Analyzing elderly users' use of the Internet for community connection

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While much of the discussion about internet usage and abusage focuses

on young people and in particular the so-called "digital natives", those people born after the internet and more specifically the world wide web had become commonplace, there is a growing and aging population of frequent and experienced users who benefit considerably from access to online resources just as much as the youngsters.

Research conducted in The Philippines and published in the *International Journal of Web Based Communities* discusses the use of online communities by the "silver surfer" generation and the gaps and opportunities that exist.

Ryan Ebardo and Merlin Suarez of De La Salle University in Manila, explain how "Older adults are thriving online and it is paramount for research to present the recent directions of scholarly works to depict the everyday digital lives of this specific social cluster." The team has carried out a systematic review of the pertinent research literature and identified twenty important papers that could be used to glean insights into the motivations of older internet users as well as to ascertain what problems they are facing if any and what prospects might exist for improving their online experiences.

The team found that the prime movers among older internet users to join online communities and to be active in those communities are engagement and enjoyment, there are also known cognitive benefits. Fundamentally, the team has found that "online communities are living spaces where older adults interact, socialize and acquire support."

The team adds that not only might a more systematic study of the use of online communities by older people help guide other members of digital society it could also feed into studies of older people at different stages of their lives—retirement, in assisted living, through partner bereavement and other life-changing states.

"In studying the impact of online communities based on social media on older adults, society will be more attuned to the complexities brought forth by late life," the team concludes.

More information: Ryan A. Ebardo et al, Older adults and online communities: recent findings, gaps and opportunities, *International Journal of Web Based Communities* (2021). [DOI: 10.1504/IJWBC.2021.116598](DOI:10.1504/IJWBC.2021.116598)

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