

Social Media Use and Family Caregivers’ Caring Experience and Well-being in Hong Kong¹

Background

In Hong Kong, there are over 280,000 family caregivers who provide care for their family members in need. Caring for others in need is stressful and challenging. According to the report “Needs and Support Required of Carers of Elderly Persons and of Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong” released in 2022, Hong Kong family caregivers spend 5 to 6 days and around 40 to 70 hours a week in caring for their family members. Furthermore, previous studies also revealed that family caregivers were more likely to report poor physical and mental well-being. In the same report, up to over 80% of family caregivers report that information technology (IT) is useful for them to get information, and around 30 % of family caregivers also think that IT is very helpful for relieving their care burden. This information indicates that IT is promising for caregivers’ experience and well-being enhancement. In the internet era, social media, as a popular IT, has been integrated into many people’s daily life. However, until now, the specific roles of social media use in family caregivers’ well-being and experience have been neglected.

Aims

Given this, we conducted an exploratory study to examine:

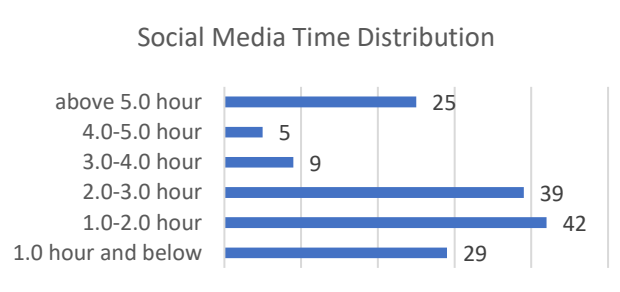
- The overview of social media use among family caregivers in Hong Kong
- The relationships between social media use and caregiving performance
- The impacts of social media use on family caregivers’ well-being and experience.

Methods

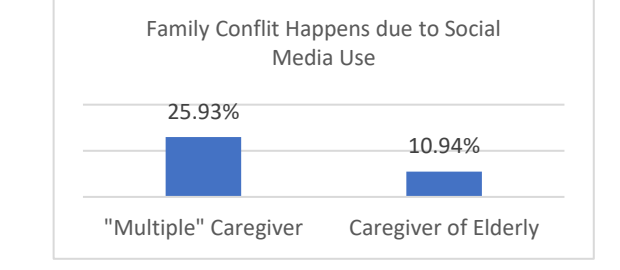
An online questionnaire-based survey was conducted among family caregivers who live in Hong Kong. From August to October 2022, we collected 149 valid samples. Two groups are identified for further analysis: family caregivers who only take care of the elderly (i.e., caregiver of the elderly, N=66) and family caregivers who take care of the elderly and family members below 60 years old (i.e., “multiple” caregivers, N=83). Data analyses for these two groups are performed with descriptive analysis, frequency table, t-test, and crosstab analysis with a chi-squared test.

Key Findings

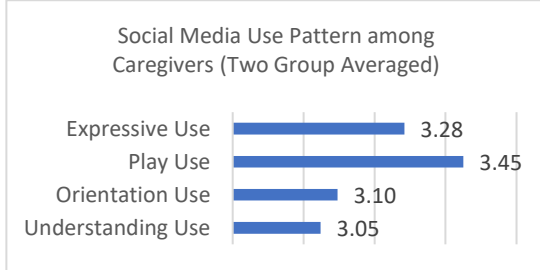
All family caregivers who attend the survey are using social media, but their engagement varies

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Top three most popular social media among family caregivers: WhatsApp, Facebook, and WeChat/Instagram2) Most family caregivers spend one to three hours a day on social media (See Figure on the right)3) On average, family caregivers use social media around 3 hours a day, which is higher than the social media time consumed by the general online population in Hong Kong (i.e., 1.88 hours a day)	 <p>Social Media Time Distribution</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Time Range</th><th>Count</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>above 5.0 hour</td><td>25</td></tr><tr><td>4.0-5.0 hour</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>3.0-4.0 hour</td><td>9</td></tr><tr><td>2.0-3.0 hour</td><td>39</td></tr><tr><td>1.0-2.0 hour</td><td>42</td></tr><tr><td>1.0 hour and below</td><td>29</td></tr></tbody></table>	Time Range	Count	above 5.0 hour	25	4.0-5.0 hour	5	3.0-4.0 hour	9	2.0-3.0 hour	39	1.0-2.0 hour	42	1.0 hour and below	29
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Around 25% of social media use time is for family caring

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Around 75% of family caregivers report that their commonly used social media is also commonly used in caregiving2) About a quarter of social media time is related to family caring3) Social media use-induced disputes occur more frequently in the ‘multiple’ caregiver group ($p<0.05$) (See Figure on the right)	 <p>Family Conflict Happens due to Social Media Use</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Group</th><th>Percentage</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>"Multiple" Caregiver</td><td>25.93%</td></tr><tr><td>Caregiver of Elderly</td><td>10.94%</td></tr></tbody></table>	Group	Percentage	"Multiple" Caregiver	25.93%	Caregiver of Elderly	10.94%
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Social media use significantly promotes social capital and positive aspect of caregiving

<p>1) Both groups agreed significantly higher in play use and expressive use than that in understanding use and orientation use (Paired Sample t Test: $p < 0.001$)</p> <p>2) Play use and expressive use significantly facilitate the online social capital accumulation and perceived positive aspect of caregiving (independent sample t-test: $p < 0.05$)</p>	 <table border="1"> <caption>Social Media Use Pattern among Caregivers (Two Group Averaged)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Use Type</th> <th>Score</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Expressive Use</td> <td>3.28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Play Use</td> <td>3.45</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Orientation Use</td> <td>3.10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Understanding Use</td> <td>3.05</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Use Type	Score	Expressive Use	3.28	Play Use	3.45	Orientation Use	3.10	Understanding Use	3.05
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Conclusions

- Social media is not only integrated into daily life but also blended into caregiving life.**
 - Family caregivers use social media around 3 hours per day.
 - Around 75% of family caregivers indicate that their commonly used social media is also usually used in caregiving.
 - About a quarter of social media time is for family caring.
 - Social media use-induced disputes occur more frequently in the group of ‘multiple’ caregivers.
- Social media use, especially play use and expressive use, displays positive impacts on family caregivers’ well-being and experience.**
 - Play use and expressive use significantly facilitate the online social capital accumulation and perceived positive aspect of caregiving.
 - Compared with the understanding use and orientation use, family caregivers report a higher level of play use and expressive use.

Recommendations:

In public address 2022 and the report “Needs and Support Required of Carers of Elderly Persons and of Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong”, one-stop information gateway and peer communication in the community are both important foci of supporting caregivers. With the findings of this report, we recommend social media to be a tool for enhancing the support for caregivers from four aspects:

- Digital support for caregivers: as an important part or complementary of the caregiver-centric, sustainable, and easily accessible one-stop information platform.
- We should call for more “caregiver-centred” use of social media: play use and expressive use.
- Peer support for caregivers: facilitating online and offline communication between peers and caregivers in the community with social media platforms to build up a caregiver-friendly community.
- More research is needed to help caregivers become effective in information consumption to avoid conflicts.

Acknowledgement

This report is a collaboration project with four parties listed in the Table below:

Sau Po Centre on Ageing, The University of Hong Kong	https://ageing.hku.hk/
The Outstanding Givers	http://www.givers.org.hk/
Tung Wah Group of Hospitals	https://www.tungwah.org.hk/
Wofoo Social Enterprise	https://wse.hk/

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