

## Chapter 7

# Investigating the Educational Needs of Elderly People Within the Scope of an Educational Program on the Use of Social Media Networks by Smartphones

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Social media networks are becoming increasingly popular as a means for social interaction. A number of studies have found that elderly people have a difficulty in using social media platforms while exist a number of barriers that discourage them from using technology. This chapter investigates the educational needs of older people, who are members of two elderly care centers in Northern Greece, intending to attend an educational program on using smartphones as a communication tool to join social media networks. Research findings indicate that elderly women are more willing to attend an educational program than men and key areas of their interest include access to the internet (e.g., online payments), how to create and use an e-mail account, and how to join social media networks in order to feel less isolated by communicating with other individuals or groups with the same interests.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Social media networks are becoming increasingly popular as a means for social interaction. Several studies have found that elderly people have a difficulty in using social media platforms, either due to a lack of technical knowledge and skills or because they feel intimidated to join them. Apart from these main barriers, there seem to be a few more reasons why third age people are discouraged from using this technology. Taking into consideration the challenges social media networks can pose to the elderly, as indicated by many studies, it appears that the key to overcome their negative attitudes towards technology, especially, towards social media networks, is the participation in educational programs that teach proper and safe use of communication technology and social media.

This chapter investigates the educational needs of older people intending to attend an educational program on the use of smartphones as a communication tool to join social media networks. The first section of the chapter includes an international literature review, with an emphasis on the reasons older people avoid using social media networks (Leist, 2013). Various factors, such as gender, family background, social status and education, appear to play an essential role in older people's use of Social Media Networks (Ma, Chan, and Chen, 2016). The literature has also shown that older women are more willing to join educational programs on the use of technology than their counterparts (Ramón-Jerónimo, Peral-Peral, & Arenas-Gaitán, 2013; Vošner, Bobek, Kokol, & Krečič, 2016). Moreover, the literature indicates that the use of social media helps older people to communicate with relatives and friends, while other studies suggest that participation in social media networks helps many older people to fight isolation (Delello & McWhorter, 2017; Jung, Walden, Johnson, & Sundar, 2017). On the other hand, other studies have shown that older people feel insecure in using social media, fearing that personal information may be disseminated to third parties, or that their accounts might get hacked (Hope, Schwaba, & Piper, 2014; Nef, Ganea, Müri, & Mosimann, 2013).

In the second section of the chapter, a research conducted in two Elderly Care Centers (E.C.C.) in Greece is presented. The research sample consists of older people, members of two E.C.C.s, sited in different cities in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The aim of the research is to explore the educational needs of elderly people intending to participate in an educational program on using smartphones as a communication tool to join social media networks. Research findings suggest that elderly women are more willing to attend educational programs than men and the areas of their interest include learning how to get access to the internet so as to improve their daily lives e.g. online payments, how to create and use an e-mail account and how to join social media networks in order to feel less isolated by communicating with other individuals or groups with the same interests.

Additionally, elderly women intending to participate in such educational programs in both E.C.C.s requested to be trained on the use of smartphones and not PCs, because they claimed that even though they possessed these devices, they were unable to use them properly.

## **THEORETICAL APPROACH**

### **Third Age Adult Learners**

The term 'third age' refers to a particular age group within a population and, given that life expectancy is increasing, its characteristics are changing. In the present day, the third age group is showing an in-

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