Research

Longevity Through Storytelling: The Silver Passport Case Study

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Abstract:
The Silver Passport Case Study investigates the preservation and dissemination of collective wisdom through storytelling, focusing on the active engagement of older adults as knowledge sharers. This initiative addresses the digital divide among older adults in Peru, fostering intergenerational connections through innovative methodologies for capturing and sharing personal histories. The study details the project's inception, implementation, and impact, underscoring its role in enhancing social inclusion and emotional well-being among senior participants. The primary results indicate notable improvements in digital literacy, social connectivity, and emotional health among the older adults. The project effectively bridged generational gaps and fostered mutual understanding between age groups. Future research should explore the long-term effects of digital storytelling on social inclusion and psychological health across different cultural contexts. This exploration is essential for developing strategies to address the challenges of aging populations and the digital divide.

Keywords: storytelling, digital inclusion, intergenerational connections, senior engagement, collective wisdom, emotional well-being

1. Introduction

Digital literacy among s in Peru remains a significant challenge, despite a reported increase in internet usage to 25% by 2022 (INEI, 2023). This lack of digital skills limits their ability to share valuable life experiences and cultural heritage. The Silver Passport project seeks to bridge this gap by equipping older adults with the necessary tools and platforms to share their stories digitally. This initiative aims to preserve their wisdom and foster intergenerational connections, contributing to cultural preservation and community building (Tessler et al., 2021; Palma, 2024). Barbosa et al. (2019) confirm that digital communication enhances social connectedness among older adults, reducing isolation and loneliness.

Hülür & Macdonald (2020) state that "Digitalization has provided new ways to communicate and develop social ties, contributing to more positive social experiences and well-being in old age." The Silver Passport project adopts a user-centered design approach, essential for developing assistive technologies tailored to the needs of older adults. Wang et al. (2019) highlight the importance of involving older adults in the design process to uncover their unique perspectives, leading to more effective and accepted technologies. They emphasize that "technology can support independent living, but it must align with the real-world needs and preferences of older adults, emphasizing usability, privacy, and co-design participation" (Wang et al., 2019).

Under the mentorship of the International Center for Journalists, the Silver Passport initiative effectively mitigated the digital divide and promoted social inclusion among older adults by involving them in storytelling activities with younger generations.

The project's inception in the post-COVID era back in August 2021 highlighted the critical need to document the life stories and cultural heritage of older adults, who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic's social isolation. By employing innovative methodologies for digital storytelling, the Silver Passport initiative not only preserved the collective wisdom of older adults but also fostered intergenerational connections that contributed to the emotional well-being of all participants.

The focus group sessions and online survey revealed that both older adults and youth valued the opportunity to connect and share stories. The use of familiar technology, such as WhatsApp, facilitated these interactions and made the process accessible (Arbanas et al., 2024).

2. Material and Methods

The case study method was selected for this project as it is a common approach for conducting qualitative research, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the Silver Passport initiative. Focus groups were utilized as the primary means of data collection, incorporating techniques such as interviewing and observation to gather rich, detailed insights from participants.

The findings suggest that storytelling can be a powerful tool for preserving cultural heritage and enhancing emotional well-being (Dimoulas, 2022). By providing a platform for older adults to share their stories, the Silver Passport initiative fosters a sense of belonging and purpose among older adults participants while bridging generational gaps (Tessler et al., 2021). This aligns with broader trends in cultural heritage management, where user engagement and participation are increasingly recognized as vital components (Palma, 2024).

In addition to focus groups, the study also employed online surveys to gather supplementary data on participants' digital habits and preferences. These mixed methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the project's impact and effectiveness. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data reinforced the conclusion that digital storytelling not only supports the preservation of cultural narratives but also significantly contributes to the social inclusion and emotional well-being of older adults.

2.1. Focus Groups

The focus groups were conducted in El Parque Infantil de Chiclayo, an open area in Chiclayo, Peru, to adhere to COVID-19 prevention measures. This setting was chosen to ensure a safe and conducive environment for interaction between participants.

The focus group sessions were conducted, each involving three older adults and three youth participants. The older adults, aged over 60 years, were considered part of a vulnerable group, particularly impacted by the pandemic's social isolation. The sessions were meticulously designed to facilitate intergenerational connections through structured activities, user testing questions, and technology training. Each session lasted for two hours and included the following activities:

1. Welcome and Introduction: Participants were introduced to the project, and consent was obtained for recording the sessions. This segment aimed to create a welcoming atmosphere and explain the project's objectives and significance.

2. User Testing Questions: Both older adults and youth were asked about their preferences for storytelling formats and platforms. This activity was designed to gather insights into their digital habits and preferences for sharing stories.

3. Technology Training: Participants were trained on using WhatsApp for recording and sharing stories. This practical session aimed to equip both older adults and youth with the necessary skills to utilize digital tools for storytelling.

4. Storytelling Sessions: Older adults shared their stories with the youth, who then reflected on what they heard. This reciprocal storytelling activity fostered a deeper understanding and connection between the generations.

2.2. Online Survey

An online survey was administered to 22 senior participants to gather additional insights into their digital habits and interests. This method was chosen to specifically target older adults who are relatively tech-savvy, ensuring that the respondents had a basic level of digital literacy necessary to complete an online survey. The survey included questions about their internet usage patterns, preferred storytelling formats, and favored platforms for sharing stories. The survey's design aimed to understand the older adults' engagement with digital tools, which is crucial for tailoring the Silver Passport initiative to better suit their needs and preferences. By identifying the most effective formats and platforms, the project could enhance its approach to preserving cultural heritage and fostering intergenerational connections through digital storytelling.

Figure 1. A: Participants of the Silver Passport initiative engage in a focus group session at El Parque Infantil de Chiclayo, Peru. B: A senior participant shares a personal story while a youth participant records the interaction on a smartphone during a focus group session of the Silver Passport initiative in Chiclayo, Peru.

3. Results
3.1. Focus Group Findings
Key findings from the focus groups, which included a total of three older adults and three youth participants, were as follows:
- Participation and Interest: Both older adults and youth showed a strong interest in sharing and hearing stories. Older adults were particularly interested in topics such as the economy, politics, family stories, health, local history, and personal experiences.

- Technology Use: All older adults used WhatsApp, with preferences for text and video formats. Youth participants also favored WhatsApp and expressed interest in podcast formats.
- Content Length: Older adults preferred longer, detailed stories (around 5 minutes), while youth favored shorter stories (1-3 minutes).
- Emotional Impact: Both older adults and youth reported positive feelings after participating, with older adults feeling heard and youth appreciating the opportunity to learn and help.

3.2. Online Survey Results

An online survey was conducted with 22 senior participants to obtain additional insights into their digital habits and interests:

- Internet Usage: Only a small percentage of older adults actively used the internet, highlighting the need for digital literacy support.
- Story Preferences: Older adults expressed a desire to share stories that conveyed personal experiences and cultural heritage.
- Platform Preferences: Older adults were more inclined to share stories via Facebook, while youth preferred platforms like TikTok for content consumption.

4. Discussion

The name "Silver Passport" symbolizes the empowerment of older adults to explore and share their rich life histories and cultural experiences, effectively giving them a 'passport' to connect with the digital world. Participants recounted a variety of stories, from traditional folklore to personal anecdotes, which not only preserved cultural narratives but also provided a sense of identity and continuity for the younger generation.

5. Conclusions

The Silver Passport project, launched in August 2021 post-COVID, aimed to preserve cultural heritage and enhance the emotional well-being of older adults through storytelling. This initiative was introduced to address the digital divide among older adults in Peru, equipping them with the necessary tools and platforms to share their life stories and cultural heritage digitally. The project targeted older adults aged 60 and above as active knowledge sharers, and younger individuals aged 18-30 as listeners and digital facilitators.

By fostering intergenerational connections, the Silver Passport demonstrated the power of storytelling in bridging generational gaps and promoting social inclusion. Integrating digital technology enriched the lives of older adults and provided the younger generation with valuable cultural insights. The positive outcomes observed in both target groups underscore the importance of preserving cultural narratives, contributing significantly to the emotional and social well-being of participants.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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