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Older Adults Attitudes Towards New Communication Technologies

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ABSTRACT

As the number of New Communication Technologies (NCTs) being created increases at an exponential rate it is important to better understand how all people in our population take advantage of newer NCTs, including older adults. This study sought to better understand older adults' attitudes towards NCTs as a means of learning and adaption as well as maintaining independence. The researchers argued that older adults' attitudes toward NCTs have an effect on older adults' perceived and therefore actual usability. This study was conducted by a communication research methods course at an Ohio public university and it included surveys and interviews of 525 older adults' living in the Midwestern United States. The researchers divided the participants into four age groups, Builders, Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials, and focused primarily on performance expectancy, and effort expectancy social influence norms and the effects of facilitating conditions. The researchers found that there were significant generational differences in attitudes towards NCTs and younger generations were more likely to positively respond to newer NCTs than older generations. The researchers also found that older adults do not experience an immediate attraction to NCTs unlike younger generations. The researchers posit that these results indicate that must be a greater focus on reducing the deficit between younger and older generations and their respective levels of NCT literacy.



BACKGROUND

New Communication Technologies

- New communication technologies or NCTs have revolutionized the way everything is done. Everything from health care to socializing has been transformed into entirely new landscapes purely based on their dependence in increasingly new technologies that are being built every day.
- We define new communication technologies as technology or technological equipment that is used for communicating, such as personal websites, blogs, email, and texting. This definition does not include inventions that have been around for many years (e.g. telephones).

New Communication Technologies and Older adults

- Consequently our population has had to learn how to adapt to the rapid timeline that newer technologies are released on and certain segments of our population have difficulty with this. It is therefore important to study how different groups adapt to NCTs and their attitudes towards NCTs.

METHOD

- This sample included 525 people, 235 men and 288 women. The sample was divided into four ages groups; adults born between 1901 and 1945 (66) were labeled Builders, between 1946 and 1964 they were labeled Boomers (256), between 1965 and 1981 was Generation X (109), and between 1982 and 1997 were labeled Millennials (92).
- The sample was gathered by students in an undergraduate communication research methods course at a Midwestern university.
- The student researchers had the participants complete a survey in silence and were present during survey completion. Contact with all subjects was attempted through phone calls to verify qualifying conditions, any information that couldn't be verified was disregarded.
- The data used in this study measured the performance expectancy of the older adults, effort expectancy, social influence norms and the effects of facilitating conditions surrounding potential NCT usage.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

- Participants emotions towards NCTs were measured on a five point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) as a less favorable attitude to NCTs to 5 (strongly agree) as a more highly favorable attitude toward NCTs.
- The variables measured for this study included age and attitudes toward NCTs.
- A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the generational differences within the different variables chosen. Exploratory factor analysis was used to evaluate the dimensionality of all measures. The composite scores were then created by averaging response to single items and estimating their reliability through Cronbach's alphas.

Test Results

- The results of post hoc LSD test indicated that Builders were significantly different from Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials in terms of performance expectancy. The average performance expectancy scores of the Builders were lower than all three other groups ranging from a difference of .38 when compared to Boomers to .68 when compared to Millennials.
- On average the Builders effort expectancy score was also significantly lower than that of Boomers (.71), Generation Xers (1.14), and Millennials (1.58).
- Test results also indicated that Builders had a much lower average score of social influence norms than Generation Xers (.25) and Millennials (.49).
- When looking at the impact of facilitating conditions Builders had significantly lower average scores than Boomers (.46) Generation Xers (.62) and Millennials (.81).

CONCLUSIONS

- We found a significant correlation between age and attitudes toward new communication technologies. Older adults' are more likely to have negative feelings towards NCTs.
- Builders when compared to Millennials had more negative attitudes towards NCTs and this trend followed when comparing Builders to all younger generations.
- Negative attitudes preceded perceived and actual decreased ability to adapt to newer communication technologies

Selected References

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