

Introduction to the Seniors' Use of Health Information Technology Minitrack

Heiko Gewald
Neu-Ulm University
heiko.gewald@hs-neu-ulm.de

Doug Vogel
Harbin Institute of Technology
isdoug@hit.edu.cn

Karoly Bozan
Duquesne University
bozank@duq.edu

Countless studies underline the challenges of the aging population for literally all economies around the world. In order to be able to cater for this population, the IS discipline needs to provide insights how we enable seniors to take part in digital life.

Health information in whatever form is not only available digitally today, in more and more societies it is expected that an individual is able to handle her/his health information online. This puts tremendous challenges on a large proportion of the elderly generation. Certainly, several members of this group have good cognitive and motoric skills and are used to manage digital sources. However, a significant number of the elderly still has difficulties to either go online or even see the necessity to do so. This leaves us with two main challenges:

1. To provide technical devices which allow ageing users to interact digitally when motoric and visual competencies decline. The currently preferred devices to access like smartphones and tablet PCs are not useful for users with declining vision or motoric challenges in their fingers.
2. To provide digital services that offer a sustainable perceived usefulness to the elderly. Although their number is steadily increasing, the number of digital offerings for this target group remains comparatively low. Especially social networks (like the often proclaimed “facebook for seniors” are still not available for a larger audience.

Also, offerings to manage health information online is too often engineered and coded by younger professionals with limited understanding of the older target audience. Companies developing such tools need to better listen to their end users and come up with new and creative ideas to make it worthwhile for the users, i.e. increase perceived usefulness.

In a similar vein the effect of training is all too often overlooked. Although it has been often shown that users perform better when they received proper training, the mechanisms for an elderly audience are often not fully explored. Seniors have a different digital skillset developed during their lifetime compared to people of younger generations. They also adopted different learning styles. These factors need to be taken into account when designing teaching mechanisms. Also, seniors tend to lean towards personalized training and seem to be not as

URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/50303>
ISBN: 978-0-9981331-1-9
(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

responsive to online self-study as the younger generation.

The papers in this mini-track address these questions and provide interesting insights into these matters.

Karoly Bozan and David Mooney present their work “Effects of Training and Support on Patient Portal Ease of Use Among the Elderly”. They address an important and still under-researched area, namely how training affects the perceived ease-of-use, seniors attest information systems. Their findings underline not only the importance of training, but specifically the need for specific forms of training designed to suit the ageing generation. Their study found that the training and on-demand support increased computer confidence, self-efficacy, perceived ease of use, and reduced computer anxiety among the elderly. Whilst younger people tend to be self-contained using tutorials on platforms like YouTube, the older generation very much tends to lean towards physical relationships, i.e. a coach or trainer approach.

Michael Milovich and Debra Burleson present their work “Social Media and Older Adults: Understanding Cognitive Training and Social Network”. The authors reviewed the value of speed of processing training, challenges that the older adults face as they use technologies, and how social inclusion might provide significant insights. Rather than advocating for the traditional methods of teaching and exploring technology, they propose that the IS discipline first needs to understand how older adults might interact with technology and improve the quality of their life.

We are looking forward to future researchers building on the knowledge presented in these papers and presenting their own research dealing with these issues.

The growing number of older adults as part of society will require the IS discipline for some time to come up with new and better solutions to ensure digital inclusion of the elderly.