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A Sociological Inquiry into AI-Based Companionship and its Impact on the Everyday Lives of the Elderly in Kolkata, West Bengal

Dr. Nabanita Das[1], Sayanti Naskar[2]

Assistant professor, Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University
PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Gour Banga

***Abstract*-- This paper examines how AI-based technologies are affecting the lives of the elderly in Kolkata, West Bengal. In the contemporary era, the emergence of AI-generated technologies has transformed the dynamics of family caregiving. Caregiving, which was originally a traditional form of moral obligation performed through filial duties, a part of cultural values, and a way to maintain unity among family members, has now been transformed or partially replaced by AI technologies. Hence, the responsibility of care has become highly personalised, closely monitored, and moralised at the level of individual family members. This also reshapes intergenerational relationships in the contemporary era. This paper will examine the level of awareness and the use of AI technologies in providing care to the elderly in Kolkata, and the elderly's interaction with AI and the subjective feelings they share about AI-generated care. This study will conclude by contemplating the challenges that the elderly face while using AI technologies. A qualitative approach is best suited for this research, enabling an in-depth analysis of the effects of AI on the daily experiences of the elderly people in Kolkata.**

***Keywords*--Artificial Intelligence, Caregiving, Elderly People, Kolkata, Subjective Feelings.**

I. Introduction

Ageing is inevitable; we all age irrespective of our class, caste, gender, economic conditions, political ideologies and so on. According to the 2001 census, the percentage of the elderly population was 7.5%, while the percentage rose to 8.5% in the 2011 census, a significant shift in our population that indicates a greying community (where the number of elderly people is rising as birth rates decline and life expectancy increases). Hence, looking after our older generations is a prime concern these days and needs to be addressed for a better future. With this rapid growth in the aged population, societies are now facing challenges in healthcare and in providing care to the elderly. Likewise, society is changing at warp speed and is testing our capability to adjust, adapt, and prosper. In this context, the rapid growth of artificial intelligence has been interwoven into the daily lives of elderly people through the widespread use of algorithmic decision-making, smart-home automation and chatbots (Mingming Fan, 2022).

If we notice the mainstream discourse, it tends to consider AI as a frictionless solution to all the problems of longevity or elderly people, while if we look critically, we would find that AI does not act as a neutral technological tool, but rather as a complex socio-technical structure that shapes ageing identities and power relations (Gallistl, 2005). In the daily lives of older people, AI and digital platforms initiate a negotiation between empowerment and systematic exclusion. There are two sides to a coin; on one side, digital platforms and AI companions offer varied options for learning, assist individuals in organising routines and socialise effectively, while challenging the 'digital divide' stereotype directly, which is often associated with older generations (EY Report, 2026). On the other side, the older generations are often considered as the passive subjects of surveillance, instead of their active involvement in digital environments (Gallistl, 2005). For older adults to remain safe, comfortable and independent, the application of AI and other automated devices has been transformed from a luxury to an ambient reality in the homes of the elderly (InsightAce Analytic, 2026). The acceptance and use of AI is not something homogeneous but rather fragmented, depending on the emotional needs of the individual, technical literacy and perceived burdens of use (Wolfe, 2025). For an older person, this AI can be both useful and disturbing simultaneously (Mingming Fan, 2022). This is because AI is responsible for both positive and negative changes that take place in the lives of the elderly. AI devices indeed monitor their lives, can track the elderly's health conditions such as blood pressure, heart rate, sleep patterns and can at the same time detect emergency falls. Children who live abroad due to higher studies or employment often carry out their filial duties by using AI-assisted technologies.

II. Objectives

1. The first objective is to explore the level of awareness and the use of AI in providing care to the elderly in Kolkata, West Bengal.

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2. The second objective is to explore how the elderly interact with AI and to understand their subjective feelings about those who are cared for by AI technologies rather than family members.
3. The third objective is to understand the challenges faced by the elderly while using AI technologies.

III. Literature Review

Fan and Thakur (2022), in *"Understanding older adults' perceptions and challenges in using AI-enabled everyday technologies"*, highlight the everyday struggles the elderly face when using AI technologies. Hereafter, instead of providing comfort and relief, technology is creating stress in the everyday lives of the elderly. The authors mention three main issues regarding this friction: Surprise Updates, which refers to constant updates in apps and devices, which make the user uncomfortable; Predictability Issues, where AI technologies are mostly unpredictable, leaving users confused and out of control; and Confusing interfaces: this implies non-transparent designs used in AI technology, which is again confusing and unclear.

Gallistl (2025), in *"How artificial intelligence is shaping our understanding of age(ing)",* explores how AI is reshaping the way society views growing old. According to him, if we depend too much on AI, then the lives of the elderly will only be about numbers, data points and health risks. Instead of providing independence to the elderly, the AI have made them look helpless and dependent.

Wong et al. (2025) viewed that older individuals have a very balanced outlook on how AI and care by humans can work together. Interviews state that the elderly do like Chatbots- that instantly reply to texts or enquiries and determine the urgency of a medical issue. But still, they have no faith in the replacement of humans with AI; they believe that AI should be used to help people, but it can never replace the warmth of humans.

Enam (2025) and his teammates saw the impact of the new AI chatbots on elderly individuals, where they found that the use of AI can speak like humans and also keep the human mind busy, which saves the old people from feeling less lonely. But it has also been found that older people sometimes get stuck and frustrated when they face empty chatbots and have to start from scratch. So, this study concludes that AI should be modified to have much more user-friendly interfaces.

IV. Theoretical Perspective

Modernisation theory states that technological and industrial development is responsible for transforming traditional social structures and relationships among family members.

According to Donald Cowgill and Lowell Holmes in the book *"Aging and Modernization"* published in 1972, modernisation results in the reduction of the social status and traditional authority of elderly people within the family and social structure. In the context of AI, technological advancement transforms caregiving practices from traditional forms of care to a technologically mediated care structure (Cowgill & Holmes, 1972). Marshall McLuhan in *"Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man",* published in 1964, put forward an argument in the context of Technological Determinism, where he highlights that technology shapes human behaviour, influences social interaction and culture. This approach by McLuhan explains in what way AI technologies influence caregiving relationships, communication patterns and experiences of the elderly in their everyday lives (McLuhan, 1964). George Herbert Mead, in *"Mind, Self, and Society"* published in 1934, and Blumer in *"Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method"* published in 1969, through a symbolic approach**,** focus on how people construct meanings through social interaction; hence, this analysis examines how elderly people interpret the AI technologies based on their experiences, emotions and within a social context (Mead 1934 & Blumer 1969). Activity Theory of Ageing by Robert J. Havighurst in *"Successful Aging"* published in 1961 suggests that successful ageing occurs when elderly people actively engage themselves in society (Havighurst, 1961). This paves the way for maintaining communication, independence and participation in social life. Disengagement Theory by Elaine Cumming and William Henry, proposed in *"Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement"* in 1961, emphasises that as individuals age, they gradually withdraw from social roles and interactions. With the advent of AI technologies, this might strengthen the disengagement theory while replacing care with other forms of human interaction (Cumming & Henry, 1961).

V. Research Methodology

Research methodology is a systematic approach adopted by the researcher to conduct a detailed and in-depth study on any particular topic. It includes research designs, methods, tools and techniques followed in the research while focusing on the study area, data sources, data analysis and interpretation of the topic. This study examines AI-based companionship and its impact on the everyday lives of elderly people in Kolkata, West Bengal. A qualitative research design has been pursued in the following research based on the secondary data collected through books, articles, journals and theses.

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Research Design

This study has been conducted through a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth insight into how Artificial Intelligence influences the daily lives of the elderly people in Kolkata, West Bengal. Furthermore, it also focuses on the lived experiences, perceptions, emotions and challenges faced by the elderly individuals in the context of AI-driven technologies in the contemporary era. Hence, this paper follows an exploratory and interpretive research design. Since, in this contemporary time, elderly life has been highly influenced by AI technologies and has become an emerging issue, especially in urban contexts, exploratory research is best suited to understand experiences that are not yet documented sufficiently. To understand how elderly individuals assign meanings to the AI technologies in their everyday lives, an interpretive approach would help the researcher to analyse this section.

Study Area

The study area selected for this research is Kolkata, as this place consists of a substantial ageing population compared to many Indian cities. Previous data have shown that urban Kolkata has witnessed a stable increase in the proportion of the elderly population due to the high life expectancy and demographic transition. Besides, Kolkata is a metropolitan city experiencing rapid digitalisation, an advanced health care system, better communication facilities, transportation and advanced public services. As a result, AI-enabled systems have become increasingly useful among the people living in Kolkata.

Data Sources

Secondary data is primarily used in this research paper, implementing a qualitative research approach to analyse the impacts of AI on the lives of elderly people. Data has been gathered from sources such as books and academic journals, government reports, research articles on ageing and AI, policy documents, newspaper articles and also from reports related to digital inclusion and geriatric care. Books on the ethic of care have also been studied.

Data Collection Procedures, Analysis And Interpretation

In this research article, data have been collected through a structured document review method. This method enables the researcher to evaluate existing documents, reports and records. Following this, the data is then interpreted by the researcher for proper screening and selection based on relevance, authenticity, credibility and connection to the objectives.

Thematic analysis is best suited for interpreting documentary data where the researcher has read the documents minutely to gain familiarity with the theme and arguments. Hence, the interpretation is that, with the advent of modernisation, the caregiving structure for the elderly has shifted significantly from kin-based care to technology-based care. Hence, it suggests that AI has become increasingly embedded in the daily lives of older adults, affecting the emotional, social, and relational dimensions of care. Traditionally, care was family-oriented and based on direct interaction, which, in contemporary times, has been entirely shaped by AI, resulting in AI-based care. ss

Ethical Considerations

This research follows the highest ethical standards throughout the research article. As the research is entirely based on document review and secondary sources, it has followed proper citations and acknowledged all the academic materials related to the topic. Reports and documents have been ensured to avoid plagiarism, and academic integrity has been maintained throughout the study. The researcher has interpreted only credible and authentic sources, keeping in mind to avoid personal bias.

VI. Findings

The findings of this research article reveal that the integration of Artificial Intelligence has significantly transformed and shaped the everyday lives of the elderly in terms of caregiving practices. The documents that have been reviewed suggest that AI-based technologies have increased comfort and convenience, healthcare accessibility among the elderly, while AI-generated care has also reduced direct human interaction and touch within caregiving relationships. AI-based technologies such as virtual assistants, telemedicine, smart monitoring devices, and digital communication platforms have provided the elderly with care in the absence of their kin who live abroad due to employment or higher education. Though AI provides safety and support, it can never replace the love and care provided by families or relatives. It has been studied that this is not the result of ignorance or abandonment of the elderly by their children, but rather due to the valid physical distance and unavoidable absence; they express their care, concern, love and emotional support through AI-generated technologies. The elderly people share mixed responses in terms of this, where they appreciate the support while simultaneously longing for direct human touch and face-to-face interaction.

The reaction towards AI-generated care is often ambivalent, where they feel secure with it while being lonely and emotionally distant. According to them, no form of technology can replace the love and care of their children, but due to unavoidable circumstances, they make necessary adaptations to it. The elderly also face numerous challenges while using AI technologies, as they lack digital literacy and knowledge, and are scared of making mistakes concerning online fraud, scams or cybercrimes. Physical difficulties can also occur, such as poor eyesight, hearing problems, etc. This might also lead to feelings of exclusion in the digital society.

VII. Conclusion

This paper concludes that Artificial Intelligence has been a significant tool in transforming and reshaping contemporary caregiving practices. This transition from traditional forms of care to AI-generated care services reflects broader and varied social changes connected to urbanisation, modernisation, migration and digitalisation. The AI-enabled technologies, such as smart monitoring devices, digital communication gadgets, telemedicine, etc., have made the lives of the elderly comfortable and convenient, but at the same time, created a void in their lives. However, the data collected also reveals that care-giving is not a functional activity only, but it also highlights an emotional and social relationship which deeply enhances human interaction, affection, empathy and interpersonal relationships. Though AI provides security and support to the elderly, they fail to replace the emotional warmth of family members entirely. The findings suggest that children who live far away from their parents due to unavoidable circumstances, such as higher education and employment, take the help of AI and digital technologies as alternatives to express their care, concern and love. But this should not be interpreted as parental neglect or abandonment. Hence, it could be inferred that AI plays the role of both an advantageous and a disadvantageous tool, where it is considered a source of empowerment for the elderly, while at the same time, they contribute to emotional isolation and loneliness in their lives. Overall, the research emphasises the need for balance between caregiving technologies and human relationships. AI can become more effective if they are combined with human relationships; this would enhance the emotions among the generations and can value the benefits of AI simultaneously.

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