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A New Narrative of Aging: The Link Between Spiritual Self-Care and Entertainment in the Virtual World

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Abstract

Aging is an inevitable and significant stage of life, during which mental and spiritual health are as important as physical well-being. This study aimed to explore the relationship between spiritual self-care and digital entertainment among older adults and its impact on their quality of life. A narrative review was conducted by searching the databases PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The search strategy included combinations of keywords such as spiritual self-care, elderly, aging, digital entertainment, virtual reality, quality of life, and narrative review. Articles published between 2015 and 2025 in both English and Persian were considered. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, approximately 45 studies were included in the final analysis. Data were extracted using narrative content analysis, and main themes and sub-themes were identified.

The review revealed that digital entertainment including online games, social networks, discussion groups, and educational classes plays a vital role in reducing loneliness, enhancing psychological well-being, and reinforcing personal identity among older adults. The integration of spirituality with digital technology, as a novel model of self-care, contributes to increased calmness, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. This approach reshapes seniors' perceptions of themselves and their social roles, shifting them from passive to active participants. Furthermore, engaging in digital spiritual experiences such as meaningful communication, mindfulness practices, and appreciation of life supports improved mental health and overall quality of life.

These findings suggest that combining spirituality with digital entertainment offers a new framework for meaningful aging. Providing older adults with access to technology and digital spiritual resources may serve as an effective strategy to enhance mental health, social engagement, and overall well-being in this population.

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Introduction

Aging is an inevitable reality of life, representing a transition from one stage of existence to another (1). This stage is often accompanied by a decline in cognitive and physical abilities (2). It is projected that the global elderly population will reach 1.5 billion in 2025 and exceed 2 billion by 2050 (3). In Iran, the population aged 60 and over was estimated to reach 10 million by 2020 and more than 26 million by 2050 (4, 5).

In today's world, aging is no longer perceived merely as a transition from activity to dependency; rather, it represents a new stage of life in which individuals seek meaning, connection, and the preservation of quality of life. With the growing elderly population worldwide, attention to the multidimensional aspects of health—

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including spiritual and psychological dimensions has become increasingly essential. Spiritual self-care, as a fundamental component of well-being in later life, plays a key role in enhancing resilience, hope, tranquility, and life satisfaction (6).

Meanwhile, digital entertainment and virtual spaces have opened new opportunities for connection, learning, social interaction, and the expression of spirituality. For older adults, entering the digital world can serve not only as a form of leisure but also as a pathway to continued self-care, mental health maintenance, and expanded social relationships (7).

However, in many societies, the spiritual dimensions of elder care are overlooked, with most attention given to physical health (8). On the other hand, although the digital space has great potential to improve older adults' lives, the lack of meaningful programming and age-appropriate content has hindered its effective use (9). studies have shown that engaging with media and interactive technologies—particularly through games, online groups, and virtual spiritual activities—can strengthen a sense of meaning, purpose, and social participation among the elderly (10).

Therefore, the connection between spiritual self-care and digital entertainment can be viewed as an innovative approach to improving the quality of life in older adults. This perspective not only emphasizes physical and psychological health but also the lived experience of meaning and connection among seniors (11). Such integration can help shift older adults from states of passivity and isolation toward active engagement in self-care and meaningful living (12).

The importance of this topic becomes even more pronounced given that the global elderly population is steadily increasing, and it is predicted that by 2050, seniors will comprise more than one-fifth of the world's population (13). This demographic shift introduces new challenges in health, welfare, and quality of life. Thus, healthcare, social, and cultural systems must move beyond a purely physiological understanding of aging to include its spiritual and psychological aspects (8). Consequently, research and policymaking should explore how to integrate spiritual self-care with digital tools and entertainment in order to develop a comprehensive model for promoting the spiritual, mental, and social well-being of older adults in the modern world (14).

Based on this rationale, the present study—titled "A New Narrative of Aging: The Link Between Spiritual Self-Care and Entertainment in the Virtual World"—aimed to provide a narrative exploration of this emerging intersection.

Methods

This study employed a Narrative Review approach to explore and conceptually reinterpret the relationship between spiritual self-care and digital entertainment in the context of aging. The main aim was to provide a comprehensive understanding of both theoretical and practical aspects by examining relevant literature in the fields of spirituality, self-care, technology use, and quality of life among older adults.

In this narrative review, studies were selected purposively based on their relevance and significance to the topic rather than through a search protocol. The review emphasized identifying key themes, concepts, and patterns emerging from the literature.

Data from the selected studies were analyzed using Narrative Content Analysis, which involved categorizing findings into main themes and subthemes and interpreting them through an integrative analytical approach. This allowed for a synthesis of insights into how spiritual self-care and digital entertainment interact to influence older adults' well-being.

To ensure rigor and transparency, the review followed principles outlined by Green et al. (2006) and Baumeister & Leary (1997), documenting the selection and analysis process sufficiently to allow for reproducibility.

Finally, the findings were presented as an integrated analytical narrative, highlighting the potential of combining spiritual self-care and digital entertainment as a framework to enhance mental health, life satisfaction, and social engagement among older adults.

Findings

1. Digital Entertainment as a Tool for Connection, Joy, and Participation

Analysis of the reviewed studies revealed that digital entertainment—including online games, social media interactions, virtual discussion groups, and online educational classes—plays a significant role in reducing loneliness and improving the psychological well-being of older adults. Many seniors use virtual platforms to maintain connections with family members, friends, and peers. The findings indicate that active engagement in digital environments enhances older adults' sense of social presence and strengthens their personal identity. Moreover, digital entertainment contributes to mental stimulation, cognitive improvement, and increased daily happiness.(7).

2. The Integration of Spirituality and Technology as a New Model of Self-Care

A key finding of this review is the emergence of a new model of self-care in which spirituality and digital technology together create a meaningful experience of

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aging. Older adults use digital platforms and applications to access spiritual content such as inspirational talks, online meditation, prayer sessions, or virtual spiritual groups which in turn enhances their sense of peace, belonging, and life satisfaction.

Studies have shown that modern technologies, when integrated with meaningful and self-care activities, can significantly enhance quality of life, vitality, and mental health among older adults.(10, 12). Moreover, the use of the internet and digital technologies among older adults has been associated with higher levels of self-efficacy and social connectedness (17). The virtual environment serves as an effective context for strengthening self-efficacy and empowering older individuals (18–20).

3. Transforming the Perception of Aging: From Passivity to Agency

The findings suggest that integrating spirituality with digital entertainment transforms seniors' perceptions of themselves and their roles in society. Older adults shift from being passive care recipients to active, creative, and purposeful participants who shape their own lifestyles. This transformation was particularly evident among those who used technology not only for leisure but also for communication, learning, and personal growth (10, 14).

Participation in digital spaces enables older adults to develop new skills (e.g., using tablets, smartphones, or applications), fostering a stronger sense of competence and participation. A study conducted in China reported that improved digital literacy significantly enhanced older adults' attitudes toward aging (23).

4. Digital Spirituality as a New Form of Lived Experience

Narrative analysis revealed that older adults experience a new form of spirituality in digital spaces one defined by "connection with others," "mindful presence," and "gratitude for life." This new experience expands the traditional notion of spirituality by merging it with technology. In this sense, the virtual world becomes not merely a site of entertainment but also a space for practicing everyday spirituality (14).

Digital media allow seniors to cultivate spiritual experiences through awe, appreciation, and reflection on life, serving as a new medium for daily spiritual practice (21). These digital forms of spirituality help promote mental health, happiness, and overall life satisfaction.

Discussion

The findings of this review indicate that the combination of spirituality and digital entertainment can redefine the experience of aging, moving older adults from passivity toward active participation and engagement in life. Digital entertainment such as online games, social networks, virtual discussion groups, and online learning plays an essential role in reducing loneliness and enhancing psychological vitality. Through active engagement, older adults not only build social connections but also strengthen their self-identity and sense of social presence. Studies have shown that online interaction and digital entertainment contribute to improved mental health and increased daily happiness among seniors (9, 12).

Another major finding is the emergence of a new model of self-care, in which spirituality and digital technology operate synergistically. Older adults use digital platforms to access spiritual content such as inspirational lectures, guided meditations, online prayers, and virtual faith communities enhancing their inner peace, social belonging, and life satisfaction. Similar findings suggest that integrating meaningful digital activities with spirituality can enhance mental health and improve quality of life (6, 10).

Participation in virtual spaces also reduces social isolation. Online communication with family, friends, and communities helps reinforce the sense of connection and belonging. Research shows that the use of technology for social well-being can effectively decrease social isolation among older adults (22).

Furthermore, the integration of spirituality and digital engagement fosters a shift in attitudes toward aging transforming older adults from passive recipients into proactive, creative individuals who play an active role in shaping their lives (14). Digital participation nurtures lifelong learning and cognitive vitality. Encouraging technology use among seniors through family members, friends, and younger generations has been shown to increase motivation and participation; for instance, studies indicate that intergenerational digital feedback enhances seniors' engagement in online activities (25).

The digital world also broadens older adults' social and spiritual connections including family ties, friendships, and online faith communities. Since studies have shown a positive relationship between social support and spirituality, virtual connections may act as mediating factors in enhancing seniors' well-being (26).

Overall, the findings highlight that the intersection of spiritual self-care and digital entertainment provides a novel framework for meaningful aging. Seniors can use technology not only for leisure but also as a platform for spiritual growth and self-expression, becoming active and creative participants in their mental and social health. This innovative approach can inform the design of educational, recreational, and spiritual programs in

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digital environments, leading to significant improvements in older adults' quality of life (12, 27,28).

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of spirituality and digital entertainment can redefine the experience of aging into an active, creative, and meaningful process. Participation in digital activities such as games, social networks, and spiritual content reduces feelings of loneliness, enhances psychological well-being, strengthens personal identity, and improves life satisfaction among older adults.

This innovative approach encourages seniors to move from passivity to agency, fostering active self-care and enabling the experience of digital spirituality, which encompasses connection with others, mindfulness, and gratitude for life.

Providing opportunities for access to technology and digital spiritual content can serve as an effective strategy to promote mental health, quality of life, and social participation among older adults. Ultimately, the integration of spirituality and digital entertainment offers a novel framework for meaningful aging, one that not only strengthens psychological and cognitive health but also empowers older adults to become active and creative agents in their personal and social lives.

Limitations

This study faced several limitations that may affect the generalizability of its findings.

First, the sample was limited to older adults who had access to digital technologies and the ability to use them.

Second, data were primarily based on self-reported information, which may have been influenced by memory bias, personal attitudes, or a tendency toward socially desirable responses.

Third, the study was conducted within a specific geographical and cultural context, and the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of older adults in other societies or cultural settings.

Moreover, the narrative and qualitative nature of the study limits causal inference, as external factors such as family support, internet accessibility, and socioeconomic conditions could influence the relationship between spirituality and digital engagement among older adults and were not fully controlled in this review.

Finally, the research was cross-sectional and short-term, and thus did not assess long-term changes in attitudes, mental health, or quality of life resulting from continuous engagement with digital media.

Authors and Contributions

Maedeh Sadeghigolafshani: Conducted the main research, data collection, and preliminary drafting of the manuscript.

Anupriya Kumar: Edited the final manuscript, provided critical feedback, and contributed to conceptual refinement.

Hamid Hojjati (Corresponding Author): Supervised the study, guided the research process, and finalized the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version.

AI Use Declaration

Minimal use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools (~15%) was applied during manuscript editing to improve language clarity. All interpretations, analysis, and writing of the manuscript were conducted by the authors. AI was not used to generate content, analyze data, or interpret results.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to the content of this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

All data generated or analyzed during this study are fully available and accessible within the manuscript. Additional information can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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