

Parallel Session: Loneliness and the role of Social Media



Dr Rebecca Nowland

University of Central Lancashire





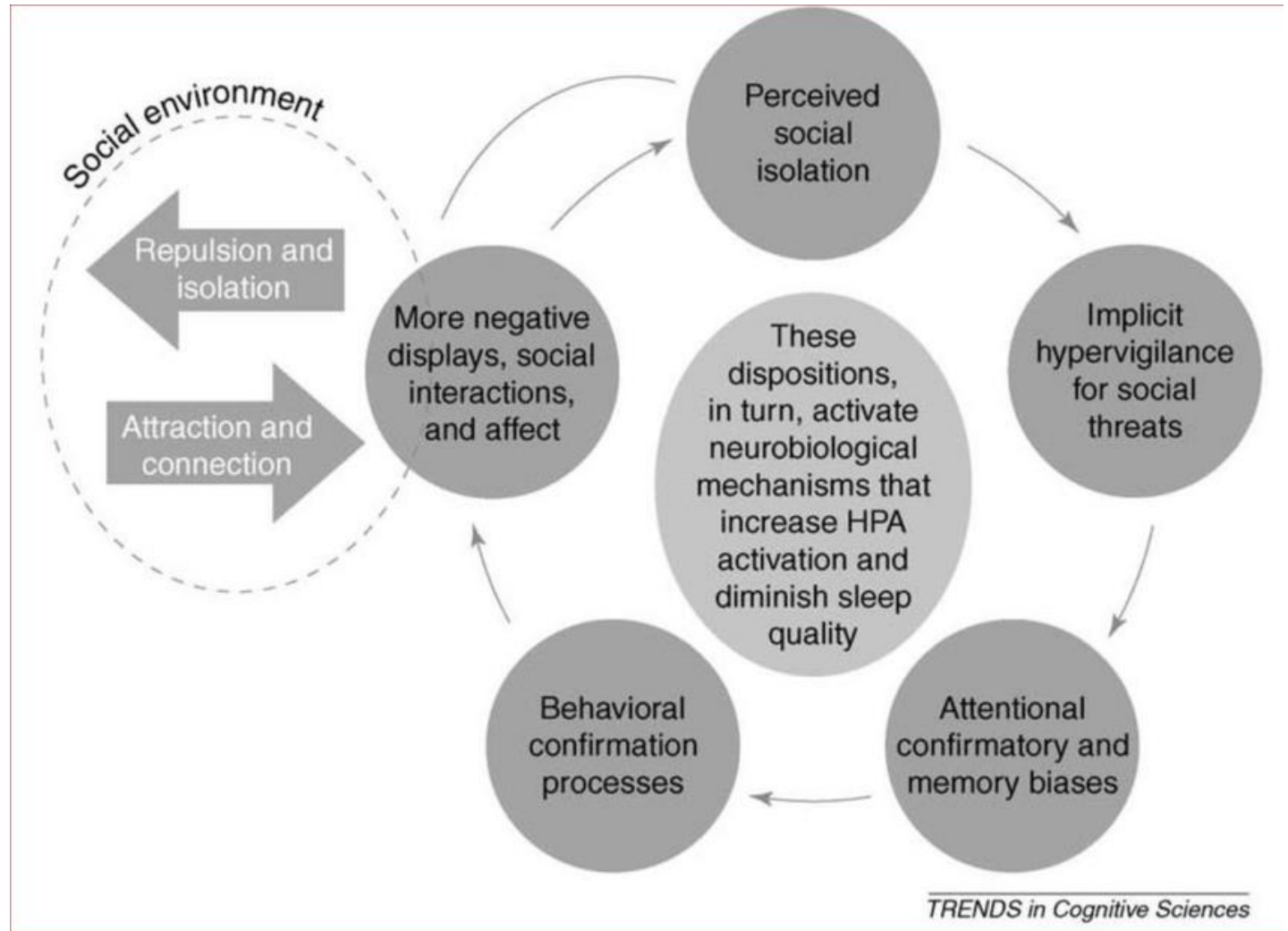
Social Media and Loneliness

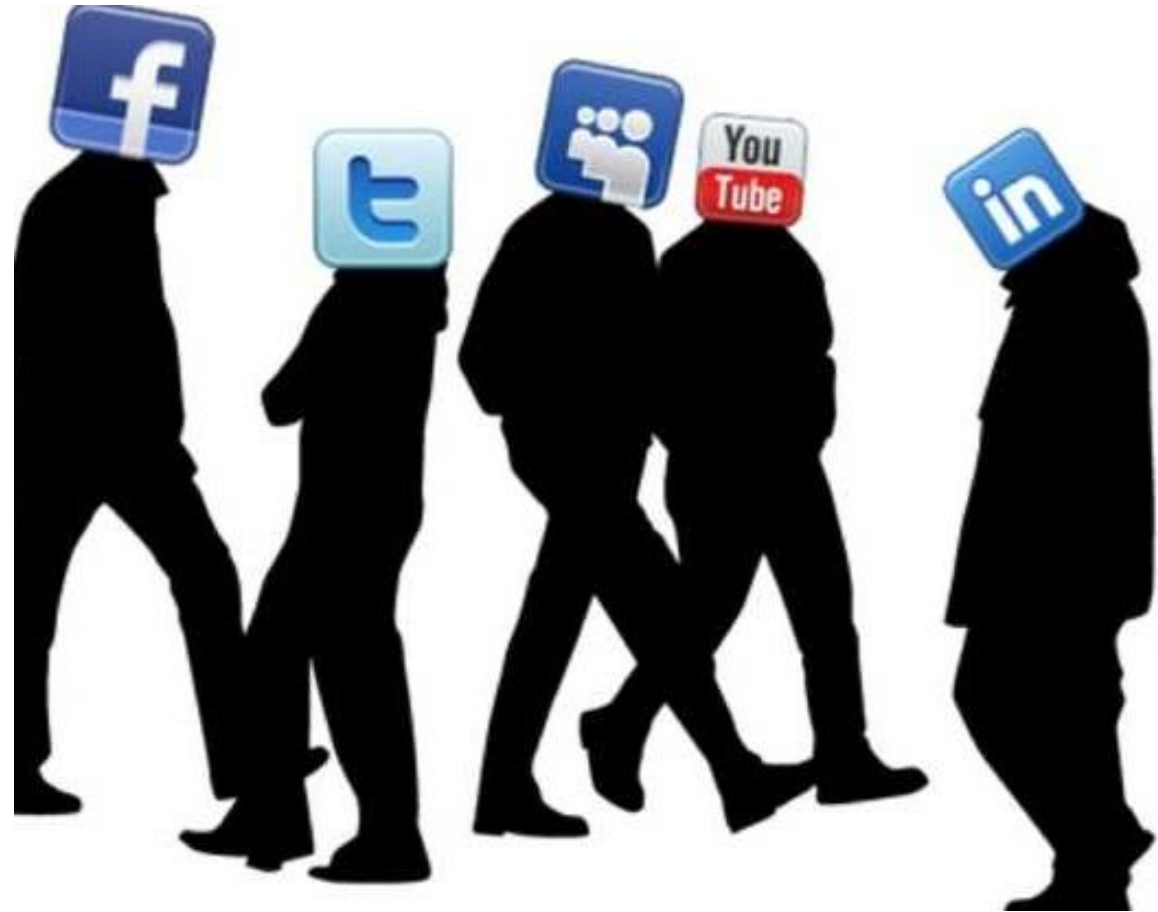


**Loneliness in the European Union: Policies at work
Brussels, 6th June 2023**

*Dr Rebecca Nowland
University of Central Lancashire, UK*

Evolutionary model of loneliness (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009)



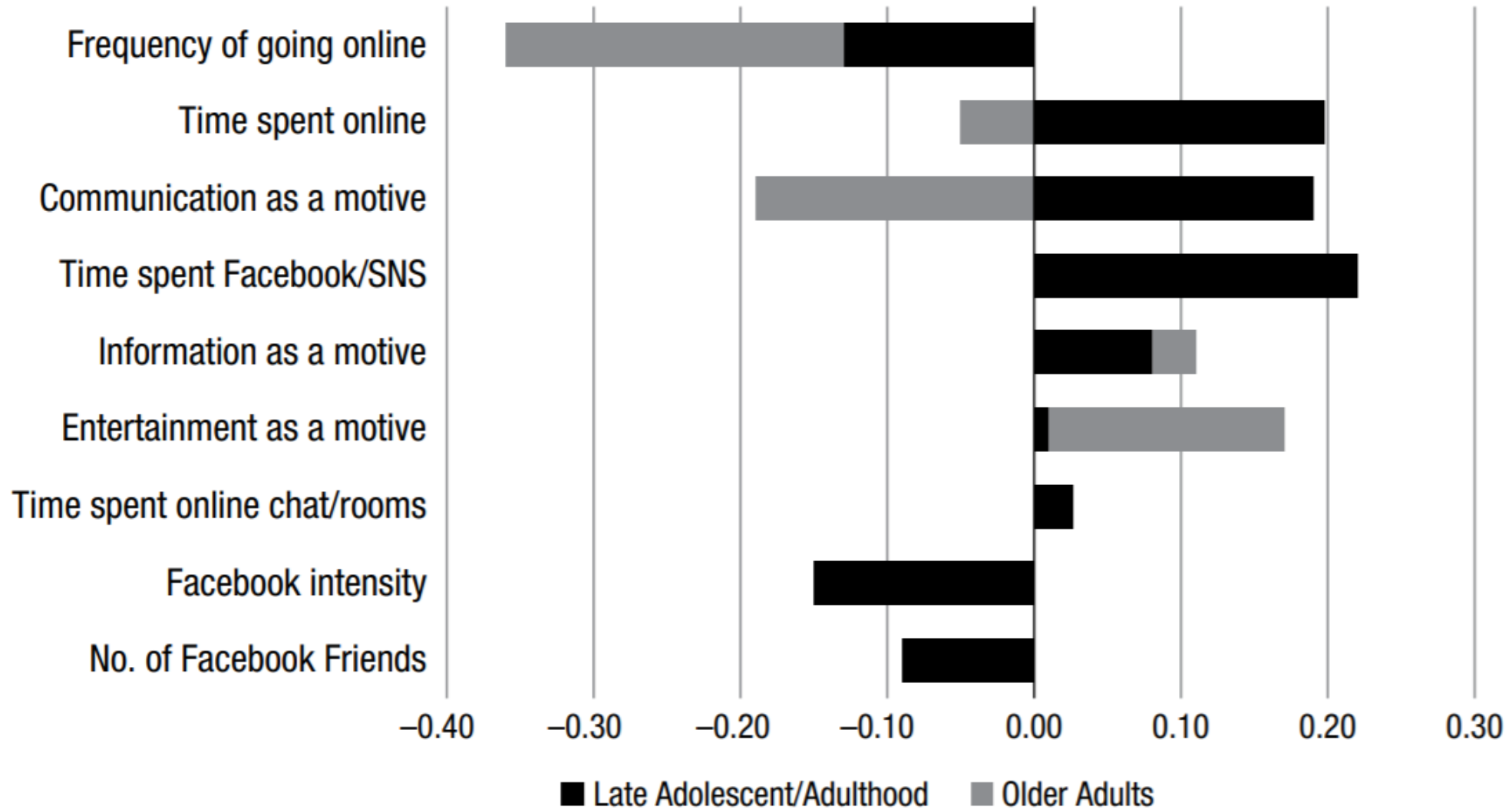


Social
Media: is it
making us
lonely?



Review of the literature – Why?

- Contradictory findings – some studies show positive associations with loneliness and some negative
- Other reviews focused on general well-being/depression but not specifically on loneliness
- Need to examine differences across the life course



Internet behaviours
associated with
loneliness

Cyberbullyi
ng

Internet
addiction



Review findings

- Based on existing theories: social capital/stimulation, displacement theory
- How technology is used is what is important in relation to loneliness
- Proposal:
 - When used as a **way station** to enhance new relationships and forge new connections social technology can reduce loneliness
 - When used as a **destination** to escape social world and withdrawal from social pain can increase loneliness
 - Lonely people may behave differently online

Nowland, Necka, & Cacioppo (2018)





How lonely people may behave online?

- We proposed that feeling lonely may impact on how people behave online
- Some evidence:
 - Passivity online
 - Less overlapping friends online/offline

BBC Loneliness Experiment

- Conducted in 2018 with BBC Radio 4
- 55,000 people aged 16 years and over largest-ever study into the issue of loneliness
- A total of 40,699 people reported on their internet use, with 40,567 (99.7%) of those people reporting that they had used the internet in the last 30 days

Who feels lonely?

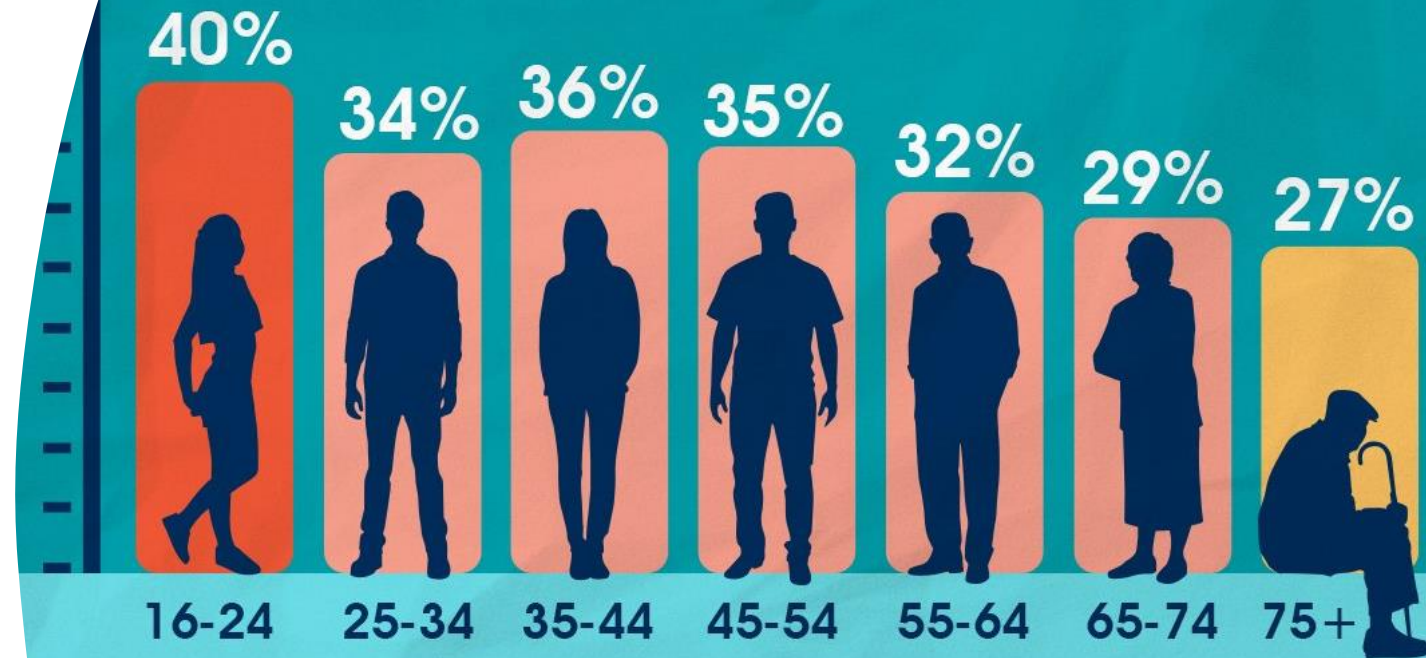


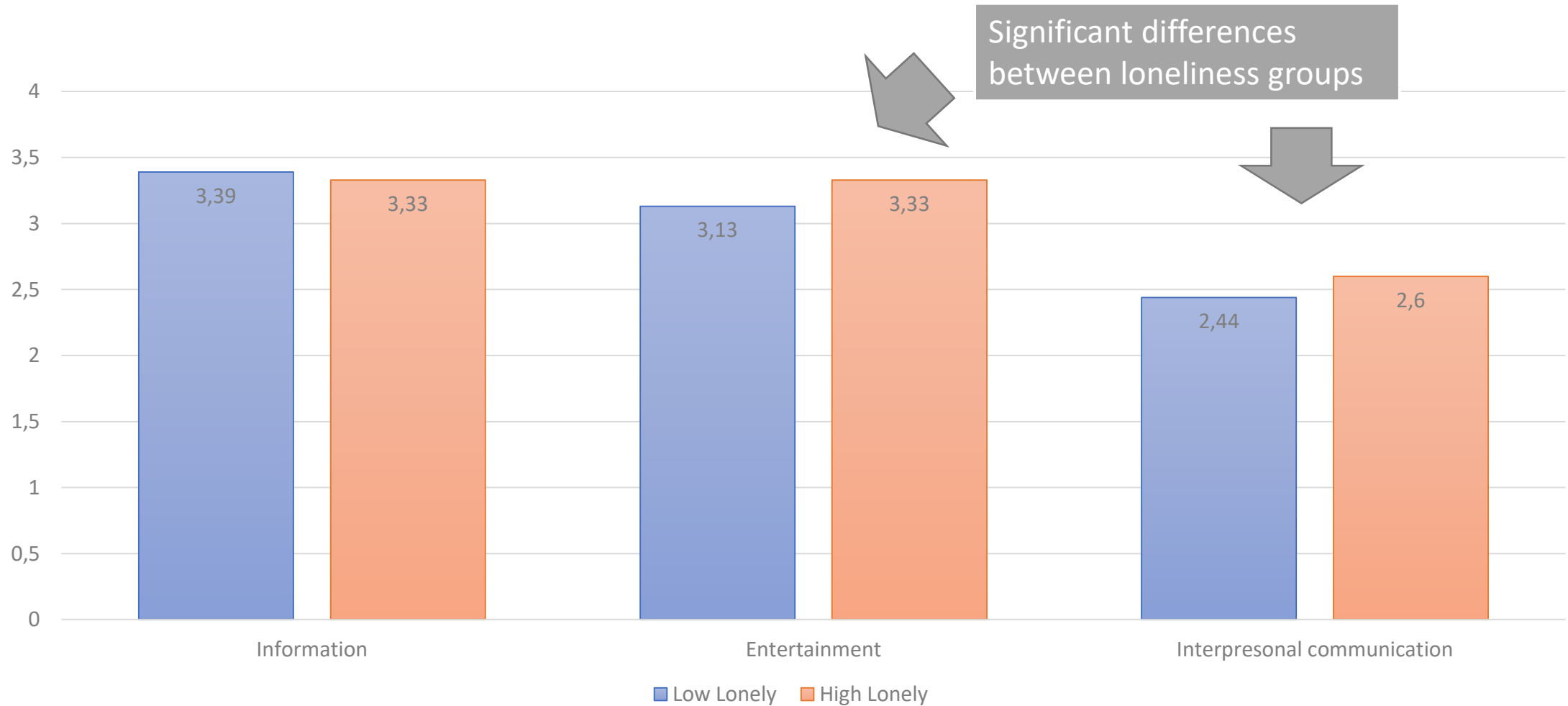
Chart shows percentage in each age group who said they felt lonely often or very often



BBC Loneliness Expt: Social media consumption

- **Loneliness is associated**
 - Greater time spent online (~1hr longer)
 - Fewer overlapping friends on Facebook
 - Fewer positive self-disclosure and more negative self-disclosure

BBC Loneliness Expt: Motivations



Review updated – what do we know now?



Still further evidence to indicate relationships between cyberbullying and internet addiction and loneliness



Strong evidence that the use of digital technology to promote social connection with elderly populations reduces loneliness



Differences in the ways in which lonely people engage with technology



Indications that engagement and influence of technology is different between generations

Important influences on experiencing loneliness when online

Social
comparison

Self-esteem

Personality traits
– particularly
openness

Rumination



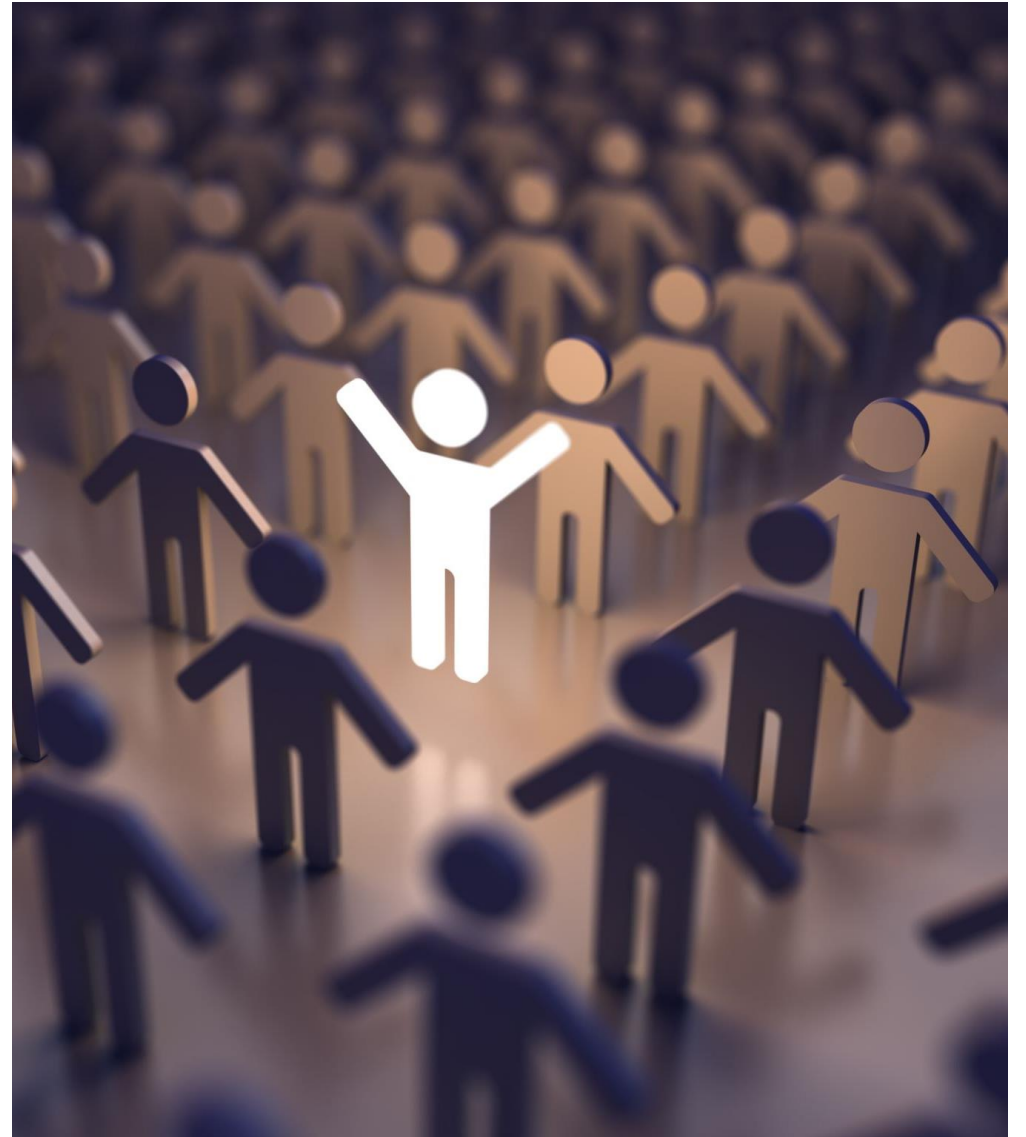
Effects of different mediums

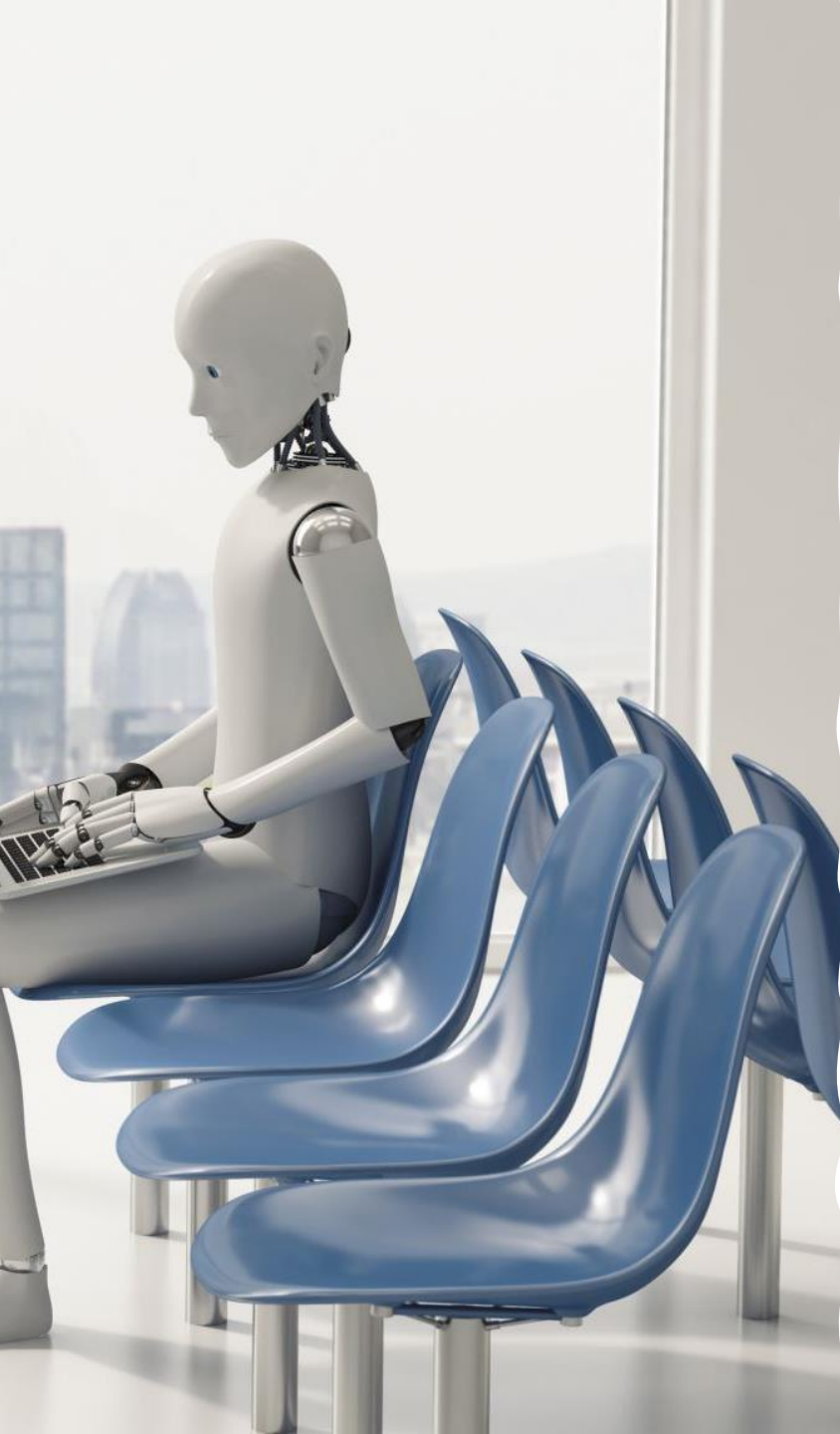
- Less evidence for differences between the different mediums/types of use
- Instant messaging
- Blogs
- Importance of images

Loneliness related to responses online

- **Extended loneliness** - abundance of connections in the online sphere (Candiotta, 2022)
- **Supportive network** – social support, optimism and inspiration
- **Social presence** – subjective experience of being present with someone

Motivation to contact can be the **DRIVE** for going online but not a **REWARD** for lonely people





Revised model of loneliness and social technology use

Revised Model of loneliness and social technology use

Influencers:
Social Comparison
Openness
Rumination



Motivation to connect



Active social media use

Motivation to distract



Passive social media use

Experiences:
Social Presence
Responsiveness
Social support



Social connectedness

Extended loneliness

Motivations for going online

Ways of interacting online

Outcomes relating to loneliness

Take home message

- Important implications for design of technology
 - Enhance social presence
 - Enable supportive networks
 - Ensure capacity for monitoring



Thank you for listening

Dr Rebecca Nowland

University of Central Lancashire

rnowland@uclan.ac.uk



**University of
Central
Lancashire**
UCLan

References

- Cacioppo, J. T., & Hawkley, L. C. (2009). Perceived social isolation and cognition. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 13(10), 447-454.
- Nowland, R., Necka, E. A., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2018). Loneliness and social internet use: pathways to reconnection in a digital world?. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(1), 70-87.
- Candiotta, L. (2022). Extended loneliness. When hyperconnectivity makes us feel alone. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 24(4), 47.