Digital inclusion: opportunities for older people

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20 September 2016

Research themes

- social isolation and loneliness
- online social interactions
  - blipfoto.com: a photography journal
- digital skills
- digital health wearables
Social isolation and loneliness

Effects of social isolation on individuals

• social isolation is more harmful than not exercising and twice as harmful as obesity
• social isolation puts older adults at greater risk of early mortality, dementia, suicide and cognitive decline
• individuals are at greater risk of developing low self-esteem, depression and loneliness
• deprives communities from their knowledge and experience, and the roles that they could play in communities and neighbourhoods
Digital inclusion

- can lead to greater social inclusion
  - regular interactions with family and friends
- foster interests and hobbies
- awareness
  - local events
- empowerment
  - planning days out
  - pre-holiday planning

Digital inclusion — online social interactions
Aid for interactions

- **Disadvantages**
  - Affects relationships?
  - Limits other activities?
  - Increases isolation?
  - Hinders conversation?
  - Consumes time?

- **Motivations**
  - Who/what influences you?
  - Family, Friends, Clubs, Societies, Advice for others?

- **Advantages**
  - Helps you to do what?
  - Gives you access to what?
  - Advice for others?

- **Risks**
  - What are your:
    - Worries?
    - Experiences?
    - Warnings for others?

- **Obstacles**
  - Equipment? Know-how? Time?
  - Where do you go for help?
  - Advice for others?
Oh my God. I have always been like a sponge, trying to learn certain things. Now I need a whole big sponge, because I want to get through to all of these I can possibly get to learn about.

It has been a great change as far as age goes. I really don’t have anything to worry about. If it is a rainy day or snow, I know I can go and continue to learn. Let’s do it. That is what it has done to my mind. It has opened me even more.

Some examples

My mum was a bit of a campaigner and she belonged to an NHS [National Health Service] patient forum and they had meetings and they shared a lot of stuff by email ... and when she could no longer get to meetings she could still make a valid input on documents and stuff.

Decreased mobility may lead to older people becoming isolated. Online communities may help. I think a lot of deaf people, particularly people who lose their hearing in older age can become very, very isolated, so it [online interaction] is important.
Online communities –
daily photo-journal blipfoto.com
You develop new friends and become a part of their lives through their photos and commentaries.

I wanted to keep my brain active and I also like taking photographs.

Also it opens my eyes to my surroundings and it gives me structure in my day.

I find I am able to share some of my concerns and worries as well as extreme joys in a way which I am unable to do face to face with people.

It makes me go out every day to find something beautiful if possible.

Digital skills

- employability
- lifelong learning
  - open educational resources
  - massively open online courses, Open University’s FutureLearn: https://www.futurelearn.com
- accessing government and other online services
Considerations for digital inclusion

- need an incentive to get and stay online
- one-off training on using the internet doesn’t suffice
- need access to an ongoing technical support
- prefer learning from one another by sharing knowledge and swapping tips

Digital health wearables —
self-monitoring of health
Activity tracker or smart watch

Picture courtesy: https://flic.kr/p/pifLfu

Research objectives

• challenges for adoption
• usage of the data for self-monitoring and self-management of health
• behavioural changes
• ethical dilemmas related to access and sharing of data
• accessibility and usability aspects related to the design and use of these devices
Reports

- Minocha, Shailey; Holland, Caroline; McNulty, Catherine; Banks, Duncan and Palmer, Jane (2015). Social isolation and loneliness in people aged 55 and over in Milton Keynes. [http://oro.open.ac.uk/43925/](http://oro.open.ac.uk/43925/)
- Reports and presentations available from: [http://oro.open.ac.uk/view/person/sm577.html](http://oro.open.ac.uk/view/person/sm577.html)

I cannot understand "older people" who are not interested in using it [the internet]!
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Discussion

• What has helped you to become digitally skilled/literate?
• Which other new digital skills would you like to learn?
• What could be done to help others to become digitally included?
• How could you help somebody else to become confident with using the internet?