What did Pandemic do to our friendships?

Jamie Mo 12475440

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Abstract

The paper examines whether the Pandemic has altered the human relationships, specifically, friendship by using quantitative and qualitative approach. Loneliness, with other explanatory variables will be taken into account in assessing whether Pandemic had significantly negative impact on the relationships. The variables will be analysed whether they are significant or not by testing serial correlation and heteroskedasticity, chow test and goodness of fit.

I. Introduction

The choice of maintaining a relation is not a trivial one. People ruminate on relationship problems for months and even years, and then, once a decision as been made, immediately begin to second guess it. However, relationship is highly contingent upon unpredictable factors such as, small individual issues as moving abroad to tragic globally crisis such as Covid. And these small to big changes in environment poses a very different social life and relationships.
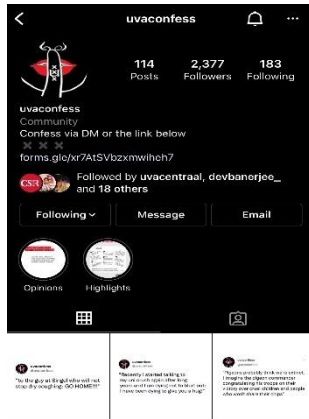
The unexpected pandemic has influenced and altered people's relationships and is shifting the relationships forms. The pandemic was not common, and it has already lasted for 2 years. It is undoubtable that pandemic has considerably changed the ways people perceive or made the relationships with friends, lovers distant or aloof or not. Some people may argue that after Covid, they have become closer to other people, while others do not. After the outbreak of Covid, since there were not many ways to be connected to fellow classmates many students, including me started to focus, and spend more time of Facebook and Instagram to be connected and feel bond. Loneliness is the subjective perception of isolation, which was in line with what I felt during the covid while we had online courses. Although I had more followers and more connections in social network, I couldn't ease the feel of loneliness. To illustrate an example of 'UvA Happenings', which is an Instagram page where students send their confession and posts. The page started to have many followers after Covid, and many students, especially internationals confessed that even though they try to be open minded and be affable, they still don't have any friends and there is no chance to make it which makes life harder.

It is hard to neglect the impact of Covid and increase of loneliness. Heidegger and Richter (2020) explicitly showed that the loneliness increased from start of the Covid, while other studies argued that those who were already lonely were kept at the same status, while there are some people who were put at social isolation and remained lonely due to the pandemic. Tilburg University (2021) conducted research on Dutch adults comparing before and after covid and demonstrated that emotional loneliness increased to 25% in summer of 2020, compared with 18% in November 2019. Additionally, researchers also concluded that percentage of adults who were not lonely before the covid crisis but became lonely after the outbreak of Covid increased to 26% , while it was formerly 18%.
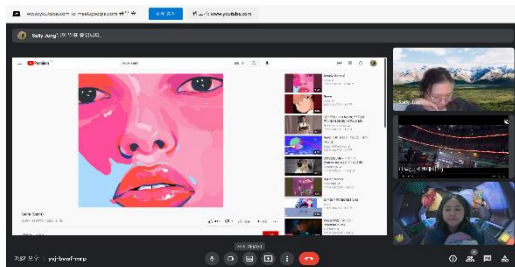
Development of technology provided us convenient and comfortable lives while in some aspects, after reading the article of Tamagotchi gave me insight that maybe technology contributed in deteriorating and getting aloof with people and friends by online contacting. However, during covid if we didn't have development of technology, it would have been catastrophic. To illustrate in the case of an international student which I experienced, while everything was in lockdown in Netherlands and as a student living in a student dormitory, there was no one I could talk to , if there was no technology, to be specific, social medias available. As there was less frequency of going to schools, and libraries were only allowed twice a week, and other internationals being all back home, I would have been socially isolated. Social medias such as Zoom, Google Meets, WhatsApp, these kinds of platforms allowed students to be less lonely and keep in touch with random friends and strangers, however it is doubtable whether students were able to maintain or develop more deep, solid friendship during COVID-19. Since there were no surrogates that would let us see our friends, it could be possible that technology gave us false impression, false closeness.

Further, by analysing the loneliness and friendship regression model, this paper will point out whether loneliness has changed or hasn't changed during covid, and the affect it had in friendship has it changed before and after covid will also be evaluated. Each of the variables on friendship will be calculated by using EViews and by the estimation output, the valid model will be made. The analysis of the f-relation might lead to autocorrelation, but this problem will be solved by adding lagged variables. But mainly this paper will only use a simple correlation and regression analysis, and since the sample is hard to gather, this paper will use the already done one, which was gathered using independent self-administrated online survey in 2020. This paper aims to explore various factors of loneliness among young internationals in university using quantitative and qualitative methods. Although to some people it may seem obvious that loneliness increased during the pandemic and happiness decreased, however, Luchetti (2020) argued that there is no correlation between covid lock down measures and increase in loneliness. It is important to know that there could be standard error and deviations which are different from the mean, majority of people. Person's situation and happiness, loneliness level, social interactions were computed as number, however, these numbers can't represent fully. Based on the samples, the results could be completely flipped over and again.

II. Theoretical Background and methods

Prior to COVID-19, International students were able to join diverse activities and experience sense of belonging and fitting in by making new friends through geographic mobility. In the article by Robertson, he stated that migrants connect with people by joining community and establishing solid social networks. And argued that friendship is imperative to transformations of self, such as defining self-hood in a new city. However, global pandemic has hindered this community, and due to lockdown, there were not many chances given to international students to build up social networks. Therefore, based on the Robertson's theoretical view, the variables of physical activity and social distancing, will be included as one variable, social interaction in the regression model.

According to Hawkley and Caciopo (2010), loneliness is occurred when one is not satisfied or what the person wants doesn't equals what is given by the counterpart in the social interactions of the social relationships. Lee and Ko (2017) predicted social interactions to be one of the significant factors which effects or be affected by friendships. Diehl (2018) stated that from his research, physical activity can contribute to decreasing loneliness. Therefore, according to these theoretical backgrounds, physical activity and loneliness will be considered as an explanatory variable of friendship regression.

It is expected that loneliness and physical activity which is both correlated to life balance and quality of life, which is related to livability. According to the definition made by Veenhoven and Ehrdardt (1995) , livability is about subjective wellbeing. The author suggests that livable city is where people are happy. In measuring whether the city is livable or not, according to Balducci and Checci (2009) , measures such as infrastructure , institutions and comforts are included. Furthermore, there are various characteristics that make a city livable such as education, health and safety, housing, commuting, tolerance, trust, self-expression. Therefore, it is also imperative to know the loneliness and how did the our variables go and changed before and after COVID-19, since they are related to livability.

Usually, autocorrelation is tested using Breusch-Godfrey test up to second order and if the autocorrelation is detected, lagged variables or control variables should be added. And in the case there is no autocorrelation, Heteroskedasticity test will be tested using Breusch pagan test. Since, Fox (1997) and Godfrey (2006) proposed that heteroskedasticity can cause biases in the standard errors and test statistics. If the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning there is heteroskedasticity, it will be solved using white robust standard errors. Chow forecast test and Chow structural stability test will be also used. Goodness of fit will be assessed based on adjusted R squared or by AIC in the case where the model is not comparable, and they both solved the autocorrelation and heteroskedasticity problem by rejecting the null hypothesis.

III. Empirical model and the results

In order to gather the data of prior to COVID-19 , samples of 368 were chosen, who were all international students studying in Jacobs University in Germany in 2018 whose age range is from 17 to 46. For during the pandemic data in 2020, German students were chosen as a sample of 175 individuals whose age was below 30. For making the regression model of the friendship, ULS-8(University of California Los Angeles Loneliness Scale) , which was developed by Hays and DiMatteo (1987) was used. The self-administrated questionnaire contained questions of loneliness , including other sub questions such as work-life balance, physical activity and quality of life. To be specific, physical activity was assessed in a form of question such as "Do you interact with people at least 5 days per week for more than 30 minutes.".

The output from the prior to COVID-19 showed that the partner status was significantly correlated with frequency of physical activity , showing the result of p value smaller than 0.05. As Diehl (2018) stated in his research, physical activity in this sample also showed that as people exercise often, loneliness decreased significantly, showing -0.09. The interesting output was that loneliness is not significantly correlated with sex , showing p value larger than 0.05. Age as expected, was significantly correlated and had positive correlation with loneliness, giving p value smaller than 0.05, while giving 0.02 output.

By programming the data of 2020, it was demonstrated that 56% of people felt lonely during 2020, and when they were asked compared with before Pandemic, do they feel lonely, only 46% replied yes. From the correlation model of physical activity and the loneliness, the p value was smaller than 0.01, which was same with 2018. Sex was not significantly correlated with loneliness, which was in line with 2018 data. Additionally, it could be interpreted from the result that to avoid feeling loneliness, students have done more physical activities which includes social net workings. And after the lock down measures were implemented, loneliness had increased in high levels

From the qualitative survey that was conducted, the results showed that students commonly urged the need for connection, since they were terrified of being apart from their friends. Since the sample survey was based on international students, many of them were geographically apart during the Pandemic. The connection that these students urged was not by phone or video chat since they don't create as much as intimacy as face-to-face creates. majority of students argued that this hasn't created much intimacy, so they don't have strong connection or friendship with their university students. Only few relationships seem

to have been maintained during the quarantine and pandemic.

Although the technology has enabled us to contact and communicate with people who are not geographically close but also at the opposite side of the world, there seemed to be limits in maintaining or developing close relationships with university friends, assuming they are geographically far and hasn't made solid relationships prior to the pandemic. It was salient factor that many of these sample students said that for the close friends assuming that they have already developed a solid relationship before the pandemic they seemed to have developed a deeper relationship. This doesn't applies to all cases and samples but majority of the samples replied that the larger boundary of friendships were deteriorated, however the smaller boundary of their friends became more thicker, and stronger.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, either from theoretical view or quantitative view, it is undoubtable that loneliness has increased during the pandemic. The lock down of social infrastructures and decreasing opportunities to meet up new friends would have been the major reason for loneliness. From the empirical model and result, it was found out that other social medias haven't contributed much to forming the intimacy. Loades (2020) stated that students who did not much social media contact had more possibility of increased loneliness compared with students who actively did social media. How could we ease the sense of loneliness? According to the sample data, by increasing the physical activity it could decrease the feeling of loneliness. Loneliness is due to lack of emotional connections or supports. It is not just about number of friends or number of followers, but about feeling connected to few friends could totally ease the feeling. Then how did this loneliness contribute to changing friendships?

Relationships are highly contingent upon various external and internal factors. The lock down has hindered people from seeing their friends, governments implementing measures of closing Universities, cinemas, restaurants, and even some governments closed boarders. These measures have changed friendships by altering face-to-face communication to social medias, such as Zoom, Google Meets, WhatsApp. Because students were lonely, they increased their usage of their Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, however, this didn't lead to the solid relationships. The sample data demonstrated us that friends could be divided into small and large circles, University friends were assumed there as shallow and business friends , with could be depicted as in the large circles, with no true means of friends while the small circles are the close friends, who made a strong relationship before the Corona. From the result we can see that the pandemic has made people focus on smaller boundary of friends while cutting off meaningless and devastating friendships. Detoxing the social connections and focusing on the dearest friends could be regarded as healthier relationships, prioritizing fewer friends and feel more connected.

Although the data was garnered in quantitative and qualitative perspective, the sample data was conducted on German University, so it is possible that there could not be many different cultural diversities in this samples, furthermore the data was collected in 2018 and it was compared with 2020 data during the pandemic which is still lasting till end of 2021, so it could be controversial whether it represents the whole effect of covid. Since it was the start of the pandemic, the data possibly represents only start of the pandemic. Additionally, the qualitative data was questioned to few samples, so there are limits using these data. It is unfortunate that this sample could be biased, however, it is still a lot meaningful in way that this paper gives insights that the pandemic had a significantly negative affect by forcing lock down and social distancing.

V. References

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