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Investigating the Influence of New Media Technologies on the Mental Health and Well-being of Older Adults in China

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Abstract: With the acceleration of population aging and the deep popularization of digital technology, new media technology has gradually penetrated into the daily life scenes of the elderly. This article takes the relationship between new media technology and the mental health and happiness of elderly people in China as the core research object. By reviewing relevant literature, it analyzes the dual impact mechanism of new media technology on the mental health and happiness of the elderly, explores the current difficulties in the use of new media among the elderly, and proposes targeted optimization paths. Research has found that new media technology can improve the mental health and well-being of elderly people by expanding social connections, enhancing health awareness, and other positive effects. However, issues such as digital divide and information cocoons may also lead to negative effects. Based on this, efforts need to be made from multiple dimensions such as technology adaptation, skill popularization, and content optimization to fully leverage the positive role of new media technology in the process of healthy aging.

Keywords: New Media Technology, Aged, Mental Health, Happiness, Healthy Aging.

1. Introduction

According to the data from the 7th National Census, China's population over the age of 60 has reached 18.70%, and the level of population aging is deepening. The mental health and quality of life of the elderly have become issues related to social harmony and development. Meanwhile, new media technologies represented by smart phones, short-video platforms and social software are evolving rapidly, driving society into the deep water zone of digital transformation. The 54th "Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet" indicates that the proportion of Internet users aged 50 and above in China has risen to 33.3%. New media is gradually breaking down the barriers of isolation between the elderly and society, becoming an important carrier for them to obtain information, maintain emotions and participate in society.

The popularization of new media technology has brought new possibilities for the mental health protection and happiness improvement of the elderly, but it also hides many risks and challenges. On the one hand, new media can transcend the limitations of time and space, helping the elderly maintain close contact with their children and relatives and friends, and alleviating the sense of loneliness brought by empty nests. On the other hand, problems such as a lack of digital skills, platform designs that are not suitable for the elderly, and the intrusion of bad information may also cause the elderly to fall into a digital divide, triggering negative emotions such as anxiety and helplessness. Against this backdrop, systematically exploring the impact of new media technology on the mental health and well-being of the elderly in China, clarifying its mechanism of action and practical predicaments, and constructing a scientific optimization path can not only enrich the research results in the intersection of new media communication and geriatric psychology, but also provide practical guidance for promoting the healthy aging strategy and improving the quality of life of the elderly.

This paper adopts the methods of literature research and logical analysis. Firstly, it sorts out the relevant research results at home and abroad and constructs the framework of literature review. The second is it is to study the impact of new media technology on the mental health and well-being of the elderly; To re-explore the mediating mechanism and regulatory factor for its implementation. Lastly, taking into account the practical problems that the elderly face when using new media currently, targeted optimization strategies are proposed with the intention of providing both theoretical and practical support in order to fully utilize the positive aspects of new media technology and promote the happiness and wellness of the elderly.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Positive Empowerment of New Media Technology on the Mental Health of Older Adults

The positive empowerment of new media technology on the mental health of Chinese older adults represents the mainstream direction of research. Jiang et al. (2024), focusing on healthy aging and media adaptation among the elderly, provided empirical evidence showing that moderate media exposure can effectively improve their mental health status, thereby supporting the goal of healthy aging.[1] From the perspective of communication and interaction, Zhu and Wen (2024) pointed out that the communication scenarios constructed by new media are a key pathway to improving mental health awareness rates among the elderly, with influencing factors covering dimensions such as information delivery efficiency and interaction frequency.[2] Regarding the alleviation of social isolation, Li et al. (2025), in a study targeting Chinese older adults, found that active social media use can effectively mediate the relationship between self-aging attitudes and social isolation by enhancing internet self-efficacy, thereby strengthening the psychological sense of

belonging among the elderly. International research also provides corroboration for this.[3] Sekikawa et al. (2025), in an urban Japanese survey, showed that the use of social media and group chats can significantly reduce the degree of social isolation among older adults, a finding that offers insights for relevant research in China. [4] Furthermore, Hsu et al. (2025) demonstrated that community-dwelling older adults' participation in technology-related activities can optimize cognitive trajectories, providing cognitive level assistance for the positive impact of new media technology on the elderly's mental health.[5]

2.2. Potential Risks of New Media Technology on the Mental Health of Older Adults

Simultaneously, the potential risks of new media technology on the mental health of older adults cannot be overlooked. Bardey et al. (2025) exposed the prevalent ageist representations and stereotypes in fashion media, indicating that such negative media portrayals can have adverse psychological impacts on the self-perception of older adults, undermining their well-being.[6] Nakada et al. (2025), in a two-stage analysis of older adults in Japan, found that inappropriate patterns of social media use may exacerbate psychological distress and could even be associated with the frailty status of the elderly. This warning is also applicable to the Chinese elderly population, which may have weaker digital adaptation capabilities.[7] Examining individual psychological mechanisms, An et al. (2025) technology anxiety among older adults have a significant impact on their social media information sharing. Psychological resilience can improve this situation by alleviating technology anxiety and enhancing perceived enjoyment, which also indirectly reflects the negative impact of technological adaptation barriers on the psychological state of the elderly.[8]

2.3. Exploring the Ways in Which New Media Technology Affects the Mental Health of Elderly People

In the exploration of influencing mechanisms, the moderating and mediating roles of individual traits and behavioral patterns have received widespread attention. Kim (2025) found that self-esteem is an important moderator of the link between social media use and life satisfaction in older people, with those who have higher levels of self-esteem being more likely to gain psychological benefits from using social media.[9] Allen et al. (2025), from a service design point of view, it is suggested that co-designed multimedia resources with informal carers should fully consider the cultural diversity to better support older adults' transition from hospital to home. This implies that appropriateness and adaptability are prerequisite factors which affect how effective these new media resources will be for mental health.[10]

3. The Dual Impact of New Media Technology on the Mental Health and Well-being of the Elderly in China

3.1. Positive Impact

New media technologies have provided multi-dimensional support for the mental health protection and happiness improvement of the elderly through expanding social connections, optimizing information acquisition, and enhancing social participation, thus becoming an important driving force in the process of healthy aging.

In terms of expanding social connections, new media technologies have broken through the limitations of time and space, effectively alleviating the sense of loneliness among the elderly. With the acceleration of urbanization, the scale of the empty-nest elderly population is constantly expanding, and the traditional face-to-face social model is greatly restricted. New media platforms such as wechat and Douyin enable the elderly to keep in touch with their children and friends at any time through functions like video calls, voice chats and community interactions, share the details of their lives in real time and receive emotional comfort. Meanwhile, the elderly can also join interest communities through new media platforms, communicate and interact with like-minded peers, build new social networks, and enhance their sense of social belonging. Expanding the circle of social relationships can effectively reduce feelings of loneliness and depression among older people, laying a good foundation for their mental health.

In terms of optimizing information acquisition, new media technologies have enhanced the health awareness and convenience of life among the elderly. New media can effectively enhance the awareness of mental health among the elderly. Through simple and understandable forms such as short videos and image-text push notifications, professional mental health knowledge is conveyed to the elderly, helping them correctly understand psychological problems and master self-regulation methods. In addition, new media platforms also provide the elderly with convenient functions such as medical service appointments, health information inquiries, and life service processing, reducing their living costs and enhancing their life satisfaction.

In terms of enhancing social participation, new media technologies have provided the elderly with diversified channels for participation and enhanced their sense of self-worth. As people age, the social roles of the elderly gradually change. Some elderly people may experience a lack of self-worth due to their detachment from social production and life. New media platforms offer the elderly a stage to showcase themselves, such as sharing life experiences and talents through short videos, and participating in discussions on community public affairs through social platforms. Such social participation can help the elderly feel their own value and importance, improve their self-confidence, and thus enhance their mental health and happiness.

3.2. Negative Impact

New media technology has also benefited the elderly's mental health and happiness. In practice, there are also many potential psychological risks in it that have a negative effect on the mental state of the elderly.

Psychological anxiety caused by the digital divide is one of the most prominent problems. Ren Hang et al. (2022) pointed out that the current elderly health communication faces predicaments such as insufficient channel coverage and forms that are not suitable for the elderly. Essentially, this issue is a manifestation of the digital divide. Some elderly people, due to their lack of digital skills and insufficient configuration of smart devices, are unable to use new media platforms smoothly and have difficulty obtaining necessary information and services, gradually being marginalized. This marginalized state can cause negative emotions such as

inferiority and helplessness in the elderly, intensifying their psychological anxiety. At the same time, the elderly-friendly design of the platform, such as too small fonts, complex operations, and too many pop-up ads, will also increase the difficulty for the elderly to use it and cause them to feel irritable.

The psychological distress caused by the information cocoon and the intrusion of bad information should not be ignored either. Excessive viewing of short videos may lead to information overload and cognitive fatigue, while personalized recommendation mechanisms can easily trap the elderly in an information cocoon. Long-term exposure to a single type of information can result in cognitive solidification and a decline in judgment ability. In addition, false health information and fraudulent information existing on new media platforms can have an impact on the psychology of the elderly. Due to their relatively weak ability to distinguish information, the elderly are prone to believing false information easily, which may lead to unnecessary health anxiety or psychological trauma from online fraud.

Overly relying on new media and leading to social estrangement will also have a negative impact on the elderly's mental health. Some old people become too addicted to new media, they reduce face-to-face communication with family and friends, which makes their real social relations weaken. This imbalance between virtual social interaction and real social interaction will gradually cause the elderly to become detached from real life, intensify their sense of loneliness, and instead be detrimental to the improvement of their mental health and sense of happiness.

4. Optimize the Path for New Media Technologies to Empower the Mental Health and Well-being of the Elderly

4.1. Promote the Adaptation of the Platform for the Elderly

In response to the current issue of insufficient elderly-friendly adaptation of new media platforms, the operators of these platforms should intensify their efforts in elderly-friendly renovations to enhance the user experience of the elderly. New media platforms should optimize their interface design, adopt large fonts, high-contrast colors, simple layouts and other designs, reduce unnecessary functional modules and pop-up advertisements, and lower the operational difficulty. The platform should develop dedicated functions such as voice assistants, one-click calling, and family protection to facilitate the use of the elderly. The platform also needs to enhance content review and screening, establish a content library exclusively for the elderly, and push high-quality and authoritative health information, entertainment content, and life service information to avoid the intrusion of bad information. Meanwhile, the government should enhance supervision and guidance, introduce relevant standards and norms for elderly-friendly renovations, and encourage platforms to fulfill their responsibilities for elderly-friendly renovations.

4.2. Conduct Digital Skills Training

Communities and elderly care institutions should take on the responsibility of digital skills training, helping the elderly master the skills of using new media and enhance their media literacy. The platform needs to formulate targeted training programs, carry out stratified and classified training based on the age, educational background, health status and other characteristics of the elderly, and focus on teaching skills such as the operation of smart devices, the use of new media platforms, and information discrimination. The platform should innovate its training methods, adopting face-to-face teaching, hands-on guidance, and peer assistance to enhance the training effect. The platform can establish a long-term training mechanism, regularly conduct follow-up visits and refresher training, and promptly solve the problems encountered by the elderly during use. In addition, families should play a significant role. Children should patiently guide the elderly in using new media, help them overcome obstacles in using it, and enhance their confidence in using it.

4.3. Build a Diversified Support System

Build a multi-faceted support system involving families, communities and society, and strengthen the positive guidance of new media technologies on the mental health and well-being of the elderly. At the family level, encourage children to enhance their interaction with the elderly both online and offline, and guide the elderly to use new media reasonably to avoid excessive reliance. At the community level, community activities are carried out relying on new media platforms to promote offline social interaction among the elderly and achieve the integration of online and offline social interaction. At the social level, social organizations and volunteers are encouraged to participate in new media services for the elderly, providing technical support and psychological counseling for them. At the same time, efforts should be made to enhance the creation and dissemination of positive energy content on new media, and create cultural and entertainment, health and wellness, and emotional comfort content suitable for the elderly to enrich their spiritual and cultural life.

5. Conclusion

This article uses literature research and logical analysis to systematically study the impact of new media technology on the mental health and well-being of elderly people in China. It has been found that new media technology has a dual effect on the mental health and well-being of the elderly: one is to expand their social circles, improve information acquisition, and enhance social participation to achieve an effective improvement in the mental health level and well-being of the elderly; On the other hand, problems such as the digital divide, information cocoons, and excessive dependence may also trigger negative effects such as psychological anxiety and distress. Social justice perception and social support play a chain mediating role in it, while individual characteristics and the external environment are important regulatory factors.

To fully leverage the positive effects of new media technologies and mitigate their negative impacts, efforts should be made in multiple dimensions, such as promoting the adaptation of platforms for the elderly, conducting digital skills training, building a diversified support system, and improving policy guarantees, to form a collaborative advancement pattern involving families, communities, and society. In the future, with the continuous development of digital technology, the connection between new media and the mental health and happiness of the elderly will become even closer. Relevant research should further deepen the exploration of the influencing mechanism, strengthen

empirical research, and explore more precise and effective new media service models suitable for the elderly, providing stronger support for promoting the healthy aging strategy and improving the quality of life of the elderly.

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