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A comparative study on the influence of social media on older adults residing at home and in old age home settings in Kolkata

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Abstract

Old-age is often characterized by absence of task and meaningful engagement. Over past few decades, it has been noticed that social media usage is no longer limited to the youngsters but senior citizens has also started using social media to remain connected with family and friends. Hence, the present study aims to explore the impact of social media in lives of elderly individuals using a mixed-method approach. The quantitative part involved a comparative study on 100 elderly individuals, 50 residing at homes and 50 residing at old-age homes in Kolkata, on dimensions of Social media use, Social functioning and Quality of Life. Qualitative part of the study focuses on the perception and attitude of elderly people towards social media use. Findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in enhancing social connectivity and reducing loneliness among older adults, thus bringing positive changes.

Keywords: Social media, elderly people, old-age home, connectivity, social functioning, loneliness

Introduction

In recent decades, the rise of social media has transformed global communication, as per a report, about 50 percent of India was using social media in 2020. It is predicted that 67 percent of the population would be using social media by the year 2025. According to the survey, 20% of respondents aged 60 and up admitted to using social media for more than 4 hours per day. This study examines the impact of social media on older individuals, both those living at home and in old-age homes. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become vital for many older adults, offering a virtual community that helps them feel more in touch with family and friends. They can easily keep up with what their grandchildren are doing or join clubs, they can find others who share their interests, which can lessen feelings of loneliness and isolation. For seniors living at home, social media serves as a lifeline to the outside world and access to emotional support. In contrast, those in old-age homes may face limitations due to restricted access. They are prone to disease and damage than younger adults because they frequently have reduced healing capacity and experience social issues like ageism, loneliness, and retirement. Forward-thinking facilities recognize social media's importance in bridging generational gaps and enhancing mental well-being. It is essential to ensure older adults have access and education to leverage these benefits as society embraces digital evolution. Some existing study shows that the usage of social media has a good impact on their mental health and promotes life satisfaction. Old age people who use social networking sites have lower rates of mental illness such as depression. There are some other studies that show that old people use social media to increase their quality of life, to get easy access to medicine, to learn how to maintain their homes and engage in healthy activities to improve lives.

Elderly individuals, especially those in old age homes, felt unsatisfied with the younger generation's attitude, lacking respect and affection, in contrast elderly women living with their families had a more positive experience due to regular interaction and support. The changing family structure and economic shifts have posed challenges for the elderly in India

(Dubey *et al.*, 2011) [4]. Elderly people living in nursing homes generally had a higher quality of life compared to those living with their families, this suggests that care facilities play significant role in enhancing the well-being of the elderly people (Pandey *et al.*, 2015) [11]. Use of social media among elderly people can help to combat isolation, loneliness, economical and medical challenges, (Dhar, 2017) [3]. Older smartphone users in Bengaluru showed willingness to adopt technology but faces barriers due to socioeconomic factors (William *et al.*, 2018) [14]. A study in urban areas of many states of India that aimed to quantify the extent of digital exclusion while also determining the causes of the marginalization. Furthermore, the research concentrated on comprehending the significant views that will be useful in developing and putting into practice strategies for the digital inclusion and engagement of the elderly in India (Ghosh *et al.*, 2019) [8]. Impact of social networks on healthcare accessibility for older widows in South India, highlighted the importance of social support for mitigating their challenges (George *et al.*, 2021) [7]. In London, the role of social networking sites for maintaining emotional and mental well-being among older people living in sheltered housing increased interactions (Field *et al.*, 2002) [5]. A correlation between social isolation and social media use among older individuals was found, indicating that higher social engagement is linked to more significant social media use by helping them to engage in interaction with other people (Meshi *et al.*, 2020) [10]. In Switzerland, it was revealed that social media can have both positive and negative effects on the well-being of older people, depending on individual circumstances. Social media improved their social connection, gave life satisfaction, increased self-esteem, and helped to combat symptoms of depression and loneliness though social media addiction was potential downside (Cotten *et al.*, 2021) [2]. Social networking sites impacts on life satisfaction among older Europeans, that suggested daily users had higher life satisfaction (Gaia *et al.*, 2021) [6]. Relationship between Bonding Social Capital (B.S.C), loneliness, and psychological, social, and emotional well-being in older age was found where positive associations between B.S.C and well-being, as well as negative associations with loneliness was observed. However, no significant relationship was found between social networking sites and B.S.C or loneliness. (Simons *et al.*, 2023) [13].

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a holistic understanding by conducting a comprehensive comparative analysis of the influence of social media on quality of life, social function and other dimensions of motivation of social media use on older individuals living at their homes and those residing in old-age home.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant relation between social media use and old people residing at home.
2. There is no significant relation between social media use and old people residing at oldage home.
3. There is no significant relation between social media use and place of living.

4. There is no significant difference of social media use effect on male users and female users.

Research Design

Independent Variable- Place of living and gender Organism- Individuals of age range 50-90 Dependent Variable- Quality of life, social function (social support, social adaptation and social engagement) and motives for social media use (relationship maintenance, passing time, virtual community, entertainment, coolness and companionship).

Quantitative Research

- **Sample Selection:** A total of 100 participants were selected in the quantitative phase of this research (50 aged individuals residing in their own homes and 50 residing in old-age homes) by simple purposive sampling.
- **Data Collection:** Structured questionnaires older people's quality of life questionnaire -brief, social function questionnaire for Chinese older adults and motives for Facebook use scale (as Facebook is most used social networking site by older adults) were administered to collect quantitative data.
- **Data Analysis:** Univariate tests, multivariate tests and descriptive statistics were applied.

Qualitative Research

- **Sample Selection:** A purposive sampling approach was used to select a subset of participants from both groups (individuals living in own homes and individuals living in old age home) who were willing to participate in interview. 18 participants (8 from each group and 2 social media non-users living in old age home) were interviewed.
- **Data Collection:** Semi-structured interview was conducted to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of older individuals regarding social media usage. The interview delves into their motivations, challenges, and perceived outcomes of using social media.
- **Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights emerging from the qualitative interviews to provide a nuanced understanding of the influence of social media on older individuals.

General Inclusion Criteria

1. Age- 60- 90
2. Area- Urban & semi-urban

General Exclusion Criteria

1. Age- Less than 60 and more than 90
2. Area- Rural

Ethical Considerations

1. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
2. Privacy and confidentiality of participants was strictly maintained.
3. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time.

Data Integration

Quantitative and qualitative data was compared and integrated to provide a comprehensive view of the research

topic relying on both statistical trends and nuanced personal experiences.

Results and discussion
Qualitative Analysis

Table 1: Univariate Test

IV	DV	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p
Gender	Quality of life	30.8323	1	30.8323	0.35260	0.554
	Social support	6.1927	1	6.1927	0.67915	0.412
	Social adaptation	10.7075	1	10.7075	0.95225	0.332
	Social engagement	0.0894	1	0.0894	0.01016	0.920
	Relationship maintenance	0.1748	1	0.1748	0.00568	0.940
	Passing time	17.2130	1	17.2130	1.42321	0.236
	Virtual community	2.4950	1	2.4950	0.12099	0.729
	Entertainment	26.6550	1	26.6550	1.19125	0.278
	Coolness	9.6509	1	9.6509	1.06345	0.305
	Companionship	0.0968	1	0.0968	0.01424	0.905
Place of living	Quality of life	1672.4799	1	1672.4799	19.12659	< .001
	Social support	30.2878	1	30.2878	3.32166	0.071
	Social adaptation	4.3414	1	4.3414	0.38609	0.536
	Social engagement	0.1306	1	0.1306	0.01485	0.903
	Relationship maintenance	19.3895	1	19.3895	0.63042	0.429
	Passing time	23.6413	1	23.6413	1.95472	0.165
	Virtual community	415.4024	1	415.4024	20.14377	< .001
	Entertainment	3.5683	1	3.5683	0.15947	0.691
	Coolness	58.3311	1	58.3311	6.42756	0.013
	Companionship	64.5895	1	64.5895	9.50357	0.003
Gender * Place of living	Quality of life	38.7028	1	38.7028	0.44261	0.507
	Social support	2.4068	1	2.4068	0.26395	0.609
	Social adaptation	1.4879	1	1.4879	0.13233	0.717
	Social engagement	0.4402	1	0.4402	0.05005	0.823
	Relationship maintenance	4.7858	1	4.7858	0.15560	0.694
	Passing time	1.2358	1	1.2358	0.10218	0.750
	Virtual community	1.6428	1	1.6428	0.07966	0.778
	Entertainment	13.0773	1	13.0773	0.58444	0.446
	Coolness	7.2430	1	7.2430	0.79811	0.374
	Companionship	0.0250	1	0.0250	0.00368	0.952

Mean

Gender	Female		Male	
	Own home	Old age home	Own home	Old age home
Place of living				
Quality of life	51.2	44.4	50.2	40.8
Social support	11.4	10.6	12.1	10.7
Social adaptation	10.1	9.92	9.59	8.96
Social engagement	11.7	11.6	11.5	11.7
Relationship maintenance	18.2	18.6	18.0	19.2
Passing time	12.3	13.0	11.3	12.5
Virtual community	11.2	15.0	11.2	15.6
Entertainment	16.9	16.5	15.2	16.2
Coolness	8.17	9.08	7.19	9.20
Companionship	8.33	9.92	8.47	10.1

Qualitative Analysis

Table 2: Axial Coding- following themes have been observed

Own home (social media users)	Old age home (social media users)
Urge for connectivity and closeness Feeling of acceptance Gets social and emotional aids High expectancy of need fulfillment More significant support networking Considers amusement More adaptation with modern technology Fear of cybercrimes	Urge for connectivity and closeness Feeling of acceptance Gets social and emotional aids Low expectancy of need fulfillment Less significant support networking Does not consider amusement Less adaptation with modern technology Fear of cybercrimes
Negative domain (social media users living in own home & old-age home)	Old age home (social media non-users)
Overuse causes eye itching/burning and headache	Urge of closeness is not fulfilled
	Don't feel accepted
	Lack of emotional and social aid

From the results and the quantitative analyses, it could be observed that there is no significant difference between male and female social media users in respect to quality of life, social function (and its sub-domains) and various motives of social media use irrespective of place they live in. A significant difference is found at 0.01 level between the quality of life of individuals who live in own home and those who live in old age home; where it is seen that older adults who live in own home (mean for female = 51.2 & mean for male = 50.2) has greater quality of life than those who live in old age home (mean for female = 44.4 & mean for male = 40.8). This suggests that people living with their family or in personal properties have greater wellbeing because of the sense of security and autonomy they experience from the place they live in. Results shows no significant relationship between social function of social media users living in own homes and old age homes. The place for significant results are virtual community, coolness and companionship components of motives for Facebook use scale. Result table suggests that older adults who live in old age homes (means for female = 15.0, 9.08 and 9.92 & means for males = 15.6, 9.20 and 10.1) are more dependent on social media for virtual communities, coolness expression and companionship than those who live in their own homes (means for female = 11.2, 8.17 and 8.33 & means for males = 11.2, 7.19 and 8.47). It can be said that residents of old age home fulfill their needs of being part of communities, expressing themselves and seeking companionships by the use of social media platforms like Facebook. Those who live in old age home away from their families want to be feel accepted where virtual communities come in role as a new mode of comfort where they can share their outlooks and find validation from others. Also, social media acts like a platform where they may express their creative side of being cool. Companionships through social media makes them feel the presence of someone who cares for them.

In the qualitative findings of the study it is indicated that older adults living in old age homes spend time in fulfilling their urge of connectivity through social media but they don't find it as a significant network for amusement, moreover they are less aware of modern technology and norms being physically away from the young generation therefore no matter how much they remain dependent on social media a longing for their expectations to be fulfilled remains unsatisfied thus showing the theme of low expectancy of need fulfillment in the axial coding. Nevertheless, they do feel accepted in social media and manages to get social and emotional aid depending on various communities, only the kind of support they expect in social media is often not received because of algorithmic limitations and inability of older people to use social networking sites without any proper guidance. On the other hand, people who live with their families don't have much urge to be close with new people other than their family members, they don't feel the need of being connected with virtual communities of social media and mostly use the new media for sake of amusement in lone time. Their needs in social media is less and these needs are often easily fulfilled thus making it a means of high expectancy but less dependency. They feel much comfortable in using social media because they could get guidance easily from family members. Moreover, social media helps them to be connected with other relatives and friends thus acting like a

significant network model for them. The qualitative work done on individuals who stay in old age home but don't use social media shows theme of unfulfilled need of connectivity, lack of emotional and social support along with feeling of being unaccepted from others. This suggests that absence of networking makes situations difficult for residents of old age home, thus the comparison with the analysis of qualitative data of social media users reflects that social media do play a role in providing some aid to those who stay in old age homes.

Conclusion

It is concluded in the study that old people who live in old age homes lacking proper support and connectivity have higher dependency on social media for sake of being part of virtual communities, expressing coolness and seeking companionships than those who live in their own homes, but their expectancy for need fulfillment is lesser than those who live in own homes because of inability to adapt with modern technology in absence of proper guidance. Supposedly this is how the quality of life of individuals living in old age home is not better than those who live in their own homes who with their close ones.

Limitation

The research might be subject to self-reporting biases as participants may had overstate or understate their social media usage. The study was focused on a specific geographical region mostly in urban and semi-urban, which might limit the generalizability of findings. Also sample size is small in the study. Such individuals who live in their own homes but alone without a family were very less in the sample.

Implication

Further studies can be done on older adults who live alone in their own homes with respect to impact of social media in their lives and similarities or comparison might be drawn with impact of social media on those who live in old age homes. From the study it is observed that social media users living in old age homes require guidance in social media, arrangements can be done by owners to provide guidance to older adults for sake of their autonomy so they themselves could more actively fulfill their needs through social media. Community service plans specially for old people can be promoted through social media. Social support teams for providing aids to old people can be operated through social media platforms.

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Appendixes

Multivariate Test

		value	F	df1	df2	p
Gender	Pillai's Trace	0.0585	0.541	10	87	0.856
	Wilks' Lambda	0.941	0.541	10	87	0.856
	Hotelling's Trace	0.0622	0.541	10	87	0.856
	Roy's Largest Root	0.0622	0.541	10	87	0.856
Home	Pillai's Trace	0.4201	6.304	10	87	<.001
	Wilks' Lambda	0.580	6.304	10	87	<.001
	Hotelling's Trace	0.7245	6.304	10	87	<.001
	Roy's Largest Root	0.7245	6.304	10	87	<.001
Gender * Home	Pillai's Trace	0.0202	0.179	10	87	0.997
	Wilks' Lambda	0.980	0.179	10	87	0.997
	Hotelling's Trace	0.0206	0.179	10	87	0.997
	Roy's Largest Root	0.0206	0.179	10	87	0.997

Univariate Tests

	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
Gender	Quality of Life	30.8323	1	30.8323	0.35260	0.554
	Social support	6.1927	1	6.1927	0.67915	0.412
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	Virtual community	2.4950	1	2.4950	0.12099	0.729
	Entertainment	26.6550	1	26.6550	1.19125	0.278
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	Social adaptation	1.4879	1	1.4879	0.13233	0.717
	Social engagement	0.4402	1	0.4402	0.05005	0.823
	Relationship maintenance	4.7858	1	4.7858	0.15560	0.694
	Passing time	1.2358	1	1.2358	0.10218	0.750
	Virtual community	1.6428	1	1.6428	0.07966	0.778
	Entertainment	13.0773	1	13.0773	0.58444	0.446
	Coolness	7.2430	1	7.2430	0.79811	0.374
	Companionship	0.0250	1	0.0250	0.00368	0.952
Residuals	Quality of life	8394.4950	96	87.4427		
	Social support	875.3528	96	9.1183		
	Social adaptation	1079.4632	96	11.2444		
	Social engagement	844.3799	96	8.7956		
	Relationship maintenance	2952.6399	96	30.7567		
	Passing time	1161.0699	96	12.0945		
	Virtual community	1979.6999	96	20.6219		
	Entertainment	2148.0594	96	22.3756		
	Coolness	871.2150	96	9.0752		
Companionship	652.4488	96	6.7963			