

**OLDER ADULTS AND MOBILE PHONE -AN ENGAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE**

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INTRODUCTION

Mobile technology allows not only ubiquitous communications but also anytime access to services that are vital for older adults people's security and autonomy. The older adults are ready to begin using the services as long as they truly facilitate independent living. On the other hand unfamiliarity, fear the lack of skills, and missing background knowledge, and inaccessible device keeps many older adults from learning and using them (Rogger, et al., 1998). Studies suggest that people over the age of 60 use mobile phones for very limited purposes, such as for calling or texting in emergency situations (Davie, R., Panting, C and Charlton, 2004). They avoid using more complex functions. The major causes are displays that are too small and difficult to see, buttons and characters that are too small causing them to push wrong numbers frequently, too many functions, menu arrangement etc. are difficult them to comprehend. Older adults seem to have a neglected user group in the design of mobile devices and services. People over the age of 60 use mobile phones for very limited purposes, such as for calling or SMS in emergency situations (Turel, O., A. Serenko and N. Bontis, 2007). Citizens above 65 years of age, who have issues of limited mobility or who are staying alone, can now access a 24-hour helpline service if they have medical needs. Older adults men use them more often than women (Mikkone, et al., 2002). New communication technologies such as the Internet, computers, tablets, and mobile phones are underutilized by older people, a population group that can potentially benefit from them the most. New technologies provide a forum for communication, regardless of location, that can help offset loneliness and isolation issues. Importantly, new communication technologies empower people by allowing for access to information, regardless of the level of mobility (Feist and McDougall,2013). Older adults are being challenged by cognition, memory, hearing, and eyesight issues.

Theoretical Framework

Since everyone expects to die one day, and because we experience physical and mental decline as we approach death, it is natural to withdraw from individuals and society. Second, as the older adults withdraw, they receive less reinforcement to conform to social norms. Therefore, this withdrawal allows a greater freedom from the pressure to conform. Finally, social withdrawal is gendered, meaning it is experienced differently by men and women. Because men focus on work and women focus on marriage and family, when they withdraw they will be unhappy and directionless until they adopt a role to replace their accustomed role that is compatible with the disengaged state (Cummings and Henry, 1961). Conceptual Framework Since this research focuses on the influence of mobile phones and its effect on the daily lives of older adults, researchers use the disengagement theoretical lens to assess the influence of mobile phones in the disengagement process of older adults. This research conceptualizes mobile phone as the 'anti- disengagement agent' and it could have the capacity to reduce the disengagement of older adults and changes their lifestyle.

Methodology

This research follows the qualitative case study paradigm to explain the experience of older adults using a mobile phone in their daily life. The sample size consists of 10(5 male and 5 female) older adults purposively selected from rural Kerala village. The age of the respondents ranges from 60- 80 years. The data collected by using a structured interview guide. The interview guide consists of five domains, such as the use, knowledge, and skill, benefits of using, problems in using, and challenges of using modern technologies. The respondents were interviewed at their



home and later telephonically to get the saturation of the data. The data were recorded electronically and later transcribed, and analysed thematically.

The analysis of the data

There are five categories were emerged out of the data analysis. They are termed as, fear towards the modern devices, learning the use of the device, adapting with the device, and finally the device becomes part of life. The majority of female respondents are anxious about the device, and they are anxious about the nature of the device, would it produce electric shock or any other harms etc. Besides, with my declining capacities, low vision and hearing are capable of managing this machine?

“When I first saw my mobile phone I was little nervous to touch it, my grandchild played a sound (ringtone) and said, Amma, it is easy to carry in your hand and you would be always connected to us, it don’t make any problems, and explained about the buttons that I have to press when call comes...and demonstrated how to charge, and what are the precautions I have to take while doing all operations and is it capable of withstanding if it slipped from my hand?”

Learning

The initial fear of modern technology brings them to learn the lessons of how to use it safely. The significant others are the main teachers, such as children and grand children. They taught them to use it well to a certain extent. The rest of the learning happened through use and learn process. And mild compulsion from the part of children is also a factor to learn. They are slightly disappointed to operate the machine henceforth.

I pressed the green button, and placed it in my left year, I heard the sound of my child “Appacha” (grandfather), Can you hear me, I said, Yeah! After that he taught me how to call him. He added some important number in my mobile, it was written in Malayalam (Name). Besides he gave my number in a piece of paper and said I have to by heart it, but I keep that paper always with my mobile phone.

Adapting

The adaptive process comes into play after the learning. The adaptation is the process of getting involved with something automatically due to interaction with it. The eroding use of the land phones in families and usefulness of mobile phones binds the older adults to use mobile phones regularly. This change brought them a new lifestyle in their life. The adaptive process is sometime being hindered by disabilities; the major disabilities are vision and hearing respectively. The adaptation process is quite slow in female compared to male.

Initially I did not use mobile phones, later I adapted with it automatically ...though I have vision problems. Children used to call me in mobile phone only; it compelled me to adjust with the mobile phones... I know only attending calls... At the beginning I was feared when phone ring, several time I pressed reject button instead of receiving button. Those days children were sportive to adapt the situation. The used to say, no hurry burry Amma (mother), do slowly if you cannot able to pick, we will call back you again.

Usage

Eventually mobile phones become interwoven with the day to day life of older adults. They started receiving calls from family members and other significant others. The use of land phone becomes limited. Some family disconnected land phone line permanently due to this reason. This transition enables them to get over the fear of using and promote a good atmosphere in the family. The care providers become the beneficiary after this transition. The consistency of proper use of mobile phone is increased.



My son told me that, if Amma learned to use mobile phone, we will be more relaxed as we can get you all time. And Amma should take mobile phone while going out... I thought it would be beneficial for both...

Become Part of life

Introduction of mobile phone makes significant changes in familial communication as it become a major channel of communication. It becomes necessary for older adults to use their mobile phone more judiciously since other way of communication accessibility is limited. This process is forced by familial pressure, significant other.

Initially I used to forget mobile phone while going out, several time when returned back home, it was full of missed calls. One day neighbor told me that daughter called me and enquired where I was? Evening again I received a call from my son and daughter and scolded me like anything... and I was ordered to carry my mobile phone always when am stepping out. After that I used to keep the mobile phone in my bag before leaving my room.

Mobile phone gives me the freedom to go out, recently only I got the freedom...past children would not permit, I am happy about it. It reduces the tension of children and I feel being followed by them... I'm excited to have a mobile phone, it not only give courage but also a sense of belongingness, and makes always being loved by my children. I'm so blessed with my children because lot of other people of my same age not even knows about these kind opportunities.

DISCUSSION

The above mentioned themes were summarized into four categories, such as psychological engagement, social Engagement, physical Engagement of older adults with regard to the use of mobile phones.

Psychological Engagement The negative aspects are it produces an extra stress and strain. The unfamiliarity of the device and, disability, lack of knowledge and skill in operating the devices are the factors. Male older adults are getting less stress and strain as compared to female form their children. But the active involvement of grandchildren reduces this stress a large amount by assisting then. Besides older adults assume that through these devices the dependency upon the children is reduced, (Activities of daily livings ,A DL). So they feel that they are helping their children by reducing their role as care taker for them midst of their workload. Hence modern communication technologies slightly reduce the care giving dimension of working children. So, mobile phone help olderadults as well as children in care-receiving and care providing aspects. Hence, mobile phones provide a space for older adults to engage psychologically with their family and community

Physical Engagement Mobility is the main factor which determines older adult's engagement in society. Older adults are used to restrict by their family members for going out alone as they think that they may fell down or anything happen if they go out alone. But it is clear that after using mobile phones family member are ready to allow their older adults to go out alone or in group. This gives an extra boost to improve their self-esteem and thereby increasing their social networks. Mobile phone can be used as an instrument to reduce the mobility problems of the older adults. It reduces the mobility issues of older adults and hence reduces the risk of fall while walking to get landline phones.

Familial Engagement Family is the place where older adults are receiving maximum comfort and security. The absence of children and grandchildren compels older adults to be alone in their home day time, months, or years. This predicament is slightly reduced after the use of modern communication technologies. Mobile phones provide freedom to contact their children and vice versa at anytime. Kinship appears more bound after the introduction of mobile phones. It enabled older adults to be touch with their grandchildren and relatives. It gives much more privacy to share with their relatives about their situation that had not revealed to their children due to certain reasons. This also makes some internal emotional problems in homes, as those older adults discuss the familial matter to others.



So indirectly it may negatively affect general cohesion of older adults in certain families.

Social Engagement Disengagement theory suggests that older adulthood is the time of withdrawal from society due to personal or social reasons (Cumming, Henry, 1961). However, now a day's family wants older adults to be engaged since family members do not have time to look after their all time. In this angle modern communication technology helps older adults to get involved in the social milieu. The social integration helps older adults to improve their quality of life by increasing social network around them. They feel they are in the hands of their dear ones since they are connected through technologies. Of late, there are several government help- line numbers started functioning to help the older adults through phones. It seems to be more useful for mobile using older adults.

CONCLUSION

The process of disengagement of older adults gets reduced through the diffusion of modern technologies, especially mobile phones. Both genders would have equal benefits in reducing their disengagement by using Mobile phone technologies in different way. Hence modern communication technologies engage the older adults in various aspects of life either directly or indirectly. The problems of depression, anxiety, loneliness and empty- nest could be reduced though modern communication technologies. Especially the universalization of mobile phones brings forth a new era in the life of older adults. It helps care givers as well as care receiver mutually. To make better use of mobile phone older adults need proper guidance from their family. It will reduce their fear and anxiety towards the devices. However, the mobile phone is not the substitution for care and social support for older adults. Nevertheless, it can be used as an aid for rendering better care and love to them to engage in their day to day life

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