Chapter 14
Golden Years in Social Media World:
Examining Behavior and Motivations

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ABSTRACT

The context of demographic aging, combined with the wide dissemination of information and communication technologies (ICT), in the various domains of society defined a set of challenges, potentialities, and limits for seniors (65+). Although there is a positive evolution regarding adhesion and even domestication of ICT by this age segment, namely the internet and digital social networking sites, the literature review presents us with an immature, limited, and fragmented field of study, comprising an immense space of evolution. Aware of the strength, magnitude, and considerable ignorance of the action of seniors in the network society, this chapter intends to map, through a review of the multidisciplinary literature, how the relationship of seniors with ICTs is configured. In addition, usage behavior, as well as the drivers, and the consequences for the elderly of navigating digital social networks are also analyzed.

INTRODUCTION

The context of demographic aging on a large scale (in developed and developing countries) combined with the relevant role of networked ICTs in several areas of society, to study the relationship of the senior population with ICTs and with digital social networks takes on particular relevance.

It is undeniable that ICT currently occupies a preponderant place in contemporary societies, and the existing literature conceptualizes and discusses the rapid evolution of advanced high-tech societies in networked information societies, as a new form of social organization (Castells, 2003; Van Dijk, 2005).

The expansion and evolution to the web 2.0, associated with interactivity and the concept of network, enabled a more active role for the user, integrating the possibility of content production and interaction, as well as the expansion of the communication modalities, the possibilities of connection and social relationship (O'Reilly, 2007).

But if technological evolution can be assumed as an element that facilitates processes and connections, it can also be a potentiator of social exclusion and a reflection of inequalities in access to benefits (Coelho, 2019). Despite the growth in all age groups, it is older people who least use the internet and digital social networks (Páscoa & Gil, 2015). As Cardoso et al. (2015, p. 359) say, "what a decade ago was an embryonic process has now become a widespread reality". In fact, despite an effort to domesticate ICT, seniors, doubly disadvantaged by patterns of inequality (Coelho, 2019), are further removed from the Internet and social networking sites, so it is urgent to scrutinize the dynamics associated with this phenomenon.

Contents of this chapter encompass issues related to the aging problem in Europe (and across the world), articulating the theme of Network Society and ICT with the digital inclusion and literacy of seniors - its benefits and challenges, and discusses the reasons, motivations and effects of the relationship that this group establishes with digital social networks.

SENIORS AND THE CHALLENGE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)

Contemporary societies experience a market demographic aging process in developed countries and this global demographic megatrend has inspired studies in different areas of knowledge. According to the World Population Prospects study (United Nations, 2020) - this aging wave that we are experiencing is an unprecedented phenomenon in human history. Today, there are 703 million persons aged 65 years or over in the world. This number is projected to double to 1,5 billion in 2050. In the European Union (EU), ageing population is one of the major challenges that many of its member states must face in the next decade. Enhanced life expectancy and decreasing fertility rates result in an increased number and proportion of older adults. Data provided by the European Commission (2019) estimates that in 2060, 1 in 3 European citizens will be 65 years old or older.

The dual dimension of aging, the individual level and the population level, led to a paradigm shift based on the notion that since life is longer, it must be lived in an "active" way. The challenge launched in 2002 by the World Health Organization (WHO), in the document "Active aging. A policy framework", has appealed to the need to foresee aging from a holistic and optimistic point of view, one that aims at quality of life, to the detriment of a pessimistic view characterized by successive losses both physically, mentally and socially. It is about promoting an active and competent aging based on a series of social and personal conditions that involve commitment to life, making elderly citizens proactive, regulating their quality of life through active participation in economic, civic, technological, cultural or even spiritual issues, and in the definition of social policies (Pinheiro & Areosa, 2018). The challenge is to ensure that aging occurs with quality in all areas and that this stage of life is an asset for society.

As we watch the planetary aging process of the population, we observe the internet drawing on the fabric of our lives (Castells, 2003), acknowledging the inevitability of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), installed as new modalities of social organization (Van Dijk, 2006), assuming an ubiquitous position in our world, to the point of being essential in the most diverse spheres of our lives.

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