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University: Dartmouth College

Project Title: The impact of evolving technology in maintaining socialized cultural learning

Location: Mumbai, India

Partners: Lookup India, Srishti Institute of Art, Design, and Technology, Old age homes

The Problem

Technology makes society faster, more productive, and connected, but it also leaves people marginalized and feeling like the world has passed by them. This holds true especially in societies that live communally - such as in India where families typically live together for many generations at a time. A survey in 2017 in India found 85.8% elderly to be digitally illiterate and 51% of the candidates unaware of resources that can help them learn (*Economic Times*). Lack of digital awareness can **disrupt peace at 3 levels:**

National Level: India is a country of different cultures and heritage passed down several generations. The recent **lack of communication** between the elderly and the youth due to the digital takeover affects this way of living in India and disrupts generations from passing on valuable information. The increased use of digital forms of communication without the right resources to identify or validate sources leads to the **spread of misinformation** which can be dangerous and has previously even led to false treatments for COVID-19 or conspiracy theories on the origin of the virus (*Badrinathan*), and even cases of mob killings (*Elyse*).

Societal Level: The social structure of families in India is changing drastically from large families with multiple generations living in one house to nuclear style families (*Forbes India*). Elderly living separately from their family leads to children worrying about their elderly parents' health and the elderly being stressed by their lowered physical and mental abilities. **Limited fluency in digital tools** prevents them from becoming more independent, making youth see them as a burden and as a result spend less time with them.

Personal Level: Increasing isolation that arises from a feeling of disassociating with present day, family, and with familiar things causes mental health issues. Over 71% of people in India view **mental illness as a social stigma** that can leave people in the dark without the needed help (*World Economic Forum*).

There is therefore a large need to address the effect of evolving technology on the elderly and how they can start using it to their advantage for better communication and independence with the **right resources to guide** them.

Why Me?

My story: My passion for building ethical tech-products, and creating tech-awareness, came in high school from teaching my 80-year-old grandfather in India how to better use his computer. Helping him become more independent, and small wins such as calling a cab for himself or telling me about his childhood through pictures he found online and seeing the joy on his face motivates me every day.

My experience: At Dartmouth College, I study Computer Science and Engineering and Human Computer Interaction. As a senior, I've spent time inside the classroom and outside deepening my moral responsibility on the effects of technology. I work with Dartmouth Humanitarian Engineering to empathize with how differently abled, homeless, and other folks can leverage technology. For three years now, I have been an advocate of tech-life balance through youth led solutions, founding Lookup India, a branch of a non-profit organization called Lookup.Live. Through Lookup, I have organized 2 talks and hosted an interview-based podcast to help people lead a healthy lifestyle with technology. Previously I have volunteered at old age homes in India and speak the local language, Hindi, which will make communication easier throughout my time there.

Solution and Impact

I plan to implement this project at all three levels of peace because of their interrelated impact on the elderly and society:

National Level: Creating a media campaign to raise **awareness on misinformation** due to misuse of technology will change the mindset of the elderly. The campaign would be in the form of illustrations like comics or satirical drawings posted to local and national newspapers that can reach the elderly across India. The illustrations will be made by selected students from Srishti Institute of Art, Design, and Technology who specialise in information arts, including Tvishaa Shah, an artist and advocate who has agreed to help.

Societal Level: To be able to improve family relationships, independence with the use of technology is important. I hope to use my network of people in Lookup India and Jamnabai Narsee School students in Mumbai to conduct **hands-on workshops in retirement homes** to help the elderly use their devices effectively. Some examples include: setting reminders to take medicines, creating digital notes of family

recipes, taking and sending pictures to family, video calling family, adding visual or audio aids for accessibility on devices, how to use the phone as a magnifying glass, online banking, and more. Partnering with Lookup India, a grant competition will be hosted for youth to pitch digital products that help the **elderly become self-reliant** in their daily activities. It will be in a 24-hour Hackathon format with students from schools and colleges across Mumbai competing in groups of 2-3 people. The winner team will receive seed funds to make their product a reality and to test usage at the old age homes. They will also be able to leverage advice from my Design Thinking professors at Dartmouth and my experience with winning a similar competition previously for tech-life balance.

Personal Level: Workshops will also include using tech as fun pastimes for the elderly like downloading old Bollywood songs or playing religious chants that they otherwise struggle to sing. To improve mental health and increase their confidence, activities like painting, games, and dancing can be hosted. Partnerships with local meditation and Yoga centres will be made to teach the elderly how to meditate and **maintain their mental health**.

Sustainability

After the media campaign column in the newspaper gains traction, the illustrations will be crowdsourced. People can send in illustrations or other art pieces that the elderly made for the column via email. This initiative will be owned by Srishti College students and made into a club supported and financed by Srishti College to continue for years. The students will also be taken to old age homes for workshops to empathise with the cause and be motivated to draw illustrations and spread the message. Workshops for the elderly will include learning how to Google for help and learn from YouTube so the elderly can get help whenever they need in the future. Dance and art workshops are already hosted by local old age homes and will be continued but with more direction and purpose of mental health improvement after our initiatives. Lookup India will host Design Thinking workshops for youth to change how people create digital products to start creating them to solve needs of society, keeping the user in mind. These workshops will continue even after my summer involvement. This will stay with not only the elderly but all marginalised sectors of society for years to come. We also look forward to gaining traction and feedback from the families of the people we will help.

Timeline

Preparation: June to July 2022

Creating the newspaper illustration comic club at Srishti and booking newspaper columns.

Gather 10 high school students and create the plan and timeline for workshops.

Buy resources needed for activities and workshops.

Implementation: July to August 2022

Create and publish one illustration per week in the chosen newspapers.

Host 3 workshops weekly in various old age homes and self-organized and advertised spaces.

Have 1 fun activity per week in each old age home.

Metrics for Success: August 2022 onwards

Measured by the quantity of crowdsourced articles and interest from the newspaper.

If old age homes are willing to continue workshops and elderly become more self-sufficient according to their families (gauged from a survey sent out towards the end).

A more lively environment in spaces with a concentrated elderly population.

Appendix

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