

Chapter 10

Elderly People with Disabilities in the Internet Age

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore behaviour regarding the use of the internet by elderly people with movement disabilities. The study illustrates the ways, and the frequency, that they make use of the internet; while identifying the attitudes of non-users towards the internet. Quantitative research was carried out from a sample of 180 questionnaires divided into dyads (ninety users of the internet and ninety non-users) in order to explore and evaluate the attitudes and views of the elderly. The findings identify the factors that motivate older individuals with disabilities to move towards making use of the internet, and allow an understanding of the reasons why some of them are still distrustful towards the internet.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the internet is an essential part of daily life (Olson & Olson, 2003) allowing people to communicate and be connected with social, political, personal, business and recreational activities (Namazi & McClintic, 2003). Thus, one of the most remarkable points is that technology in many circumstances acts as social work to the

elderly, as it provides them with the opportunity to keep in touch “with the times” (Thorne, 1996). However, senior individuals, in order to be familiar with internet technology and adopt it, should take advantage of it.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2000) the elderly are getting familiar with internet technology very quickly, although they feel uncomfortable with such developments. According to Zeithmaml and Gilly (1987, p. 66),

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the elderly adopt technologies when an advantage is presented and communicated. Furthermore, a few years later Menchin (1989, p. 131) supported this by arguing that the acceptance of innovations by the elderly is strongly related to the benefits that they will gain by adopting them.

Several models have been developed in order to examine the variables that influence elderly people to use or not use a technology; most of these models have approached the issue from a psychological point of view. The diffusion model of Rogers (1962), the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1993) and the technology readiness index of Parasuraman (2000) are some models that have been developed to identify the use of the internet by consumers. A limited number of research studies examine the use of the internet by the elderly with disability.

The number of elderly people are now defined as aging due to increasing of their longevity as the standards of living have been improved. Firms take into consideration for their marketing plans the emerging new segment of the elderly, the “able elderly”.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to illustrate the use of internet by elderly with disabilities.

CHANGES IN THE “GREY MARKET”

According to Juznic et al. (2006), the internet can be characterised both as a communication tool and an information source which opened up interesting opportunities for marketers Shwu-Ing Wu (2002). Moreover, the internet is also a significant source of consumer information because it is more economical, and at the same time more accessible and user-friendly (Bonn et al., 1999).

However, the degree of “user involvement” in an “internet marketing” activity will illustrate the success of internet marketing, as it plays an essential role regarding consumer behaviour (Lassar et al., 2005). At this point it is vital to

highlight some of the variables that influence an individual’s internet behaviour. According to Lassar et al. (2005) the perceived usefulness, the ease of use of the internet, online experiences, and many special characteristics play an important role regarding consumers’ internet behaviour. However, according to Haisken-De New et al. (2001), interest in the internet is strongly related to age, and it is true that internet users are usually the youngest of the population.

Nowadays things have changed and the “grey market” is a growing and increasingly profitable market, according to Pickton and Broderick, 2005. They argue that the “grey market” can be considered as a general term for anyone aged 55 or over. Furthermore, in industrialised countries the “grey market” already accounts for 25% of the population compared to 15% in 1950, and is anticipated to double by 2020. As Moschis (2003) states, the elderly have special needs which are caused by two main factors: the elderly have social differences due to their life circumstances.

There is little knowledge about the attitudes, characteristics, values, behaviour, motivations and concerns of older users and non-users of the internet, especially in Greece. This is a consequence of the fact that, until now, elderly individuals were largely a neglected segment of the population with low economic resources and importance (Moschis, 2003).

The elderly had never learned about the internet from their education and, furthermore, it was not necessary in their working environments. When the internet became obligatory, almost the majority of them were already retired (Juznic et al., 2006).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN USERS AND NON-USERS OF THE INTERNET

The present study approaches and analyses the differences between users and non-users of internet defined by Trocchia and Janda (2000). There are different themes: reference group affiliation,

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