

# SENIORS' BARRIERS AND PROBLEMS IN UTILIZING THE INTERNET AND DEVELOPING SOCIAL NETWORKS

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## Abstract

The importance of older adults' social networks in providing practical, emotional and informational support is well documented. In this paper, we reflect on the personal social networks of older adults, and the shortcomings of existing online social networking sites (SNSS) in supporting their needs. We report findings from ethnographic interviews, focus groups and hands-on demonstrations with older adults, where we find key themes affecting adoption of SNSS. We then consider design aspects that should be taken into account for future SNSS, if they are to meet the preferences of older users.

*Keywords: barriers and problems, social networks, SNSS, Internet*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

People of all ages need to be able to access and use digital tools as society grows more dependent on the internet and other forms of technology. Yet, seniors in particular have certain difficulties and impediments to using the internet and creating social networks.

The biggest obstacle for elders is a lack of digital literacy. Many elderly folks did not grow up using technology, thus they may not be acquainted with even the most fundamental computer concepts. Seniors may find it challenging to utilize social media, browse the internet, and even write emails due to their lack of expertise.

Seniors also have to deal with physical restrictions. For instance, it may be challenging to read tiny print or follow online chats if you have a visual or hearing issue. Seniors may also find it difficult to use technology or take part in online social activities due to physical mobility concerns.

Seniors often struggle with social isolation, and the internet and social media may be helpful resources in the fight against it. Yet, owing to worries about privacy and security or a lack of trust in their capacity to utilize technology efficiently, seniors may be reluctant to use these technologies.

In general, elders have various obstacles and difficulties while using the internet and creating social networks. By addressing these problems, we can make sure that seniors have the connections and resources they need to live happy and active lives.

## **1.1. Barriers and Problems in Utilizing the Internet and Developing Social Networks**

1. Digital literacy: As mentioned earlier, many seniors lack the knowledge and skills needed to use computers, the internet, and social media platforms.
2. Physical limitations: Vision and hearing impairments, as well as mobility issues, can make it difficult for seniors to access technology and engage in online activities.
3. Lack of access to technology: Some seniors may not have access to the internet or computers, either due to financial constraints or a lack of infrastructure in their area.
4. Privacy and security concerns: Seniors may be hesitant to use the internet and social networks due to concerns about their personal information being shared or stolen.
5. Social isolation: Many seniors experience social isolation, and while the internet and social networks can be valuable tools for combatting this, seniors may be hesitant to use them due to concerns about safety or a lack of confidence in their ability to use technology.
6. Ageism and stereotypes: Older adults may be stereotyped as being technologically inept, which can be discouraging and cause them to avoid using technology altogether.
7. Lack of relevant content: Some seniors may not be interested in the content available on social media platforms or may have difficulty finding content that is relevant to their interests.

These are just a few of the many barriers and problems that seniors face in utilizing the internet and developing social networks.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In a research on internet usage among older persons, Cotten, Ford, and Ford (2012) discovered that although many seniors have access to the internet, using it presents a number of challenges. Physical constraints, a lack of computer knowledge, and worries about security and privacy are some of these obstacles.

According to Selwyn and Gorard (2016), initiatives to close the digital gap between older and younger generations must take into consideration the special requirements and difficulties that older persons face. They contend that methods like accessible online material and community-based digital literacy initiatives may help close the gap.

According to Charness and Boot (2019), age-related losses in cognitive performance may make it challenging for older persons to pick up new skills and adapt to technological changes. They suggest that adaptive technologies that account for the cognitive changes brought on by ageing may be able to alleviate these issues and enhance seniors' capacity to utilize technology successfully.

In a research on social networking among older persons, Xie and Bugg (2009) discovered that although some seniors were reluctant to utilise social media platforms owing to worries about privacy and security, others saw them as useful resources for maintaining relationships with friends and family. They recommend that initiatives to encourage social networking among seniors should include both the advantages and disadvantages of online social interaction

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

An extensive collection of recordings, anthropological observations, and researcher notes were obtained during all of the investigations. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. With this technique, particular events and tales may be categorised according to shared characteristics before finally emerging as overarching themes. The focus group approach and ethnographic interviews both give rich datasets that may be used to derive conclusions. The information on older persons' physical and online social networks was compiled using the insights.

#### **3.1. PERSPECTIVES ON OFFLINE SOCIAL MEDIA**

##### **3.1.1. Findings from Focus Groups**

Findings from the first round of focus groups and the ethnographic interviews provide light on older persons' offline social networks. In general, the participants claimed that the majority of their social networks are made up of family members (of varied degrees of closeness), friends they had before they retired from their jobs or former social lives, and new friends they made after they retired (often through shared social activity or shared experiences such as moving to a sheltered housing complex)

##### **3.1.2. Interview Findings from an Ethnographic Study**

The sheltered housing tenants who participated in the ethnographic study's interviews had just moved, and they were in the midst of one of the significant transitional periods mentioned earlier in the article. The change created a physical distance that put pressure on some of their social network, much as the focus group. It was noted that keeping in touch with former neighbors was a challenging but desirable task. One instance, for instance, described relying on a "proxy" (the neighbor's daughter) to maintain social contact.

The individuals they engage with daily, weekly, monthly, and annually, as well as those that surround and support them, were mentioned by every participant in the interview. Figure 1 shows a broad model that was developed with four significant stakeholder groups:

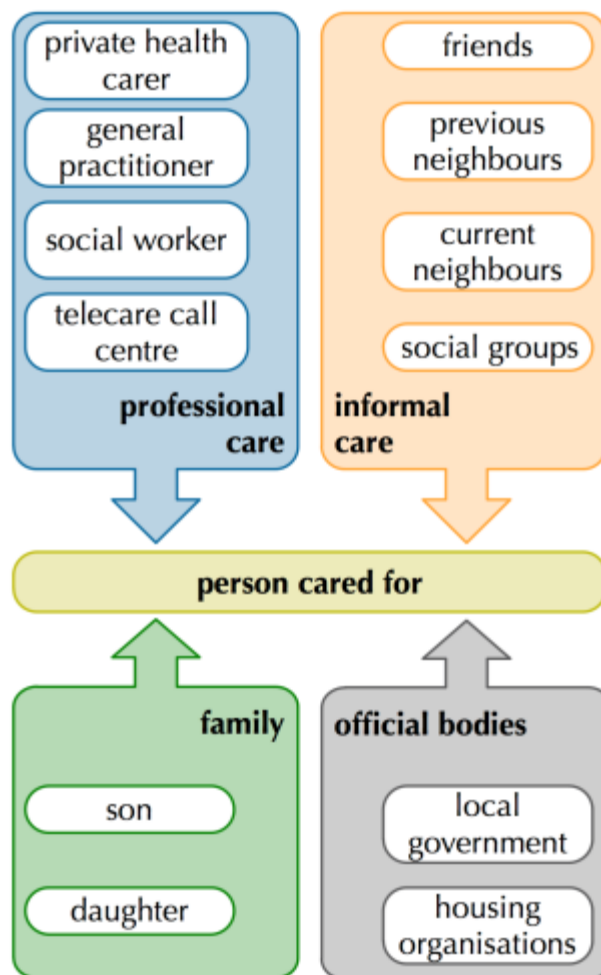


Figure 1 - Model of stakeholder current relationships emerging from the participants in sheltered housing

**3.3. SNS demonstrations**

My Buddies Online, a social networking service (SNS) created with older individuals in mind, was shown, but there was no longer-term usage. Despite the fact that users thought the site was enjoyable to use during the presentation, this is the case.

**Table 1: Barriers mean and standard deviation**

<b>Sample Statistics</b>			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Addiction to Face book	3.11	1.4939	0.1824
Embarrassing Postings	3.83	1.2375	0.1473
Time constraints	2.81	2.4967	0.1435
Preferable alternatives	2.62	1.4388	0.1382
Offline and Online stalkers	1.72	1.382	0.1387

Participants had trouble understanding the SNS's goal or aim, which is consistent with earlier focus group results. "I honestly couldn't see where I can fit into this," was a prevalent thought. Several participants said that SNSs were a stilted communication route and that they were meaningless for the individuals they felt connected to. They felt it difficult because they didn't have a clear understanding of why they were utilizing such a site. Their prior online activities, such utilizing a search engine to look for information or email to speak with someone, all had a specific purpose. Moreover, they believed that without a firm understanding of the function of SNS, they would be unable to determine if they were utilizing it properly. This worry was heightened when they realized that they would utilize social networking sites in a public setting, where they would disgrace themselves in front of their network.



Figure 2 – Social networking site demonstration at the School of Computing User Center

Overall, they felt safer researching and experimenting with a collective identity (and the associated partial anonymity) than showcasing themselves as an individual.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The usage of SNSs was more circumspect among older users. They feared identity theft and wanted to protect their privacy. They were worried about having to reveal all of their information to new online communities they join. Instead, they would choose a more cautious, piecemeal strategy for disclosing their identities. The elder participants shared Lehtinen et al perception .s that SNSs were places where people went to get attention and notoriety. There are similarities between the online and physical worlds in terms of this desire for information sharing and demand for privacy. It agrees with the conclusions made by Robin Dunbar and his colleagues in the field of evolutionary anthropology. When it comes to the scale of their social networks and their information-sharing behaviour, humans display traits common to the whole species. They divulge extremely personal details to a select group of devoted supporters (the support clique), a little less information to those they communicate with frequently but wouldn't turn to first in a crisis (the sympathy group), and even less information to those they see infrequently and don't feel an emotional connection to (the clan).

Given these innate traits of the species, it makes sense that older adults' personal social networks would share many traits with those of younger people. For example, both groups face communication difficulties brought on by distance and busy schedules, as well as a need to keep in touch with network members on a variety of frequency and intimacy levels. Even while there are similarities between people offline, it seems that they cannot be easily transferred to online social networks or SNSs. It is always possible to claim that there may be technical concerns

with the senior population, yet the bulk of study participants are at ease and knowledgeable with technology. So, it is important to comprehend why if they are finding it difficult to adopt SNSs. The fact that their own Ning group website has seen such growth indicates that, in the appropriate setting, SNSs may be more widely accepted by older individuals. Although "meaning" was a key motif we noticed in our study, it might be risky to attempt to emphasise it too much since, in the appropriate environment and with the correct design, older people may be just as frivolous as younger ones.

## 5. CONCLUSION

By revealing how older, tech-savvy users perceive SNSs, this report aims to advance existing research on older persons and SNSs. The authors have started to think about design implications for SNSs that want to draw in older folks using these findings. It is important and urgent to continue research in this field. This effort has inspired us to continue the work we are already doing.

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