






FREE COMMUNICATION

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND OLDER ADULTS, TECHNOLOGICAL APPROACH AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY IN OLD AGE

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Participation of older adults in the use of technologies
2. Opportunities for older adults to use social networks
3. Nursing recommendations for educating on social networks
4. Implications of the use of social networks in old age

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to construct a reflection on the use of social networks by older adults as an opportunity for technological connection and development in old age. **Method:** a theoretical-reflective essay constructed from the authors' reflective integration based on a literature review related to the topic in April 2023. Social networks constitute a representation of information technologies where communication establishes social relationships and favors access to information. Informative, communicative, administrative, leisure and entertainment use is common, providing a feeling of company and personal and social well-being. **Conclusion:** using social networks in older adults represents an opportunity for better social contact, access to information and communication. Overcoming digital divides is an opportunity for nursing based on digital interventions to implement to promote a technological approach favoring the development of older adults.

DESCRIPTORS: Social Networking; Aged; Technology; Development; Aging.

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INTRODUCTION

Social networks form a connection where spaces for interaction between people are created and information is shared¹. They constitute a representation of information technologies where communication and relationships are established over long distances and access to information is favored.

Access to the internet, use of technologies and social networks has increased in older people due to the need to participate in social dynamics, a situation that increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was an increase in the use of social networks, mainly WhatsApp, for communication and information purposes by older adults²⁻³. However, the excess of information and the lack of digital structures relegated a large part of older adults from technology⁴.

They constitute a limitation in functional and cognitive capacity that in some way hinders the use of technology in older adults⁵. This is not generalized, since technology management and communication and social relationship maintenance could favor elder health.

It has been reported that there is a progressive acquisition of digital skills and optimal use of them, particularly to obtain information and communicate⁶. Other older adults in community settings require knowledge to use social networks, and their use is limited to communication⁷. The context in which they are developed is substantial to gradually bring them closer to the use of social networks.

The use of social networks favors a better perception of the quality of life in old age and it is pointed out that the traditional approach to aging as one that is distant from technology can cause limitations in daily life⁸. Communication, emotional and social well-being and intergenerational connections can be favored in old age by connecting it with social networks. One of the elements of active aging could be the use of technological devices and tools as a fundamental element to promote health and personal satisfaction in old age⁹.

Given this vision of the importance of using social networks by older adults, reflection is proposed on the focus of old age on technology and the connection through social networks. Therefore, the objective is to construct a reflection on the use of social networks by older adults as an opportunity to connect with technology and development of old age.

METHOD

This is a theoretical-reflective essay study constructed with authors' reflective and critical integration approach based on literature review on social networks and older adults. A search was carried out for articles that included original, reflective studies and reviews in SciELO, LILACS and Google Scholar with descriptors "Social Networking", "Technology", "Aged". The search period was from 2019 to 2023. Essay construction was carried out in April 2023 in Celaya, Guanajuato, Mexico. Once the critical reading was carried out, the essay was constructed considering a disciplinary reflective approach.

Currently, older adults seek not to be left behind in the use of technologies and social networks, leading them to discover their own skills and experiment with the platforms they have at their disposal. However, it has also been reported that the use of social networks decreases considerably over the years¹⁰. Because older adults stop finding it something interesting and novel and it becomes a tool used for emergencies, the technological approach shapes their adaptation to the environment experienced in different situations.

Using social networks increases thanks to the ease of communication with mutual aid groups and thanks to the activities carried out in gerontological centers, allowing dissemination to be easily accessible to everyone⁹. For older adults who enjoy most of their old age in the comfort of their homes, social networks have played an important role in avoiding losing the role they have in society, in addition to fostering their curiosity.

WhatsApp and Facebook present their users with options to share, receive and consult multimedia information, in addition to communicating with other people. To a lesser degree of use is Twitter and Instagram, access being at least once and more frequent among men¹¹. YouTube and Google have the favorite function for older adults to search for information and learn new skills and knowledge¹²⁻¹³.

Despite the large number of older adults interested in being included in the use of social networks and the immense flow of information, there may be limitations that keep a significant number of older people on the sidelines, without this being generalized. One of the most important barriers to inclusion in social networks is the lack of information available for its use and the difficulty of communication with the new generations that intervene in this need¹⁴. Criminal events have increased in recent years due to the vulnerability of older adults to provide their bank details in a simulation of a dangerous situation by cybercriminals¹⁵. This has generated widespread fear and rejection among older adults due to the lack of security in electronic handling.

There are some difficulties typical of pathological aging; older adults with memory problems would have problems performing a sequence of tasks necessary for the use of social networks¹⁶, which represents a major impediment to the inclusion of this age group in social networks.

Although there is much more access to new information and communication technologies (ICT), it is still very common for there to be population groups that have difficulty using them, resulting in a large digital divide. The gap is accentuated in older adults, and different obstacles are observed that prevent them from appropriating the Internet that correspond to various situations in their life, culture, economic, social structure and roles to which they belong¹⁷.

Other barriers that older adults suffer when using social networks are related to accessibility, since there is a great deal of misinformation in the way they are used, and for this reason the vast majority of older adults have poor management of the different current technologies¹⁸.

Regarding Facebook, there is limited use by older adults. The fact that there is a lack of knowledge about some functions of this social network, lack of practice and difficulties in sharing images has become one of the main barriers to use. In addition to the fear that their privacy will be affected, this social network fails to fully adapt to their age¹⁴.

On the other hand, although WhatsApp is the most used social network, and its frequency of use is directly related to various sociodemographic characteristics, such as education, the presence of depression, economic income, sex and age¹⁹. The use of WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube decreases as age increases. While Instagram and Twitter are used more at older ages, therefore, age can be considered a digital divide¹³. This means that they do not have access to the benefits that the internet and social networks provide them, implying a social and economic disadvantage, because these new technologies mark social distances that prevent there from being equal development. Therefore, it is important that older adults are included, since it would generate well-being and a better quality of life⁷.

To overcome this digital divide, policies and programs aimed at the inclusion of older people have been implemented in several countries, such as the Charter of San José on the rights of older people in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, ensuring that older people

have access to ICT related to the right to education, accessibility and mobility²⁰.

Among the benefits of using social networks by older adults and ICT in general that were identified are those of an informative, communicative, administrative, leisure and entertainment nature. But these are not the only ones, as they have been shown to help improve plasticity and cognitive functions in the same way that communication and maintaining relationships are initial benefits represented¹¹.

The communicative benefit of social networks refers to the fact that they are a communication channel between older adults and people who may be far away from them, such as family, youth friends and other acquaintances. They help older adults stay informed of what is happening around the world, eliminating all geographical, cultural or physical barriers⁹.

Using social networks makes them feel accompanied despite their loneliness, allowing them to experience feelings of personal and social well-being. They can consult topics of interest, having the possibility of sharing moments of fun and leisure with their family members, carrying out various activities in the comfort of their home⁹. This leads to a feeling of improved quality of life by facilitating many daily activities.

Using social networks in older adults has contributed to their psychological well-being by reducing levels of depression and isolation, increasing healthy social relationships and improving their quality of life²¹, because they contribute to older adults having active aging through the use of social networks, in addition to cognitive benefits such as mental exercise, fun, improvement in attention, memory, speed to react, better reasoning and problem-solving²².

The development of programs and interventions that promote the digital inclusion of older adults is a measure that nurses can implement, since it is a need that society, with new changes and advances, needs to meet. This is because currently ICT and therefore social network, are increasingly part of the lives of all age groups, since their use is required for some activities of daily living, or simply facilitate many other activities, which can be a great benefit for older adults.

CONCLUSIONS

Access to information technologies cannot go unnoticed by older adults. Using social networks is an opportunity for the older adult population to be able to venture into technology and thus be able to maintain social relationships, access to information and communication, in addition to promoting cognitive function maintenance.

Social networks represent a window of opportunity for social contact, so the most frequent are usually WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Although it is true that it represents this opportunity, it is also necessary to assess the functional and cognitive capacity that usually contributes to the digital divide that older adults may have.

Disciplinary and professional practice contributions for nursing converge in that the nurse must incorporate the digital integration of older adults into their health promotion interventions, as it favors cognitive, emotional and social health. Through digital health promotion, nurses seek to overcome digital gaps and should not be alien to seeking to integrate technology and social networks, since they represent a part of the care that favors the development of older adults.

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Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work - **Castañeda RFG, López MNA, Medina BRR**. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content - **Castañeda RFG**. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved - **Castañeda RFG**. All authors approved the final version of the text.

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