



Title:

Digital and social media emerges as an effective tool to enhance the quality of life in elderly communities.

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the efficacy of digital and social media to enhance the quality of life in the elderly communities. Older people tend to be physically and socially inactive. This may be due to retirement from workforce, thus, lack of task-oriented work routines, and poorer health. The studies investigate the potential for new technologies to enhance the quality of life and facilitate meaningful engagement in physical and social activities among culturally and linguistically diverse older adults. This paper examines three different elderly communities, of which include independent retirement community, aged care nursing homes community and elderly migrant community. The first study is about the Nursing Home residents in Perth of Western Australia. They were motivated to raise their energy level by introducing 'SitDance' online exercise program. In essence, they moved their body actively as a daily routine in lieu of remaining idle watching television. Online media program has given them a boost on their energy level. It helps them to remain physically and mentally active. The second study is about older migrants living in Australia using social networks platforms to stay connected with their diasporic families and friends overseas. Social networks platforms do help the older migrants to eliminate social isolation. The last study examines the healthy independent retirees who become internet users. They found joy, pride and contentedness in accessing information from online media as a means of remaining cognitively active.

Based on the above three studies, I want to make the point that with the support of internet, the elderly communities can come to alive and well.

Keywords: elderly, aging, older adult, quality of life, technology, aged care, engagement, social media, social support.

Communities and Social Media

Introduction

Most countries have rising life expectancy and declining fertility rates and in turn have aging population. Of course, every human being in the world is entitled to find a way to live long and healthy life. With the changing demographics, making the society more age friendly becomes an essential and urgent task. The important aspects of measuring wellbeing for older adults are their physical and mental health. (Juul, et al., 2019).

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) reports that older people make up a considerable proportion of Australia's population—in 2017, over 1 in 7 people were aged 65 and over. As such, elderly health is one of the most important Australian agenda. Providing aged services to older Australians bring social and economic challenge to the whole country. On the other hand, if the older Australians stay on being fit and healthy in their later life, they are a good source of manpower. They can contribute socially, culturally and economically to the wider community.

The advent of social forms of technology, embedded in our everyday life, can transform the elderly communities, to meet their human need and purpose of life.

Characterized by speed and instantaneity, mobile phones, emails, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace Twitter and blog sites) and online websites bring proximity to the world. (Delanty 2018).

The affordances of digital and social media provide the opportunities for older adults to initiate meaningful physical activities, maintain social ties, improve cognitive abilities, prevent depression and anxiety and many more.

This paper argues that positive outcomes generated by the online media and social networks are no less real than the traditional support.

The online media and social networks are regarded as building weak ties as well as fragile communities. This paper argues that the internet has performed a pivotal function to boost workout class as in the first study; to bring together strangers and families to new intimacy in the second study and to establish social interaction in the third study. Internet may build thin communities but strong ties do appear at times.

Rollout of online exercise program ‘SitDance’ at Perth Nursing Home.

The research of Juul, et al., (2019) revealed that online website exercise program could be used to increase physical and social activities. It would reduce inactivity and facilitate social interaction. Before the start of the daily exercise program ‘SitDance’, nursing home residents remained inactive during most (45-77%) of their time. They were sleeping, doing nothing or watching television. Whilst only less than 10% of their time were socializing and engaged themselves in physical communication activities. The inactivity led to loneliness, depression, anxiety, boredom and social exclusion. It impacted negatively on their health, wellbeing and quality of life. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) reports that 7 in 10 older people are overweight or obese. Give older people a standard daily routine and meaningful physical activity has positive impact on their mood.

Since the rollout of online exercise program with music 'SitDance', high participation rate from residents was found. People were motivated to follow the daily routine to workout. They moved their bodies, singing together and triggered small talks with fellow residence and family members. The exercise program had transformed the Nursing Home to a livelier place. The activity had also raised residences' curiosity and enthusiasm in using touch screen technologies. They began to explore smart phone to watch videos online, play games thus initiated virtual social interaction. They were now engaged in meaningful social and physical activities rather than passively sitting in front of television. The significant benefit of exercise is protecting elderly against injuries and falls.

The opportunity to take part in social activity provided mental and physical stimulation. It Initiated interaction between older people and their family members. They were happy and enjoying their time. They felt proud of themselves. Social media provides meaningful activities to raise self-esteem and bring happiness. The engagement raised their spirit and created social life within nursing home. The online exercise program even facilitated communication across language differences. Participants interacted with each other beyond the constraint of linguistic abilities. Physical and mental limitation did not exist anymore.

The problem of Australia's aged care policy may relate to inactivity, care dependency, limited mobility, chronic diseases, fatigue, cognition and habitual inactivity of older people. It is essential for government and policymakers to endorse the use of new technologies and focus on initiating meaningful activities. The introduction of internet may support older people social wellbeing within daily living domain. The readily available information from internet may fill some older people's gap on nutrition, mobility, personal hygiene, toileting and continence, cognitive skills, verbal behavior, depression, social and emotional needs. To sum

up, the exercise program 'SitDance' – an online media is proven to be an effective tool to initiate meaningful physical activity for the aged care nursing homes community.

Use of reliable digital communication tools to transform social relations - concept of 'digital kinning' for older migrants

In Australia, in 2016, 25% of the population was born overseas, including 37% of people aged 65 or over (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The older migrant community experiences higher probability of dispersal of family and support networks. There is certainly a need to maintain networking across distance, both proximate and distant. The research project from Baldassar, L. & Wilding, R. (2019) examined the role of communication technologies to maintain social networks of care and support. It is understood that this sort of social networks is fundamental to health and well-being of older adults. Successful ageing for elderly community can hence be achieved.

From data collected in the study, aging migrants used digital communication technologies (e.g. phone, video calls, social media platforms) to maintain ties to family and friends living abroad. Smartphone and Facebook posts were their favorite social media to illustrate their daily routine to grandchildren. Skype video calls maintained the close ties with siblings, friends and protected them from social isolation. Communication technologies iPad and Whatsapp were central to bridge ties with kin live nearby as well as live at a distance. Text message particularly satisfying to reassure their families were well. Hear and see family on a regular basis through devices were now a daily routine. This could combat the potential isolation effect. (Baldassar & Wilding, 2019).

The other purpose of using digital communication technologies is to maintain cultural identity. Migrants keep their own ethnicity therefore they retain their own

cultural identity. Access to the readily available information from the internet apps such as WeChat allows migrants to share reflections on news and events in home country. Digital communication technologies help to alleviate the tension between fulfilling and abandoning their sense of cultural identity. Watching favorite TV series, listening to music, religious quotes and stories initiate endless entertainment. Social and cultural connections are maintained with own distant kin. The technologies support elder migrants' sense of belongings to their home country community.

Aging migrants can also receive distant support service from volunteer who speaks their own language through video conversation. One example is an aging migrant using Skype calls to converse with exchange students.

The use of various 'digital' social media such as voice calls, video calls, text messages, photographs, emojis and sharing of memes to connect with 'kin' (families and relatives) is given the term of 'digital kinning'. Social media is conveying types of closeness and bonding experiences to older migrants. New communication technologies have initiated a better quality of life to elderly migrant community by enabling a new set of practices, namely digital networks.

Use of social networking sites - strengthening social connectedness and raising cognitive functions.

According to Newman et al (2019) from Department of Clinical, Education and Health Psychology studies, older adults often experience the feeling of loneliness due to physical morbidity and bereavement social isolation. The research sent out 1164 questionnaire papers to older adults. The study examined the use of social networking sites in the over 65+ perspective associated with wellbeing and cognitive function. Social network sites included Facebook, Twitter, Instagram,

LinkedIn, Snapchat, Tumblr, Quora and Whatsapp. In the research they found that majority of social network users were facebook users (43%).

The following conclusion is supported by data results.

Older adults find beneficial effects of participating in social network sites. There is reduction in feeling of loneliness. They perceive technology as a learning avenue for new knowledge or skill. Social networking sites act as enabler of connectivity to outside world. They feel more confident and raise their self-esteem in using technologies successfully. Internet overcomes their physical mobility constraint. Social networking sites provide social bonding and social bridging with family and friends as well as younger generations. Online shopping facility reduces their functional disability limitation. They play games on internet and keep up to date with people of interest. Technology is a means of remaining cognitively active. All the above activities contribute to feeling of connectedness not isolation, hence improve the overall social well-being of older adults. To sum up, social networks have enhanced the quality of life in independent retirement community.

Conclusion

It is imperative that the older people to continue to contribute socially, culturally and economically to the wider community, no matter of living at home independently or staying at 'aged care home'. The above-mentioned researches confirm the positive impact of internet on the well-being of elderly communities.. Digital and social media generates positive outcomes to the culturally and linguistically diverse group on the principles of social connectedness, inclusiveness and community involvement. It helps to alleviate the negative effects of loneliness and social isolation in old age.

The advent of digital and social media brings impact to all communities.

Ultimately, digital technologies can transform the elderly communities to a better

world. This would ease the social and economic burden laid by the change of Australian demographics. Social media enables elderly communities stay up-to-date with families and friends around the world; network with other people who share similar interests or ambitions; join or promote worthwhile causes and raise awareness on important issues. Through a phone, a tablet or a device, the quality of life for elderly communities can be improved.

To conclude the above researches, it is clearly stated that digital technologies can enhance the quality of life for elderly communities.

- The first case study evaluates the online media 'SitDance' proven to be an effective tool to initiate meaningful physical activity for the aged care nursing homes community.
- The second case study examines social media conveying types of closeness and bonding experiences to older migrant community through 'digital kinning'.
- The third case study discusses the digital technology as a means of remaining cognitively active for independent retirement community.

To recognize the value of technologies government and policy makes are urged to invest more resources to improve the digital literacy of older people and support the digital material and infrastructure. Social media contributes to increased physical activity and social interaction, and thereby facilitates meaningful engagement to improve physical health and social wellbeing of older people.

A growing proportion of older adults are bound to increase pressure on the aged care sector. Technology is cost-effective tool to deliver a much-needed resource efficient solution to social and physical inactivity. Positive outcomes generated by the online media and social networks are no less real than the traditional support.

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