Editorial: Insights in older people's digital literacies

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Insights in older people's digital literacies

The global aging phenomenon has accelerated the discussion of older people's positions in digitalizing societies. Even though digitalization of services and communications can be inclusionary, they may also have exclusionary effects for senior citizens. Extant research has offered several examples of how senior citizens sometimes struggle to keep up with digitalization of everyday life (Papí-Gálvez and Parra-Casado, 2023). Important shares of people over 65 years of age lack adequate digital literacies to support their learning, wellbeing, everyday life, and participation in society, and need social support in order to get by (Rasi-Heikkinen, 2022). There is a substantial need for more research evidence about older people's digital literacies (in their varying forms) and digital challenges they are facing in everyday life, as well as suggestions on what sorts of education that could help them develop digital literacies. By help of four research articles, this Research Topic contributes with new insights to all these important areas.

The article "*Digital inclusion for social inclusion. Case study on digital literacy*" by Méndez-Domínguez et al. draws on two sets of empirical data. To fulfill their first aim, to identify differences in access to technologies and digital skills between different social groups, they draw on data from a survey conducted in the region Rioja, Spain. In their analysis, they relate physical access to ICTs, ICT-skills as well as patterns of ICT-usage to respondents' varying social characteristics. Respondents' income and level of education reoccur as important factors in shaping both ICT access and skills. The authors' second aim relates to data from focus groups targeting three different groups of respondents, students, professionals in social work, and senior citizens. By help of these data the authors identify similarities and differences between the groups in regard to their ICT-literacies. In light of these differences, they conclusively state how "tailoring ICT design to specific groups/segments/populations for the purposes of digital literacy is essential to reduce the digital and social participation gap" (p. 14).

Lin et al. article "*Exploring the intersections of immigrant seniors' digital literacies and social connectedness: a Canadian study.*" Based on a sample of 16 individual interviews with immigrant seniors in Canada, their article offers detailed accounts of four of these life stories with a specific focus on exploring how "immigrant seniors are embracing and engaging with technology and building their digital literacy potential as a conduit for social connectedness" (p. 3). Their analysis of the stories draws on Dewey's (1956) notion of natural impulses of a child – communication, construction, expression, inquiry – and are framed by an ambition to inform the construction digital literacy programs for older

adults as "pedagogical spaces." Important features of such pedagogical spaces include that they allow for social interaction, invite to group activities, offer hands-on skills, promote self-expression and stimulate intellectual curiosity.

As we have stated above, there is also an urge for more research on older individual's digital literacies, and their encounters with digital services. It is not sufficient to statistically ascertain that the vast majority of older individuals today, at least in richer countries, have access to digital media – in Sweden as many as 9 out of 10 (Olsson and Viscovi, 2023). More correctly, as van Dijk (2020, 47) emphasizes, "… the problem only starts when everybody has a computer, smartphone and Internet connection." The statement becomes clearer in light of the article by Vercruyssen et al. (a) titled "*How 'basic' is basic digital literacy for older adults? Insights from digital skills instructors.*" The authors explore the diversity of challenges that the uninitiated individual must overcome to become a proficient user. The terminology alone is a barrier as well as understanding and operating the hardware. Keyboards, mouses or touchscreens are hardly intuitive or self-instructional gadgets and expressions as browser, operating system, downloading or uploading not natural parts of everyone's vocabulary. Furthermore, knowledge and skills must be taught, repeated – and continuously recaptured as hardware, apps and interfaces are far from standardized and stable. Difficulties as these are often overlooked in the literature on digital literacy, Vercuyssen et al. (b) elucidate. Prevalent definitions tend to take a certain level of literacy for granted, which on closer inspection is not at all self-evident.

The fourth article of this Research Topic conveys new knowledge about older individuals' online engagement. The article authored by Bergström is titled "*Internet perceptions among older adults in Sweden.*" Drawing on a national survey, Bergström finds that increased frequency of usage correlates positively with appreciative perceptions as learning from the internet, looking for solutions online, and seeing opportunities rather than problems. However, breadth of use, i.e., number of different activities, exhibits a somewhat ambiguous pattern. On the one hand, broader use means, as expected, a positive approach toward learning and finding solutions online. But broader usage also means being less positive about time spent and keeping up with what happens online. Maybe Bergström glimpses something important here: with increasing age it becomes more difficult to maintain acquired online repertoires and skills, which may lead to frustration and disappointment.

The four articles provide insights into digital literacies among different social groups of older people. For older people's inclusion and agency in digitalizing society, actions and cross-sector collaborations are needed from multiple societal actors, including educators. The articles speak for the need to better design both technologies and digital literacy training to meet the needs of the diverse population of older people.

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