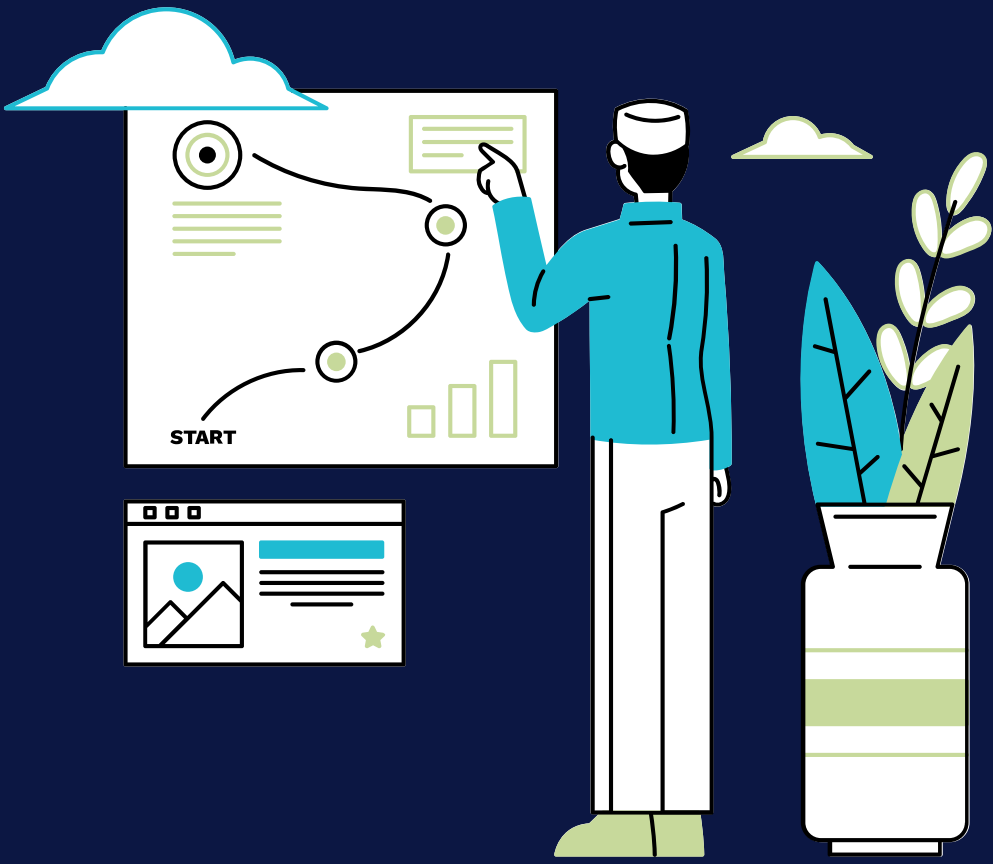


# DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN SOCIAL CARE

## Using Social Media to Reduce Loneliness in the Elderly



### 1. Research Design

The research design in this study was qualitative secondary research design because it critically examined how social media can alleviate the loneliness of older adults in UK social care settings. The loneliness phenomenon is subjective and socially constructed and can be studied using the approaches of qualitative research due to the need to interpret the subject under investigation instead of quantifying it (Creswell and Poth, 2016). It employed a case study approach targeting social care interventions based on digital interventions in the UK. Instead of using primary data, the study reviewed the current academic literature, policy reports and sector reports to find trends in implementation and effectiveness.

### 5. Data Analysis – Thematic Analysis

The study used thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2021) framework. Stages included:

1. Data familiarisation
2. Initial coding
3. Theme development
4. Reviewing and refining themes
5. Linking findings to theory

Four key themes emerged:

- Multidimensional nature of loneliness
- Social media as social convoy maintenance tool
- Multi-layered digital barriers
- Characteristics of effective digital interventions

The role of social care providers in supporting digital inclusion was particularly informed by Grey et al. (2024).

### 2. Research Philosophy – Interpretivism

It is based on the interpretivist philosophy, which presupposes the construction of reality as social and better comprehended in terms of meanings and experiences (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). The chosen interpretivism ideology was appropriate since the study examines the experience of loneliness and the perception of digital products in the context of elderly care. The study did not seek to test hypotheses but rather to interpret the role of the social media in social care practice.

### 6. Validity and Reliability

Validity

- Triangulation across academic, policy and charity sources
- Use of established theoretical frameworks
- Transparent documentation of coding process

Reliability

- Clearly defined search strategy
- Explicit inclusion criteria
- Replicable thematic procedure

### 3. Research Approach – Inductive

An inductive approach was adopted. Themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed through predefined hypotheses. This allowed patterns relating to digital inclusion, barriers, and effective intervention models to develop organically (Okoli, 2023). The inductive approach aligned with the interpretivist philosophy by allowing findings to be shaped by evidence rather than theory-first assumptions.

### 7. Ethical Considerations

- Only publicly available data was used
  - No direct participants were involved
  - Full referencing and academic integrity maintained
  - Sensitive interpretation of vulnerable older adult data
- As no primary research was conducted, issues of consent and confidentiality were not applicable.

### Conclusion

This is a qualitative, interpretivist and inductive approach that allowed making a critical inquiry into the possibility of how social media may be effectively and ethically incorporated into the UK social care strategies to alleviate loneliness among older adults.

### 4. Data Collection – Secondary Sources

No primary data was collected. The research analysed:

- Peer-reviewed academic journals
- UK Government strategy papers
- NHS Digital publications
- Charity reports (Age UK, Campaign to End Loneliness)
- Systematic reviews and evaluation studies

Databases used included EBSCOhost, PubMed, Google Scholar and ScienceDirect. The context of digital exclusion during COVID-19 was particularly informed by evidence highlighting the “double burden” of digital and social exclusion (Seifert, Cotten and Xie, 2021).

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