

Impact of Smartphone use on Social Connectedness and Psychological Well-Being among Elderly

Asna Saidi*, Sanju Choudhary**, Dalbir Singh Saini*** and O.P. Sharma****

Abstract

This study aims to explore the impact of utilizing smartphones on older adults' psychological well-being as well as their sense of connection to others. Smartphones have become a significant tool in helping to lessen loneliness and improve the emotional support received by older adults due to the rapid growth of technology. This research examines the relationship between the frequency and purpose of utilizing smartphones and belongingness, social interaction, and psychological well-being within older adults. Quantitative research design will be utilized to collect data from a sample of older adults (60+ years of age) regarding their smartphone usage patterns, social belongingness, and psychological health using standardized questionnaires. Data is collected from participants through surveys, and analyses will be conducted using regression and correlation. It is anticipated that there will be a positive correlation between smartphone use and psychological health through an increased level of social connectivity for older adults. Furthermore, older adults who utilize their cell phones for social purposes, such as video calling to their family members and communicating with friends, may experience an increased quality of life and emotional well-being, as well as reduced social isolation, stress, and loneliness than their counterparts who do not use cell phones. The conclusions reached in this study could not only enhance the level of understanding of how to use digital technology as a means of improving the lives of older adults and promoting an attitude of digital inclusion among the social and mental health.

Key words: Smartphone usage, social engagement, well-being, social isolation, digital inclusion

Digital technology is growing rapidly and is now pervasive in all areas of life, regardless of age group; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that as digital technology becomes increasingly widespread, the impact of technology on the lives of older adults will continue to grow. A thorough examination of how digitalization affects the way older adults experience the ageing process is still a nascent area of research. Digital technology should be viewed as a tool that provides solutions to challenges faced by older adults; however, older adults have begun to incorporate digital technologies into their daily lives, social networks, and overall experiences later in life. While older adults are increasing their use of smartphones, most existing studies have focused solely on whether older adults can use digital devices, or how digital devices can assist in maintaining distance and promoting independence. Although these studies are very important, it is equally important to begin to look beyond these two areas, at the effect of smartphone usage on the social and emotional aspects of older adult life. Today, many people use smart devices for communicating, staying connected with their families, getting information and news, joining in on social online networks, and helping people feel they are not isolated. Technology is now a critical component

of many older adults' daily lives. Peine and Neven (2019; 2021) suggest that technology and ageing are interrelated and will influence each other because they make up each other as part of what we know as the co-creation of technology and getting older. This perspective moves away from viewing older adults as simply receivers of technological interventions. By contrast, this perspective emphasizes how new technologies are part of the realities of later life and help to shape an older adult's experiences, identity, and social participation in a digital culture. Smartphones are widespread across generations, and their role in the daily lives of older persons reveals unique patterns of use and meaning-making that challenge oversimplified preconceptions about social interaction and technology use (Beneito-Montagut et al, 2022).

Social ties

With the evolution of our understanding of how older adults are physically and socially connected to others throughout their lives, there has been a significant increase in our understanding of the issues regarding social connectedness for older people. While previous theories of ageing attempted to explain the social experiences of older individuals differently than did other researchers, a theory of ageing known as detachment theory by Cumming and Henry

*Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, (Raj.) 302004. Saeediasna07@gmail.com

**Research Scholar, Philosophy Department, M.S.J. GOVT. COLLEGE, Bharatpur, (Raj.) Sanju.choudhary0@gmail.com

***Prof. & Head, Department of Psychology, Om sterling global University Hisar. sainids@gmail.com

****Former Head & Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur (Raj.) 302004. opbrd65@gmail.com

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Asna Saidi, Department of Psychology, University of Rajasthan, JLN Marg, Jaipur.

(1961) identified "detachment" through the practice of reducing one's involvement with other people as representing the naturally progressive process of getting older. While it is possible to adopt a variety of concepts to characterize aging successfully, it can be argued that activity theory (Havighurst, 1961) provides a powerful framework for understanding the association between continued social engagement, meaningful connections with others, and active involvement with one's community. These two theories have shaped our understanding of how social interactions have an impact on the well-being and quality of life of older adults. Numerous studies have shown a strong relationship between social connectedness and health and mental well-being among older adults (Suragarn et al., 2021). According to Cornwell et al. (2008), social connectivity is indicated as a helpful substitute for adjusting to social situations and continuing to be socially active in later life.

However, research on technology-based social connectivity among older adults has developed slowly. The slower development of scholarly work on older adults and their use of technology can partly be attributed to the prevalence of age-related stereotypes that view older adults as incapable of or disinterested in using digital technologies (Mannheim et al., 2023). Research has mostly employed deficit models to focus on interpersonal aspects of a connection, mainly addressing issues like poor health (Cotten et al., 2014), loss of mobility, and loneliness and unwelcome isolation (Silva et al., 2020). One important component of a person's sense of belonging is their sense of closeness, which is influenced by their social distance from other people (Lee & Robbins, 2000). Because of this perception, older adults have been seen as users of technology-based programming aimed at providing more opportunities for social interaction and connectivity, with limited digital participation. When compared to other media and in-person contact, some elderly people also view it as low-quality communication (see, for instance, Godman-Deane et al., 2016; Grünjes et al., 2024).

Subjective well-being

The subjective well-being of an individual refers to his or her cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life and includes the domains of life satisfaction, positive effect, and negative effect. There are two main approaches to assessing quality of life;

objective assessments of quality-of-life focus on measurable indicators related to the strength of an individual's life (i.e. economic status, health, etc.) while subjective assessments focus on an individual's subjective experience, emotional reactions and satisfaction with the circumstances of their life. Nagpal and Sell's (1985) conceptualization of subjective well-being as a multidimensional measure incorporating how an individual evaluates and feels about different life domains provides further evidence of the relationship between subjective well-being and successful ageing. Subjective well-being has been identified as a critical measure of successful ageing by reflecting psychological adjustment, emotional stability, and life satisfaction during older adulthood.

Objectives

1. To study the relation between social connection and smartphone use in the elderly.
2. To examine the relation between smartphones usage and psychological well-being in older adults.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a strong positive correlation between smartphone use and social connection in the elderly.

H2: There will be a strong positive correlation between smartphone use and psychological well-being in the elderly.

Method

Research design

This research will investigate the relationship between the following variables, smartphone usage, social connection, and mental health, using quantitative methodology with both correlational and descriptive designs. The primary purpose of this study is to determine what effect smartphone usage has on older adults' social and mental health.

Data for the study will be collected using a cross-sectional survey approach, which allows researchers to collect all their data from each participant at one time. This method is considered appropriate for identifying patterns, relationships, and effects of smartphone usage on mental health characteristics among older adults.

Sample Size

The anticipated sample size will be between 100-200 older adults and will be contingent upon availability and feasibility of

participation. Participants in this study will be selected from older adults using a purposive sampling technique to recruit participants meeting the following criteria: aged 60 years or above,

- use smartphones regularly,
- and are willing to participate in the study.

Inclusion Criteria

1. People aged 60 years and above
2. Have smartphones to communicate and do something else daily.
3. Understand questions and answer them.

Exclusion Criteria

understand manner and assistance will be available to participants when they require it.

Results and Discussion

Pearson's product-moment correlation was used for the evaluation of the relationship between smartphone use and social connectedness, as well as for the evaluation of smartphone use and psychological well-being in older adults.

In addition, there is a significant positive relationship ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) between the amount of time individuals use mobile phones and their overall psychological well-being;

Table 1. Mean and SD and coefficients of Correlation

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Smartphone Use	32.45	6.21	—		
2. Social Connectedness	41.38	7.14	.58**	—	
3. Psychological Well-Being	76.52	9.36	.49**	.63**	—

$p < .01$ level of significance

1. People that are aged 60 years and above are significantly impaired mentally or have major health problems that impact the ability to participate.

2. People not using a smartphone.

Psychological Measures

The tools and questionnaires that would be used to assist in the study include:

1. Smartphone usage questionnaire

It will help to evaluate the frequency and duration of usage, along with reasons for usage.

2. Social Connectedness Scale

The Social Connectedness Scale developed by Lee, Draper, & Lee (2000) will assess participants' perceptions of their social connections and feelings of belonging.

3. Psychological well-being scale

It was developed by Carol Ryff (1995) to measure the emotional/social/psychological functioning of older individuals.

Procedure

Once informed consent is obtained from participants, data collection will begin. Respondents will receive a full explanation of the actual purpose of the research and that their confidentiality will be guaranteed. The questionnaires will be administered to each respondent in a straightforward and easy-to-

therefore, older individuals who utilize their phones on a regular basis experience greater emotional and psychological wellness.

The purpose of the research was to examine smartphone use and its impact on the psychological health and social connectedness of older adults. The research findings indicated that older adults' psychological wellbeing was enhanced by the effective use of smartphones for social contact, emotional support, and overall psychological wellbeing. Frequent users of smartphones (those who communicate, network through social media, use video calling applications, etc.) have a significantly higher degree of social connectedness and psychological adjustment than those who have little engagement with smartphones. The researchers also found a strong positive association between smartphone use and social connectedness among older adults. Using smartphones enables older adults to maintain regular contact with their friends, family, or other people, even when they are separated by physical distance or limited mobility due to one illness or another. Accordingly, various smartphone applications such as WhatsApp, video calling applications, and social media provide older adults an avenue to stay socially active and emotionally connected. Physical

and psychological well-being are improved when one feels connected (Lee & Robbins, 1998). These results are congruent with many of the principles of activity theory, which describes how continued engagement in social relationships and activities leads to healthy aging and higher levels of overall life satisfaction. Moreover, older adults who used smartphones regularly reported increased emotional wellbeing, less loneliness, and a better sense of social belonging. By using communication technologies, older adults have greater access to information, feel valued, and are often included within their communities, improving their mental wellbeing. Entertainment, education, and health-related resources available on smartphones can all aid with emotional stability, as well as provide ways for elderly people to connect with others and remain engaged in their community later in life.

One key finding of this research is that social connectedness is significant research finding linking smartphone use to psychological wellbeing. Those older adults who stayed connected through digital means experienced less loneliness and emotional issues than those without such connections. With migration, urbanization, and the changing dynamics associated with families leading to a decrease in the number of people in person contacts, smartphones can facilitate maintaining meaningful relationships and a system of emotional support.

While it was previously believed that older people are only the passive receivers of technology, the results of this research support the theory put forward by Peine and Neven (2019; 2021) that there is a dynamic relationship between ageing and technology. Many older people use their smartphones on a regular basis within their daily lives and social interactions, however it can be noted that all older users do not benefit equally; therefore we must also take into account that there are some key barriers and obstacles to successful smartphone engagement for those aged 65 and older (e.g.: physical limitations, digital literacy, education level, and access). Furthermore, some older users may experience limitations with respect to operating their smartphone, privacy issues, and/or require assistance from family members related to using their smartphones. It is critical to provide older individuals with appropriate

training for digital devices and systems of support to ensure they have access to tools and resources for the effective and confident use of technology.

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