SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELDERLY PEOPLE: RESEARCH TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

Population aging is becoming a worldwide reality a global reality, and engagement with social media as well. The older adult population is growing rapidly and their mental and physical health will be a global concern. Social networks have been regarded as an essential partner to assist older persons. It is therefore essential to know how the older population interacts with social media and the possible advantages and risks in this contact. This paper reports the findings of a comprehensive literature review in the area of social media and the elderly. The study of the research articles focused on their research\approach, methods of data collecting, research areas, goals and findings. Our results suggest that presently there is no prevailing research approach for this area of study, samples are usually extremely small, research efforts are focused on particular domains, and there is a missing of rigor in the reporting process. This study is significant since it highlights the present status of research in this area and leads future prospective research.

KEYWORDS: *Elderly, Social Media, Literature Review.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world's population is aging. According to the United Nations, it is estimated that the population of elderly people would more than double between 2013 and 2050, from 841 million to more than 2,000 million. For 2047, it is anticipated that for the first time, older adults will surpass the number of children. In turn, the elder population is growing older. In 2013 the percentage of individuals over 80 years among the senior population was 14 percent and it is expected to reach 19 percent by 2050. If so, by that year, there will be 392 million individuals over 80 years globally, which implies more than three times the present number[1–9].

As individuals age, their physical capabilities begin to deteriorate, they have limited mobility and their reaction time is considerably slower. Such a restriction in their mobility often results in reduced involvement in social activities, which may tend to enhance feelings of loneliness, and diminish morale and contentment with life. It is also widely known that for the older population, their health and well-being relies, to a larger degree, on the emotional and social connections they have with their family members and friends. Technology may play an essential role assisting the elderly to maintain these social connections. It may enhance their quality of life by decreasing their feeling of loneliness.

As Hawkeye and Cacioppo suggest, that developing methods to assist older persons in establishing and sustaining social ties should be a priority for public health.

Older people constitute the fastest increasing percentage of the world's population, and their social

needs may be fulfilled via involvement in social networks.

Social networking has become a crucial aspect of daily life for many individuals. In recent years more and more elderly people have started to utilize social media. According to Madden, from 2000 to 2009, there was a 70 percent increase in Internet use by people aged 50–64 years, and a 38 percent increase by those over 65 years; and during 2010 there was an increase of 88 percent in the use of social media by people aged 50–64 years, and a 26 percent increase by those over 65 years. However, in contrast to young people, the use of social media by older individuals is still modest.

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Defining "old" is tricky because age categorization may change in various geographic locations and over time. The United Nations accepted the concept of older person as individuals aged 60 years or older[10]. Some organizations have divided the elderly population into three groups: the "young old" aged between 60 and 75; the "old old" aged between 75 and 85; and the "very old" with ages above 85 years. There are also variations within the research community, some researchers consider older people those individuals over 65, while others considers those over 60 years as elders for the elderly is people who are over 55 years old, and consider as elderly people those aged over 50. A rising issue linked to the increase of the older population is social isolation. According to Couture, 43 percent of individuals over 65 feel lonely on a regular basis and this emotion is linked to a decline in health or perhaps early mortality.

Social isolation may be defined as a low amount and poor quality of interaction with other people. This covers the amount of connections a person has, his emotions of belonging, and how satisfying his relationships and his interactions with others are. Even, when there is no accepted definition for social media, Obar and Wildman identify four similarities of contemporary social media services:

- They are Web 2.0 Internet-based apps;

- Its lifeblood is user-generated content;

- People and groups establish user-specific profiles; and

- They encouraged the growth of social networks online by linking a profile with those of other individuals and/or organizations.

In conclusion, social media may be regarded as internet-based apps that create connections among users and user-generated content in online settings. Social media applications can be used to interact with other people via blogs, web forums, social bookmarking sites, photo and video sharing communities, content communities, social networking sites, and virtual games with the goal to consume, co-create, share, and modify content generated by the same users. Some of the most prominent social media today are: Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Skype, Google+, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat.

Preventing and relieving social isolation and loneliness is a crucial factor in improving the quality of life of older people. Information and communication technology (ICT), together with efforts conducted by local communities or government organizations, may be used as a tool to assist decrease feelings of loneliness and improve the mental well-being of older people. The wide availability of mobile communications networks, smart phones and tablets, combined with social media applications, make it easier for elders to contact and share information with family and friends through text, voice and images with the potential to decrease loneliness and increase perceived social support, sense of belonging and feelings of connectedness.

Social media may be even more helpful for seniors with restricted mobility and for those who are no longer physically near to family and friends since it may help, regardless of time and location,

to retain social ties that would otherwise be difficult to preserve. Besides this, the elderly population have recently shown a special enthusiasm for the adoption of new network tools that allow them to share, with a growing network of contacts, links, photos, videos, news and status updates , and consequently improve their skills and opportunities for communication, information searching, knowledge sharing, and relationship building [9], [14].

In general, social media enables older people to express themselves, engage in discussions and remain in touch with society. Participating in social networks can empower older individuals and give them with a feeling of connection and greater control and self-efficacy. An intriguing development in the usage of social media by elders is health care. It may be an excellent source of health assistance. Patients may find and obtain health-related information and services; they can provide and receive information to manage particular illnesses and build connections with health professionals for medical help.

On the other side, the scientific community have also discovered a variety of educational, cognitive, physiological and experiential variables that may impede the usage of social media by the older population found four aspects of limitations that elders face when interacting with technology: intrapersonal obstacles, structural barriers, interpersonal barriers, and functional barriers. They also found that these restrictions were less restrictive for individuals with greater incomes and higher education, but judged to be more restrictive as the age of users rose.

2. DISCUSSION

As part of the study of the limits identified by the researchers on this topic, it is interesting to note that only in 20 out of 36 publications (56 percent), the authors commented on the major constraints they encountered in their investigations. The greatest number of studies (16 out of 20, 80 percent) established as their primary restriction that the findings made difficult the generalization and construction of cause-and-effect connections owing to the sample, either because it was extremely homogenous, very small or biased. For example, the authors stated that in their research, the sample was extremely small, the participants were mainly African American females who has had some computer expertise, thus they propose to conduct further study targeting other populations to see if the results could be or just not applied.

3. CONCLUSION

To find relevant studies, we searched relevant databases such as EBSCO, ACM, Scopus, Springer, Science Direct, JSTOR, Academic Search Complete, Emerald, ERIC, and Web of Science. We used the term social media with combinations of the following keywords: old people, elderly, seniors and older adults. This first search returned a total of 88 items. Then we perform the same search in Google Scholar obtaining 78 articles. In total the searching procedure yielded 166 articles. To be included in the present review, an article needed to contain the selected keywords, and meet three inclusion criteria which are

- Include experiments, scientific studies, literature reviews or experiences with seniors in the use of social media tools;

- Explain the study methodology;

- Explain how social media was used, for example what kind of interaction they analyzed with Facebook, Twitter and so on.

In a first round the screening of the papers with regard to the inclusion criteria was performed separately by two writers. As a consequence, 28 papers were approved for inclusion by both writers and 32 further articles were accepted by just one of the authors. In a second round, a third

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author reviewed these 32 papers and approved the inclusion of 14 of them. Subsequently, three articles were removed because the full-text version could not be found, (just the abstract), two for being posters (and no full papers) and one for being duplicated. In total, 36 publications were included in the study for a full-text review (Appendix) (Appendix). After inclusion, the papers were evaluated using the following criteria:

- Article "demography": publication channel (journal or conference), authors' affiliation, and target audience

- Aim of the study/research questions

- Research approaches

- Data collection methods

- Main domains of research

- Participants' demography: number, gender, age, educational level

- Main results

- Future work.

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