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## How startups and apps are angling to solve elder-care and digital loneliness for 2024

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Moreover, the cultural context of Bangladesh – where family-based care for the elderly is predominant – necessitates a unique approach. Integrating technology into this familial setup can alleviate the burden on family caregivers and ensure a better quality of life for the elderly. However, several hurdles stand in the way. The foremost is the lack of infrastructure and expertise in developing and implementing such technologies. Additionally, there's a significant gap in digital literacy among the current older population, making the adoption of tech-based solutions a challenging task. On the other hand, costs of living are going up with no limits in sight and this convention; unfortunately, might not even be an option for most people by then. The development of tech-enabled geriatric care is not just an opportunity but a necessity – it requires concerted efforts from the government, healthcare industry, and technology sector, combined with a societal shift towards accepting and integrating technology in caring for the elderly.

What's unique in this demographic – as both an advantage and a disadvantage – is how every one is more or less technology dependent. Their daily lives are intertwined with the digital space and similar to the digital media posts, contributes to a landscape where meaningful conversations are scarce. As a result, individuals, despite having hundreds of online friends or followers, often feel misunderstood, unappreciated, or unnoticed.

The need to counter the effects of digital loneliness and

cognitive training more engaging for users, especially beneficial for elderly users or those with cognitive impairments such as Alzheimers. Similar apps that are available on the market include Timeless, an app designed to help Alzheimer's patients recognize their loved ones using facial recognition technology, as well as MindMate, which offers a comprehensive solution with games designed to enhance cognitive abilities, tools for health tracking, and advice on nutrition and exercise.

Another issue that has links to eldercare but affects a much wider demographic is digital loneliness, an increasingly prevalent mental health issue in our hyper-connected world. It reflects the paradoxical nature of modern communication – while technology has made it easier than ever to stay in touch, the depth and quality of these connections often fall short, leading to a sense of isolation despite being constantly 'connected.'

The phenomenon of digital loneliness stems from the superficial interactions that predominate online platforms and social media. These interactions, while frequent, lack the personal touch and emotional depth that human connections require. The ephemeral nature of digital communication, characterised by brief texts, emojis, and fleeting social media posts, contributes to a landscape where meaningful conversations are scarce. As a result, individuals, despite having hundreds of online friends or followers, often feel misunderstood, unappreciated, or unnoticed.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

superficiality in our hyper-connected world is bound to create demand for apps that enforce slowness and deliberation. Apps that help people slow down, take a breather, be in the moment and self-reflect in our busy daily lives are going to become meaningful paths towards self-therapy, and any idea that brings these to the table are bound to do well.

Lettre.app is one such idea – a letter writing experience for Apple iPads that incorporates slow delivery between sender and recipient, the app was designed by (including the authors of this article) a team of Bangladeshis and Bengali expatriates. The key idea behind the app treats handwriting as a form of therapy, and the act

of making penpals around the world to be a way to connect across diverse backgrounds, nationalities and experiences. The story behind Lettre's idea also holds tremendous potential for Parkinson's therapy – for Mashfique Anwar, the ex-Apple developer who made the app, the joy of seeing his late father being able to write again with the Apple Pencil and iPad despite his condition is what kicked off the project in the first place.

The doom and gloom that surrounds humanity at present – with the effects of climate change, economic fluctuations,

pandemics and mental health being at an all time high – it's up to the dreamers and thinkers, designers and coders, to make the world a marginally better place for those who need some hope in the bleakness of it all.

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