta = slandered coefficient.

Table 2 shows this represents the regression line's intercept. It suggests that the lonely one, an independent variable, would probably score 2.30. When all independent variables are zero, at $p < 0.001$, this value is highly significant. The dependent variable loneliness decreases by 0.35 for every unit increase in social media use frequency, suggesting that increased frequency lessens perceived loneliness with a strong (Beta = -0.45) and significant ($p < 0.001$) effect. An increase in perceived social support is linked to a 0.50 unit reduction in loneliness, the significant ($p < 0.001$) of this relationship. The older people become, the less lonely they feel with a very little score drop of 0.02 in every group of ages. P value of 0.046 indicates that this result is statistically significant. The experiences men have are slightly less lonely than women's, but that evidence is weak. Lower loneliness is associated with a higher level of education: it decreases by 0.20 units, $p = 0.005$. This is a statistically significant effect. Different living arrangements considerably reduce loneliness, with a 0 point 25 unit drop. At $p = 0.006$, this finding is statistically significant. Studies using regression indicate various major factors of loneliness.

Discussion

The socio-demographic status of the respondents had the highest number between the ages of 60 and 64 years old. This was considered to suggest that possibly the younger senior citizens are more responsive to completing surveys or more quickly obtaining the necessary information. It shows with the national patterns that this involves the distribution of the elderly by gender (CBS, 2022).

There are somewhat more men than women, but overall the gender is equal. Keeping this balance is very important to ensure that the results reflect both genders in a fair way. There is a large variation in the respondents' educational backgrounds; some are just literate. The difference in educational attainment may affect people to use social media and view loneliness.

Most respondents have married as evidenced by trends in the elderly population. The large number of them living together with their spouses or at least one relative is a confirmation to this idea that family support is necessary in this age bracket. According to regression analysis, having a larger family may help lessen loneliness. Ninety percent of respondents who live with their families emphasize the strong familial relationships that exist in the neighborhood, which may help protect against social isolation (Kruse, 2006).

It is noted that most of the respondents are active users of social networks; however, the majority of them indicated Facebook. Since social media is currently used by at least a dozen people, it could be considered one of the means of support for the older population. YouTube, which is preferred by 28.09 percent of Internet users, shows the interest of people in watching and listening to videos, which may likely suit senior citizens particularly (Nimrod, 2017). Higher levels of social media use may very well reduce feelings of isolation because researchers have discovered that there is a relation who is both negative and significant between

loneliness and social media use, say Bonsaksen et al. (2023). With respect to this matter, people maintaining their close relationships through online platforms are usually left lonely. Therefore from this perspective it indicates that while social networking sites may help to bring individuals closer together they do not necessarily reflect what such people pursuing greater intimacy are feeling. Also, the analysis shows that the presence of loneliness is associated with low perceived social support, meaning that the increased perceived support is related to reduce loneliness.

The fact that there is a tiny negative relationship between loneliness and age shows that even among older people, slightly younger senior citizens are a little less lonely (Lee et al., 2021). It could be this way because, as compared to the elderly population, these people are more likely to exercise, contribute to the community, or both. As such, older people were lonelier, in which younger people were less lonely than older ones.

As per the data, males might feel slightly less lonely than women, but the difference in loneliness was not very much; in other words, it was insignificant. Such a conclusion implies more research to establish the causes of these gender differences. In general, there is a considerable negative correlation between the level of loneliness and the level of education: people with higher education have much lower levels of loneliness, perhaps due to better social skills and more opportunities to join social networks and engage in related activities. Moreover, cohabitating with one's family along with getting married are vital indicators of alleviated feelings of isolation and depression. This is due to it being indicative of there being cushions, which reflect intimate relationships and blood connection ties (Jang & Je, 2022).

The findings of this study demonstrate that loneliness is a complex issue for older adults; additionally, it shows how social media usage, social support as it perceived by others and socio-demographic characteristics predict loneliness among elderly people. This knowledge helps in reducing solitude levels within older individuals and being capable of raising the standard of living amongst them.

Conclusion

The study's main objectives are to assess the relationship between social media use and feelings of loneliness and to see whether various platform types and usage patterns affect this relationship. This research examines how socio-demographic factors influence loneliness experiences among elderly people. In this study, it was found that older people (60-64 years) are more active while also having a nearly equal gender ratio. Higher education level and living with a family seemed to decrease lonely feelings. Frequent social media use especially Facebook promotes engagement among individuals thereby decreasing loneliness levels. The outcome suggests that less isolated individuals are those interacting with online communities. For new studies it is important to investigate what role does time play in determining how social internet affects isolation, does it help overcome it? If so, then how? And lastly; do demographic characteristics have any influence on such outcomes?

References

- Baker, S., Warburton, J., Hodgkin, S., & Pascal, J. (2017). The supportive network: rural disadvantaged older people and ICT. *Ageing & Society*, 37(6), 1291-1309.
- Bonsaksen, T., Ruffolo, M., Price, D., Leung, J., Thygesen, H., Lamph, G., Kabelenga, I., & Geirdal, A. (2023). Associations between social media use and loneliness in a cross-national population: do motives for social media use matter? *Health psychology and behavioral medicine*, 11(1), 2158089. doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2022.2158089
- Central Bureau of Statistics. (2022). National Population and Housing Census 2021.
- Chen, Y. & Schulz, P. J. (2016). The effect of information and communication technology interventions on reducing social isolation in the elderly: A systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 18(1),
- Chen, Y., & Gao, Q. (2023). Effects of social media self-efficacy on informational use, loneliness, and self-esteem of older adults. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 39(5), 1121-1133.
- Chopik, W. J. (2016). The benefits of social technology use among older adults are mediated by reduced loneliness. *Cyber psychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 19(9), 551-556.
- Cotton, S. R., Anderson, W. A., & McCullough, B. M. (2013). The impact of ICT use on loneliness and

- contact with others among older adults. *Gerontechnology*, 12(3), 230-243. <https://doi.org/10.4017/gt.2013.12.3.003.00>
- DataReportal. (2024). Digital 2024: Nepal. We Are Social and Melt Water. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-nepal>
- Fotteler, M. L., Kocar, T. D., Dallmeier, D., Kohn, B., Mayer, S., Waibel, A. K., & Denking, M. (2023). Use and benefit of information, communication, and assistive technology among community-dwelling older adults—a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1), 2004.
- Fu, L., & Xie, Y. (2021, September). The effects of social media use on the health of older adults: An empirical analysis based on a 2017 Chinese general social survey. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 9, No. 9, p. 1143). MDPI.
- Guzman, A. A., Brecht, M. L., Doering, L. V., Macey, P. M., & Mentis, J. C. (2023). Social media use and depression in older adults: a systematic review. *Research in Gerontological Nursing*, 16(2), 97-104.
- Haris, N., Majid, R. A., Abdullah, N., & Osman, R. (2014). The role of social media in supporting the elderly quality of daily life. In *2014 3rd International Conference on User Science and Engineering (i-USER)* (pp. 253-257). IEEE.
- Hutsuliak, N., & Dushkevych, M. (2022). Correlation of loneliness feeling experience and interpersonal relation types in the period of middle age. *Psychological Studies*.
- Jang, S., & Je, N. J. (2022). The relationship between digital literacy, loneliness, quality of life, and health-promoting behaviors among the elderly in the age of COVID-19. *International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences*.
- Kanbay, M., Tanriover, C., Copur, S., Peltek, I. B., Mutlu, A., Mallamaci, F., & Zoccali, C. (2023). Social isolation and loneliness: undervalued risk factors for disease states and mortality. *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*, 53(10), e14032.
- Karaoglu, G., Hargittai, E., Hunsaker, A., & Nguyen, M. H. (2021). Changing technologies, changing lives: older adults' perspectives on the benefits of using new technologies. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 3887-3907.
- Krause, N. (2006). Exploring the stress-buffering effects of church-based and secular social support on self-rated health in late life. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 61(1), S35-S43.
- Krause, N. (2006). Social relationships in late life. In *Handbook of the Psychology of Aging* (6th ed., pp. 182-209).
- Kuoppamaki, S., Hänninen, R., & Taipale, S. (2022). Enhancing older adults' digital inclusion through social support: A qualitative interview study. In *Vulnerable People and Digital Inclusion: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives* (pp. 211-230). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Laifa, M., Akrouf, S., & Mammeri, R. (2018). Forgiveness and trust dynamics on social networks. *Adaptive Behavior*, 26(2), 65-83.
- Lee, S. L., Pearce, E., Ajnakina, O., Johnson, S., Lewis, G., Mann, F.,... & Lewis, G. (2021). The association between loneliness and depressive symptoms among adults aged 50 years and older: a 12-year population-based cohort study. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 8(1), 48-57.
- Moore, R. C., & Hancock, J. T. (2020). Older adults, social technologies, and the coronavirus pandemic: challenges, strengths, and strategies for support. *Social Media On Society*, 6(3), 2056305120948162.
- National Academies of Sciences, Division of Behavioral, Social Sciences, Medicine Division, Board on Behavioral, Sensory Sciences, & Loneliness in Older Adults. (2020). *Social isolation and loneliness in older adults: Opportunities for the health care system*. National Academies Press.
- Nimrod, G. (2017). Older audiences in the digital media environment. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(2), 233-249.
- Peek, Sebastiaan TM, Katrien G. Luijkx, Maurice D. Rijnaard, Marianne E. Nieboer, Claire S. Van der Voort, Sil Aarts, Joost Van Hoof, Hubertus JM Vrijhoef, and Eveline JM Wouters. "Older adults' reasons for using technology while aging in place." *Gerontology* 62, no. 2 (2016): 226-237.
- Petersen, B., Khalili-Mahani, N., Murphy, C., Sawchuk, K., Phillips, N., Li, K. Z., & Hebblethwaite, S.

- (2023). The association between information and communication technologies, loneliness, and social connectedness: A scoping review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1063146.
- Pinquart, M. (2003). Loneliness in married, widowed, divorced, and never-married older adults. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 20*(1), 31-53.
- Quinn, K. (2018). Cognitive effects of social media use: A case of older adults. *Social Media Society, 4*(3), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118787203>
- Rachtham, P., Techatassana Soontorn, A., & Kaewkitipong, L. (2022). Old but not out: social media use and older adults' life satisfaction. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems, 26*.
- Zhang, K., Kim, K., Silverstein, N. M., Song, Q., & Burr, J. A. (2021). Social media communication and loneliness among older adults: The mediating roles of social support and social contact. *The Gerontologist, 61*(6), 888-896.