Computer-Mediated Communication Usage and Perceptions Amongst Rural Elderly in the Ningo-Prampram District

Marian Tsegah, Department of Media and Communication Studies, Central University, Ghana

George Clifford Yamson, University of Environment and Sustainable Development, Ghana*

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8539-7331

ABSTRACT

With the advancement of technology, the widespread use of mobile phones for internet access has become routine for many people. This trend has also impacted how the elderly maintain social relationships, which is a crucial aspect of healthy aging. To address this research question, a survey employing questionnaires was conducted, targeting a large sample of elderly individuals aged 50 years and above in the Ningo-Prampram district of Ghana. The study revealed that a significant number of respondents were hesitant to use social media, primarily due to the perception that it could disrupt communal culture and social relations. These findings highlight the need for further investigation into the usage and perception of computer-mediated communication (CMC) among the elderly, including those from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Exploring these aspects could uncover valuable opportunities to improve the digital experiences and social well-being of the elderly population.

KEYWORDS

Communication, Computer mediated, Mobile Phones, Rural-Elderly, Social interactions, Social media

INTRODUCTION

Most nations' rural regions are experiencing faster population ageing than urban areas, resulting in a larger proportion of elderly citizens. Lower population density and more geographically distributed people make it more difficult and costly to create and maintain extensive service infrastructure in metropolitan areas, such as adequate roads and telecommunications services (Arcury et al., 2005). As a result, rural residents have restricted access to services and activities, and their status may worsen when paired with weaker socioeconomic situations. This disadvantages the rural population in compared to urban populations, and it may be particularly troublesome for elderly people, who may suffer a higher risk of social isolation, limited mobility, a lack of support, and health care shortfalls as a result of where they reside (UNECE, 2017).

*Corresponding Author

The United Nations defines older people as those aged 60 and up. It is frequently defined as 65 and above. According to the United Nations (2013), the population of elderly people will more than double between 2013 and 2050, rising from 841 million to more than 2,000 million. It is projected that by 2047, elderly adults will outnumber children for the first time. The number of people aged 60 and above is anticipated to double by 2050 and more than treble by 2100, growing from 962 million in 2017 to 2.1 billion in 2050 and 3.1 billion in 2100, according to World Population Prospects: the 2017 Revision (Sanderson, Scherbov & Gerland, 2017). In turn, the older population is growing older. In 2013 the proportion of people over 80 years within the older population was 14% and it is projected to reach (19%) by 2050 (Coto, Lizano, Mora, & Fuentes, 2017). The authors reiterate that by that year, there will be 392 million people over 80 years worldwide, which means more than three times the present number.

In the demography of Ghana, the elderly, people aged 60 and above account for approximately 7% of the total population, out of these majority of the elderly people live in rural areas (Mba, 2010). Mba stated that the ageing population of Ghana has been accelerated by several factors including rapid fertility decline and advancements in public health, personal hygiene, sanitation, and nutrition. The impact of rural-to-urban migration, as well as the stronger external family ties, have contributed to the rural population's declining growth. The elderly population like most people in Ghana needs to be socially and emotionally connected in society, a situation accelerated globally by the introduction of information communication technology and smartphone technologies enabling individuals to communicate with virtually anyone at any time (Sum et al., 2008).

The use of mobile phone technology allows instantaneous communication with others and has become a prominent method of socialization. The covid-19 pandemic has taught us that the internet is now the new way of communication, one that has forever changed the way people live and communicate. Many rural elderly have the desire of living the same life as their counterpart in the cities; however, the rural elderly suffer the deepest social and economic disadvantage where social integration and interaction is likely to be limited to watching TV and attending local folk activities such as a funeral, child naming among others. The problem of the high dependency ratio among rural dwellers makes it difficult to adopt the technology. Mba (2010) added that in Africa, particularly in the Ghanaian context, the majority of persons aged 60 and above are economically dependent. OConnor, Fuller, and Cortez (2018), opined that technology may benefit older adults in rural areas, however, a sizable minority of these elderly often do not use it. Technologies such as social media tools are low-hanging fruits allowing for greater connection through video-mediated visits and engagement in virtual communities among the aged (Dornovan & Blazer,2020).

Helsper (2008) maintains that the rural elderly have a low willingness to use the Internet to access government services online or through other electronic channels. Helsper added that where the rural elderly are deprived of amenities, particularly television programs, they are more likely to rely on simple mobile phones with dial-up access. Consequently, the internet will be less frequently used.

According to Favotto (2016); Wild, Inchley, and Currie (2014) traditional methods of CMC involve email, and instant messaging but currently, there are many diverse methods such as Skype, FaceTime, and social media sites. Currently, the most common methods are not bound to a desktop computer; portable laptop computers, mobile phones, and tablets have become more common communication tools (Arnold, Lucier-Greer & Mancini, 2015). Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire,1984; Kiesler & Sproull, 1992; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991) suggest that the text-based CMC environment reduces or filters out physical and contextual social cues and, as such, makes it difficult, if not impossible, to develop close, intimate relationships. With these problems highlighted above, the. purpose of this study was to determine how rural elderly people perceived social media and its use to maintain their social relationships The main objective of this study was to examine how rural elderly perceived social media and its use for social relationships It has been established that the digital divide leads to the social exclusion of populations based on different factors. Age has been a major leading factor in the digital divide, placing older adults into one of the largest affected populations (Tsai et al., 2015).

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/article/computer-mediated-communication-usage-and-perceptions-amongst-rural-elderly-in-the-ningo-prampram-district/323857

Related Content

Children's Social Participation in Virtual Worlds

Terhi Tuukkanen, Terhi-Anna Wilska, Ahmer Iqbaland Marja Kankaanranta (2013). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking (pp. 59-73).*
www.irma-international.org/article/childrens-social-participation-in-virtual-worlds/110968

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Emergency Services: A Survey of Texas Emergency Services Districts

Dianne Rahmand Christopher G. Reddick (2013). *International Journal of E-Politics (pp. 30-43).*
www.irma-international.org/article/information-and-communication-technology-ict-for-emergency-services/93130

The Use of Digital Technologies for Traceability: An Analysis of Consumer and Firm Perceptions

Francesco Pacchera, Chiara Cagnetti, Mariagrazia Provenzano, Tommaso Galloand Cecilia Silvestri (2023). *The Role of Brands in an Era of Over-Information (pp. 123-145).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-use-of-digital-technologies-for-traceability/328724

Digital Teens and the 'Antisocial Network': Prevalence of Troublesome Online Youth Groups and Internet trolling in Great Britain

Jonathan Bishop (2014). *International Journal of E-Politics (pp. 1-15).*
www.irma-international.org/article/digital-teens-and-the-antisocial-network/117788

Social Computing: An Examination of Self, Social, and Use Factors

Sandra A. Vannoyand B. Dawn Medlin (2017). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking (pp. 31-47).*
www.irma-international.org/article/social-computing/212728