Chapter 12
Encouraging Social Inclusion for Older Adults Through "Interest"–Led Technology Use

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ABSTRACT

There are many misconceptions about older adults' capabilities and aspirations, and especially their attitudes and approach towards technology. They are often misunderstood and seen as uninterested and unmotivated to engage with use of technology. Due to an absence of an "interest" framework for older adults to learn mobile touch screen technologies, this chapter investigates the role that pre-existing interests play in older adults' adoption of technology. Can a curriculum guided only by pre-existing interests of older adults, rather than a structured curriculum have a positive influence on its adoption for mobile touch screen technologies? The results show that when older adults are taught according to requests based on their pre-existing interests, it encouraged long-term adoption of technology including building up their confidence in usage of mobile touch screen technologies.

INTRODUCTION

As technology of all varieties becomes more accessible to the totality of society across all generations and as an outcome of increased life expectancy, older adults are leading lives that are more active in their third age. While the world was embracing the shift with touch screen technology and the Internet in our everyday lives, people were actually living longer compared to their predecessors (DESA, 2015). The developed countries were the first to undergo this major shift and currently, it is a worldwide phenomenon.

Although this brings about societal and economical challenges (Sander, Oxlund, Jespersen, Krasnik, Mortensen, Westendorp, Rasmussen, 2015) it also presents a new array of opportunities. Older adults do this in creating for themselves opportunities to learn new skills and pursue new interests and hobbies to challenge themselves. At the same time, there are many misconceptions about older adults' capabilities and aspirations, especially their attitudes towards technology (Cherry, Brigman, Lyon, Blanchard, Walker, & Smitherman, 2016). They are often misunderstood and seen to lack interest and motivation in the use of technology even though studies have shown otherwise (Anderson & Perrin, 2017). What has become evident to government authorities is that there is low-level uptake of technology amongst older adults (Chen, McGaughey, Zeltmann, Lu, Hsin-Ke, &, Maria, 2018). Not being able to use technology is isolating and makes it difficult for older adults to conduct their everyday lives (Quan-Haase, Guang & Wellman, 2018). Hence, it is imperative for older adults to participate in technology use. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to seek out ways and means in which social and digital inclusion for older adults can occur. This chapter aims to explore the relationship of older adults to pre-existing "interests" and their interest in technology with reference to Hidi and Renninger's Four-Phase Model of Interest Development (2006). In order to better understand the subject matter of this theme, the definition of terms such as "older adults" and "interest" will be required. Older adults generally refers to people 65 years old and over, mainly to represent a benchmark of life stage, whereby it is considered a legal retirement age and eligibility for pension (OECD, 2018). In Australia, in order to be eligible to apply for senior's card, the minimum age is 60 years and working less than 35 hours per week (DHS, 2018). The use of the term "interest" refers to older adults' individual interests and hobbies in general. However, in order to avoid confusion, it will be referred to as *pre-existing interests*. When *interest* is described as a verb, the word will be presented in italic, whereas in the case of a noun, it will not be italicised.

The topic of interest was first explored within the field of psychology as far back as 1891. It then disappeared for a few decades and resurfaced in the 1980s falling into the subcategory of educational psychology (Silvia, 2006). Most studies today gravitate towards technology uptake and younger children and in the case of the elderly mostly in a classroom setting. To date, there has been very little research about how technology could support older adults' pre-existing interests. The main factor for adoption of new technology is constructed around the notion of interest. An effective and sound theoretical and motivation approach framework is contained in the three models referred to here: The Four-Phase Model of Interest Development (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 1992). These models have assisted studies in the exploration of the factors that can stimulate interest in use of mobile touch screen technologies by older adults and consequently improve the quality of their lives. While it can be imperative to provide technologies to the elderly that are easy to learn, there is also the specific pre-existing interests of older adults in order to facilitate a successful learning environment. This approach allows for a better understanding of the relationship of how interest can best complement and support their pre-existing interests in their everyday activities and also make use of old age learning capabilities.

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