

**EXPLORING CHALLENGES FACED BY ELDERLY IN ADOPTING THE INTERNET
AND CULTIVATING ONLINE CONNECTIONS**

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Abstract

Many studies suggest that social networks and online communication can improve the health and social welfare of seniors and enhance their quality of life. However, challenges with the use of online social networks may prevent elderly individuals from accessing these benefits. This study explores the experiences of seniors when facing barriers and challenges in using social networks.

Using a phenomenological approach, this qualitative study conducted in 2016 with purposive sampling involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 9 seniors (3 males and 6 females) with an average age of 68.3 years who confirmed to be active members of at least one online social network. The data analysis, using Colaizzi's 7-step method, revealed two main themes of "preconditions of use" and "individual concerns," with six relevant subthemes, including the need for equipment and facilities, adequate income, technical knowledge, trust in information, trust in other users, and security and privacy.

The findings suggest that elderly individuals face significant barriers and difficulties in using online social networks. However, educational planning can help seniors overcome these barriers and improve their quality of life. This study underscores the importance of understanding the challenges that seniors face in adopting technology and developing effective interventions and solutions to support their digital participation and socialization.

Keywords: Challenges, Internet, Online Connections, Data Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

As technology advances and becomes more incorporated into our everyday lives, people' ability to navigate the digital world becomes more vital. Unfortunately, there are substantial hurdles and limitations that hinder many older people from fully using the internet and building online social networks.

This is a critical problem since internet communication and socializing have become an increasingly significant part of our life, notably during the COVID-19 epidemic when physical separation measures were implemented. Understanding the obstacles and limitations that seniors encounter in embracing the internet and establishing online relationships is critical for designing effective treatments and solutions to help this demographic fully participate in the digital era.

This paper will look at the many difficulties that seniors experience when it comes to embracing and using the internet, such as digital literacy and physical restrictions, as well as the barriers that hinder them from creating and sustaining online social networks. Moreover, the article will cover alternative solutions and treatments that might assist in addressing these problems and improving seniors' online involvement and socializing.

1.1. CHALLENGES

1. Lack of technical knowledge: Many seniors are unfamiliar with technology and may find navigating the internet and using online platforms difficult.
2. Access to equipment and facilities: Elderly may lack access to the essential equipment and facilities, such as computers or high-speed internet, to utilize online platforms successfully.
3. Restricted money: Seniors on a limited income may be unable to pay the price of internet connection and may see it as a luxury rather than a necessity.
4. Seniors may be cautious of the authenticity and dependability of information accessible on the internet, making them reluctant to utilize it.
5. Seniors may be leery about engaging with strangers online and may feel uncomfortable revealing personal information.
6. Concerns about security and privacy: Seniors may be worried about the security and privacy of their personal information while utilizing online platforms, particularly in light of recent data breaches and identity theft.

7. Ageism and the digital divide: Some elders may feel excluded and isolated as a result of the younger generations' digital proficiency.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The internet has become an essential part of daily life for many people, providing access to information, communication, and entertainment. However, older adults may face challenges in adopting the internet and cultivating online connections due to a variety of factors, such as physical and cognitive limitations, lack of access to technology, and fear of online risks.

Studies have shown that older adults may be less likely to use the internet than younger adults, with factors such as low income, low education, and physical disability affecting their access to technology. Additionally, older adults may experience age-related changes in cognitive abilities, which can affect their ability to navigate and use online platforms.

Another barrier to internet use among older adults is the fear of online risks, such as scams, fraud, and identity theft. Older adults may be more vulnerable to these risks due to a lack of familiarity with online technologies and a greater willingness to trust others.

To address these challenges, researchers have suggested a variety of strategies, such as providing access to technology, offering training and support, and designing user-friendly online platforms that are tailored to the needs of older adults. Additionally, community-based programs and social support networks can help older adults overcome social isolation and cultivate online connections.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by older adults in adopting the internet and cultivating online connections are complex and multifaceted. Further research is needed to better understand these challenges and develop effective interventions to support older adults in their use of online technologies.

3. METHODS

The phenomenological approach is one of the qualitative approaches.

To precisely characterize and describe events as they are experienced in a particular situation is the aim of phenomenological inquiry.

This study, which was conducted in Semnan, Iran, in 2016, received permission from the Semnan University of Medical Sciences Ethics Committee. The following were the requirements for inclusion in this study: participants had to be at least 60 years old, actively participate in at least one social network, such as Facebook or Instagram, or use a messenger service, such as Telegram or Skype; they had to have joined a social network after turning 60; they had to have sufficient experience using social networks or messenger services; they had to be alert; they had to be able to send and receive posts or messages. The participants were selected using a purposeful sample technique, and the data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The interviewees selected the place because they felt comfortable speaking openly about their experiences there and it met the conditions for conducting interviews (e.g., being quiet and relaxing).

Some of the interviews were conducted at both the interviewer's and the interviewees' homes. At the beginning of each interview session, a short description of the study's goals was provided to each participant. When all possible participant questions were answered and it was determined that they were willing to participate in the study, the informed consent forms were acquired.

Participants were given guarantees about the privacy of the information collected. We recorded each interview using a tape recorder and a cell phone. Please discuss your experience with social media in the interview's opening statement. Following then, more thorough enquiries were undertaken in order to get more comprehensive information. Two instances of sample inquiries are "Give me an example" and "Can you clarify further?"

During the interview sessions, the researcher also watched the participants' facial expressions and body language and, when applicable, took some useful notes.

The interviews were also promptly examined after being verbatim transcribed. The subsequent interviews were then planned. After interviewing 9 seniors for this research, the results were deemed

ed saturated. The researcher and three additional researchers verified the data saturation throughout the data gathering process.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 displays the demographic details of the 9 seniors who took part in this research. The experiences of the elderly with relation to the use of social networks were analyzed, and two key themes of "preconditions of usage" and "individual concerns" emerged.

Table 1: Demographic Specifications of Participants

Age	Sex	Level Of Education	Participants' Past Jobs	Marital Status
66	Male	Associate degree	Employee	Divorced
72	Male	Diploma	School Manager	Married
75	Female	Bachelor	Teacher	Married
63	Female	Physician	Gynecologist	divorced
74	male	Diploma	Employee	Married

5. DISCUSSION

The study's findings showed that the preconditions for usage and personal concerns were the two main themes that emerged from the senior's experiences utilizing social networks.

Having access to the Internet and a computer is required in order to use social networks. Hutto and Bell also hypothesized that a barrier preventing seniors from accessing social networks is a lack of access to computers and apprehension about technology.

The findings suggested that older adults who utilize online social networks need have access to equipment like tablets, laptops, and modern cell phones in addition to having Internet access. The elderly cannot get access to them because of their exorbitant costs. One of the primary reasons why older people don't use new technology is the high cost, which is accompanied with ergonomic challenges and a lack of enthusiasm. According to several surveys, having access to internet-connected devices like tablets and smart phones is quite inexpensive. Most older

Iranians are retired and have just a pension as income. There is no money saved from living expenditures to purchase laptops or mobile devices for accessing social media. Paying attention to the finances and means of support of the elderly may help them prepare for the requirements of utilizing social networks so they can profit from their use. The utilization of social networks seems to be influenced by economic factors. The findings of this research suggest that basic computer and internet skills are necessary for older people to utilize social networks. A web-based expertise is necessary for effective social networking. In order for the elderly to access the modern websites and apps, they must comprehend some of the more complex terms like server, search, browser, and search engine. Additionally, using social media effectively requires specialized understanding. Leist discovered that in order for older people to utilize social networks, they must have the essential functional ability to use computers and social media, as well as the necessary information and communication technology (ICT) knowledge and attitudes.

The results of the current research also showed that seniors utilized social networks and the Internet to acquire a variety of information, although they did not always believe what they found. The majority of elderly people use the internet to read news and do information searches. Similar to this, Leist (2013) thinks that social networks' capabilities may be used to find and disseminate health-related information on different illnesses and therapies. The elderly's quality of life may be improved as a result, but there is a possibility that the shared knowledge, particularly when it comes to chronic and life-threatening disorders, may be erroneous or even detrimental. On the other side, older people in social networks have the power to influence one another to treat and follow through with medical treatments, which speeds up healing. Social networks may exploit this, and by developing them and uploading accurate, trustworthy, and genuine information, ageing can be accompanied with greater health. These networks may assist seniors in finding the appropriate information about ageing and their medical requirements and difficulties if they are formed, maintained, and updated by health care providers like the ministry of health and social security. This may also improve the standard of living for this expanding population.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the challenges and barriers that seniors face when utilizing online social networks. The findings suggest that there are preconditions of use and individual

concerns that impact seniors' ability to use these platforms effectively. The preconditions of use include the need for equipment, facilities, adequate income, and technical knowledge, while individual concerns relate to trust in information, other users, and security and privacy.

Despite the challenges, the use of online social networks can improve seniors' general health and social welfare and enhance the quality of their lives. Therefore, there is a need for educational planning to encourage the elderly to use these platforms effectively. Providing seniors with the necessary skills and knowledge can help them overcome the barriers and fully participate in the digital age.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of understanding the challenges that seniors face when adopting the internet and cultivating online connections. It provides insights that can guide the development of interventions and solutions to support seniors in using online social networks effectively and enhancing their quality of life.

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