



Marginalisation of Older Adults on Digital Media

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Abstract: This paper study and explore the viewpoint under which older adults (aged 60 and above) can be considered as a minority in the prevailing digital world. Older adults came across information and digital content through the digital media even though they are not fully capable of understanding such information and contents. Though the number of digital media or the internet users among senior citizens rise exclusively in the recent years, they still account to be the lesser number in comparison with age group younger than them. A sequential explanatory mixed-method with structured survey questionnaire was employed, which was analysed and followed by in-depth interview which questions were structured and semi-structured based on the results seen from the survey. Samples are collected among older adults who have access to the internet living inside the state of Mizoram under which every districts of Mizoram are present. The questions include the process in which older adults are represented in the digital media, limitations of content available for older adults and their views on the digital media. The findings showed that older adults are underrepresented in the internet; digital divide occurred which was influence by the socioeconomic background and content limitations lead to deprivation in knowledge and self-learning.

Index Terms - Older adults, marginalisation, Mizoram, social media, representation

I. INTRODUCTION

In their daily lives, as well as from cultural expectations and assumptions, adults confront substantial marginalisation (Carmen & Adrian, 2012). Typical stereotypes of elderly people include a loss of ability to learn new things and a lack of physical ability, among other things (Resnick & Avers, 2012). Technology is increasingly considered as a way for older adults to feel more included and connected; nevertheless, society and the media increasingly see older adults as unable to adapt to and understand new technologies that are embedded in everyday chores like phones, banking, driving, and shopping. There is a lot of research on how technology can make older adults feel more included after they use it, but there isn't much on how technology's increasing prevalence leads to their marginalisation in the first place. Individuals - frequently older ones - with less digital literacy are becoming increasingly marginalised as technology's significance in daily life rises (Martínez-Alcala, et al., 2018). This is due to the fact that they were not born into the world of technology and digital media; rather they had to accept change in their lives associated with technology after their thirties or forties. This is the age group where learning new possibilities showed recession compared to age group younger than them (Smith, 2014).

This paper study and explore the viewpoint under which older adults (aged 60 and above) can be considered as a minority in the prevailing digital world. Older adults came across information and digital content through the digital media even though they are not fully capable of understanding such information and contents. Though the number of digital media or the internet users among senior citizens rise exclusively in the recent years, they still account to be the lesser number in comparison with age group younger than them (Smith, 2014).

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II. Ageism and marginalization

The phrase "elderly" has ageist implications because it indicates less competence; in 1995, the United Nations replaced the term with "older persons" in policymaking (Palmore, 2001). Robert N. Butler invented the term "ageism" in 1969, relating it to racism and sexism. In his book "A History Of Ageism Since 1969," Achenbaum traces the history of ageism back to centuries, beginning with the general practise of dismissing older persons as less valuable contributions to society due to their physical ability to contribute through physical labour. Throughout history, civilizations have alternated between providing for and cherishing senior citizens and allowing them to walk off to die (Achenbaum, 2015). At its root, ageism affects everyone since everyone will, at some point, be an older adult (Palmore, 2001). Micro aggressions are a crucial point of awareness before and as one grows older; they include assumptions of fewer abilities such as hearing or learning, as well as being talked down to or spoken to slowly. These micro-aggressions can also be found in language. Senile, demented, and elderly are terms that have been mostly relegated to the back burner because of their bad connotations (Resnick & Avers, 2012).

III. Marginalization on Digital Media

The technology literacy of older adults is lower than that of the general population. As technology advances and becomes more mainstream, older adults may find themselves lacking in knowledge and so unable to use and appreciate new and evolving technologies (Tsai, Shillair, Cotten, Winstead, & Yost, 2015). For technologically literate older adults, technology is not a burden or a source of feelings of marginalisation. Gish's (2017) research demonstrates how technology may be easily accepted by older persons and can be beneficial to them. Stinchombe (2017), on the other hand, demonstrates how modern technologies may be annoying and difficult to utilise. In the case of Mizoram majority of the older adults are technologically illiterate, and they confront several hurdles and marginalisation when it comes to using social media. The older adults are being forced to adapt to things that they previously did not have to or did not want to do because of the modern digital and virtual environment. This is a problem for 21st century education, which should occur at all stages of life (Kukier, 2019).

IV. Representation of older adults on digital media

Research trends on representation of older adults inside digital media has shown that older adults are depicted in a negative light, portraying them as ill-health, victims, or a drain on society. Several previous studies have frequently referenced negative attitudes, usually to help frame a positive topic but still reinforcing negative stereotypes. People's attitudes toward ageing, how older individuals are seen by society, and how older people view themselves can all be influenced by how older people are portrayed in the media. Negative depictions of older people that do not reflect the full range of people's experiences as they grow older can help to foster or maintain negative attitudes toward the ageing process. Negative portrayals of older people can harm them, according to research by the Royal Society for Public Health, because they lead to direct age-based discrimination, which can promote social exclusion, have an impact on mental health, and affect wider determinants of health and wellbeing, such as employment (Herklots). It has been discovered that older people are frequently stereotyped and adversely represented in the media, implying that older individuals in society are given dominant connotations by the restricted media representations (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2000). Similarly, other studies have discovered that older individuals, especially older women, are underrepresented in commercial media, with unfavourable stereotypes and minor positions being the norm. However, few empirical researches have looked into the impact of media depictions on the health and well-being of older individuals (J, 2014).

V. Methods and Data

The study had combined survey questionnaire with in-depth interview for data collection to help triangulate the data. There are 112 respondents to the survey questionnaire and 6 interviewees which were done during the month of March and April 2022. The respondents were older adults aged 60 and above with an access to the internet and digital media. The questionnaires were distributed firstly through the help of GoogleForms App and the interviewees were selected randomly among the survey respondents.

VI. Analysis and Findings

Following the transcription of the responses, reoccurring themes were identified and shown here. The responders' personal statements were provided in italic font. There are 11 districts inside the state of Mizoram and inside each districts one respondent were selected each. Their phone numbers were obtained with the help of Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP) Headquarter Office.

VII. Under-represented and Stereotyped

According to the findings, older persons are underrepresented in digital media. When it comes to news or information on older people, the respondents claim that they are under-represented and stereotyped. Their personal experiences show that younger age groups are positively depicted on digital media, with an emphasis on their accomplishments and social outcomes. Older adults have conducted social works for their society through the establishment of Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP), and they can do a plethora of other things that are beneficial to society, but they are stereotyped as an age group that is vulnerable and susceptible to minor events that they themselves consider unworthy of mention. They do not consider themselves to be particularly susceptible to diseases or physically handicapped as a result of their age. This can be seen in the comments of two interviewees who indicated that they are physically and psychologically capable of doing better than how they were portrayed in the media.

"In one instance, a friend of mine received our local MUP Award, and we were ecstatic for him. We submitted his accomplishments to our local region newsletter, but they were never published; instead, they focused on the line-up of our local junior football team, and vice versa. They didn't pay attention to our age groups and instead focused on other issues, even if they were minor."

VIII. Emergence of digital divide

The study discovered a digital divide among Mizo older adults, which is nearly identical to earlier studies. However, Mizo older individuals have primary or middle-class education levels, which have led to a fear in their use of digital media. They are unable to completely comprehend English terms and use their iPhones with caution, fearing that they would endanger their devices. They are unable to search for what they are looking for when using communication apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook, or Youtube. They are constantly in need of assistance when it comes to utilizing their smartphones and accessing the internet.

"Whenever I need to retrieve earlier WhatsApp discussions, I can never discover what I'm looking for and have to ask my eight-year-old granddaughter." I have a primary level of education, and while using a smartphone is not my preference, my son insisted on it, and it has been a bit of a hardship for me because I had to learn how to pick up a phone call for months."

IX. Limitations of available content

With the growth of technology, a slew of Mizo Youtubers have developed, each with a large number of subscribers and views. As a result, Mizo senior citizens can watch YouTube videos in their mother tongues. However, they were limited in terms of content that matched their tastes. There are specific issues that they need or want to research, and they enlisted the support of their relatives to do so. However, most of what they find is written in an English language that they do not understand.

"I wanted to illustrate that the elderly were more susceptible to the epidemic during the initial time of the pandemic lockdown." So my kid and I went on YouTube to look for it, but all we could find were videos in English. My son interprets it for

me, but I would prefer to hear it in my own language. Then, with my son's assistance, I left a comment on one Mizo Youtuber's (whose channel name is an alias) material demanding that he translate the information and post it on his channel. I discovered his article on the same information after a week or so, and it delighted me."

X. Conclusion

Older adults have a tough time self-learning and interpreting knowledge through digital media because of their low level of education and lack of technological skills. They are unable to obtain clarification against the use of digital media as a consequence of their lack of knowledge and fear of using the internet, which is also a result of their digital divide. The study looked at how older adults feel about using digital media, and it was shown that they find it bothersome. They are aware that they are not as physically and psychologically fit as their younger counterparts, but they believe they are stronger than how they are portrayed in the media.

Recommendations

Although there is a lot of previous literature on the topic, the study only addressed a tiny fraction of older adults, and there is still a gap in the opinions and self-portraits of older adults in relation to digital media. A study on older adults in the communication and media domain was practically left out in the context of Mizoram. There is a need to continue this research in order to fully comprehend older folks' attitudes about digital media and to provide digital education.

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