

Project Proposal: Crowdsourcing Causes of Youth Emotional Loneliness

Motivation

It is common knowledge that the current youth is facing a loneliness epidemic, to the point that some western countries have created loneliness ministers. Statistics Canada identifies the 15-24 year old demographic as the loneliest [1]. The German government saw an increase of loneliness during the pandemic. Iconography and subcultures in the youth spheres of the internet show a strong trend towards loneliness – [doomers](#). The previous work focusing on the causes of this new found loneliness surge is limited. To study such a subjective and diverse cause, traditional methods of interview or surveys might not be most effective. There is a high cost associated with them. Smaller number of participants can increase the inaccuracies due to the diversity of the problem. Younger adults may not be as responsive to surveys or interviews.

Loneliness comes in two kinds, there is social loneliness in which a person is not making social interactions, and emotional loneliness in which an individual is not having an emotional connection with others.

Identifying the causes are significant to provide a litmus of loneliness for policy makers. It is also needed for individuals and professionals trying to mitigate this at a personal level.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the causes of youth emotional loneliness?

RQ2: Has the loneliness experienced after COVID-19 pandemic decreased?

RQ3: Can crowdsourcing target younger demographic more effectively?

Concrete Operationalisations

The people targeted are youth who would already classify themselves as lonely. Young adults aged 15-24 are targeted. The claimed age from the user is trusted to be accurate. There is no geographic boundary for the participants; however, it is likely that most of them are within Canada and around the University of Toronto.

The cause of loneliness can be anything that participants write or post. The accuracy and significance of these answers will be judged by other participants in a visual format.

The new method of crowdsourcing interviews and surveys would be better effective than traditional methods if more answers are received by more participants, and when new themes unidentified by previous work can be discovered.

Related Work

1. Statistics Canada published the results of the Canadian Social Survey in 2021, and youth aged 15-24 reported being lonely at rate of 23%. In this age range women were lonelier than men, compare 29% and 18%.
2. The largest survey on the subject of loneliness conducted by BBC showed the 40% of people aged 16-24 feel lonely.
3. According to *YouGov*, “Nearly nine in ten (88%) Britons aged from 18 to 24 say they experience loneliness to some degree, with a quarter (24%) suffering often and 7% saying they are lonely all of the time”.
4. A survey during the COVID social isolation period in Germany showed a higher number of loneliness during the pandemic, but this rate decreased as the isolation measures were lifted.
5. Similar results to 4.
6. This is by far closest research to this project. Fardghassemi et al seek to answer to research questions:

1. What are the subjective causes of loneliness for young adults in London's most deprived boroughs?
2. What role do social media play in the subjective cause of loneliness for young adults in London's most deprived boroughs?

These questions are answered by interviewing a set of 48 individuals from lower income boroughs of London. These interview responses are grouped and analysed by their recurring themes.

This project seeks to improve on the results by crowdsourcing their methodology. In such a way, the number of responses will increase, and more accurate themes can be triangulated on this subject.

7. This study provides a longitudinal analysis of Norwegian adolescents. It follows a more structured form of survey collection, and seeks to identify the causes using pre-defined predictors.

The Actual Plan

A web app needs to be created for the purpose of this survey. One of the research questions is about the new method conducting surveys, so the web app needs to be modular to support other survey questions. The web app should be open source and free under the GPL3 to garner the trust of the participants. The survey may need to be approved by an ethical committee, as personal data of the users will be collected. Some participants may also be under the age of 18.

The web will be an unstructured web map, that can group visuals, words, and text together. The users can add any post, and they are encouraged to write longer forms of text. Users can link them to topics. The topics will grow visually in size due to the up and down votes. The users can insert images, and text. Questions and or keywords can be used as the topics to which personal accounts, other keywords, or visuals can be linked to.

Users will be used to link the accounts and visuals under the topics of their choosing. Furthermore, researcher input or natural language processing tools can be used to extract key thematic elements from the accounts.

To market this survey, a series of poster can be placed around various University Campus bulletin boards. As well as ad campaigns and posts from various platforms. Such platforms may include Tinder, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Reddit. Particularly subreddits that have a major inclination of youth loneliness themes such as /r/doomer, /r/urbanHell, /r/antiwork. These posts will be honest about the intentions of the survey, but will be marketed in a way that is *familiar* to the users of such platforms using visuals, archetypes, and language used by the specific *subculture*.

In our analysis, we can then judge the effectiveness of the crowdsourcing method by comparing it with the themes from [6]. The crowdsourcing method should produce the interview style accounts from [6] at a global scale of hundreds or thousands.

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