

Original Research Article

Use of Internet as Communication and Social Interaction Media among Empty Nesters

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to investigate the use of internet as communication and social interaction media and its association with selected demographic variables among empty nesters. A total of 100 empty nesters residing in selected areas of Ludhiana, Punjab were selected using snowball sampling technique. A self-structured questionnaire was used to assess the use of internet. The present study concluded that among a total of 100 subjects who participated in the study, more than half were not using internet. Majority of the subjects used Skype and WhatsApp for face to face conversation and text conversation respectively. Internet use was significantly higher among subjects age less than 60 years, graduates, married, urban, employed, professionals, salaried.

Key words: Internet use, Empty nesters.

INTRODUCTION

Empty nest syndrome describes the feelings experienced by the parents when their children have moved out of the house for their priorities of life. ^[1] For the purpose of this study “empty nester” was defined as any individual or married couple whose children have moved out of the house either because of job, education or marriage. A growing trend towards nuclear family set-up, and increasing education, urbanization and industrialization, modernization, and many other reasons elderly in India are living on their own. ^[2] Almost 15 million elderly Indians live all alone. ^[3] Empty nesters are more likely to suffer from loneliness and depressive symptoms as compare to non empty nesters. ^[4] Internet use increases the ability of empty nesters to keep in touch with the family and friends & to decrease the loneliness. ^[5] This study was

conducted in order to collect data about use of internet as communication and social interaction media among empty nesters. Many researches are done in this particular field but lack of researches was felt in finding internet profile of empty nesters specifically in India.

So, this area was selected in order to collect data about usage of internet among empty nesters in selected areas which may serve as basis for further studies related to comparison of social interaction and loneliness among empty nesters who use internet and those who do not.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and sampling: A descriptive research design was used for the study, a total of 100 empty nesters residing in selected areas of Ludhiana,

Punjab were selected using snowball sampling technique.

Inclusion criteria

- Subjects who were willing to participate in the study
- Subjects who were able to understand English, Hindi or Punjabi

Exclusion criteria

- A diagnosed hearing problem
- Severe physical and/or mental illness
- Neurological disorder

Sample size: A total of 126 subjects were assessed for eligibility, out of which 100 subjects were found to be eligible.

Tools

Internet use profile: The tool was divided into 2 parts

Part 1: Socio demographic profile: It included age, gender, marital status, occupation, religion, type of family, educational status, living status, and total family income.

Part 2: Internet Use Questionnaire: It consisted of various aspects of using internet

Procedure of data collection: The permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal of the institute. Subjects who met the inclusion criteria were enrolled in the study. Participant information sheet was given to the subjects. Verbal consent was taken before participation in the study. Data was collected using interview schedule using the internet use profile.

Statistical analysis: Analysis of data was done in accordance with the objectives of the study using descriptive (frequency, percentage) and inferential statistics (chi square). The descriptive statistics was used to study the demographic details of the subjects and their use of internet, inferential statistics was used to find out the association between internet use and selected demographic variables. The SPSS version 16.0 was used for calculations.

RESULTS

Analysis and interpretation of the data was based on objectives of the study.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To assess the use of internet as communication and social interaction media among empty nesters residing in selected areas of district Ludhiana, Punjab.
2. To determine the association of use of internet as communication and social interaction media in selected areas with selected demographic variables.

Demographic characteristics

Table 1: Socio demographic profile of the subject N=100

Socio demographic variables	%
Age(in years)	
40-49	19
50-59	20
60-69	41
70 or above	20
Gender	
Male	46
Female	54
Educational status	
Illiterate	22
Elementary	27
Higher secondary	23
Graduation or above	28
Marital status	
Married	80
Divorced/Separated/Widow/Widower	20
Living Status	
Living alone	13
Living with spouse	80
Living with brother/sister	07
Present employment status	
Employed	46
Unemployed	54
Former occupation	
Business	11
Professional	44
Farmer	16
Labourer	01
Housewife	28
Source of Income	
Pension	32
Salary	33
Business	13
Support from children	21
Support from relatives	01
Monthly income(in rupees)	
<50,000	73
50,001-1,00,000	24
>1,00,000	03

Table 1 describes the socio-demographic profile of the subjects. The maximum number of the subjects i.e. 41(41%) were in the age group of 60-69 years, followed by equal number of subjects i.e. 20(20%) each falling in the

age group of 50-59 and 70 or above. The least were from 40-49 years with 19(19%). More than half of the subjects were females with 54(54%) and 46(46%) were males. Regarding educational status, the distribution was almost equal in all the categories with 28(28%) graduates, 27(27%) and 23(23%) educated up to elementary and higher secondary level respectively and rest of the subjects i.e. 22(22%) were illiterate. out of the total subjects studied, majority i.e. 80(80%) were married, a few i.e. 20(20%) were divorced/separated. Majority i.e. 80(80%) of the subjects were living with spouse, a very few i.e. 13(13%) were living alone and the least i.e. 07(07%) were living with their brother or sister.

A total of 54(54%) subjects were unemployed and 46(46%) were employed. With regard to their former occupation, 44(44%) were professionals, followed by 28(28%) housewife, 16(16%) being farmer, 11(11%) were businessmen and only 1(1%) was laborer. The source of income for 33(33%) was salary, followed by pension being the main source for 32(32%), 21(21%) reported having support from their children, 13(13%) had their own business and only 1 (1%) was getting support from relatives. Majority of the subjects were having monthly income of less than 50,000 (in rupees), followed by 24 subjects with monthly income of 50,001-100000. Very few i.e. 03 were having monthly income of more than 100000 (in rupees)

As regard to mental health issues, majority of the subjects i.e. 90(90%) reported suffering from loneliness, 27(27%) reported grief, 18(18%) had anger, 11(11%) had anxiety and 2(2%) each were having substance use problems i.e. opium and crying spells.

As regard to physical health issues maximum number of subjects i.e. 42(42%) reported having arthritis and joint problems, followed by 30(30%) having

hypertension, 25(25%) had diabetes and 9(9%) had asthma.

Table 2: Socio-demographic profile of off springs N=183

Variables	f (%)
Age (in yrs)	
16-30	093(51)
31-45	078(43)
46-60	012(06)
Gender	
Male	101(55)
Female	082(45)
Education	
Illiterate	007(04)
Elementary	023(13)
Secondary	048(26)
Graduation or above	105(57)
Occupation	
Employed	166(90)
Unemployed	016(08)
Studying	004(02)
Marital status	
Married	127(69)
Unmarried	056(31)
Residence	
India	078(43)
Abroad	105(57)
Reasons for leaving home	
Job	090(49)
Study	046(25)
Marriage	047(26)
Distance from home (in kms)	
<10,000	075(41)
>10,000	108(59)

Table 2 describes the socio demographic profile of the off springs. Majority i.e. 93(51%) were in the age group of 16-30 years, followed by 78(43%) in 31-45 years and the least i.e. 12(6%) in 46-60 years. Majority i.e. 101(55%) were males, 82(45%) were females. Regarding educational status majority i.e. 105(57%) were graduate or above, 48(26%) were qualified up to secondary level, 23(13%) were qualified up to elementary level and only a few i.e. 7(4%) were illiterate. In relation to occupation, majority i.e. 166(90%) were employed, 04(2%) were studying, 16(8%) were unemployed.

Majority i.e. 127(69%) were married, and only 56(31%) were unmarried, majority i.e.105 (57%) were abroad, and 78(43%) were in India. The major reason for leaving home was job for majority i.e. 90(49%), followed by marriage and study with 47(26%) and 46(25%) respectively.

The distance from home was more than 10, 000 (in kms.) for majority i.e. 108(59%) and for the remaining 75(41%) was less than 10,000 (in kms.)

Use of internet

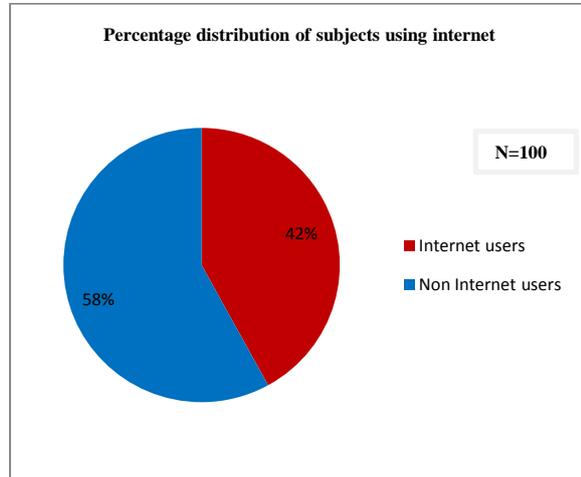


Figure 1: Distribution of subjects regarding the use of internet as communication and social interaction media

A total of 42(42%) subjects reported using internet, whereas 58(58%) subjects never used internet. (Fig 1) out of the total 42 subjects who reported using internet, 25(59.5%) reported that they were very comfortable in using it, whereas 09(21.4%), 05(12%), and 03(7.1%) reported that they were somewhat comfortable, not very comfortable and not at all comfortable respectively. Regarding the frequency of use of internet out of total 42 subjects , 27 (64.3%)reported using it once or more in a day, 09(21.4%) reported using it a few times a week, 05(12.0%) said that they use it for a few times a month and only 1(02.4%)hardly ever used it.

Majority i.e. 39(92.8%) used cell phone, followed by portable devices by 18(42.9%) subjects and the least used i.e. by 07(16.7%) was desktop. Regarding the most often devices used to access internet, more than half i.e. 25(54%) reported cell phone, 15(40%) said portable devices, and the least was desktop i.e. by 02(06%) subjects.

As per the average time spent on internet, equal number of subjects i.e. 16(38.1%) each used it for one hour or less

and 4-5 hrs per day. A total of 10 subjects used it for 2-3 hrs per day. Out of 42 subjects 30(71.4%) used Skype for face to face conversation, followed by 19(45.2%) who used Viber and 8(19%) used Yahoo messenger and only 1(2.4%) used Imo. Majority i.e. 38(90.5%) subjects used WhatsApp for text conversation, followed by 28(66.7%) who used facebook, 27(64.3%) used skype, 18(42.8%) used viber, 14(33.3%) used email, 6(14.3%) used yahoo messenger, 02(04.8%) used telegram and imo, and only 1 subject (2.4%) used tango.

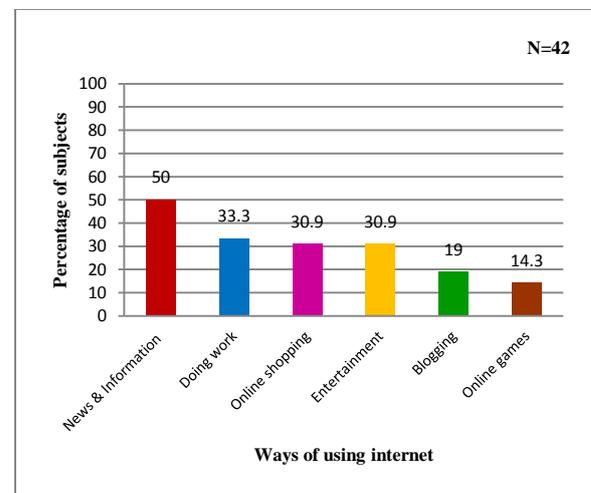
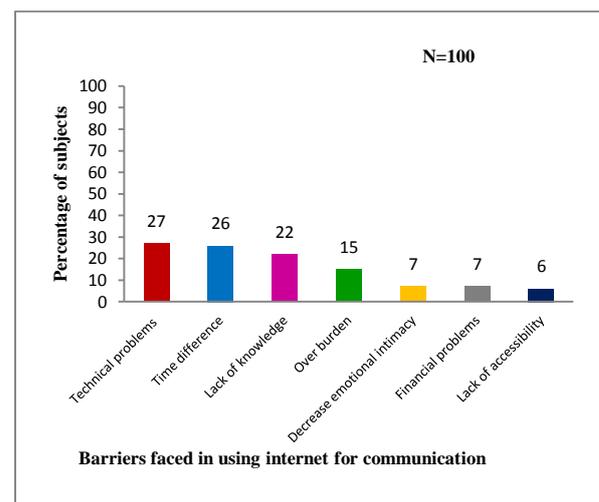


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of subjects regarding ways of using internet



*Subjects had multiple responses

Figure 3: Percentage distribution of subjects regarding barriers in communicating through internet.

Half of the subjects i.e. 21 (50%) reported using internet for getting news and information, followed by 14 (33.3%)

who used it for doing work, 13(30.9%) of the subjects used it for online shopping and entertainment each, 8 (19%) used it for blogging and only 6 (14.3%) subjects used it for playing online games. (Fig 2)

Almost half of the subjects i.e. 48% personally visited their children for once in a year, however 25% said they have never visited their children similarly near about half i.e. 43% of the children visited their parents once in a year.

A total of 27%, 26%, and 22% had barriers of technical problems, time difference and lack of knowledge respectively. 15% reported having overburden, 7% reported having decreased emotional intimacy and financial problems each, and 6% said that lack of accessibility was a barrier in using internet for communication. (Fig 3)

Table 3: Association of use of internet with selected socio-demographic variables. N=100

Socio demographic variables	Internet users n=42	Non internet users n=58	Chi-square p value
Age(in years)			
40-49	14(33)	05(09)	$\chi^2 = 33.037$ p= 0.000*
50-59	15(36)	05(09)	
60-69	13(31)	28(48)	
70 or above	00(00)	20(34)	
Gender			
Male	20(48)	26(45)	$\chi^2 = 0.076$ p = 0.840NS
Female	22(52)	32(55)	
Educational status			
Illiterate	01(03)	21(36)	$\chi^2 = 45.792$ p = 0.000*
Elementary	03(07)	24(42)	
Secondary	16(38)	07(12)	
Graduation and above	22(52)	06(10)	
Marital status			
Married	39(92)	41(71)	$\chi^2 = 7.491$ p = 0.000*
Divorced/Separated/Widow/Widower	03(08)	17(29)	
Habitat			
Urban	37(88)	13(22)	$\chi^2 = 42.036$ p =0.000*
Rural	05(12)	45(78)	
Living status			
Living alone	04(10)	09(16)	$\chi^2 = 4.057$ p=0.138NS
Living with spouse	38(90)	45(77)	
Living with brother & sister	00(00)	04(07)	
Present Employment status			
Employed	31(74)	15(26)	$\chi^2 = 22.719$ p = 0.000*
Unemployed	11(26)	43(74)	
Former Occupation			
Business	07(16)	04(07)	$\chi^2 = 28.258$ p = 0.000*
Professional	29(69)	15(26)	
Farmer	01(03)	15(26)	
Labourer	00(00)	01(02)	
Housewife	05(12)	23(39)	
Source of income			
Pension	06(14)	26(45)	$\chi^2 = 34.014$ p = 0.000*
Salary	25(60)	08(13)	
Business	05(12)	01(02)	
Support from children	03(07)	19(33)	
Shopkeeper & agriculture	03(07)	04(07)	
Monthly income(in rupees)			
<50,000	20(48)	53(91)	$\chi^2 = 24.143$ p =0.000*
50,001-1,00,000	19(45)	05(09)	
>1,00,000	03(07)	00(00)	

*Significant at p value<0.05

NS=non significant at p value >0.05

There was significant association between age, educational status, marital status, habitat, employment status, occupation, source of income and family income with internet use at p<0.05.

Internet use was more among subjects having age40-59 years, who were graduates, married, living in urban area, living with spouse, who were employed, professional, having salary of their own

and having monthly income less than 1,00,000 (in rupees).(Table 3)

DISCUSSION

The study findings revealed that a total of 42(42%) subjects reported using internet, whereas 58(58%) never used internet. Similar study was reported by Namkee G Choi (2013) showed that 40.04% subjects were using internet where as 59.60% never used internet in US ^[6] Regarding barrier which is faced in using internet for communication showed that subjects reported technical problems, lack of knowledge, financial problems and lack of accessibility as barriers. Similar study conducted by Anne Morris (2007) also depicted that subjects reported fear of technology, lack of knowledge, lack of accessibility and cost as the barriers. ^[7]

The present study depicted that internet use was higher among employed, a total of 31(74%) subjects who were employed were using internet, were as only 11(26%) of those who were unemployed were using internet. The similar findings were reported by Lawrence E. Strickling (2010) where it was found that internet use among employed subjects was 73.4% as compared to unemployed with 61.9% in US. ^[8]

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that almost half of the subjects were using internet. More than half felt very comfortable in using internet. Majority used cellphone for accessing internet. Skype and WhatsApp were reported to be used most often for face to face and text conversation respectively. Internet use was more among subjects having age 40-59 years, who were graduates, married, living in urban area, living with spouse, who were employed, professional, having salary of their own and having monthly income less than 1,00,000 (in rupees).

The barriers identified in the present study can be addressed to enable the empty nesters to use internet as communication and social interaction media. Similar study can also be conducted on large sample size to generalize the findings on larger sample size.

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