Night of the Nerds

Desk Research - Loneliness in young adults 14 - 19

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Reflection

For our project we will need to make sure we are aware of any pitfalls that may happen when creating an online solution for young adults. It will **have** to be in conjunction with an offline solution as well- Something where one will reinforce the other, and vice-versa. Loneliness is only increasing in young adults after covid, and while our project will only tackle those who are actively gaming to make connections- It's still going to be important to keep in mind why people may have turned to gaming to fill their social channels. There is of course a large bias in my studies as loneliness was an incredibly hot topic after covid, researchers most certainly looking into how young adults and children would respond socially to covid. However, for our project I do not inherently see this as a bad thing. The demographic we are looking towards were children during covid- Their socialization will inherently be different then past generations not only because of the internet and general generational differences, but covid only amplified this already growing problem.

Summary

Research was done in regards to loneliness in young adults within the Netherlands. My main research questions tackled the percentage of lonely young adults, how covid affected them, how does loneliness affect them, and what are side effects of online use.

After covid there was a statistically significant increase in loneliness in young adults alongside increased negative mental health side effects. Online usage increases in lonely people which leads to lower quality offline social circles, however those who are lonely have more satisfaction with online connections created.

Current Situation

Data Mage Studios is working for Night of the Nerds as well as Join Us to create an innovative technical solution to loneliness in Young Adults. According to Join Us 10% of young adults in the Netherlands aged 15 - 25 consider themselves to be lonely. We are meant to target those aged 14 - 19 to come up with a solution that will effectively allow offline and online contact to reinforce each other, using a digital solution that we design and create.

Process

The first thing we did was define our target audience. While we were given an age range, it wasn't quite specific enough to do any specific interviews or research on as loneliness in young adults is an extremely broad target group. For our target group we chose **young adults aged 14 - 19 who are / have lived in the Netherlands and socialize online using video games.** We chose this because, as a studio we want to be able to create a video game as not only are we interested in the topic itself, but a few of us actually socialized heavily during covid using gaming as a platform for connections. Narrowing it down to those within the Netherlands is also important for our research, as there are cultural reasons that people

socialize differently depending on what country you are present in. For example- Americans tend to be stereotypically considered to be much more vocal to strangers, easily striking up connections in comparison to other country's citizens who may find themselves more reserved, or find interaction in different ways. By limiting our target group to those living in the Netherlands, we are much more easily able to secure interviews as well as limit our research to those that research *specifically* those within the Netherlands.

With that specified, I began creating **research questions** for myself. I wanted to make sure to have a varied interest in topics for my research, and not to end up with seven articles that all said the same thing.

My specific research questions were the following-

- How does loneliness affect young adults?
- Did covid have an effect on young adults socializing?
- What are negative and positive side effects of online socialization?
- What is the estimated percentage of loneliness in young adults in the Netherlands?

In a study released in 2021, about 19.4% of young adults aged 12 - 18 years old in the Netherlands find themselves to be lonely in the Netherlands, with related causes being parental divorce, familial issues, bullying, and social media usage being primary causes (Bayat, 2021). The article goes on to state that this is considered moderately high, however this was a research study conducted in 2015 and released in 2021. According to a study done in 2022 by the GGD Hollands Midel, a self reported that about 63% of young adults aged 16 - 25 reported feeling ' Somewhat to Very Lonely '(GGD, 2022). This is a remarkable increase of over 40% of young adults. In the same study, 88% of young adults also reported that covid had negatively affected them. In 2020, 31% of young adults in the Netherlands felt increased anxiety, 28% felt

more stressed, and 30% felt more sad (Gagliardi, 2023). Overall, the younger generation is feeling more lonely, isolation from covid only exasperating these feelings. Loneliness is also coming in combination with feelings of sadness, anxiety, and overall stress. Continuing from pre pandemic, to during- There was a '...statistically significant increase in depression symptoms' (Lee, Cadigan, Rhew, 2020) which also pairs with the overall loneliness that young adults were and still are feeling. The generation of children who spent a significant period of time during covid, isolated from most besides their immediate family have grown up to have a much tougher time with socialization and creating the necessary connections to tackle loneliness.

Many who felt isolated and lonely during covid, turned to online channels to help curb the feelings that they had at the time. In 2014, a study was done in regards to how continuous online gaming affected a person's social circles and found that the more 'online' a person was with gaming, the more likely they were to have lower quality social circles (Kowert, Domahidi, Festl, Quandt, 2014.). While the study is a bit older, it is important to keep in mind that especially at a younger age, that in person socialization is a critical aspect of a child's development. The more online a child or even young adult is, the more likely they are to have trouble socializing in the future. However, those who are lonely are also more likely to be drawn to online channels for socialization. Lonely people are far more likely to use the internet for social reasons and emotional support compared to those who are not, as well as gain far more satisfaction from online friends or online socialization (Morahan-Martin , Schumacher , 2003.). Especially when online usage skyrocketed during covid with the rise of social media apps and online gaming, those who were lonely were far more likely to go online to try and socialize. Young adults were lonely, and used these channels to try their best to socialize with others- To try and get the kinds of connections that not only they wanted, but were barred from getting in offline settings.

Results

- How does loneliness affect young adults?

There is an increase of negative mental health side effects in those that are lonely compared to those that are not.

- Did covid have an effect on young adults socializing?

There was a significant increase of those who were lonely from before to after covid lockdown. Many young adults were unable to socialize offline and turned to online socialization instead.

- What are negative and positive side effects of online socialization?

While online usage may impact the quality of offline socialization in increased use cases, those who are lonely are able to connect with others and gain more satisfaction then non-lonely people which creates channels for socialization.

- What is the estimated percentage of loneliness in young adults in the Netherlands?

Currently- According to the GGD, an estimated 63% of young adults in the Netherlands report feeling somewhat to very lonely.

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