



SHARING COMPANIONSHIP IN DIGITAL SPACE: GENDER-FLUX EXPERIENCES OF GRANDPARENTS AND DISTANT CHILDREN IN IBADAN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Common problem at old age is loneliness and social neglect. Most often, many elderly people feel left alone with detrimental effects on their welfare and social state. With modernization, urbanization and capitalism, children are compelled to work far from home and once this happens, social realities make it difficult for them to keep in touch with their parents. The situations become more precarious as intergenerational gaps widen to include grandchildren and grandparents. Many grandparents of Africa play nurturing roles for their grandchildren and this compensates for the companionship they lose with their immediate children. With continuous effects of modernization and capitalism however, the first level loneliness tend to play out at this second level of grand relations. With the advent of social media and IT however, the description of space and relations across spaces tend to be redefined and reappropriated in manners that blurred hitherto gender lines of neglect. It is against this backdrop that this article examined the role of social media in moderating intergenerational relations within African family social system. The primary location of this study is Ibadan, Oyo state, south western Nigeria. 200 copies of structured questionnaires were administered on grandparents and their distant children while 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with grandparents in Ibadan. While questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS, the IDIs were tape-recorded and analyzed using ethnographic summaries and narratives. Very definitive findings were made that will enhance body of knowledge on family relations, IT, socialization, gerontology and development.

Keywords: *Companionship, Gender-flux, Digital space, social media, grand relations*

INTRODUCTION

Companionship refers to sharing of relationship among two or more people. It is a two-way process which involves sharing of ideas, values, likes and things of interest. This is done in such a way that the parties involved feel some sense of friendship and closeness. Companionship goes a long way in the relationship because it cures loneliness and gives a sense of belonging among the people. Those involved in companionship seek the progress of one another through encouragements, supports and sharing of ideas, proffering solutions to difficulties during challenging times and situations. Sharing companionship is a two-way relationship between two or more individuals. Important factor to be considered when sharing companionship is communication. Communication can be described as a process of interaction between two or more people. It is described by Adler and Towne (1978) is a process between at least two people that begins when one person wants to communicate with another. DeVito (1986) also defined communication as the process or act of transmitting a message from a sender to a receiver, through a channel and with the interference of noise. Keyton (2011) defined communication as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one place to another. Communication, before the inception of technology was in form of writing symbols, use of smoking signals especially in Africa and parts of Asia. However, as technology evolves, mobile phones, internet, emails among others, were adopted as means of communication.

Effective communication frequently results in friendships that are more meaningful, smoother and more rewarding relationships with people on and off the job, and increased ability to meet personal needs (Jossey-bass/Pfeiffer, 1998). Building effective companionship has been made easy through various digital media such as mobile phone, PDA, and social media. In the digital age, companionship does not have to be face-to-face relationship. Recent advancement in digital information technology has enabled billions of people to connect more easily with people miles away, but it has not really been known about how the frequent presence of these devices in social settings influences face-to-face interactions.

The virtual world has been a space where true identities and emotions are masked or emotional companionship comes in the form of a techno-intimacy formed via virtual

friendships (Allison, 2006). In the current social milieu, new and digital technologies have emerged with different possibilities irrespective of space and time. The host of these new technologies affords people to share ideas on the internet platform and sites called digital space. Advancement in technology has encouraged relationship and companionship through the use of social media. Technology has impacted social interactions since the rise of social media. Social media has made relationship and companionship a lot easier. In digital age, social media has facilitated effective companionship through the use of smartphones. But in recent times, social networking sites which include Facebook, Whatsapp, Skype, Twitter, IMO, Yahoo messenger and BBM facilitate communication with friends, families and relatives thereby providing effective companionship.

However, the emergence of these technologies have offered methods of providing companionship to frail, elderly individuals who live at home alone or spend long periods of time alone in most cases or sometimes with their grandchildren. Grandparents with distant children are often lonely, which affect them a lot because at this stage of their lives they need someone (relative) close to them to interact with. The elderly individuals especially grandparents face special problems and circumstances causing them to have varied needs for companionship (Chun, Kobayashi and Liu 2005). Most grandparents or aged persons are bedeviled with myriads of psychological and social problems. Such problems include loneliness, depression, among others. Interestingly, these challenges are traceable to lack of adequate or absence of companionship between the aged and their distant children.

Technologies have offered methods of providing companionship to the elderly individuals. We are living in the digital age, with an increasing proportion of transactions and social interactions carried out online including among older people (Wood and Salter, 2016). There is substantial evidence which shows that people who say they feel lonely are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure and depression and are more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease in later life compared to those with stronger social relationship (Wood and Salter, 2016). This loneliness which has affected their social, mental and psychological being can be traced to their loss of companions, isolation and decline of some physical and mental capabilities.

There are a number of factors that can be attributed to the separation of children from their aged parents or grandparent; this can range from employment or search for employment, education, marriage and other natural phenomena. This separation in terms of physical space has depleted the frequency of meaningful communication and relationship between the aged (grandparents) and their offspring.

Living apart affects the relationship between grandparents and their children in various ways. Physical distance simply can make it difficult to spend time together with grandchildren (Ayalsumi, 2010). There are technologies, such as easy-to-use mobile phones and computers that facilitate communication with family thereby providing companionship. While these have their place, they can offer as much companionship as busy family members can provide, like speaking on phone, answering questions, asking questions, reading the news, discussing topics of interest to the elderly person. They can give updates about grandchildren, check pictures online and upload theirs for people to see how they look. Other forms of communication, for example, mobile phone calls, SMS and emails are also spreading among the older ones of the population. Grandparents are using technology more and more to keep up and connect with their children by texting, emailing, video-conferencing and using social media like Facebook and twitter with their children. Technologies have strengthened the connection between grandparents and their children in a way irrespective of the distance between them.

Research has shown that elderly individuals at home alone need companionship and mental assistance. Distance between grandparents and their children could cause relationship deficiencies. The detrimental effect is evident in the loneliness grandparents feel when they cannot communicate with their children from time to time. Several studies have shown that some grandparents develop emotional or psychological problems as a result of their children not physically present with them.

Evidence has shown that loneliness is increasingly high among older ones. Risk factors associated with a greater sense of loneliness include poor health, living alone, being widowed, and having limited social, civic and cultural networks; all of these risks tend to increase with age (Wood and Salter, 2016). Distance between children and elderly parents makes it harder for children to provide support in time.

As grandparents get older they experience some certain things that affect their social and mental wellbeing. It is no longer possible to ignore ageing, regardless of whether one views it positively or negatively (Hermalin, 1995). Individuals begin their ageing process at the moment of birth, and go through the life course accumulating a range of experiences that may positively or negatively affect their capabilities and wellbeing in later years (Aquilino, 1990). At the stage of their lives they need someone to talk to and interact with. In later life, the thing for elderly parents is lack of companionship and care from children. The advent of digital technologies has blurred the distance between grandparents and children because they can communicate, share live events and interact with one another especially through the use of social media. Social media helps grandparents and their children to communicate on a personal level. However, these solutions are not without its challenges. Thus, improving computer confidence and literacy may as well be an important element which fortify older people's existence on social networks – but not a means of replacing traditional “human interaction” (Wood and Salter 2016).

Although communication and transportation has been improved, physical distance is still a barrier for children to stay connected at the end of life of their parents. Grandparents have difficulties in relating/communicating personal problem over the internet because of security concerns, internet's low bandwidth could cause a major connectivity issue, perception that social media platform affects moral compass of children and this could make grandparents desist from using it. It is against this backdrop that this study examines how grandparents employ the digital space to enhance their companionship with their distant children. The following questions were investigated in the study, Why do grandparents use social media as effective novel instrument in their relationship with their distant children? Do distant grandparents use social media to facilitate relationship with their distant children? What types of social media do grandparents use in their distant relationships with their children? Among others.

This study is of high significance due to the fact that one cannot overlook at the effect of modernization, globalization, industrialization, urbanization and capitalism on every aspect of life, which do not exclude the elderly and their social relationship or intimacy with their children. The kinship network was very strong in the traditional society; this kinship network has gradually been replaced with the social network. This article is however significant because it creates awareness on the experiences of grandparents with their distant children, shed more light on what these aged and elderly parent face when their children are not around them and how technology through social media has bridged the gap between them. This article can be useful to hospitals and relatives of the elderly because it will enlighten them on how to care for the elderly in the area of communication, this also serves as a way of bringing to the lime light what these elderly ones are passing through psychologically, mentally and socially.

Companionship: Examining the Digital Space Channel

Companionship is the sharing of relationship among two or more people which involves sharing of ideas, interests, likes among others. It is a closeness or familiarity, a true fellowship among two people who for whatever reasons have truly connected (Valenti 2017). Researchers found out that companionship had a main effect on psychological well-being and a buffering effect on minor life stress, and that companionship was the strongest predictor of relationship satisfaction and feelings of loneliness (Steinhilber 2016). Loneliness relates not only to age but also to other social and demographic characteristics such as gender, socio economic status, marital status, quality of social networks and contact with friends (Pinquart and Soresen, 2001). Prior to death, most of older adults experience severe pain, immobility, and psychological distress (Shi & Wang, 2010). This will make them to

need more companionship and need someone close to them to help with their needs and interact with.

We live in digital age, with an increasing proportion of transactions and social interactions carried out online, including among older people (Wood and Salter 2016). Although young people are mainly found on social media sites, social media use has also become popular among older age groups. Parents and grandparents have started to view social media as one of the favorite communication platforms for present-day youth and, hence, many of them have created profiles on Social Networking Sites (SNS) in order to re-connect with their children and grandchildren (Simonpietri, 2011). Chu (2010) emphasizes that encouragement or coercion from children who want their parents to make use of the computer and who provide support are the main motivations for older adults to learn to use the Internet. As a whole, older adults value deeper, well thought out, carefully crafted social communications that are achieved through telephone calls, e-mails, and written letters. While older adults perform many social functions that could be supported by online technologies, few seniors use such systems (Hope, Schwaba & Piper, 2014). Another research outcomes shows that, many older people are digitally excluded, and often reluctant to engage with computers and the internet, and would not naturally associate them with a healthy social relationship (Wood and Salter 2016). While older adults may have fewer friends on an SNS than younger users, their friend groups have a wider distribution of ages, indicating that they are using such services for intergenerational communication (Pfeil, Arjan and Zaphiris, 2009). Many older people have also fully embraced digital technology, but there remains a stark difference in internet use between the youngest and oldest age groups; virtually all (99 per cent) of young adults have recently used the internet but this falls to just 33 per cent of those aged 75 and over (West 2015). West 2015 in his research also said older women are less likely to use the internet than older men; in 2015 around two in five (41 per cent) men aged 75 and over were recent internet users compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) of women aged 75 and over.

One of the main reasons why the members of different generations gather on the Internet is connected to increased geographical distance and thus the inability to actively communicate face-to-face (F2F) (Harwood 2000). A research indicated that one of the most important motivations behind using web-based communication platforms is the feeling of closeness and connectedness these platforms create (Tamme and Siibak, 2012). Online technologies are promising for helping older adults maintain social connectedness, particularly with younger people, yet many older adults resist or participate minimally in the mainstream technologies used by younger members of their social network. DiMaggio et al. (2001) argues "that the internet enhances social ties" by putting "users in more frequent contact with families and friends" (p. 317). The impact of, and motivation to use the Internet, especially for older people, is likely to be very different if it supplements communication with already established friends and family or if, instead, it substitutes for more traditional communication and traditional social ties (Cummings, Butler & Kraut, 2002). Photos, videos and updates shared on a daily basis can provide a valuable connection to faraway family and friends who are tied together in a variety of ways; Even though older adults may be among the most resistant to broadband, there is evidence that once these users get a taste of high-speed access, they often come to rely on the internet as an everyday utility in their lives (Madden 2010). Findlay 2003 in two separate studies listed in the same paper, teleconferencing was found to reduce support needs and loneliness, especially for geographically isolated people. Older adults are motivated to stay connected with people in their social network with which they already have a strong connection (Carstensen 2003).

Online activity also allows seniors to regain control over their personal and social life, which may have become compromised due to age-related changes, by connecting with others and seeking information online (McMellon and Schiffman 2002). Sundar et al (2011) said that, the seniors who use SNSs use it to stay connected with family, and joined because of the influence or help of a family member or friend. Making use of different web-based communication platforms has helped to increase the time spent communicating with family

members (Virge and Andra 2012). Zickuhr, 2010 said research suggests that nowadays members of older generations attend and take advantage of the communication opportunities offered by social media); the use of new technologies and services including email, Internet and mobile phones, social media, social networking among others are helping to ease the burden for some families. Many studies have also noted that the use of social networks sites (SNSs) can enhance social interaction among the elderly and that the motivation for the elderly to use SNSs is to keep in contact with remote friends and family or the younger generation (Tsai, Hsien and Yi, 2016). (Alch, 2000), our research suggests that adults often turn to their children when they need assistance on the Internet.

Social networking sites such as Facebook have been developed to enable and encourage communication and interaction between users, and it is suggested that, when used for this purpose, online technologies can strengthen interpersonal relationships. New forms of communication such as mobile phone calls, SMS and e-mail are also spreading among older groups of the population (Quadrello et al, 2005). The telephone still forms the primary way through which interaction occurs between geographically separated parents and children (Kennedy, Smith, Wells, and Wellman, 2008). King O'Rian said the distance created by migration of one partner in my sample, sometimes motivated older relatives, such as grandparents, to become more technologically proficient and to join Skype driven primarily by the desire to maintain strong emotional connections to their grandchildren; O'Riain also noted in Ireland that the interviewees discussed how Skype had changed their emotional lives and expressions because of the cheap and easy to use nature of Skype, some even described it as revolutionizing their children's relationships to their parents both as grandparents learned to use Skype and technology, and as children learned to present themselves and their lives to their grandparents via Skype. In terms of keeping connected, senior citizens also tend to prefer Skype over Facebook, as Skype better replicates the social interaction they were used to while growing up (Weishar, 2010). Instant messenger and Facebook are the most popular methods for maintaining contacts between family members; these platforms are particularly valued because of the relative intimacy they offer due to the privacy settings that can be modified by the users (Tamme and Siibak, 2012). Although face-to-face contact is less frequent for those whose children live some distance away, communications such as telephones, mobile phones, email and webcam tools such as Skype and social networking sites such as Facebook, make communication easier when children live far apart (WRVS 2012).

Theoretical Exposition

Social Action Theory

Social action theory as propounded by Max Weber and Actor network theory as propounded by Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and John Law was adopted for this paper. To Weber, the task of sociological analysis involved "the interpretation of action in terms of its subjective meaning" (1921/1968:8). To him action was said to occur when individuals attached subjective meanings to their action. He was concerned with action that clearly involved the intervention of thought processes (and the resulting meaningful action) between the occurrence of a stimulus and the ultimate response.

Weber utilized his ideal-type methodology to clarify the meaning of action by identifying four basic types of action; Means-ends rationality, Value rationality, Affectual action and Traditional action.

- Means-ends rationality: is determined by the expectations of actors and of other individuals in a given context. These expectations become the conditions and/or indicators for measuring attainment of an actor's rationally calculated ends. This suggests that individuals supposedly act on the basis of some calculation that will lead to benefits
- Value rationality: this type of action is determined by conscious belief in its ethical, religious, aesthetic and political value notwithstanding the prospects of succeeding (Ritzer 2008).
- Affectual action: is more of psychological and of less importance for Weber. It is determined by an actor's emotional state at a given point.

- Traditional action: is dependent on an actor's customary values. Weber concluded that any given action normally involved the combination of these four types (Ritzer 2008).

Social action theorist argues that society is the product of people interacting in social groups and trying to make sense of their own and each other's behavior. The social exchange of action is only possible when interpretive understanding takes place, which of course occurs only when the parties involved ascribe meaning to each other's action (Olutayo and Akanle 2013).

Actor-Network Theory

The Actor-network theory contains not merely people but objects and organization. The theory is most often regarded as a 'material-semiotic' method. This means that it maps relations that are simultaneously material, that is relationships between things; and semiotic relations, that is relationships between concepts. Actor network theory assumes that many relations are both material and semiotic. Actor network theory recognizes the place of the object (physical world), ideas and concepts in the social construction of reality (Olutayo and Akanle 2013 pg 198). These objects and organization are called actors. Olutayo and Akanle 2013 also said networks comprise-human and non-human actors (ideas, object, concept and so forth) that interact to create and sustain the network; both human and non-human actors in a network are called actant. Actor-network theory does not usually explain 'why' or 'how' a network occurs or takes the form that it does. Rather, Actor-network theory is a way of thoroughly exploring the relational ties within a network. The most central concept in Actor-network theory is the actor-network. The term 'network' is believed to be somewhat problematic in that according to Latour have a lot of unwanted connotations. Firstly, it implies that what is described takes the shape of a network, which is not necessarily the case. Secondly, it implies 'transportation without deformation', which, in Actor-network theory, is not possible since any actor-network involves a vast number of translations. Latour, however still contends that network is a fitting term to use, because "it has no a priori order relation; it is not tied to the axiological myth of a top and of a bottom of society; it makes absolutely no assumption whether a specific locus is macro or micro and does not modify the tools to study the element 'a' or the element 'b'". Actor-network theory also said people and objects (computer software, hardware and technical standards) is important to social network, and the society is in order because of the actor network running smoothly.

Companionship is the sharing of relationship between two or more people. This sharing of relationship involves interaction between those involved in that relationship. When two people interact with one another they make sense of each other's behavior by attaching subjective meaning to their action. Sharing of companionship in digital space involves the interaction between human and non-human actors. Non-human actor includes objects like the social media, social networking among others. In applying these theories, social action theory and actor-network theory, experiences of grandparents when they share companionship in digital space involves interaction which is the action and making use of technologies to share companionship involves actor network theory.

DATA AND METHODS

The study area was Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo State, in the South-western part of Nigeria. Ibadan has a population of 5,591,589 (National Population Commission (NPC, 2010). The target population for this article was grandparents and children who engage their parents through social media. Grandparent was targeted because the article seeks to investigate the experiences of grandparents with their distant children when sharing companionship in digital space.

To generate data for sharing companionship in digital space; experiences of grandparents with distant children in Ibadan, a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative method was

used. Two hundred copies of questionnaires were used for the study and they were administered through a combination of self administration and researcher administration within Ibadan. The IDIs were used to complement data obtained with questionnaire and were used to elicit information from 20 purposively selected grandparents who shares companion with their distance children. All qualitative data collection instruments were researcher administered for consistency and comprehensive data gathering as many unspoken data must also be noted and this can properly be done by the researcher. Snowballing techniques (Non-probabilistic sampling technique) were employed to locate grandparent who shares companion with their distance children on digital space

Although it is commonly argued that snowballing does not enable representativeness, according to Aldridge and Levine (2001), this type of sampling is most appropriate where there is no sampling frame, where examples of the people to be studied are rare or widely spread, and where the people of interest are likely to know each other and they will help the researcher find more *relevant* contacts (see also Bryman, 2004, Haralambos and Holborn 2008). While sharing companionship on digital space by grandparents with their distance children is gradually becoming the other of the day, there is no sampling frame yet for those grandparents that shares digital space on social media, this explains the reason for the choice of sampling method adopted in this study. Quantitative data was analysed with the aid of statistical software while qualitative data was analysed through content analysis, interpreted and presented as ethnographic summaries.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondent. Sex of the respondents indicates that there were more females than males, which constituted more than half of the entire sample size (59.0%), in the study. Also age of the respondents' shows that majority of the respondent age range is between 41 and 60 (64.5%). This is expected because a younger age than this may not have become a grandparent. Religious affiliation of the respondents indicates that majority of the respondents are Christians (74.0%) while (26.0%) were Muslims. Ethnic affiliation section shows that 75.0% are Yoruba. This is expected because the study was conducted in a Yoruba community. Also 68.4% of the respondents were married. Educational qualification of the respondents indicates that 81.0% of the respondents have completed their tertiary education, which shows that majority of the respondents are educated and sharing companionship on digital space will not be a problem. The employment details of the respondents' show that 57.0% work with the government and the occupation indicate that 61.5% are civil servant. About 66.5% of the respondents earn monthly income between 50,001-100,000 naira. Lastly, 44.0% of the respondents have between 3 - 4 children.

Table 1 Distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	82	41.0
	Female	118	59.0
Age	Less than 20	3	1.5
	21 – 30	31	15.5
	31 – 40	37	18.5
	41 – 50	33	16.5
	51 – 60	71	35.5
	More than 60	25	12.5
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	148	74.0
	Islam	52	26.0
Ethnic Affiliation	Hausa	2	1.0
	Yoruba	150	75.0
	Igbo	32	16.0
	Edo	16	8.0
Marital Status	Married	137	68.5
	Separated/divorced	10	5.0
	Single	34	17.0
	Widowed	19	9.5
Educational Level	completed secondary	4	2.0
	tertiary not completed	34	17.0
	tertiary completed	162	81.0
Employment Details	government employed	115	57.5
	self employed	52	26.0
	unemployed/retired	11	5.5
	Student	22	11.0
Occupation	Student	30	15.0
	civil servant	123	61.5
	self employed	47	23.5
Monthly Income	10,001-20,000	27	13.5
	20,001-50,000	20	10.0
	50,001-100,000	133	66.5
	100,001 and above	20	10.0
Number of Children	None	29	14.5
	1-2	76	38.0
	3-4	88	44.0
	5-6	7	3.5
	Total	200	100.0

Table 2 indicates the distribution of the use of social media in moderating and facilitating relationships among grandparents and their children. All respondent (100.0%) claimed to have access to social media. The table also shows that majority of the respondent (88.0%) access their social media frequently while others (12.0%) access social media seldom. Some respondents explained how often they access social media in in-depth interview conducted.

An interviewee said;

“I access social media regularly because my internet connectivity is always on”
(IDI/male/60years/lecturer/2017)

Another interviewee also explained that time is a factor when making use of the social media.

“I operate social media whenever I have time because I have other things which make me busy. So I access it when I am less busy”
(IDI/female/62years/trader, retired/1-11-2017)

A interviewee stated that;

“I do not spend much time on it, as soon as I open it when I receive messages, I reply them on time and go offline”
(IDI/female/48years/trader/2017)

Also from the same table, (100.0%) all the respondents make use of social media to communicate to their children/grandparents in distant places.

A interviewee said;

“I use social media to chat, greet, monitor and know the condition of my children”
(IDI/female/50years/trader,teacher/2017)

Another interviewee said that;

“I use social media to communicate to my children because they all have access to it”
(IDI/male/65years/lecturer/2017)

Some interviewee furthermore explained what they use social media for, apart from communicating to their children.

“I use social media for academic purposes and receiving prevailing information in the society daily”
(IDI/male/63years/lecturer/2017)

Another interviewee also said that;

“I use social media for social calls, contacting friends and relations and also doing some social work”.
(IDI/male/65years/lecturer/2017)

Another interviewee also said

I don't like boring life; through social media I reconnect with old friends”
(IDI/male/68years/lecturer/2017)

Table 2 also revealed that most of the respondents (80.5%) frequently make use of social media to communicate to their children/grandparents while others (19.5%) seldom communicate with their children/grandparents. It also revealed that most of the respondent (95.0%) regularly stay connected or communicate with their distant children/grandparents. The in-depth interview conducted further express how regularly grandparents use social media to communicate with their children in distant places.

An interviewee said;

“I chat with my children twice in a week and it also depend on the amount of money (data) I have, so until it finishes, I keep chatting with them.
(IDI/female/62years/Civil servant/2017)

Table 2 also revealed that most respondent (60.0%) make use of social media within the range of 1-2 hours while some of the respondents (34.0%) spend 3-4 hours when making use of social media. Some grandparents also explained how long they spend when making of social media

A interviewee said;

“I use social media for at least an hour and I actually use most of the time at night”

(IDI/female/56years/civil servant/2017)

From the same table also, findings revealed that most respondents (43.0%) use smartphone device to communicate with their children/grandparents. The table further explained that most of the respondent (68.5%) make use of the device chosen because it is easy to access social media, some respondents (15.5%) use the device chosen because it enables them to see clearly especially if they want to use Skype, video conferencing and so on, while others (16.0%) use the device because of both the easy access of social media and to be able to see clearly when using Skype and so on.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the use of social media by grandparents to facilitate relationship and their children.

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Access to social media	Yes	200	100.0
How often social media is accessed	Frequently	176	88.0
	Seldom	24	12.0
Use of social media to communicate to your children/grandparents in distant places	Yes	200	100.0
How often social media is used to communicate to distant children/grandparents	Frequently	161	80.5
	Seldom	39	19.5
how regularly distant children/grandparents stay connected or communicate through social media	Regularly	190	95.0
	Rarely	8	4.0
	Not regularly	2	1.0
how many hours spent when making use of social media	1-2 hours	120	60.0
	3-4 hours	68	34.0
	5-6 hours	1	.5
	7 hours and above	11	5.5
what device used most to communicate with your distant children/grandparents online	Cellphone	26	13.0
	Smartphone	86	43.0
	Cellphone and smartphone	16	8.0
	Cellphone and laptop	8	4.0
	Smartphone and tablet	28	14.0
why the use of device chosen to communicate with children/grandparents online	Smartphone and laptop	36	18.0
	It is easy to access social media	137	68.5
	It enables me to see them clearly especially if i want to use Skype, video conferencing etc.	31	15.5
	all of the above	32	16.0
	Total	200	100.0

Table 3 below indicates the distribution of the use of social media by grandparents as effective novel instrument in their relationship with their distant children. The findings revealed that (99.0%) of the respondents enjoy using social media to communicate to their distant children/grandparents, while others (1.0%) do not enjoy using social to communicate

to their distant children/grandparents. This implies that almost all the respondents enjoy using social to communicate to their distant children/grandparents. From the same table, it shows that all the respondents (100.0%) opine that social media has increased the amount of communication with their distant grandparents/children.

A interviewee said;

“Social media has increased it very tremendously because even when I don’t want to chat, my children would send me messages through social media”
(IDI/male/65years/lecturer/2017)

Table 3 also show that 87.0% of the respondent said that socialhas increased the amount of communication with their distant grandparents/children to a great extent, while 12.5% of the respondents said that social has increased the amount of communication with their distant grandparents/children to a little extent. This implies that social media has increased the amount of communication with their distant grandparents/children to a great extent. The table also showed that most of the respondents (99.5%) said that social media has been very effective in facilitating the growth and closeness between grandparents and their children.

A interviewee said that;

“Social media has played a very good and effective means of communication much better than what we were used to like the television, radio and so on, social media is very helpful and has played a significant role. My children are far away from me, but because of social media we are very close, when people say out of sight and out of mind, although it is out of sight but through social media it is within and on the mind”
(IDI/male/62years/lecturer/2017)

Another interviewee also said;

“Social media has brought me and my children closer; in fact, one of my children abroad on regular basis sends me a mail especially on Sundays about his work and other personal stuffs. (IDI/male/65years/lecturer/2017)

The table also shows that most of the respondents (97.5%) view social media as a new and better means of communication and interaction. The table shows that most of the respondent (91.5%) agreed that social media has been an effective means to communication to a great extent. This implies that most of the respondent view social media as a new and better means of communication and interaction and it has been an effective means to communication. The table shows that 99.0% said social media has allowed grandparents and children to stay connected with one another. The table also revealed that 99.0% of the respondent said social media has also improved the quality of connection with their children/grandparents far away. Also from the table 79.0% of the respondents prefer to communicate face to face, while others (21.0%) prefer to communicate through social media.

A interviewee said;

“I will prefer face to face interaction but my daughter is in china, so what do I do!!!”
(IDI/female/65years/lecturer/2017)

Another interviewee said;

“In the absence of social face-to-face, social media has taken over. Face-to-face is relatively difficult now. If you ask my children to travel at times, you have to consider the condition of the road” (IDI/female/68years/lecturer/2017).

Table 3. Frequency distribution of why grandparents use of social media as an effective novel instrument

in their relationship with their distant children.

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Do you enjoy using social media to communicate to your distant children/grandparents	Yes	198	99.0
	No	2	1.0
Has social media increased the amount of communication with your distant grandparents/children	Yes	200	100.0
How has social media increased the amount of communication with your distant children/grandparent	to a great extent	174	87.0
	to a little extent	25	12.5
	not to any extent	1	.5
How effective has social media facilitated the growth and closeness between you and your distant children/grandparents	Very effective	199	99.5
	Not too effective	1	.5
Do you view social media as a new and better means of communication and interaction	Yes	195	97.5
	No	5	2.5
To what extent has social media played an effective means to communication	to a great extent	183	91.5
	to a little extent	17	8.5
How helpful would you say social media has allowed you and your distant grandparent/children stay connected with one another	Helpful	198	99.0
	Not helpful	2	1.0
Has social media improved the quality of connection with children/grandparents far away	Yes	198	99.0
	No	2	1.0
Do you prefer to communicate with your	Preference for face to	158	79.0

distant children/grandparents face to face or through the use of social media	face communication		
	preference for social media communication	42	21.0
	Total	200	100.0

Table 4 below indicates the types of social media used by grandparents in their distant relationships with their children. The findings revealed that majority of the respondent uses Whatsapp and Facebook (64.0%) to communicate with their distant children/grandparents, while about (20.5%) uses Whatsapp, Skype and Facebook to communicate, also (9.0%) use Whatsapp and Email, while (6.5%) uses all the social media to communicate with their distant children/grandparents.

A interviewee said;

I make use of whtasapp mostly but I also use facebook and email a times
(IDI/female/60years/Civil servant/-2017)

Another interviewee said;

“I use only emails mostly both officially and for private matters”
(IDI/male/65years/lecturer/2017)

Another interviewee also said

“I use mainly whatsapp and emails. I don’t make use of video calls”
(IDI/male/62years/lecturer/2017)

A interviewee said;

“I make use of whatsapp, facebook and email but my children make use of skype to communicate to me” (IDI/female/59years/lecturer/2017)

Some interviewee also identified another social media platform aside from whatsapp, facebookand email.

A interviewee said;

“I use skype and messenger once in a while but it doesn’t always go through”
(IDI/female/71years/retired, trader/29-08-2017)

Table 4 also shows the reason why grandparents/children use the type of social media chosen. Most of the respondents (42.5%) said they use the social media platform because it is fast, cheap and easily accessible to operate, some respondent (3.5%) said it is convenient for them to use, some respondents (2.0%) also said they get to communicate with them face to face especially with skype and other video platforms while few respondents (1.5%) said it is what their parent use. The respondent interviewed explained why they use the type of social media chosen.

A interviewee said;

“I use it because the information I want to pass is secretive and whatsapp is a good means of sending private messages” (IDI/female/52years/civil servant/29-08-2017)

Another interviewee also said;

“To me email is the cheapest and fastest, so I make use of it”.
(IDI/male/62years/lecturer/2017)

A interviewee also said;

“Whatsapp is faster and easier. I get to see their pictures and it is interesting anyways” (IDI/male/65years/lecturer/2017).

A interviewee said;

“It is cheaper, and for the skype, it has video facility and it makes it easier to see who am speaking to” (IDI/female/52years/lecturer/2017).

Another interviewee said;

“I use it because it is the cheapest way of communicating with them rather than talking to them through phone calls and I also like whatsapp because I use the video call and it is cheaper” (IDI/female/53years/trader/15-10-2017).

From the same table also, findings revealed that most of the respondents (53.5%) prefer to use whatsapp to communicate with their distant children/grandparents, while some respondent (17.5%) prefer to use whatsapp and facebook, few respondent (9.0%) prefer skype to communicate. This implies that most of the respondents prefer to use whatsapp to communicate with their distant children/grandparents. The table also revealed why they prefer the type of social media chosen. Most of the respondent (37.5) said it is fast, cheap and easily accessible to operate, for those that use video calls, the respondents (5.5%) said I get to communicate with them face to face especially with skype and other video platforms. However the in-depth interview conducted further revealed interviewee preference for the type of social media chosen

One of the interviewee said;

“I prefer to use whatsapp because nowadays, it seems like facebook is dangerous now but whatsapp is very safe” (IDI/female/54years/trader/2017).

Another interviewee said;

“I prefer to use whatsapp to communicate with my children because it is easily accessible even when am busy” (IDI/male/65years/lecturer/2017).

A interviewee also said;

“I prefer to use email and whatsapp to communicate with my children, and for the imo, it enables me to see them anytime I want to” (IDI/female/47years/Civil servant/2017).

A interviewee said;

“I prefer to use the email more than the remaining social media platforms because of the privacy; nobody can access your email without your password but other social media platforms through the process of interacting, a lot of people know your privacy” (IDI/male/62years/lecturer/2017).

Another interviewee also said;

“I prefer whatsapp, although I use facebook and I wanted to use instagram but my children told me not to because I will have to be posting my pictures all the time and I



don't like posting my pictures. That is why I rarely use facebook, even on whatsapp I don't upload my picture" (IDI/female/47years/trader/2017).

Table 4. shows that most respondents (60.5%) make use of whatsapp only, some respondents (14.0%) use whatsapp and facebook frequently, while some respondents (9.0%) make use of skype and whatsapp. The table also shows that 56.0% said that whatsapp only has enhanced the growth of communication with their distant children/grandparents; some respondents (16.0%) said skype and whatsapp has enhanced the growth of communication with their children/grandparents while others (12.5%) said whatsapp and facebook has enhanced the growth of communication with their distant children/grandparents. The table also explained how social media has enhanced the growth of communication with their distant children/grandparents. 10.5% of the respondents said it has brought us closer to a great extent and has reduced loneliness by increasing the level of intimacy. 9.5% of the respondents also said it has enhanced communication greatly and frequently when visiting is not possible and irrespective of the distance.

A interviewee said;

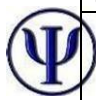
"Social media has enhanced the growth of communication between me and my children because when I am chatting with them, it seems like they are beside me and even if I am not happy and I hear hi mum, I get excited. I also crack jokes by using funny emojis" (IDI/female/49years/trader/2017).

Another interviewee also said;

"Social media has been helpful, when we did not have social media; we had to go to Nitel to queue just to talk to them" (IDI/female/70years/trader, retired/2017).

One of the interviewee also said;

"Social media has enhanced the growth of communication between me and my children because what would have cost me time, energy and so on is taken over by the social media" (IDI/male/62years/lecturer/2017).



S/N	Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	What type of social media do you use to communicate with your distant children/grandparent	Whatsapp and Facebook	128	64.0
		Whatsapp and Email	18	9.0
		Whatsapp. Skype and Facebook	41	20.5
		All Options	13	6.5
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2	Why do you use the type of social media chosen	It is fast, cheap and easily accessible to operate	85	42.5
		It is confidential and private when using it to communicate	4	2.0
		It is convenient for me	7	3.5
		I get to communicate with them face to face especially with skype and other video platforms	4	2.0
		It is what my parent use	3	1.5
		It is very effective and reliable	1	.5
		No response	96	48.0

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Table 4. Frequency distribution of the types of social media used by grandparents in their dist

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relationships with their children

3	What type of social media do you prefer to communicate with your distant children/grandparent	Skype only	18	9.0
		Whatsapp only	107	53.5
		Facebook only	7	3.5
		Emails only	4	2.0
		Whatsapp and Facebook	35	17.5
		Skype and Whatsapp	14	7.0
		Skype,Whatsapp and Emails	7	3.5
4	Why do you prefer the type of social media chosen	It is fast, cheap and easily accessible to operate	75	37.5
		It is confidential and private when using it to communicate	4	2.0
		It is convenient for me	4	2.0
		I get to communicate with them face to face especially with Skype and other video platforms	11	5.5
		There is no problem with network coverage when communicating to them	4	2.0
		No response	102	51.0
5	What type of social media platform do you use frequently to communicate with your distant children/grandparent	Whatsapp only	121	60.5
		Facebook only	13	6.5
		Emails only	5	2.5
		Skype only	6	3.0
		Skype and whatsapp	18	9.0
		Skype, whatsapp and emails	5	2.5
		Skype,whatsapp and facebook	4	2.0
6	What type of social media platform has enhanced the growth of communication with your distance children/grandparent	Whatsapp only	112	56.0
		Facebook only	10	5.0
		Emails only	5	2.5
		Skype only	8	4.0
		Whatsapp and emails	4	2.0
		Whatsapp and facebook	25	12.5
		Skype and whatsapp	32	16.0
7	How has social media enhanced the growth of communication with your distant children/grandparents	It has brought us closer to a great extent and has reduced loneliness by increasing the level of intimacy	21	10.5
		It has enhanced communication greatly and frequently when visiting is not possible and irrespective of the distance	19	9.5
		It is better than phone calls because i get to see them when am using video calls on Whatsapp, Skype and so on	7	3.5
		It is easy, fast and cheap, hence we can communicate better because there is easy flow of communication	26	13.0
		It saves time and the cost of travelling over to see them	2	1.0
		It makes me to get in touch with them every now and then and also allows me to know their welfare	8	4.0
		No response	117	58.5

The table below reveals that 100% of ages less than 20 frequently access social media, 96.8% of

ages 21-30 frequently access social media while 3.2% seldom access social media, 91.9% of ages 31-40 frequently access social media while 8.1% seldom access social media, 81.8% of ages 41-50 frequently access social media while 18.2% seldom access social media, 81.7% of ages 51-60 frequently access social media while 18.3% seldom access social media, 96.0% of ages more than 60 frequently access social media while 4.0% seldom access social media. A chi-square table showed that P value was 0.127. This is greater than 0.05. Therefore, there was no significant relationship between age and how often they access social media. This is in contrast to Olson et al. (2011), he said younger adults have been using the Internet longer (no younger adults reported less than three years of use, and about 15% of the older sample reported from less than 6 months to a year), and use it more frequently than older adults (the majority of the younger sample reported over 15 hours per week, the majority of the older sample reported five hours or less per week); younger adults had significantly more experience (71% occasionally or frequently use the Internet, and 30% of older adults occasionally or frequently use the Internet).

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of age and how often social media is accessed

	How often do you access social media		Total	χ ²	df	p-value
	Frequently	Seldom				
Less than 20	3(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	3(100.0%)	8.586	5	0.127
21-30	39(96.8%)	1(3.2%)	31(100.0%)			
Age	34(91.9%)	3(8.1%)	37(100.0%)			
41-50	27(81.8%)	6(18.2%)	33(100.0%)			
51-60	58(81.7%)	13(18.3%)	71(100.0%)			
More than 60	24(96.0%)	1(4.0%)	25(100.0%)			
Total	176(88.0%)	24(12.0%)	200(100.0%)			

Table 6 below reveals that 100.0% of the age group that is less than 20 said social media is extremely effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children. On the other hand, 74.2% of the ages between 21-30 years also said social media is extremely effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, 19.4% said social media is very effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, while 6.5% said social media is somewhat effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children. 64.9% of the ages between 31-40 years also said social media is extremely effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, 16.2% said social media is very effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, while 18.9% said social media is somewhat effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children. 33.3% of the ages between 41-50 years said social media is extremely effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, 48.5% said social media is very effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, while 18.2% said social media is somewhat effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children. 50.7% of the ages 51-60 years said social media is extremely effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, 38.0% said social media is very effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, 9.9% said social media somewhat effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, while 1.4% said social media is not effective and has not facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children. 36.0% of the ages more 60 years said social media is extremely effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, 52.0% said social media is very effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children, while 12.0% said social media is somewhat effective and has facilitated the growth and closeness grandparents and their children. A chi-square test showed that p-value was 0.044. This is less than 0.05. Hence, it is followed that there is a significant relationship between age and how effective social media has facilitated the growth and closeness between grandparents and their distant children.

Table 6. Cross-tabulation of age and how effective social media has facilitated the growth and closeness

between grandparents and distant children

	How effective has social media facilitated the growth and				
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	closeness between you and your distant children/grandparents				Total		Df	p-value
	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Not too effective				
Age Less than 20	3(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	3(100.0%)	25.449 ^a	15	.044
21-30	23(74.2%)	6(19.4%)	2(6.5%)	0(0.0%)	31(100.0%)			
31-40	24(64.9%)	6(16.2%)	7(18.9%)	0(0.0%)	37(100.0%)			
41-50	11(33.3%)	16(48.5%)	6(18.2%)	0(0.0%)	33(100.0%)			
51-60	36(50.7%)	27(38.0%)	7(9.9%)	1(1.4%)	71(100.0%)			
More than 60	9(36.0%)	13(52.0%)	3(12.0%)	0(0.0%)	25(100.0%)			
Total	106(53.0%)	68(34.0%)	25(12.5%)	1(0.5%)	200(100.0%)			

DISCUSSION

The use of social media has gone viral between the older and younger generation. Since the invention of social media, communication and interaction has been greatly improved. This study tried to look into the experiences of grandparents when sharing companionship in digital space. It was discovered that most grandparents’ access social media and they use it for communication and interaction. Many studies have also noted that the use of social networks sites (SNSs) can enhance social interaction among the elderly and that the motivation for the elderly to use SNSs is to keep in contact with remote friends and family or the younger generation (Tsai, Hsien and Yi, 2016).

The grandparents are interested in using the computer mostly for finding information on various topics like healthy, recipes, news, music, movies, and so on and to communicate and maintain relationship with the family (2nd partner meeting, Athens Greece 2014). The findings of this study showed that grandparents make use of social media in their day to day activities. It was also discovered that apart for using social media for social activities, they use it for receiving prevailing news in the society, academic purposes and so on.

Parents and grandparents have started to view social media as one of the favorite communication platforms for present-day youth and, hence, many of them have created profiles on Social Networking Sites (SNS) in order to re-connect with their children and grandchildren (Simonpietri, 2011). This study also revealed that grandparents use social media as a means of communication and interaction between them and their distant children.

This study also discovered that grandparents who access social media regularly stay connected to their children. This research also identified the types of social media used by grandparents. Although face-to-face contact is less frequent for those whose children live some distance away, communications such as telephones, mobile phones, email and webcam tools such as Skype and social networking sites such as Facebook, make communication easier when children live far apart (WRVS 2012). Instant messenger and Facebook are the most popular methods for maintaining contacts between family members; these platforms are particularly valued because of the relative intimacy they offer due to the privacy settings that can be modified by the users (Tamme and Siibak, 2012). It was discovered that grandparents make use of different social media platform. They are whatsapp, facebook, skype, emails and messenger although the most used social media platform is whatsapp, facebook and skype. It was also discovered that the reason for the use of this social media platforms is because of the cheapness, ease and fastness. The study revealed that these social media platforms have enhanced the growth of communication by reducing their loneliness and also increasing the level of intimacy between grandparents and their children.

Making use of different web-based communication platforms has helped to increase the time spent communicating with family members (Virge and Andra 2012). This study revealed that grandparents enjoy using social media because it has increased the amount of

communication between them and their children to a great extent and this has led to the growth and closeness between them. (Zickuhr, 2010) said research suggests that nowadays members of older generations attend and take advantage of the communication opportunities offered by social media); the use of new technologies and services including email, Internet and mobile phones, social media, social networking among others are helping to ease the burden for some families. Grandparents make use of social media because they see it as a better means of communication and interaction, because it eases the burden of families by allowing grandparents and children to stay connected with one another, although it was also discovered that grandparents and their children prefer face-to-face communication. Help to go online and use the internet to communicate with friends and family cannot replace face to face interaction and, for many older people, cannot help them meet new friends or create new networks (Wood and Salter 2016).

Relationships between parents and their children are greatly improved when there is effective communication taking place (Zolten and Long, 2006), that is, if communication between parents and their children is good, then their relationships are good as well. Social media has been able to bridge the gap between grandparents and their children because of the frequent and effective communication between them through social media. SNSs provide older adults the opportunity to reconnect with people from their past and also to bridge gaps between generations (Barker 2012).

Social media often acts as a platform for poor time management, inappropriate content, online predators, and privacy threats, causing parents to worry about the risks involved (Watkins 2016). Although this study revealed that most grandparents have not been faced by any online risks, while few people have been affected by media risks before, for example account hacking, online harassment and the likes. Most of the grandparents are really very concerned about staying safe and secure online. It was also revealed that grandparents said that social media has reduced the loneliness when their distant children are not with them and social media has mainly helped their relationship with their distant children rather than hurt.

Technological challenges included slow connections, limited storage space, and related technical problems, and fear and or perceived irrelevance of the medium, positive and negative elements of feedback would certainly seem to have an effect on older generations and thus grandparents desires to embrace technology (Hunt 2012). This study revealed that grandparents faces challenges when using social media and most of this challenges are major connectivity issues. Other challenges include internet low band width, high rate of cost when there is no network, privacy issues and so on. It was also discovered that most of the grandparent don't feel comfortable using the social media when this challenges arises while others feel comfortable using the social media.

This study also discovered that age is not a factor contributing to how often they access social media. This is in contrast to Olson et al. (2011), he said younger adults have been using the Internet longer (no younger adults reported less than three years of use, and about 15% of the older sample reported from less than 6 months to a year), and use it more frequently than older adults (the majority of the younger sample reported over 15 hours per week, the majority of the older sample reported five hours or less per week); younger adults had significantly more experience (71% occasionally or frequently use the Internet, and 30% of older adults occasionally or frequently use the Internet). This study also revealed that gender does not affect how often they access their social media. This finding is in contrast with (West 2015) in his research said older women are less likely to use the internet than older men; in 2015 around two in five (41 per cent) men aged 75 and over were recent internet users compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) of women aged 75 and over. This finding also discovered that age determines how effective social media has facilitated



the growth and closeness between grandparents and distant children and type of social media used by grandparents and their distant children.

Conclusion

This article has explored information on sharing companionship in digital space; experiences of Grandparents with Distant Children in Ibadan Southwestern Nigeria and important findings have been made relative to how companionship are been shared using digital space by children and grandparent in this modern time due to distant caused by a number of factors like marriage, employment and so on. The elderly needs care and support of their children, however, due to marriage, education and sometimes employment that takes people away from their usual place of abode, this care and support are sometimes hampered. In other not to feel too lonely, elderly share companionship using social media, they use modern day technologies to know about the welfare of their children where ever they may be all over the world. Parents and grandparents have started to view social media as one of the favorite communication platforms for present-day youth and, hence, many of them have created profiles on Social Networking Sites (SNS) in order to re-connect with their children and grandchildren (Simonpietri, 2011). This article also revealed that grandparents use social media as a means of communication and interaction between them and their distant children. A major finding and conclusion is that gender is in a state of flux as companionship are shared at the digital space intergenerationally. That is both women and men use the digital space identically to maintain companionship without major differences along gender utilization and maintenance.

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