Bridging the Digital Divide for Older Adults

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Understanding the Digital Divide

The difference between those that have access and use of internet and those who don’t.

- Country development
- Urban vs. rural
- Cost
- Geographic & Socioeconomic

Fear
- Fear of making mistakes, new tech
- Lack of interest, don’t see the point, too old
- Missing knowledge & experience

Attitude
- Digital Skills

Cost
Understanding the Digital Divide

• As ICT become increasingly pervasive, those that are left behind are highly disadvantaged
• COVID-19 has highlighted the vital importance of increasing digital inclusion
• Older adults – often excluded and marginalized with respect to technology.
  – Especially when we intersect lower socioeconomic factors, race, gender and new immigrant status with older adults
From our Older Adult Community …
Consequences of Digital Divide

Missed opportunities
Lack of services
Difficulty with healthcare
Lack of value
Poor care & health outcomes
Barriers to accomplish things that used to be easy

Isolation
Voices not heard
Loneliness
Left behind
Feelings of uselessness
Frustration
Socially disconnected
No one cares

Poor overall well-being
Bridging the Divide

- Funding for infrastructure development in rural areas
- Access via local libraries, community centres, etc.
- Targeted subsidies
  - Technology
  - Access
  - Education
Bridging the Divide

• Cognitive support
• Emotional support
• Design
Barriers directly heard from our older adult community ...
Interface Design

• One size does NOT fit all!
• Differences in motivations, expectations, experiences, comfort, capabilities, etc...
Age-related changes in capabilities
Basic principles that designers get wrong

1. Size, colour and contrast

- Font sizes too small
- **Click targets too small**
- **Colours used inappropriately**
- Not enough contrast between website elements

Overwhelm with dense text, especially when text is stuffed into small spaces without enough white space to separate sections
Basic principles that designers get wrong

2. Navigation
   – Aesthetic overriding intuitive navigation
   – Overwhelming information
   – Mismatch with mental models
   – Needs to clearly answer
     • Where am I?
     • Where have I been?
     • Where can I go?
Basic principles that designers get wrong

3. User testing with older adults
   - Only real way of knowing how someone will interact with a technology is by testing it with them
   - Gain insights into usability struggles and successes
Going beyond surveys

• With surveys …
  – Low granularity
  – Subjectivity bias
  – Social desirability bias

• Neurophysiological tools
Making it accessible

Mobile User Experience Lab

Bringing research, design, user testing and training to the community.
Policy Implications:
To Close the Digital Divide

Principles
• Affordable access
• Access to digital literacy training
• Accessible interfaces
• Accessible support

Processes
• Open & transparent
• Multi-stakeholder
• Co-design with older adults
Some Canadian Initiatives

Canada’s Digital Charter

• Principle #1: Universal Access
  – “All Canadians will have equal opportunity to participate in the digital world and the necessary tools to do so, including access, connectivity, literacy and skills”

Canada’s Connectivity Strategy

• aims to connect 95% of Canadians to high-speed internet by 2026, and 100% by 2030
Can we do more?

Current focus:
- Affordable access
- Literacy and skills

Holistic approach:
- Accessible design
- Accessible support

Public and Private Policies
Thank you!
Looking forward to your questions & comments.