



Older people and new technologies: challenges for devising solutions to promote digital inclusion

Aging brings to the fore situations and challenges for society to devise solutions that can support the lives of older people and contribute to their well-being¹. A timely issue, a number of aspects associated with digital inclusion reveal that “inclusion” can help promote a longer, more dignified and better quality life.

The first aspect involves the hiatus between older age and the exponential advance in technology. The pace of technological innovations, interfaces and digital devices has led to a shift in older people’s way of life, requiring this group to master e-skills in order to ensure inclusion in the digital world².

Countless activities are mediated by technology, such as the use of ATMs or apps for banking operations; virtual meetings for work, education or leisure; information and communications technology devices including Smartphones and multi-function printers with built-in fax/scanners; online medical visits and service bookings over the internet; virtual tours of museums as a cultural alternative; and an array of technology resources and devices which support physical activity, besides health promotion and monitoring.

Today, making the most of the triumph of longer lives means engaging in activities mediated by technology products and devices. However, the older population remains a group that faces the greatest barriers to connectivity³.

The second aspect is the fact that older individuals are staying longer in the job market, albeit due to changes in pension/retirement rules, as a means of topping up their income, or because they are the sole breadwinner. Concomitantly, there has been a growth in the market that employs on-line platforms or mobile apps to offer their services⁴ (e.g. apps for personal transportation, shipping goods and food delivery), posing a further challenge for older individuals who need, or wish, to be involved in this type of work.

The third aspect relates to the rise in the prevalence of chronic diseases, particularly among the older population, calling for longitudinal care models. Health services are placing greater emphasis on the individual in managing and nurturing their own health, often requiring the use of monitoring tools (e.g. glucose meters or blood pressure monitors) and communication with health services via apps^{1,5}. These cases illustrate the need for investment in digital inclusion programs for health education to enable management of chronic diseases within the home setting⁶.

In the current scenario, ageism toward older individuals constitutes a barrier to the process of digital inclusion. The notion that older age precludes learning leads to the reinforcement of stereotypes that fail to embrace the diversity and individuality of aging, with the consequent risk of propagating a distorted image

of this phase of life. Age-related prejudice toward older people gives rise to gerotechnological anxiety and low perceived self-efficacy, leading to intergenerational conflicts and abandonment of technologies. Thus, tackling agism is vital in order to promote digital equality⁶.

The aspects outlined provide windows of opportunity towards securing the right to learning throughout the lifespan and acknowledging the importance of intergenerational collaboration and support. In recognizing the ongoing ability to acquire new skills and learn new tasks (including competencies for using new technologies), digital inclusion programs have proven ideal forums for extending learning and promoting continuing education⁶.

The process of digital literacy is predominantly promoted by intergenerational assistance and support⁵. This contact between generations allows differences to be embraced and mutual learning to be fostered through interaction of the youngest and oldest members of society. This sense of solidarity brings the learner closer to the teacher, fosters a rewarding relational environment, boosts feelings of self-efficacy, while broadening the opportunity for participation of older people. This strategy contributes to lifelong learning and allows individuals to feel part of the globalized world^{3,7}.

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