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Ageing in a network society: An Introduction

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Welcome to the special issue ‘Ageing in a network society’ of *Networking Knowledge*. With

the rapid advancements in digital platforms and the emergence of new trends, greater challenges have been posed by both an increasingly global and network society, demographic challenges and changes in the labour workforce and in the complexity of social interactions (Bond, Peace, Dittmann-Kohli, & Westerhof 2007; Bowling 2005). In the UK alone, projections suggest that the number of older people in society will have nearly doubled to 19 million by 2050.¹

Whilst we have been aware of the main advantages and barriers posed by the introduction of new media over time (Castells 2001), challenges such as intergenerational gaps in the access to information that may affect learning, communication and authority roles, social digital divides, accessibility and difficulty in accessing daily-living services are likely to persist (Costa, & Veloso 2016; Fisk, Rogers, Charness, et al. 2009; Sixsmith & Gutman 2013).

Information and Communication Technologies can play a crucial role in strengthening age identity and encouraging prosocial behaviours, sense of social connectedness and of purposefulness (Costa 2013; Cabrera, & Malanowski 2009; De Schutter & Vanden Abeele 2008; Felsted, & Wright 2014). By exploring the older adults’ needs and their context, their media appropriation, usability and accessibility issues and the development of easy-to-use services and ICT-based products, the papers in this special issue highlight the complexity of the relationship between older adults and the network society in which we live.

Hence, this special issue aims to explore the role of ICTs in encouraging the development of networked older adults. Specifically, the following papers give a noteworthy contribution to the challenges posed by an increasingly ageing and networked society. This special issue is edited by colleagues whose disciplines are not naturally symbiotic – one from Information and Communication studies and the other from Ageing studies. As such, this special issue posed an interesting set of challenges for the editors as they explored their shared understandings of what it means to grow old or be old in a network society. The editors would therefore like to thank the authors for their receptiveness to ageing studies theory and for challenging their own assumptions about what it means to be old. This special issue acts, in some ways, as a stepping stone or a bridge between more information technological based notions of what it is to grow older and cultural gerontological constructions of older age.

¹ www.parliament.uk

The Collection

In “Jumping the digital divide: How do silver surfers and digital immigrants use social media?,” Kaja Fietkiwicz discusses the use of different social media services by different generations – “the silver surfers” (individuals born in the 30s and 40s), “the digital immigrants” (individuals born in the 60s and 70s), “digital natives” (individuals born in the 80s and 90s) and “younger generations” (individuals born in the 90s and millennials).

In “The Elderly’s Media Appropriation as Variable for Target Groups”, Rebeka Haubold and Sonja Guanguin identify a set of classification categories for older adults by means of media appropriation. Supported by their experience in the intergenerational volunteering group of the GAM e.V. (Gesellschaft Alter(n) Medien e.V.) - The ‘Medienclub Leipziger Löwen’ (Media-Club Leipzig’s Lions), they give an important insight into the concept of media appropriation with regards to older adults and its main implications for media practitioners.

In “Older Adults and Email Use: interface redesign’s challenges,” Sónia Ferreira, Óscar Mealha and Ana Isabel Veloso present the results of a cross-country research carried out under the Project SEDUCE (“Senior Citizen Use of Computer-Mediated Communication in Web Ecologies”) in order to determine to what extent the participation of older adults in the development of an email service could influence its usability and to design a simplified interface for this service.

In “Seniors, iTV and content about Social Services: clarifying the relationship,” Telmo Silva and Mariana Carlos propose a set of principles for the development of social services for iTV, taking into account its potential and the limitations of older adult viewers.

Similarly, in “Communicating Public and Social Services through iTv: a user-centred approach,” David Campelo, Jorge de Abreu and Telmo Silva describe the implementation of an iTV system dedicated to the older adult population.

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