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Research article

Philosophy of Well-being: Quality of Life and Inclusion of the Elderly Population of Kazakhstan in the Era of Digitalization

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Abstract. The topic of well-being is one of the most relevant not only in the academic environment, but also in various kinds of social discourses and public discussions. The problem discussed in this article is that the majority of the elderly experience certain difficulties when using digital tools, the role of which is rapidly increasing in public life. The purpose of our research is to analyze the quality of life and inclusion of the elderly population of Kazakhstan in the era of digitalization through the prism of the philosophy of well-being. The main research method is an analytical review of academic articles and policy documents related to both the concept of well-being and the digitalization of social and economic processes, that is, the impact of technology on the quality of life of an aging population. In addition, we analyzed the existing digital applications of Kazakhstani and foreign developers designed for the elderly. As a result of the study, conclusions are drawn about the influence of the philosophy of well-being on the quality of life of older people in Kazakhstan and on their involvement in social processes.

Key words: Philosophy of well-being; quality of life; elderly population; inclusion; digitalization; government programs; digital applications.

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Introduction

One of the main issues in the discourse being studied is that the concept of well-being itself has not yet been fully conceptualized, leading to discrepancies in academic texts and public usage of the term. In this article, we approach well-being as a philosophical concept that encompasses the most essential aspects of the term, such as the objectivity of well-being, which stems from a general understanding of the term, the subjectivity of well-being perception, which depends on individual values and life satisfaction, as well as the welfare and prosperity of society based on social and economic indicators. We apply this understanding to analyze the quality of life of the elderly population in Kazakhstan in the era of digitalization. In other words, our first research question is formulated as follows: To what extent has the topic of well-being been explored in the academic field, and how much attention is given to the well-being of the elderly in the digital era within the programmatic documents of Kazakhstan? Another aspect of our article focuses on the inclusion of the elderly, posing the second research question as: What is the level of involvement of the aging population in social processes that also tend to rapidly digitalize?

Methodology, methods and materials

The authors conducted an analytical review of academic articles and program documents related to the topic of the study. When using the concepts of «well-being» and «quality of life», the authors rely on an integral characteristic that includes a complex system of cultural, socio-economic, and political indicators, factors, and conditions, given that these concepts are not fully conceptualized in scientific literature. The authors studied materials from the World Assemblies on Aging of 1982 and 2002, the 2020 report «Assessment of the Socio-Economic Status and Needs of the Elderly in Kazakhstan (Results of a Comprehensive National Sociological Study)», developed with the technical support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Kazakhstan, the 2020 baseline report «Decade of Healthy Aging», and the national plan «Active Longevity» for 2020-2025. The existing database of digital applications and programs developed by foreign and Kazakhstani developers, aimed at use by the elderly, was also analyzed.

Discussion

The concept of «well-being» encompasses a wide range of interpretations, both in academic contexts across different disciplines and in everyday perceptions. Well-being is understood as life satisfaction, mental balance, an optimistic outlook on life, and much more. Additionally, the meaning of «well-being» can vary depending on cultural contexts and how different age groups perceive it. Researchers note that «...scholars agree that well-being is a multidimensional concept, but they differ in opinions regarding what these dimensions and components are. This situation is problematic» (Jarden et al., 2023).

When discussing the philosophy of well-being, we draw on various theories that focus on its general nature, often grounded in ethical and axiological foundations. These typically include hedonistic and eudaimonistic theories. Regarding the specific philosophical foundations of well-

being for the elderly, Soren Harnow Klausen notes that despite significant research interest in this topic, a theory of well-being for the elderly as such still does not exist. Moreover, S. Klausen emphasizes the unique psychological characteristics of the elderly and their typical living conditions, arguing that these factors, which are considered components of well-being, should be interpreted and weighed differently compared to other age groups (Klausen, 2020).

Recently, the term «positive aging» has become increasingly common in the context of elderly well-being. For instance, researchers define positive aging as «...a multidimensional concept that effectively combines various characteristics of aging, such as optimal, successful, productive, and healthy aging. Positive aging consists of five independent factors: health, cognitive abilities, activity, affect, and physical fitness. In practice, this is determined by a wide range of biopsychosocial factors and is evaluated using both objective and subjective indicators. The core idea is that at any age, including old and very old, people are to some extent responsible for the quality of their lives» (Bar-Tur, 2021). In other words, positive aging is the key to the well-being and inclusion of the elderly population in an aging world.

Another significant issue is the complexity of measuring well-being. What are the criteria for well-being? How objective are they? Researchers note that «...recent trends in well-being measurement have raised scientific standards and rigor associated with approaches to national and international comparisons of well-being. One of the main themes of this research has been the shift towards multidimensional approaches rather than relying on traditional indicators such as single measures (e.g., happiness, life satisfaction) or economic indicators (e.g., GDP)» (Ruggeri et al., 2021).

The interconnection between the concepts of population aging and technological progress also receives considerable attention in academic literature. A special issue of the journal «Aging and Technology» features articles covering a wide range of international research on aging and technology. The collection of articles demonstrates the positive impact that technology can have on the lives of elderly people, including improvements in cognitive abilities, physical and mental health, and daily activities (Marston et al., 2021).

These publications predominantly address the medical aspect of population aging. For example, Wu Y.-H., Lewis M., and Rigaud A.-S. (Wu et al., 2019) discuss how the use of technology can benefit people's health by stimulating cognitive abilities, improving memory, and enhancing thinking. At the same time, the authors highlight other aspects of how technology affects the lives of elderly people, noting that interacting with technology can become challenging and burdensome later in life due to difficulties with graphical user interfaces, pressing multiple buttons, and using peripheral devices and/or screens (e.g., smartphones) because of age-related health issues (e.g., dexterity, vision problems, and cognitive impairments) and for people with various forms of disabilities (Marston et al., 2020).

The discussion also includes studies on Virtual Assistants (VAS), which can enable people (including the elderly) who experience such difficulties to still benefit from technology, such as listening to music, setting medication reminders, and making phone calls, including to emergency contacts and/or emergency services (White et al., 2020). Another important aspect of using technology to assist elderly people is the ability to connect them to places they can no longer visit by using virtual reality (Brown, 2019).

«Digital transformation and demographic changes are two meta-processes that have impacted the age and aging of populations», write researchers Race-Heikkinen and Michael Doherty (Race-Heikkinen et al., 2023). They note that the digital transformation of public and private services, such as healthcare and social services, is currently a priority for governments in both developed and developing countries. Digitalization is expected to enhance service accessibility and ensure equal access to them. However, it is also acknowledged that digitalization can have negative consequences for some elderly individuals. This occurs because there are elderly people who either cannot or do not wish to use the provided digital technologies and services or use them in a way that does not fully contribute to their well-being, daily life, and participation in modern digital society. Particularly during pandemics like COVID-19, the non-use or limited use of digital technologies and media can have serious consequences for digital and social isolation, as well as for the risks of obsolescence and loneliness (O'Sullivan et al., 2021).

Another study focuses on digitalization and demographic changes as two major and interconnected social transformations that significantly shape societies in the 21st century. Scholars observe that new aging population groups are increasingly adopting digital technologies, but research still concludes that the digital divide between age groups persists. The vast majority of studies focus on the positive potential of digitalization; however, in line with discourses on digital fatigue and digital detox, research also questions the uncritical assumption that digital technologies are always beneficial for their users, including the elderly. Thus, studies have also highlighted the potential risks associated with digitalization for aging (Wanka et al., 2023).

Results

Elderly Population in the Era of Digitalization: A Literature Review.

The inclusion of elderly people in digital life can be approached from various perspectives. In one scientific study, researchers examined this phenomenon from two angles (Hänninen et al., 2021). First, digital inclusion is defined as the extent to which elderly individuals or specific groups of elderly people can participate in the life of a digitalizing society through digital technologies, media, and services. Second, digital inclusion involves digital engagement, which refers to policies, practices, and research projects designed to encourage, study, and assess the participation of elderly people in the digital society. Moreover, digital inclusion is connected to a range of aspects, including digital skills, digital health literacy, digital empowerment, digital volunteering, and digital neighborliness.

Another study, involving participants aged 63 to 86 living in the United Kingdom, identified three interrelated but analytically distinct themes related to the meaning and experience of using digital devices in daily life during and after the pandemic. These themes are thematically presented as follows: the integration of digital technologies into daily life; social and digital connections; and challenges and limitations of digital technologies in everyday life. This study also paid considerable attention to the issue of ageism, as researchers believe that digital technologies represent a domain where elderly people frequently encounter ageism in various forms. The perception of elderly individuals as incompetent and unwilling to use digital technologies serves not only as a prejudice but also as a barrier to the broader adoption of

these technologies by this demographic. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of digital technologies and platforms are often not designed with elderly users in mind, which adds another layer of discrimination and ageism in the use of digital technologies (Martin et al., 2023).

The issue of ageism in the application of digital technologies is also emphasized by the authors of the article «Older Adults Can Use Technology: Why Healthcare Professionals Must Overcome Ageism in Digital Health» by Ryan A. Mace, Meghan K. Mattos, and Ana-Maria Vranceanu (Mace et al., 2022). The researchers examine a case in which, despite the active use by elderly individuals of various smartphone applications and other digital health technologies to reduce barriers to healthcare and promote self-management of diseases, many healthcare professionals still adhere to outdated, ageism-rooted beliefs that digital health and elderly people are incompatible. The authors urge all sectors of healthcare to challenge ageist beliefs and practices that have led to the «digital divide in healthcare» among elderly patients and provide examples of evidence-based strategies and ongoing scientific initiatives that can promote the adoption of digital technologies in healthcare research, clinical practice, and education.

Thus, it can be noted that the well-being of elderly people, the impact of digital technologies on their quality of life, and inclusion are quite thoroughly examined in the global academic literature. However, it is premature to speak of a philosophy of well-being for the elderly population, as the theoretical and conceptual foundations of this phenomenon have not yet been developed.

Another problem is that in domestic research, the topic of elderly well-being through the lens of digitalization and inclusion is hardly addressed. In the 2020 report «Assessment of the Socio-Economic Status and Needs of the Elderly in Kazakhstan (Results of a Comprehensive National Sociological Study)» (Alimbekova et al., 2020), researchers discuss the socio-economic status and preferences of elderly people in Kazakhstan. This report touches on various aspects of elderly life, such as their health status and the availability and quality of medical services, assessment of the need for assistance and the channels through which it is received, preferences of the elderly population regarding state socio-economic support, their social and political activity, their awareness of government programs and social support systems, and other important issues. Although this report is a fundamental study concerning the life activities of the elderly population in Kazakhstan, it does not address crucial questions such as digitalization and its impact on the well-being of pre-retirement and retirement-age individuals, nor the formation of the foundations of a philosophy of well-being for the aging population. This omission may be due to the fact that digitalization processes have become more actively implemented after 2020, influenced by both the pandemic and the rapidly developing digital industry.

As researchers note, despite the extensive range of studies dedicated to digitalization and later life, we still know little about what digital inclusion and isolation mean for elderly people and their experience of aging, as well as how to promote digital inclusion in a way that elderly individuals themselves would desire (Wanka et al., 2023).

«Perhaps more than anything else, the well-being of elderly people demonstrates the complex, holistic, and dynamic nature of well-being in general; how it—while not being fundamentally incomprehensible, relative, or subjective—depends on the subtle interplay between cognition and affect, values, preferences, and experience», notes Søren Harnow Klausen (Klausen, 2020).

Well-being of the Elderly Population and Digitalization in Kazakhstan.

In Kazakhstan, the well-being of the elderly population and the role of digitalization have gained increasing attention, especially in recent years. Until recently, state policies on aging were integrated into broader sectors like healthcare, social security, and social services without specific focus on the elderly. However, the «Active Longevity» national plan, implemented from 2020 to 2025, stands out as a significant initiative dedicated specifically to this demographic. This plan led to the establishment of Active Longevity Centers across various regions in Kazakhstan. These centers focus on three key areas: promoting active aging, encouraging a culture of health, and fostering community engagement. The centers offer a variety of activities, including sports like yoga and Nordic walking, educational courses such as language and computer literacy classes, as well as workshops, counseling, and various events (Alimbekova et al., 2020).

In addition to these centers, older generations in Kazakhstan participate in social life through volunteerism. The «Silver Volunteer» project, for example, involves 689 elderly individuals across 17 regions. Moreover, the elderly can pursue further education through the «Silver University» program, which is offered in 72 universities nationwide. Notably, this program also includes courses in computer literacy. For instance, in February 2022, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU) organized free two-month computer courses for elderly people (Bilimdinews, 2022). These types of courses are initiated by both governmental and private organizations. The «Connect-ed» foundation in Astana, for instance, has held free three-week digital literacy courses for retirees, such as the «I am now online» course in the spring of 2022. These courses teach basic digital skills, smartphone usage, popular digital applications, and introduce concepts of internet etiquette and digital security (The Village Kazakhstan, 2023). Previously, in 2017, a project on mobile literacy, called «Digital Life», was implemented in Aktau by the company «Kcell» and the agency «E-event», where elderly participants were taught how to use mobile applications (Lada, 2017).

These initiatives reflect Kazakhstan's growing focus on improving the well-being of its elderly population through digital inclusion and active engagement in society, addressing both the challenges and opportunities presented by an increasingly digital world.

Currently, older adults in Kazakhstan are active internet users, with two-thirds possessing the necessary skills and frequently using the internet. More than half (54%) of elderly individuals reported daily internet use within the last three months, whether at home, work, or elsewhere. However, around 31% had not used the internet at all during the same period, while 15% used it with varying frequency, from once a week to once a month (Alimbekova et al., 2020: 58).

Despite the availability of digital literacy courses and the encouragement of online communication, experts note a generally low level of digital literacy among the elderly population (Alimbekova et al., 2020: 71). According to OECD data from 2023, «less than 30% of Kazakhstan's population has basic ICT skills» (OECD, 2023). This digital divide poses significant challenges for older adults, particularly in accessing services that are increasingly available only online. Many older individuals struggle with using electronic systems for various services, including social services. For instance, they may find it difficult to use the Damumed app, engage in online banking, sign documents or applications using electronic signatures (EDS), and more (Alimbekova et al., 2020: 71). Additionally, there is a low level of awareness about available social services among rural and small-town populations (Alimbekova et al., 2020: 70).

Prevailing stereotypes about the inability of older adults to learn and adapt to new skills, especially in ICT, exacerbate these challenges (Alimbekova et al., 2020: 72). Moreover, experts highlight the negative perception of old age as a period of need, dependency, illness, alienation, and loneliness. Consequently, many older adults prefer to live focused on the needs of their children's families, as shown in research results (Alimbekova et al., 2020: 57), to avoid feelings of loneliness, dependency, and irrelevance.

The national plan «Active Longevity» has achieved some positive results. However, the project faces challenges, such as its implementation being limited to major cities and low awareness of these centers' activities among the elderly population (Alimbekova et al., 2020: 86).

In addition to digital literacy, the use of mobile applications is becoming increasingly relevant as a quick and widespread method for engaging in social and communication life. The most popular applications globally in 2023, according to App Annie, include major social networks and messengers like TikTok, Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Other top apps include Spotify, Zoom, and Netflix (Tadviser, 2024).

Among the available mobile applications for older generations developed by foreign developers, there are various free apps, mainly focused on monitoring certain physical health parameters. These include apps for measuring and controlling blood pressure, tracking blood sugar levels, medication information (usage, pharmacy search, dosage), booking doctor appointments, and exercise routines (e.g., eye exercises). Additionally, there are apps for various services, such as online shopping and delivery (food, goods), and government services. Some specialized paid apps also exist, such as those for yoga, breathing exercises, and more.

In Kazakhstan, mobile apps developed by local developers are popular for transportation information, taxi booking, food ordering and delivery, and financial transactions. However, there are currently no apps specifically targeting older adults or related to health monitoring (Forbes, 2023).

In 2021, a prototype mobile app named «Sağat» was developed and subsequently received a trademark certificate (Iskaliyeva et al., 2021). The app's functional tasks include reminders for holidays, birthdays, and precise medication timings. Its goal is to support active longevity and socialization for older adults (Mobile App «Sağat», <http://100let.kz/sagat/>). However, the app does not appear to be currently available or accessible.

Another project, funded by grants for 2018-2020, was led by Kozybayev University. This project aimed to create a mobile app using artificial intelligence to provide information for the successful socialization of individuals with disabilities and older adults (<https://ku.edu.kz/page/view?id=1413&lang=ru>). The results of this project are not publicly documented.

A more successful project is «Accessible Kazakhstan». This online map provides information about the accessibility of urban facilities and services. The map helps individuals with limited mobility (including people with disabilities, parents with strollers, older adults, pregnant women, and those with temporary injuries) navigate city spaces. The map uses color-coded icons: green for fully accessible locations, yellow for partially accessible locations requiring assistance, and red for inaccessible locations (e.g., lacking ramps). The map is available in Kazakh, Russian, and English. The project is overseen by the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia (EFCA) in collaboration with the «Tandau» Foundation and the «Erekse Tandau-Shelek»

Foundation, and is funded by the European Union Delegation to Kazakhstan, the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan, UNICEF, and the Astana Hub IT Startup International Technopark (Official site of the Accessible Kazakhstan project, <https://doskaz.kz/>).

There is also an Interactive Accessibility Map available on the «Social Protection of People with Disabilities» information portal, similar to the previous project. This project features an interactive map with available objects and static data for each region and category of people with disabilities and elderly individuals, categorized into three levels of accessibility: accessible, partially accessible, and not accessible. It also offers options to select by region, district, and object category (Information Portal «Social Protection of People with Disabilities», <https://inva.gov.kz/kk>).

A positive aspect is that the portal includes other important resources: rehabilitation measures and support, government services, a social services portal, and electronic accessibility. The latter includes online applications for various categories of people with disabilities.

Despite active internet use by elderly people and the availability of digital literacy courses organized by both government and private organizations, there remains a low level of digital literacy among the elderly population. Analysis of digital applications from domestic developers has revealed a lack of applications specifically aimed at elderly individuals. Although there were announcements about the creation of mobile applications for the elderly, the final results, such as the availability of these applications, have not been found. Digital applications for monitoring physical health, offered by international developers, are actively used by users.

Conclusion

In the era of digitalization, the philosophy of well-being becomes an increasingly relevant topic, especially in the context of the quality of life and inclusion of the elderly population. For Kazakhstan, as for many other countries, the issues of social well-being for the older generation gain particular significance against the backdrop of rapid technological development. Digitalization opens up new opportunities to improve the quality of life for the elderly, but it also presents challenges related to the need for adaptation and education.

Inclusion of the elderly in the digital environment is a key aspect of contemporary understanding of well-being. This not only involves access to technology but also the ability to use it effectively, which requires support from society, the government, and family members. It is important that digital technologies serve as tools to enhance quality of life rather than becoming additional barriers.

The analysis of scientific publications reveals that the well-being of the elderly, as well as the impact of digital technologies on their quality of life and inclusion, is extensively covered in the global academic literature. However, discussing the philosophy of well-being for the elderly is still premature, as the theoretical and conceptual foundations of this phenomenon are not yet fully developed. As researchers emphasize, despite extensive studies on digitalization and its impact on later life, our understanding of what digital inclusion and isolation mean for the elderly and their aging experience remains limited.

Despite the active use of the internet by the elderly and the availability of digital literacy courses organized by both governmental and private organizations, the level of digital literacy among the elderly population remains low. Analysis of applications developed in Kazakhstan reveals a lack of applications targeted at elderly users. Although there have been announcements about the creation of mobile applications for the elderly, the final results, such as the presence of these applications, have not been found. Meanwhile, international developers are already offering applications designed for monitoring the physical condition of elderly users.

Enhancing digital literacy, adapting technologies to the needs of the elderly, and developing educational and support programs are necessary steps toward achieving inclusion. Only under a comprehensive approach to addressing these issues can we talk about a full realization of the philosophy of well-being for the elderly population in Kazakhstan.

Thus, the future of the well-being of the elderly in Kazakhstan in the era of digitalization depends on how successfully society can integrate them into the digital world, ensuring access to modern technologies and creating conditions for their active and comfortable use.

Authors' contributions

Abdina A.K. – writing the article text, literature review, analysis of official documents, text editing.

Uyzbayeva A.A. – writing the article text, analysis of state programs, analysis of digital applications, technical design.

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Әл-ауқат философиясы: цифрландыру дәуіріндегі Қазақстанның қарт тұрғындарының өмір сапасы және инклюзиясы

Андатпа. Әл-ауқат тақырыбы тек академиялық ортада ғана емес, сонымен қатар әртүрлі әлеуметтік дискурстар мен қоғамдық талқылауларда да өзекті болып табылады. Бұл мақалада қарастырылған мәселе – егде жастағы адамдардың көпшілігі әлеуметтік өмірде рөлі тез артып келе жатқан цифрлық құралдарды қолдануда белгілі бір қиындықтарға тап болады. Біздің зерттеуіміздің мақсаты әл-ауқат философиясының призмасы арқылы цифрландыру дәуірінде Қазақстанның егде жастағы тұрғындарының өмір сүру сапасы мен инклюзиясын талдау болып табылады. Зерттеудің негізгі әдісі – әл-ауқат тұжырымдамасына да, әлеуметтік-экономикалық процестерді цифрландыруға да қатысты академиялық мақалалар мен бағдарламалық құжаттарға аналитикалық шолу, яғни технологияның қартайған халықтың өмір сапасына әсерін қарастыру. Бұдан басқа, біз егде жастағы адамдарға арналған қазақстандық және шетелдік әзірлеушілердің қолданыстағы цифрлық қосымшаларын талдадық. Зерттеу нәтижесінде әл-ауқат философиясының Қазақстандағы қарттардың өмір сапасына және олардың қоғамдық процестерге қосылуына әсері туралы қорытындылар жасалды.

Түйін сөздер: әл-ауқат философиясы; өмір сапасы; егде жастағы халық; инклюзия; цифрландыру; мемлекеттік бағдарламалар; цифрлық қосымшалар.

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Философия благополучия: качество жизни и инклюзия пожилого населения Казахстана в эпоху цифровизации

Абстракт. Тема благополучия является одной из актуальных не только в академической среде, но и в различного рода социальных дискурсах и общественных обсуждениях. Проблема, рассматриваемая в данной статье, заключается в том, что большинство представителей пожилого возраста испытывают определенные затруднения при использовании цифровых

инструментов, роль которых в общественной жизни стремительно возрастает. Целью нашего исследования является анализ качества жизни и инклюзии пожилого населения Казахстана в эпоху цифровизации сквозь призму философии благополучия. Основным методом исследования является аналитический обзор академических статей и программных документов, касающихся как концепта благополучия, так и цифровизации социальных и экономических процессов, то есть влияния технологий на качество жизни стареющего населения. Кроме того, нами проанализированы существующие цифровые приложения казахстанских и зарубежных разработчиков, предназначенные для пожилых людей. В результате исследования делаются выводы о влиянии философии благополучия на качество жизни пожилых людей в Казахстане и на их включенность в общественные процессы.

Ключевые слова: философия благополучия; качество жизни; пожилое население; инклюзия; цифровизация; государственные программы; цифровые приложения.

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