



Using information technologies for a better and more independent future

news and views, volume 2, winter 2009

So much to learn

Since the summer we have met with many groups of people – throughout England and Scotland, who are all over the age of 50. We are trying to discover and understand what people think about digital technologies including computers and mobile phones, why some people love them and others hate them and what they might want in the future.

Some people have taken part by completing a questionnaire, some have watched actors acting out some ideas for the future, and some are about to take part in some psychological tests of well-being. And one felt the desire to share her frustration.

Eastenders of the north?

It is hard to imagine what might change in the next five or ten years. Researchers at Dundee University have been using live performance and videos to help both designers and older people take a 'wee peek' into the future.



A three act drama created in collaboration with Maggie Morgan in Dundee, was performed by two actors, Ian (Pat) and Sarah (Maggie). The performance took place over two mornings in Dundee, with a group of 16 non-computer users and 16 computer users of retirement age. Interestingly the computer users were more suspicious of the dangers of viruses, hacking into personal files, violation of personal privacy than the non-users. One person asked: "Would the computer tell on you to anyone else?" Eight members of each group stayed on into each afternoon to take part in a design exercise to redesign a device they had been shown in the morning dramas.

Learning how to use computers

Some people taking part in our survey are taking computer classes run by Age Concern in Leicester. Over one third of those attending the classes indicated that they were doing so as a preparation for becoming digitally engaged, but for two-thirds it was as a refresher, to enable them feel more confident with technology.

- The people we have talked to prefer formal learning environments to begin their digital engagement journeys, which raise awareness; they 'only just wet your mouth'. Another acknowledged that, 'I have so much to learn – courses like these only give you a taster, there is so much I want to do and learn about yet'.
- For some these introductory courses have been empowering; and they wanted to attend more advanced classes to develop their skills more; for example online communication, shopping and banking online, as well as searching for information, including cheaper service providers.
- The overwhelming majority of the digitally engaged told us that technologies had a positive impact on every day life. One important, recurrent theme was the fact that digital technologies facilitate communication (especially via emails and mobile telephones), increase access to information and can improve quality of life (relaxation/reduced social isolation).
- Some people also shared with us some difficult/frustrating dimensions to digital technology use, and for many these fears centred on feeling confused, the use of jargon, and using the technology infrequently which meant they forgot things.
- When they get stuck with technology other people, especially neighbours, followed by children and grandchildren are called upon to help.

A chance to share

In Derby we have teamed up with Derby Age Concern to offer free **15 minute computer taster sessions**. These mini bite size sessions will provide you with a wonderful opportunity to pop along and meet us, learn more about our project and have a demonstration.

Please contact: Jatinder Sandhu, Nottingham Trent University, Tel: 0115 8483746
Email: jatinder.sandhu@ntu.ac.uk

Also in the Midlands, a special event on **Improving everyday life: getting connected to public services** is being held as part of the Festival of Social Science in Cotmanhay, Ilkeston on March 19th 2010.

Useful links

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/course> This BBC online course allows you to learn how to use the internet using a step by step process.

In and around London

In four visits to the London Borough of Hackney we have been meeting with enthusiastic computer users, people learning to use the internet and people who have never used a computer or the internet. Mobile phone use is much higher than expected – whether it is ‘just for emergencies’ or as a combined digital camera and music store.



The University of the Third Age has over 1500 members in the Harrow branch to the North West of London. They estimate about 10% use the internet to keep in touch with the group. This made it very easy to set up an email questionnaire and arrange a meeting where 14 people took part in the full survey and discussion. The group included some early adopters who have been computer users since the 1980s.

Online club houses

Two ‘clubhouses’ are now successfully up and running – one in Saltburn, Cleveland (led by Steve) and one on Dundee, Scotland (led by Paula) and we will soon have another one set up in Northampton in the East Midlands

Within the Saltburn clubhouse there is eagerness to share cultural and heritage information online. Members of this clubhouse have become absorbed in activities such as creating a wiki* for the fisherman’s choir. Some of the members are involved in other formal learning at the Destinations community centre and see the social opportunities of the club as a merciful release from stress.

The use of social networking sites (such as Ning) have also proved useful for the Dundee clubhouse. People are, on the whole still getting to grips with it and are beginning to send each other messages. The Dundee clubhouse in the near future will begin to focus on activities such as blogging.

Emerging findings from the digital engagement questionnaire are suggesting that there is a real need for support in learning how to use digital technologies. In addition emerging findings suggest learning instructed by a personal teacher or either at adult education centres, at Age Concern or at home was the most favoured method of learning.

Quiz

An online clubhouse is:

- a) Small porter cabin beside the railway line
- b) A friendly online place to play with new technologies
- c) An internet gambling site

Many older people thoroughly enjoyed the formal computer training and felt they had benefitted also from the peer support. Formal learning was favoured as the tutor is able to provide step by step support. Peer support is also favoured (i.e. learning with others with similar skill abilities) as this seemed to give individuals more confidence. Steve Thompson has found intergenerational learning is possibly the most effective motivator for engagement with new technologies, something the Northampton clubhouse is seeking to investigate too with the help of Age Concern, Northampton.

Correct answer to Quiz is b)

**A wiki is a special type of website where you can add information as well as search*

Psychological testing

What we want to know? How does information processing help in the use of new technologies such as mobile phones, computers, Internet, DVD players, etc.?

Why is that important? This is important to be able to find ways to adapt and optimise the access to new technologies for all ages.

Does computer use support brain function? Studies indicate that mental activity does support brain function, but it is not yet clear to what extent the use of new technologies affects brain function.

How do we find out? Prof. Hogervorst, Dr. Bandelow and Veronika van der Wardt have developed brain function tests, which are very much like puzzles or games. In cooperation with other research projects we then aim to modify computer systems to support people's access to these systems. The same study is currently being conducted in Indonesia to see if in a developing country similar psychosocial factors are affecting the use of computers and other new technologies.

Can you help? We would like to invite you to take part in a study to see if there is a relationship between the performance on those tests and computer use. To find out more about taking part you can email Veronika at v.i.e.van-der-wardt@lboro.ac.uk

Readers rants

Small change – big issues, *emailed by CK Lincoln*

I've just had to get a new keyboard. I had one that was sticky and I struggled for years. Then I got one, identical to my work one which was lovely. Good oh, I thought, Christmas 2009, letter writing will be sooo much easier, but it died!!!, So now Another nice new keyboard, fantastic, except, NOT the same as my work one (standard keyboard layout) AND I AM A TOUCH TYPIST. I may have started nearly forty years ago, on the big manuals, but, over the the years I've evolved, and learned 'keyboarding' AND the position of the END key.

This key is really important to me, it allows me to move freely around my text. I can jump

around using CTRL and the arrow keys, then I delete/alter what I want, and then I jump back to the END!!!! I've been doing this for years, never had to look at the keys to do this, it's sort of part of me.

Now my ***** Microsoft keyboard, has me pressing INSERT instead of END, which means instead of going to the end of the text, to continue typing, I actually overwrite the existing text which I've just altered. Hell, I can't even reach the END key so easily. Obviously it's the most unimportant key on this keyboard.

So, this little missive has probably taken longer than it should have done. I guess the only solution is to try and think as fast as I can type, or type as fast as I can think, or stop editing my stuff, ignore the typo's and the misplaced apostrophe's and grammar, stop being such a ***** perfectionist, don't try to forget that I was going to rant on about the enter key being slightly different position meaning every web search now ends in a hash, but that would mean editing or starting the paragraph above, and totally ignoring the fact the crap and all the other rubbish i'm typing and be li allow tmyself to be free. like a bird LOL xxx

Ed's note: Keyboard shortcuts not only help ex-secretaries but also anyone with mouse problems, and people who have visual impairments.

News about Digital Britain

From the BBC: "The UK government has pledged to get another one million people online by 2012 as it pushes ahead with moving the majority of its services onto the web. It has announced a £30m cash injection for UK online centres, set up nine years ago to provide help for those without internet access."

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/8401196.stm> 8th December 2009

Who's who?



My name is Veronika van der Wardt and I am the new research associate for WP2 (Psychosocial factors in the use of new technologies). Previously, I developed a computerized cognitive test battery and investigated the impact of cognitive abilities in athletes with learning disabilities on sports performance.

Three more members of the research team, Matt Bell on the left and Matthew Tylee Atkinson on the right with Karen Li in the middle are also all at Loughborough University.



Welcome also to Adam Jones who has taken up the PhD studentship from NTU , his work will focus upon mapping and analysing existing learning and support needs

Word search

What technologies do you use: camera, computer, dvd, internet, mobile, printer, scanner, telephone, video

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Please email me copy, articles and letters
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Summer 2010 by 30th June 2010

Sus-IT is funded by

