

# Social media buffers depression among older adults with pain

October 17 2018

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With a few finger strokes or swipes on a computer or cell phone, seniors with pain reduce the risk of depression when visiting social media sites.

In a newly published University of Michigan study, researchers reported that using social media can reduce the [negative health effects](#) of curtailed social contact that comes as a consequence of pain.

The findings are significant among an aging society where social isolation and loneliness are key determinants of well-being, said Shannon Ang, the study's lead author and doctoral candidate at the U-M Department of Sociology and Institute for Social Research.

"Our results may be possibly extended to other forms of conditions (e.g., chronic illnesses, functional limitations) that, like pain, also restrict physical activity outside of the home," Ang said.

Ang, along with Tuo-Yu Chen of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, used data from a nationally representative survey involving more than 3,400 Medicare beneficiaries aged 65 and older in 2011. The respondents were asked about depression, pain and their social participation.

The data, however, does not distinguish between the types of social media that [older adults](#) use—although 17 percent of them had used a social networking site in the last month. To capture if purported benefits were from social media and not just from general internet use, the analysis was adjusted for various online uses such as paying bills or shopping for groceries, Ang said.

The findings showed older adults who experienced pain were less likely to participate in social activities that require face-to-face interactions, which offers mental benefits.

Still, [social media](#) may preserve cognitive function and psychological well-being in this population, the researchers said.

"This is critical because the onset of pain can often lead to a downward spiral of [social isolation](#) and depression, resulting in adverse outcomes for the health of older adults," Ang said.

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: Social media buffers depression among older adults with pain (2018, October 17)  
retrieved 23 April 2024 from  
<https://phys.org/news/2018-10-social-media-buffers-depression-older.html>

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