

Teaching IT Use to Elderly: A Media Literacy Solution

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Abstract

The increasing digitalization of society has amplified the digital divide, particularly affecting the elderly population. As life expectancy rises globally, integrating older adults into the digital world is essential to promoting social inclusion, reducing isolation, and enhancing personal independence. This article investigates the potential of media literacy as a solution to improve IT skills among elderly individuals. Media literacy encompasses not only the technical ability to use digital tools but also the critical skills necessary to work with and evaluate digital information responsibly. The study examines barriers such as limited prior exposure to technology, cognitive decline, and socio-economic constraints, which hinder older adults' ability to acquire IT competencies. It also explores successful interventions, including community-driven workshops, adaptive learning programs, and intergenerational training models designed to meet seniors' unique learning needs. Findings suggest that media literacy-based IT training enhances both digital proficiency and social participation among older learners. The article concludes with practical policy recommendations aimed at integrating media literacy into national education programs targeting the elderly. Future research should focus on cross-cultural evaluations of media literacy initiatives and long-term impacts on seniors' quality of life in an increasingly digital world.

Key words: digital inclusion, elderly education, IT skills development, lifelong learning, media literacy.

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Introduction: The human society gets older

The aging of human society is a significant global phenomenon and represents one of the most profound demographic shifts in modern history. Advances in healthcare, evolving cultural norms, economic changes, and decreasing fertility rates have led to a sharp rise in the proportion of elderly people. This trend has far-reaching implications for economies, societies, and political systems, raising important questions about the sustainability of current societal structures.

A key driver behind the aging population is the worldwide decline in fertility rates. In many industrialized countries, fertility rates have fallen below the replacement threshold of 2.1 children per woman, resulting in smaller generations of young people (United Nations, 2019; Adsera, 2004). This decline is largely influenced by greater access to education and job opportunities for women, which has reshaped societal views on family size and childbearing. Many women are postponing motherhood to pursue higher education and build careers, which shortens their childbearing years and often leads to smaller families (Nazaré et al., 2022).

Economic pressures further exacerbate this decline. Urbanization and the high cost of living have made child-rearing less economically feasible, and in some countries younger people tend to migrate to more prosperous countries (Glöckner & Sabbar, 2022). For instance, in countries like Japan, where urban housing is costly, many couples choose to remain childless or have only one child (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2019). This shift is not confined to developed nations; emerging economies like China and Brazil are also experiencing falling fertility rates as a consequence of urbanization and the declining utility of children as economic assets in agrarian societies.

Another critical driver of societal aging is the dramatic improvement in life expectancy due to advances in medical care and public health measures (Tomraee et al., 2022). Life expectancy has increased significantly over the past century, with many people now living well into their 70s, 80s, or even 90s. Innovations such as vaccines, antibiotics, and improved sanitation have drastically reduced mortality rates, especially in childhood, allowing a larger proportion of individuals to reach old age (Gutin & Hummer, 2021).

Moreover, healthcare advancements in managing chronic diseases and age-related conditions, such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer, have contributed to longer lifespans. Technologies such as minimally invasive surgeries, better diagnostic tools, and the widespread use of pharmaceuticals have enhanced the quality of life for elderly populations (Beard et al., 2016). The focus on preventative

health measures, including exercise, dietary improvements, and smoking cessation, has also played a significant role in ensuring healthier, longer lives.

Economic factors have had a profound impact on the age structure of societies. The post-World War II baby boom, particularly in the United States and Europe, created a large generational cohort that is now transitioning into old age (Lee & Mason, 2017). This demographic bulge significantly influences the aging trends in these regions. The economic prosperity of the mid-20th century provided widespread access to education and healthcare, ensuring better living conditions for this cohort and contributing to their increased longevity.

Culturally, changing attitudes toward family structures and aging have played an influential role. Sabbar et al. (2023) demonstrate that self-perception is often influenced by external narratives and media, which can shape how individuals view themselves and their roles within society. Traditional multigenerational households, where extended families lived together and cared for their elderly members, are being replaced by nuclear families or single-person households in many parts of the world (Harper, 2016). This shift reflects broader societal transformations, including the prioritization of individualism and economic independence over collective family obligations.

Additionally, societal perceptions of aging have evolved. Aging is no longer uniformly associated with decline and dependency; instead, many older adults are redefining aging through active engagement in work, social activities, and lifelong learning. This cultural shift has normalized the idea of prolonged participation in society, contributing to an increasing focus on policies that support healthy aging (Harper, 2016).

The aging of society has significant social ramifications, including changes to intergenerational relationships, caregiving dynamics, and the structure of social safety nets. For instance, as the proportion of elderly individuals rises, younger generations face greater responsibilities for caregiving and financial support (OECD, 2020a). This "sandwich generation", caught between caring for aging parents and raising their own children, often experiences emotional and financial stress (DeRigne & Ferrante, 2012). Additionally, loneliness has emerged as a growing concern for the elderly, driven by urbanization, busy lifestyles, and the decline of close-knit communities. While social media can exacerbate loneliness through superficial interactions, it also offers opportunities for older adults to connect with like-minded individuals, build online communities, and foster meaningful relationships, serving as a valuable tool in combating isolation in a digital age (Nosrati et al., 2023).

The aging population also strains public systems, particularly

healthcare and pension schemes. Maleki Borujeni et al. (2022) emphasize that social inequality and injustice contribute to societal challenges, highlighting the importance of preventive measures and equitable policies to address systemic issues. Many countries operate on pay-as-you-go pension systems, where the working-age population funds the benefits of retirees. As the number of retirees grows and the workforce shrinks, these systems face sustainability challenges. For example, in Japan, where over 28% of the population is aged 65 or older, public pension systems are under significant strain, necessitating reforms such as raising the retirement age (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2019).

Governments and organizations worldwide are adopting policies to address the challenges posed by aging societies. Aghigh et al. (2022) argue that the efficiency of laws is crucial for societal compliance, emphasizing that laws rooted in formal and substantive principles are more effective in preventing societal issues. Strategies include encouraging higher birth rates through incentives such as parental leave, subsidized childcare, and financial support for families. For instance, Scandinavian countries like Sweden have implemented generous parental leave policies and flexible work arrangements to support working parents (OECD, 2020b).

In addition to boosting fertility rates, policies aim to integrate older adults into the workforce to reduce dependency ratios. Many countries are raising the retirement age and promoting lifelong learning programs to help older adults remain economically active. For example, Germany's "Silver Economy" initiative focuses on creating opportunities for older adults to contribute to the labor market (Cabinet Office, 2020).

Investments in healthcare systems are also crucial for managing the needs of aging populations. Preventative care, age-friendly infrastructure, and long-term care facilities are key components of these strategies. Moreover, technological innovations, such as telemedicine and assistive devices, are helping to improve the quality of life for older adults while reducing healthcare costs.

A country for old men?

As societies face the economic and social challenges posed by aging populations, many countries have implemented strategies to reintegrate older individuals into the workforce. Re-employing older adults seems to be a viable solution to mitigate labor shortages, reduce the economic burden of aging, and promote social inclusion. Interestingly, a study by Dariush et al. (2017) found that while socioeconomic status strongly influences access to education and field selection, it has no significant impact on intrinsic motivation—suggesting that older adults, like younger learners, may be driven more by purpose and personal

ambition than by financial background alone. This approach not only addresses workforce gaps but also allows older adults to contribute their experience and skills to society.

Japan, one of the fastest-aging nations in the world, has pioneered efforts to keep older individuals in the labor force. Faced with a declining birthrate and a shrinking working-age population, Japan introduced measures such as the extension of retirement ages and government incentives for companies that employ older workers. Under the "Employment Stabilization Act for Older Persons," companies are encouraged to rehire retirees or extend their retirement age beyond the conventional threshold of 60 years (OECD, 2020a). Additionally, programs like Silver Human Resource Centers support older adults in finding part-time and temporary employment in roles that align with their abilities (Cabinet Office, 2020).

Germany has also taken significant steps to re-employ its older population, particularly through reforms in its pension system. By gradually increasing the statutory retirement age from 65 to 67 and introducing flexible retirement options, Germany has incentivized longer workforce participation (Börsch-Supan et al., 2019). Companies in Germany have adopted initiatives to create age-friendly work environments, offering opportunities for lifelong learning and training to help older employees adapt to technological advancements (Schroeder, 2021). These measures have successfully retained older workers while addressing the skills gap caused by demographic shifts.

In the United States, programs targeting older workers have also gained traction. The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides training and part-time job placements for low-income individuals aged 55 and older. SCSEP not only enhances employability but also contributes to community development through roles in non-profit organizations and public agencies (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). Moreover, private sector initiatives, such as phased retirement programs, allow older employees to transition into reduced workloads while mentoring younger colleagues, ensuring knowledge transfer and organizational continuity (Cahill et al., 2015).

Singapore, facing similar demographic challenges, has implemented proactive policies to retain older workers. The government increased the re-employment age to 68 and offered subsidies to employers who hire older individuals through the Special Employment Credit scheme (Ministry of Manpower, 2020). Efforts to create age-inclusive workplaces, combined with retraining programs, have enabled older workers to stay relevant in the changing job market.

Reintegrating older populations into the workforce provides multiple benefits beyond economic gains. It enhances social cohesion, reduces

age-based discrimination, and promotes intergenerational collaboration. While challenges such as health limitations and workplace adjustments persist, the experiences of these countries underscore the importance of policy innovation and societal commitment in addressing the complexities of aging populations.

Despite these efforts, a critical barrier to re-employing older individuals is their lack of proficiency in information and communication technologies (ICTs). In today's digital-driven economy, ICT skills are essential for most roles, making it imperative to prioritize digital literacy training for older workers. The rapid advancement of technology has transformed workplaces, from the automation of routine tasks to the adoption of digital collaboration tools. Many older workers, particularly those who retired before the digital revolution or had limited exposure to technology in their careers, find themselves at a disadvantage when re-entering the labor market. For instance, positions in retail increasingly require familiarity with point-of-sale systems, while administrative roles demand proficiency in software like Microsoft Office or cloud-based platforms. Without a foundational understanding of these tools, older workers risk being excluded from even entry-level opportunities (Fisk et al., 2020).

Moreover, ICT training can enhance not only employability but also confidence among older individuals. Studies have shown that older workers often perceive technology as intimidating, which may deter them from seeking employment altogether (Charness & Boot, 2016). Targeted digital literacy programs tailored to their learning pace and needs can bridge this gap, enabling them to adapt to modern work environments. Therefore, we think learning media literacy is a very crucial aspect of any program that is up to get older people back to work.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in secondary data analysis and a comprehensive literature review to explore the role of media literacy in improving IT skills among older adults. The methodology focuses on synthesizing existing research to identify barriers, successful interventions, and potential strategies for enhancing digital inclusion for the elderly. By leveraging a wide range of peer-reviewed articles, program evaluations, and policy reports, this study builds a conceptual framework to address the digital divide and propose actionable recommendations for fostering media literacy among older populations.

The first phase of the study involved an extensive review of scholarly literature across multiple disciplines, including education, gerontology, and media studies. The review encompassed theoretical frameworks,

empirical studies, and program evaluations from various cultural and socio-economic contexts. This approach ensured that the study captured diverse perspectives and identified best practices from both developed and developing regions. The secondary data were systematically analyzed to categorize the barriers older adults face into three primary domains: cognitive, socio-economic, and technological. These categories provided a structured foundation for examining how media literacy interventions can address these challenges effectively.

In the second phase, the study reviewed specific case studies of media literacy programs targeting older adults. These programs were selected based on their relevance, documented outcomes, and methodological rigor in reporting results. Examples included community-based workshops, intergenerational mentorship initiatives, and adaptive learning platforms tailored for seniors. The analysis focused on the pedagogical approaches employed, the extent to which they aligned with older learners' needs, and the measurable impacts on participants' digital literacy levels and social inclusion.

Additionally, policy documents and government reports were examined to understand the broader institutional frameworks supporting media literacy for older adults. This included initiatives such as national education strategies, digital inclusion policies, and funding mechanisms for technology training programs. By integrating policy analysis with findings from the literature, the study identifies systemic factors that enable or hinder the success of media literacy interventions.

The final phase of the methodology involved synthesizing the findings into practical recommendations. This synthesis emphasized strategies to design media literacy programs that are accessible, culturally sensitive, and adaptable to diverse learning needs. The study also identifies gaps in existing research and calls for future investigations into cross-cultural and longitudinal impacts of media literacy initiatives on older adults' quality of life.

Media literacy

Media literacy is an essential skill in the modern world, where the constant flow of information influences almost every aspect of daily life. Defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate information across various media formats, media literacy equips individuals with the tools to critically engage with the vast array of content they encounter. As digital platforms dominate how people consume news, entertainment, and social interactions, media literacy has become indispensable for fostering informed citizenship, providing an effective education using both online and offline educational facilities is important more than any time (Shahghasemi et al., 2023). In this

regard, Dastyar et al. (2023) emphasize the critical role of virtual education as a complementary component of holistic education, particularly in fostering environmental awareness, critical thinking, and social responsibility among learners. Moreover, research shows that social media can influence even deeply personal decisions, such as partner selection, highlighting the need for media literacy to help individuals critically evaluate the impact of digital content on their values and choices (Nosrati et al., 2023).

Media literacy empowers individuals to become active, rather than passive, consumers of information. Kharazmi and Mohammadi (2020) highlight how media shapes public perception during crises, using political narratives to influence how events are understood, underscoring the powerful role of media in framing societal issues. The media landscape today is saturated with diverse content, ranging from traditional news outlets and television broadcasts to social media platforms, blogs, and independent creators (Nosrati et al., 2023). While this diversity has democratized the dissemination of information, it has also introduced challenges, such as the proliferation of fake news, biased reporting, and manipulative advertising. Media literacy provides the critical thinking skills needed to question the credibility of sources, identify biases, and discern factual information from opinions or falsehoods. Without these skills, individuals are more susceptible to manipulation, which can lead to misinformed decisions and societal polarization (Livingstone, 2004).

In addition to evaluating content, media literacy emphasizes the ethical and responsible use of media. In an age where anyone can create and share content, understanding the impact of one's contributions to the media ecosystem is crucial. This includes recognizing the power of language, visuals, and framing in shaping perceptions. Media-literate individuals are better equipped to create content that is truthful, respectful, and constructive, fostering healthier communication online and offline (Shahghasemi, 2022).

Media literacy also plays a vital role in safeguarding democracy. However, fostering media literacy and creating informed citizens requires reliable technological infrastructure, which is often overlooked. Research shows that technological infrastructure plays a critical role in addressing societal challenges, ensuring accessibility and continuity in education, healthcare, and other essential systems (Mohammadi & Kharazmi, 2021). Informed citizens are the cornerstone of any democratic society, and media serves as the primary channel through which people stay informed about political events, policies, and global issues. However, the rise of echo chambers and algorithms that prioritize sensational or polarizing content has challenged the impartiality and comprehensiveness of information available to the

public. By promoting media literacy, individuals learn to seek diverse perspectives, engage with credible sources, and resist the allure of misinformation. This not only enriches public discourse but also helps protect democratic processes from the corrosive effects of propaganda and manipulation.

Furthermore, media literacy addresses the psychological and emotional impact of media consumption.

In their thought-provoking article, Nosraty et al. (2020) show how in today's hyper-connected world, individuals are constantly bombarded with images, videos, and messages that can shape their self-perception and mental well-being. Their compelling article offers a fresh perspective on how unrealistic portrayals of beauty, success, and happiness on social media, for instance, can lead to feelings of inadequacy or anxiety. They argue that media literacy helps individuals deconstruct these messages, recognizing the artificiality and constructed nature of much of the content they consume. By understanding how media shapes perceptions, individuals can develop a healthier relationship with media and protect their mental health.

The integration of media literacy into education is critical for equipping future generations with the skills to navigate the digital world (Zamani et al., 2024). Sabbar et al. (2019) found that even highly educated individuals often lack awareness of ethical rules, highlighting the need for stronger emphasis on ethical education in academic and professional environments. Schools and educators have a unique opportunity to introduce media literacy at an early age, teaching students not only how to consume media critically but also how to create meaningful content. This involves fostering skills in research, critical thinking, and communication while encouraging ethical media use. Incorporating media literacy into the curriculum prepares students to thrive in a media-saturated environment, empowering them to contribute positively to society (Livingstone, 2004).

In workplaces, media literacy is equally significant. As businesses increasingly rely on digital communication and online branding, employees must understand how to convey messages effectively while maintaining ethical standards. Missteps in media use can have far-reaching consequences, including reputational damage and loss of trust. Training in media literacy ensures that employees can navigate the complexities of digital platforms, from managing social media accounts to analyzing trends and data (Sarfi et al., 2021). This not only benefits organizations but also enhances individual career prospects in a competitive job market.

Parents also play a critical role in fostering media literacy at home. Children are often early adopters of new media technologies, and their exposure to digital content can shape their development in profound

ways. Parents who model media-literate behaviors, such as discussing the accuracy of news stories or questioning the intentions behind advertisements, provide a foundation for their children to develop these skills. Open conversations about online safety, privacy, and the importance of diverse viewpoints help young people become more discerning and responsible media users (Potter, 2018).

We should know, however, that rapid pace of technological change means that the media landscape is constantly evolving, requiring individuals to adapt their skills and knowledge. Additionally, access to media literacy resources is uneven, with disparities based on socioeconomic status, education levels, and geographic location. Bridging these gaps is essential to ensure that all individuals can participate fully in the digital age. Governments, educational institutions, and non-profits must collaborate to create accessible media literacy programs that reach diverse populations. Another challenge lies in combating deeply ingrained biases and misinformation. Even with media literacy, individuals may struggle to overcome cognitive biases or emotional reactions that affect their interpretation of information. One of these cognitive biases, of course, is agism.

Media literacy for the elderly

While often discussed in the context of younger generations, media literacy is equally important for older adults. For this population, it can serve as a bridge to job opportunities, enhance mental and physical well-being, and further a sense of connection in an increasingly digital society. However, many older individuals face barriers to media literacy, including generational gaps in technology use, lack of confidence, and limited access to training programs.

The modern job market is heavily reliant on digital platforms for recruitment, networking, and professional development. For older adults, proficiency in media literacy can make the difference between successful job searches and exclusion from the workforce. Job postings are increasingly hosted on online platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed, and Glassdoor, requiring individuals to navigate these tools effectively (McDougall et al., 2018). Additionally, online applications and digital resumes have become the norm, demanding a basic understanding of formatting, uploading, and tailoring documents for specific positions.

Older adults with strong media literacy skills are better equipped to use these platforms, search for relevant job opportunities, and engage with potential employers. Beyond job boards, networking through social media platforms like LinkedIn has become an essential component of career advancement. Media literacy enables older individuals to create professional profiles, connect with industry

professionals, and showcase their expertise to a broader audience.

Rasi et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review to examine how media literacy can be effectively promoted among older adults. Media literacy, encompassing the ability to use, understand, and create media content, is recognized as essential for active participation in today's digitalized societies. The review analyzed 40 empirical studies published from 2005 to 2019 to identify the dimensions of media literacy targeted by interventions, the pedagogical approaches employed, and their reported outcomes. The studies spanned 17 countries and included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods designs, with most participants being over 60 years old. Their findings highlighted that the majority of interventions emphasized the "use" dimension, targeting skills for operating digital technologies and navigating online environments. Fewer interventions addressed "understanding", such as evaluating the credibility of digital content, and even fewer emphasized creative production. Pedagogical approaches varied widely, including formal teacher-centered methods, learner-centered strategies, creative pedagogies, and blended online techniques. Despite advancements, the review identified a need for interventions that align with older adults' specific media literacy needs and interests, emphasize critical thinking, and foster self-efficacy.

Despite the benefits, many older adults face challenges in developing media literacy. Research suggests that older job seekers often lack confidence in their digital abilities, leading to avoidance of technology and missed opportunities (Charness & Boot, 2016). Additionally, stereotypes about older workers' adaptability to technology can discourage employers from hiring them, creating a cycle of exclusion. The integration of advanced technologies requires both technical proficiency and ethical considerations. Just as AI in healthcare must enhance decision-making without compromising autonomy or privacy, media literacy programs for the elderly should empower rather than overwhelm users. In fact, Darvish et al. (2019) demonstrate how shifts in Iranian lifestyle, particularly within domestic spaces, reflect a broader trend toward individualization and modernity—highlighting the growing need for flexible, personalized approaches in education and social design. Addressing training gaps is crucial for developing tailored IT learning approaches that promote digital competency and social inclusion among older adults (Tomraee et al., 2024).

Rivinen (2021) introduces the concept of "media literacy geragogy", aiming to enhance theoretical and practical understanding of media literacy education tailored to older adults. This doctoral dissertation utilizes a design-based research (DBR) approach, combining qualitative and limited quantitative methods across three sub-studies. It explores how pedagogical strategies can address older adults' media literacy

needs, defined through the dimensions of use, understanding, and creation. The first sub-study systematically reviewed 40 empirical studies (2005–2019) focusing on interventions that promote media literacy among older adults. The findings highlighted gaps in practical implementation, particularly in fostering critical and creative skills. The second and third sub-studies engaged 16 older adults, 15 professionals, and 22 teacher trainees in participatory workshops and pilot courses, incorporating creative and reflective methods to co-design and evaluate intervention models. Data were analyzed through content analysis. Key outcomes include the development of eight design principles for geragogical media literacy education, emphasizing personalization, holistic approaches, diverse pedagogies, soft skills in facilitators, cognitive support, empowerment, systematic support, and interdisciplinary collaboration. These principles informed the creation of a new university course, "Media Education and Learning Support for Older Adults," for teacher training programs.

Abad Alcalá (2014) addresses the growing digital divide among older adults in Spain, the world's second-oldest population after Japan, and proposes new methodologies for designing e-inclusion programs to enhance media literacy. The study contextualizes the digital divide as a generational gap in ICT access and usage, emphasizing the underutilization of the Internet by older adults, with only 15.6% of those aged 65–74 using the Internet within a three-month period. The paper critiques the shortcomings of previous public policies and e-learning projects in addressing these disparities, citing poor methodological foundations as a significant barrier to success. The author advocates for a shift from traditional quantitative approaches, which emphasize Internet access and basic usability, to a qualitative focus on older adults' personal and social contexts. Proposed methodologies include contextualism (adapting materials to cultural and social environments), incrementalism (phased learning aligned with digital literacy levels), motivation (tailored strategies to enhance engagement), and absorption processes (evaluating skill acquisition methods). These strategies aim to promote not just digital competence but also transformative uses of ICT to improve quality of life and civic participation among older adults.

Tomczyk et al. (2023) explore digital inclusion among older adults from an intergenerational perspective, emphasizing the role of young adults in promoting digital and media literacy (DL&ML) development. The study highlights digital exclusion as a critical issue, with older adults often experiencing limited access to and competence with digital technologies, resulting in barriers to participating fully in the information society. Using qualitative data collected via the SELI e-learning platform, 22 young Polish adults (aged 20–35) shared insights into strategies for fostering digital inclusion among seniors. The

findings identified 11 approaches to promoting digital inclusion, such as leveraging traditional media, emphasizing the practical benefits of ICT use, and addressing resistance to digital technologies with gradual and supportive learning processes. Additionally, participants noted the potential for intergenerational programs to engage young people as mentors, promoting skills transfer within families or community contexts. Strategies like tailoring ICT tools to senior needs (e.g., larger fonts, simplified interfaces) and employing peer-education models among seniors themselves were also recommended.

Programs aimed at improving media literacy for older adults can help overcome these barriers. For instance, community-based workshops or online tutorials tailored to older learners can teach practical skills like navigating job boards, writing resumes, and utilizing video conferencing platforms for interviews. Mentorship programs pairing tech-savvy younger individuals with older adults can also provide personalized support, fostering intergenerational learning and empowerment.

Social isolation is a significant concern for older adults, with implications for mental health and overall quality of life. Media literacy plays a crucial role in mitigating loneliness by enabling older individuals to connect with others through digital platforms. Social media, video calling applications, and online community forums provide opportunities for interaction, even when physical gatherings are not possible. Older adults who are proficient in media literacy can maintain relationships with family and friends, participate in interest-based groups, and stay informed about local events and activities. Research suggests that while excessive passive use of social media can negatively impact well-being, purposeful engagement—such as learning, communicating with family, or participating in interest-based groups—can foster social integration and enhance emotional resilience (Zamani et al., 2021). Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Zoom are especially valuable in facilitating these connections, allowing older adults to engage in real-time conversations and group discussions (Tsai et al., 2020). By fostering social bonds, media literacy can enhance emotional resilience and reduce feelings of isolation.

Schreurs, Quan-Haase, and Martin (2017) examine the digital literacy paradox among older adults, focusing on their experiences with ICTs, barriers to digital engagement, and the social supports influencing their technology adoption. The study employs interviews (n= 21) and surveys (n= 23) conducted in Southwestern Ontario to explore how older adults perceive their digital skills, the factors hindering their digital literacy, and the role of social and institutional networks in facilitating their technology use. Findings reveal that older adults often acknowledge the benefits of ICTs, such as improved communication, access to information, and enhanced daily activities. However, they also face

significant barriers, including a lack of confidence, technical skills, and motivational support. Media representations of older adults as technologically inept exacerbate these challenges by lowering self-esteem and creating an environment of doubt. Many participants relied on family or peer support to navigate digital tools, but this dependence also reinforced feelings of inadequacy. Despite access to technology, participants frequently performed cost-benefit analyses, weighing the effort required to learn against the perceived benefits. Schreurs and his colleagues propose a model emphasizing the social context of learning and the importance of supportive environments to overcome the digital literacy paradox. They argue that intergenerational support and structured social learning can mitigate apprehension, enabling older adults to gain experience and confidence with ICTs.

Media literacy also supports older adults in accessing mental health resources. Online platforms offer a wealth of information about coping strategies, therapeutic techniques, and professional counseling services. For older individuals experiencing anxiety, depression, or grief, these resources can be invaluable. However, navigating the vast amount of information online requires critical thinking skills to distinguish credible sources from misinformation. Media literacy training can teach older adults how to identify reliable health websites, use telehealth platforms, and seek out evidence-based resources. This capability empowers them to take an active role in managing their mental health and making informed decisions about their care.

Reynolds et al. (2022) explore the mental health information preferences of older adults to address barriers to mental health service utilization, such as low mental health literacy and limited shared decision-making opportunities. The study surveyed 229 adults aged 50 and older in central Canada to assess their preferences for mental health information and identify predictors of these preferences. Using descriptive analyses and hierarchical linear regression, the study highlights critical findings related to older adults' informational needs and preferences. Participants rated all mental health topics as highly important, expressing a preference for detailed, balanced information spanning two to six pages on various treatment options, including psychological, pharmacological, combined, and self-help approaches. Formats such as discussions with healthcare providers and written materials were significantly preferred over other mediums. Older adults also reported consulting family, friends, and healthcare professionals more frequently than other sources for mental health information. Regression analyses revealed that socio-demographic and psycho-social factors contributed to the variance in information preferences.

Media literacy is equally important for older adults' physical well-being, particularly in managing chronic conditions and staying informed

about health-related topics. The internet offers a wealth of resources on disease prevention, treatment options, and lifestyle modifications. For instance, older adults with diabetes can access online tools to track blood sugar levels, learn about dietary recommendations, and connect with support groups.

However, we should note that there are downsides in online health information seeking. Misinformation and misleading advertisements often target vulnerable populations, including older adults. Media literacy equips older individuals with the skills to evaluate the credibility of health-related content and avoid potentially harmful practices. Additionally, understanding how to use telemedicine platforms enables older adults to consult with healthcare providers remotely, reducing barriers to accessing care (Gell et al., 2015).

Media literacy can also encourage physical activity among older adults by exposing them to virtual fitness classes, instructional videos, and activity-tracking apps. Platforms like YouTube and specialized fitness websites offer exercises tailored to older individuals, including yoga, strength training, and mobility exercises. Participation in these activities can improve physical health, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and enhance overall well-being. To maximize the benefits, media literacy training should include guidance on finding reputable fitness resources and using technology like wearables or fitness apps effectively. By integrating media literacy with health promotion, older adults can develop sustainable habits that support an active and fulfilling lifestyle. A more healthy elderly can find a better job, indeed.

Community-based workshops are a practical approach to improving media literacy among older adults. Libraries, senior centers, and community colleges can host free or low-cost classes focused on foundational digital skills. These workshops can cover topics such as internet navigation, social media usage, job-seeking platforms, and online safety.

Interactive and hands-on learning methods are particularly effective for older learners, as they allow participants to practice skills in a supportive environment. Facilitators should prioritize patience, clear communication, and step-by-step instructions to build confidence and competence.

Miller et al. (2024) evaluated the implementation of a digital literacy training program for low-income older adults using a community-engaged learning (CEL) approach. The program, embedded in a 10-week undergraduate course, paired 27 students with 18 older adults for weekly training sessions at a senior center. The curriculum combined practical digital literacy training for older adults with classroom sessions for students, focusing on aging and design-thinking strategies. Pre- and post-training assessments showed significant gains in older

adults' digital literacy skills and confidence in using technology, though no changes were observed in loneliness levels. Participants also reported more positive attitudes toward aging and expressed enthusiasm for the program. Students' fear of working with older adults did not change, but their comfort in engaging with them increased. Both groups highlighted the value of the relationships formed during the program. The study concludes that CEL offers a promising strategy for addressing the digital divide in underserved populations by fostering intergenerational collaboration and mutual benefit.

Intergenerational mentorship programs can foster media literacy by pairing tech-savvy younger individuals with older adults. These programs benefit both groups, as younger mentors gain teaching and interpersonal skills while older participants receive personalized assistance. Mentorship can focus on specific goals, such as creating a professional LinkedIn profile, setting up telehealth appointments, or learning to use social media. Successful mentorship programs often emphasize mutual respect and cultural exchange, creating a positive and collaborative learning environment. By addressing individual needs, these programs can accelerate media literacy acquisition and enhance intergenerational understanding.

Online learning platforms like Coursera, Khan Academy, and specialized senior-focused sites can offer self-paced media literacy courses. These courses allow older adults to learn at their own convenience and revisit materials as needed. Topics can range from basic computer skills to advanced training in digital marketing or e-commerce. To ensure accessibility, courses should be designed with older learners in mind, featuring intuitive navigation, large fonts, and clear language. Additionally, integrating quizzes and practical assignments can reinforce learning and build confidence.

As we mentioned earlier, government agencies and nonprofit organizations should play a crucial role in promoting media literacy among older adults. For instance, public campaigns can raise awareness about the importance of digital skills, while grants and funding programs can support local training initiatives. Partnerships with technology companies can provide older adults with affordable devices and internet access, addressing key barriers to media literacy. Nonprofits like AARP and Age UK have already made significant strides in this area, offering workshops, online resources, and advocacy efforts to bridge the digital divide. Expanding these initiatives can ensure that more older adults benefit from media literacy programs.

Healthcare providers can also play a role in enhancing media literacy among older patients. During routine visits, doctors and nurses can introduce patients to telehealth platforms, recommend credible health information websites, and discuss the benefits of digital tools for disease

management. Incorporating media literacy into health education empowers older adults to take an active role in their care and improve their outcomes.

We should know, therefore, that media literacy is a vital skill for older adults, influencing their ability to find employment, maintain mental and physical well-being, and stay connected in an increasingly digital world. While challenges such as limited access to technology and generational gaps in digital skills persist, targeted programs and strategies can empower older individuals to overcome these barriers. Community workshops, intergenerational mentorship, online learning platforms, and government initiatives all play a critical role in fostering media literacy among this population.

Conclusion

Media literacy has emerged as an essential skill for integrating older adults into the digitalized world, fostering both individual and societal benefits. As global demographics shift toward an aging population, ensuring that older adults can effectively engage with technology is imperative for reducing isolation, improving job opportunities, and enhancing overall well-being. The challenges older individuals face—ranging from limited access to technology and generational skill gaps to a lack of confidence—can be addressed through targeted interventions that prioritize inclusivity, adaptability, and empowerment.

The role of media literacy in job-finding cannot be overstated. Proficiency in digital tools equips older adults to navigate online job platforms, create professional profiles, and engage in virtual networking, addressing the barriers to workforce reintegration. Beyond economic benefits, media literacy enhances mental and physical well-being by combating social isolation, providing access to critical health resources, and encouraging active lifestyles through virtual tools and fitness applications. These multifaceted impacts underscore the transformative potential of media literacy.

Programs aimed at fostering media literacy among older adults should adopt diverse approaches tailored to this demographic's unique needs. Community-based workshops, intergenerational mentorship initiatives, and online learning platforms are particularly effective. These interventions not only impart practical digital skills but also build confidence and foster intergenerational relationships, promoting social cohesion and understanding. Moreover, integrating media literacy into healthcare and social services can empower older adults to take charge of their well-being, ensuring they have the tools to make informed decisions in an increasingly digitalized environment.

Policy support is critical to the success of these initiatives. Governments, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations

must collaborate to design accessible, culturally sensitive, and scalable programs. Funding for affordable technology and internet access is vital, as is addressing systemic biases that perpetuate digital exclusion. The integration of media literacy into national education and workforce policies will ensure that older adults are not left behind in the digital age.

Future research should focus on the long-term impacts of media literacy training on older adults' quality of life, exploring cross-cultural differences and identifying best practices for scalability.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Conflicts of interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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