Senior Citizens and Internet Usage

COML 680
Gonzaga University
Senior Citizens and Internet Usage

Proposed Topic & Rationale

Older adults make up what is arguably the fastest growing segment of the United States population. O’Hara (2004) reported that, in 1970, people over the age of 65 made up 9.9 percent of the total U.S. population. O’Hara likewise reported that, by 2000, this segment of the population grew to represent 12.4 percent. With the increasing size of this population, comes increasing importance in society.

Of all demographic groups, senior citizens are the least likely to use the Internet (Osman, 2005). With the Internet’s growing importance in the lives of Americans, this population is significantly underrepresented, missing out on an important access point to information and connection to friends and family.

Senior citizens report anxiety about their ability to learn the skills necessary or about their ability to retain the information (Mellor, 2007). This generation frequently lived through their entire professional and personal lives without the need for computers or the Internet. In contrast, their younger family members (including grandchildren) have grown up with computers and the Internet affecting a large portion of their lives (Osman, 2005).

Senior citizens experience physical and cognitive challenges when learning Internet skills. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. This demographic needs a personalized, tailored approach to learning computer, Internet and e-mail skills. These skills will help combat the social isolation that seniors frequently experience.
This project will consist of a series of teaching sessions aimed at senior citizens, teaching Internet and e-mail skills. The lessons will take place in a computer lab, giving the “students” the opportunity to learn by performing the tasks themselves. The project will also include a literature review, which will further explore the rationale for the project and inform the format and the content of the sessions.

Participation will be solicited in a number of ways, including through a few local non-profit agencies that provide services to senior citizens and through local churches.

The series will be sequential, each new session building on lessons learned in previous sessions. The sessions will have a multimedia component, including a combination of hands-on practice and power point illustrations that are easy-to-follow. Handouts will also be employed to help increase retention. If they are available and appropriately geared toward the audience, videos may also be included to further illustrate the concepts. All of the media created will be sent home with students for further reference and increased retention.

The content of the sessions will include the following topics:

- Basics of computer use (how to use a mouse, how to adjust the screen for easier viewing, how to open the browser)
- Glossary of terms (including frequently used acronyms)
- Computer basics (how to access files, how files are saved on computers, saving/finding files on the computer)
• Email (email addresses, how to send/receive email, how to use attachments, how to sign up for free email, how to access web-based email)

• Internet basics (how Internet providers work, maximizing/minimizing windows, how to get to a website, major buttons on browser, using bookmarks)

• Security online (how to tell if a website is secure, what does security online mean, how to stay safe while surfing online, what to watch for, how to prevent abuse/fraud online, overview of computer viruses)

• Websites which might be of interest to seniors (website examples of hobbies, connecting with friends/family, health information, picture sharing websites, iGrandparents websites, “chat rooms”, Facebook)

• Advanced topics – What are blogs? (what are they, how do they work, how would I or my family use one to stay in touch?)

• Advanced topics - What is social networking? (MySpace, Facebook)
Proposed References List  
(Note that there are some APA formatting mistakes below:

First Monday, 10(7-4).

Internet Journal of Health, 3(1), 2.


Haddon, L. (2000, December). Social exclusion and information and communication


depression in the elderly: A review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. 106(1/2), 29-44.
