Internet and Old People : An Overview

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Abstract:

There does not seem to be any conclusive evidence that suggests which information would best benefit the needs of older users. However, there is evidence to suggest that the information needs of older users are no different than the needs of any other adult, that is, older people use the Internet to complete the same tasks. Many researchers believe that information orientated around virtual communities rather than information retrieval would benefit older users the most. This paper addresses each age group, although research has been focused on the people of pensionable age and above. The wide scope

has been intentional in order to accumulate a diverse collection of research that can be accessed for future projects.

Keywords: Computer; Information technologies; Internet; Old people.

الملخص

لا يبدو أن هناك أي دليل قاطع يشير إلى أفضل المعلومات التي يحتاجها المستخدمين كبار السن جراء استخدامهم الانترنت، ومع ذلك فهناك أدلة واضحة تشير إلى أن احتياجات المستخدمين كبار السن من المعلومات لا تختلف عن احتياجات أي شخص بالغ آخر.. أي أن كبار السن يستخدمون الإنترنت لإكمال المهام ذاتها.

تتناول هذه الورقة فئات عمرية مختلفة على الرغم من أنه قد تم التركيز على الأشخاص في سن التقاعد وما فوق كنطاق أوسع.. تَم ذلك عن قصد من أجل تجميع مجموعة متنوعة من البحوث التي يمكن الاستفادة منها لمشاريع المستقبل.

1.0 Introduction

Recently we find that the Internet has facilitated communication and social connections transcending geographic distance at relatively low cost.

According to the article, Internet access and computer ownership by older people has been considerably slower than that of any other age group. Almost 3 out of 4 people aged 65 years and older, compared to fewer than 1 out of 5 people aged between 20 and 44 years, have multiple (2 or more) chronic conditions(Anderson G,2009).

Older adults are also more likely to feel socially isolated than younger adults, and social disconnectedness and perceived isolation are independently associated with lower levels of self-rated physical health and higher odds of having a mental health problem (Cornwell EY, Waite LJ,2009). Older adults who have health problems and feel socially isolated are especially likely to benefit from using Internet technology because it allows them to carry out an increasingly diverse array of tasks, especially when they lack family, friends, and health and social service providers who can help with these tasks. Previous studies have documented the multiple benefits of computer and Internet use training for older adults(Xie B,2011). Older adult Internet users note increased communication with those in their social networks; maintenance of geographically dispersed connections; convenience and benefits of searching for and increased learning from health-related information; increased ability to research non-health-related information, read news / magazines / books, and engage in continuing education activities; increased awareness of and connection to interest / support / hobby groups, events, and resources in their immediate and global communities; convenience of online shopping, banking, travel arrangements, and

related information; and use of computer- and Internet-based entertainment(AARP. 2009).

Nielsen (2000) considers the main influential factors on Internet access to be education and age. However, Browne (2000) suggests the two most serious barriers to the Internet for the elderly are income and education. On the other hand, Seniornet (1998) found that, older users in the US with discretionary incomes sufficient to purchase hardware and software are achieving computer literacy at the same rate of younger adults. Another study shows that age is not an isolated factor for influencing the popularity of new technologies but it is the social, economic and cultural aspects associated with ageing that need to be examined (Beckwith &Trieber, 1998; World Health Organisation, 1999). This paper investigated these aspects in order to identify areas for further research.

1.1 Definition of Old

According to the article, the expression, old age is not a definite biological stage, as the chronological age denoted as "old age" varies culturally and historically(Old age. Oxford Reference. 2006).

Many researchers divide older people into categories, segregating by either age or degree of dependency. Dee and Bowen (1986, as cited in Blake 1998) distinguish between people who are older and unemployed, retirees, housebound elders living alone, old elders and old elders who live in sheltered accommodation. Beckwith and Treiber (1998) split the elderly into three groups separating them by dependency. Firstly, newly retired people who still have all their faculties are described as 'third age'. 'Fourth age' describes older people who have developed a small degree of dependency, and finally 'fifth age' is used in term of people who have a high dependency due to a disability. Other researchers divide the elderly into three distinct groups by age, 'young old' (60 – 75), 'old old' (75 – 85) and 'very old' (over 85) (Blake, 1998).

Old age comprises "the later part of life; the period of life after youth and middle age.., usually with reference to deterioration",(Millennium Web Catalog). At what age old age begins cannot be universally defined because it differs according to the context. The United Nations has agreed that 65+ years may be usually denoted as old age(WHO,2016) and this is the first attempt at an international definition of old age. However, for its study of old age in Africa, the World Health Organization (WHO) set 55 as the beginning of old age. At the same time, the WHO recognized that the developing world often defines old age, not by years, but by new roles, loss of previous roles, or inability to make active contributions to society.

Most developed Western countries set the age of 60 to 65 for retirement. Being 60–65 years old is usually a requirement for becoming eligible for senior social programs(Barry, Patricia). However, various countries and societies consider the onset of old age as anywhere from the mid-40s to the 70s. The definitions of old age continue to change especially as life expectancy in developed countries has risen to beyond 80 years old.

1.2 Elderly Society in Great Britain

The number of elderly people in Great Britain is increasing. Age Concern predicts that the proportion of elderly people in the UK will double over the next 50 years and by 2031 almost 23 percent of the population will be of pensionable age. This growing proportion of society will inevitably develop a high dependency on a decreasing workforce; that is, they will put high demands on hospitals, residential care and state financial support schemes (Dundee University, 2001). The most practical and desirable way to meet this challenge is to enable older people to continue living independently. Information technology has the potential to increase active participation in society and reduce the economic burden on the workforce (Beckwith &Triber, 1998; Dundee University, 2001).

1.2.1 Current Scenario

4.6 million Computer users over the age of 50 in Great Britain illustrate that older people are slowly picking up on the Information Technology revolution and joining the online experience (Age Concern, 2000). However, only around 11 percent of users aged 65 and over (Age Concern, 2001; KPMG Consulting, 2000; Office for National Statistics, 2001) uses the Internet. This study also reveals that, though Internet access has risen by around 51 percent for the population as a whole but there has been little change for users aged 65 and above as only 2 percent of users within this age bracket have tried the Internet (Seniors and the Internet, 2000).

1.2.2 Elderly People and the Society

For older people, technology and design is only one potential barrier. Culture has a far greater ability to exclude by afflicting stereotypes and labelling seniors as technophobes (Cabinet Office, 2001; Darcy, 1999; Seniornet, 1998; World health Organisation, 1999). At present, services are organised and information is designed predominantly by people who work within the information design and delivery business, largely people who have not yet reached retirement age. As a consequence, the older generation is not given the prominence they deserve (D'arcy, 1999).

Older people have different expectations these days, and that will continue to change. What might have been good enough for previous generations will not cut it in the future, and what we have is not sustainable anyway. I certainly don't want to end up in a care home, nor do I want to have to make the decision for my parents to go into one. I have worked with many older people who have just wanted to stay in their own homes. It's about choice, having the services in place to

support people to make choices about how they want to live, and be supported when necessary in later life.

They should be taken seriously even if sometimes they sound crazy and annoying, try to understand you have no idea about the life they have led. Learn from them as much as you can. And seeing them in old age homes truly shatters my heart.(Mark Oster, Businessman, Blogger,2018)

1.2.3 Education and Income

Many researchers imply that one of the main influencing factors on the uptake of new technology by society and specifically older people is education (Browne, 2000; James, 1996; Swindell, 2000; Tweed & Quigley, 1999; Neilson, 2000). A large percentage of older working class people would have been forced to leave mainstream education after just one or two years of high school due to the post war depression (Swindell, 2000). Generally this decision would have been compulsory to enable them to find employment to support a family. People from a middle class background may have been given the opportunity to continue into further education. As a result of this lack of early education the people of this generation were generally employed in manual jobs, both skilled and unskilled (Cabinet Office, 2001).

1.2.4 Use of IT to Contribute to Society by Older People

The government is working in association with Age Concern and Help the Aged to devise a scheme, thus allowing older people to share their talents and experiences in their own communities (A Better Society for Older People, 2000). This type of project promotes active social involvement and encourages the use of information technology to compile reference material with the focus being on end goals rather than on the technology itself; which is essential to translate technology into everyday life (Beckwith &Treiber, 1998; James, 1996; Seniornet, 1998).

Employment and voluntary work allows older people the opportunity to remain part of a respected social group and distances the evolution to a culturally disregarded pensioner. It is society that has generated this culture; by employing older people society is changing negative cultural traditions, positively lengthening the ageing process and reducing the burden on society.

Subsequently older people will have the opportunity to extend social networks and retain cognitive stimulation, all the right attributes for delaying the ageing process (Beckwith &Treiber, 1998; Swindell, 2000).

Information technology skills acquired by older people during post retirement leisure time or as part of a retraining scheme can now be integrated back into society, thus challenging stereotypes and creating an awareness of the potential of older people (Darcy, 1999). Even though employment and voluntary opportunities may not always be computer related, IT does give older people the capability to research information, prepare documentation and preserve effective communication. This is particularly essential for people who may be suffering from disabilities associated with the ageing process (Beckwith &Treiber, 1998). IT allows users of all abilities and age groups to access information and services, thereby creating equal opportunities for all participants. Attaining IT skills and knowledge of information communication technologies will provide older people with the self-belief to enable them to apply for employment and voluntary work without the fear that technology has overtaken them (Beckwith &Treiber, 1998, Cabinet Office, 2001). In fact, Tweed and Quigley's research estimates that 25 percent of older computer users currently use technology to perform voluntary work (Tweed & Quigley, 1999).

Information and communication technologies can increase social exclusion (Nielsen, 2000; Kraut as cited in Swindell, 2000). As online activity increases an individual's participation in society may reduce, thus increasing the risk of depression and isolation. Study found that, the more time people spent on the Internet the less time they spent communicating in a real environment. Similarly, (Stanley, 2000) raises concerns that residents within sheltered

accommodation may retire to computers within their own rooms reducing their interaction with other residents.

Internet have a positive effect on the lives of the elderly, 64% of users believe that a computer has made a great difference to their lives. With 59 percent, or 2.7 million users, email was discovered to be the principal technology for keeping in close contact with family and friends (Age Concern & Microsoft, 2000).

Haddon and Silverstone (1996) also enumerate the importance of considering the negative implications of society's reliance on technology. They point out the necessities for ensuring information technology does not create a dependence that may result in a decline in human contact for citizens that are already deprived and isolated.

1.3 Information Needs

Older people will greatly benefit from accessing information via communication technologies to participate in leisure activities and retain social networks. The independence to access this material without relying on family, friends or social services will contribute to a sense of personal enrichment (Beckwith &Treiber, 1998). New technology will improve the speed, efficiency and convenience of access to this information for all older people (Cabinet Office, 2000).

Rowe (as cited in Blake, 1998) suggests that the information needs of the elderly can be categorised into five broad topics. Some of the categories contradict those mentioned in Tweed & Quigley paper. Neither Blake nor Rowe

provides evidence to suggest why this categorisation is favoured. The five suggested categories are:

- Educational opportunities
- Leisure activities and retirement
- Welfare and benefits
- Information providers, for example Citizens Advice and legal services
- Skills that benefit the community

1.4 Educating Older People

Research shows that although new technology will improve the speed, efficiency, and convenience of public services, older people are nervous about using it (Cabinet Office, 2001). Additional research shows that attitudes can change when older people are educated in the possibilities of new technologies and shown how they can be integrated into everyday life (Cabinet Office, 2000; Blake, 1998; Seniornet, 1998; James, 1996; Celebrating Older Learners, 2000).

Many researchers, including Beckwith and Treiber (1998) and Swindell (2000) suggest that a lack of previous education contributes to negative attitudes towards training later in life. However, Swindell also suggests that training schemes may prove attractive to older people who were denied formal education earlier in life.

Once older people are actively involved in computer training schemes their commitment has been recorded as high. D'arcy, (1999) proposes that this is achieved because participants make an active decision to learn. Additionally, high commitment could be attributed to the social experience of working within a classroom environment. However, James (1996) believes that there is

evidence to suggest that older people prefer to learn outside of the traditional classroom environment. One-to-one teaching is often preferred, as students do not have the anxiety of inconveniencing other members of the group and shaming themselves (Sussex University, 2000).

1.4.1 Government Initiatives

The Government has responded to citizens' demands for flexible and affordable learning opportunities and access to computers by establishing Information and Communication Technology Learning Centres. The centres target disadvantaged older people offering access and training, and providing some citizens over the age of 60 accesses to low cost reconditioned computers. By 2002 the government aims to have all public libraries offering Internet training sessions specifically designed for older students. Learndirect and UK online centres and training schemes will offer all citizens easy access to government services online. In addition, local authorities already run adult training schemes that benefit almost three million trainees a year (A Better Society for Older People, 2000).

1.5 Lacking for the Older People

Memory Loss: An eventual decline in memory is inevitable with increasing *age;* however, some individuals can suffer severe memory loss while others will appear largely unaffected. This is another example of the diversity of older people. James suggests that trainers should use familiar terms and techniques so procedural memories can be exploited. *He* concludes by emphasising that although older learners may be slower at acquiring new skills, the end result will be an equal to that of younger learners. This is true providing the

technology and training takes into consideration the unique requirement of older learners.

Physical Issues: The most common physical impairment to occur with age isreduced vision (Blake, 1998). Older users with a visual impairment may feel as though computers have become yet another form of technology that is inaccessible. However, unlike other forms of technology and information distribution systems computer interfaces can be easily modified for older users through access technologies like screen magnification software. Other access technologies for visual disabilities include Braille pads and screen readers.

1.6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have provided an overview of Internet and old people. There does not seem to be any conclusive evidence that suggests which information would best benefit the needs of older users. However, there is evidence to suggest that the information needs of older users are no different than the needs of any other adult, that is, older people use the Internet to complete the same tasks. Technology has erased the idea that "education is as old as water-engraving" after it has been learned by many older people. We have noticed that age does not preclude the use of technology because it is a new type of culture through which everyone gets information very quickly, that age does not prevent knowledge and age does not conflict with the demand for knowledge. Perhaps the future turns upside down and the elderly become addicted to technology to prove the presence of old age when using the Internet as if he wants to say to those around him "I exist and my senior age did not isolate me from the world and does not mean I am not an active role" and this part of the challenge to the age of aging.

Finally, researchers have suggested some areas for further study which are;

- The effect of surrounding environments and relationships on the uptake of new technology by older people.

- How previous education standards affect the uptake of information communication technologies by the older people.

- The effects of new technology on the social interaction of older people.

- How information and communication technologies can benefit users with age related disabilities.

- New information delivery channels and older people.

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