

Draft abstract BCS HCI workshop 2006:

Does the World Wide Web meet the information needs of older people?

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Abstract

Over the last ten years the World Wide Web has brought rapid changes to the way we interact with business, government bodies and each other. The technology can be used to access and utilise a wide range of information. The potentially easy access to this information will affect the way in which citizens of all ages and cultures manage their lives. Statistical analysis of use of the web by age shows that older people are lagging behind the rates of take up of the younger generations who use computers and the internet at school and work. In the United Kingdom for example latest figures show that 64% of all adults had accessed the internet in the preceding 3 months, however there was considerable variation by age. Less than 20% of over 65's had used the internet in the preceding 3 months (ONS 2005).

Introduction

Information Communication Technology (ICT) potentially offer support for activities of daily living and social connectedness that will benefit an ageing population but some concern is being expressed about the digital divide and exclusion of certain groups of people from information technologies including exclusion of older people.(eEurope Advisory Group 2005) However, older people throughout the world are themselves participating in this changing technological world by getting involved in using the internet encouraged by younger family members, and in some cases by attending classes or making use of computers in day centres and clubs.(Chong and Theng 2004, Curzon, Wilson and Whitney 2006). This involvement is enabling them to utilise the available information to manage their lives, remain connected to local society and to friends and family and to obtain the information required to enable them to deal with the changing effects of ageing.

Comparison Studies

Chong and Theng (2004) reported the results of a study of web-based information needs of senior citizens in Singapore. This study revealed considerable interest by older people wanting to learn about and use this new technology. The study also identified the mismatch between the information available from the World Wide Web and the information requirements of the older users. This paper will report on a replication of the study with older people in London, United Kingdom in order to explore current attitudes to new technology and use of the internet, how new opportunities are being exploited and whether there are opportunities to improve usability and support for tasks such as information seeking. The study involved over 100 older people in the United Kingdom. The results from over 100 questionnaires from the United Kingdom respondents were analysed and compared with the results from Singapore.

The initial results from this comparison demonstrated; the motivation of the older users to use the Internet, their expectations on how it would meet their information needs and how it met their expectations. Because the 'real world' nature of the uses that the older people were using the Internet for, the tasks they were attempting were often quite complex and difficult. This meant that their success rate was sometimes low but the nature of an information source is that it must meet the true information needs of the users not provide them with easy to find but useless information.

Conclusion

This work has served to identify the links between older people in two different areas in the world with respect to their use of the Internet as an information source to be used in their daily lives.

References

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