



**Selected Papers of #AoIR2020:  
The 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference of the  
Association of Internet Researchers**  
Virtual Event / 27-31 October 2020

## **OLDER PEOPLE'S DIGITAL LIVES**

Esther Milne, Anthony McCosker and Kath Albury  
Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

Anette Grønning  
University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

Earvin Cabalquinto  
Deakin University Australia

Diana Bossio and Max Schleser  
Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

Older people have rich and varied digital lives.

But this has not always been the way that older people's use and negotiation of online, social and digital communication technologies has been framed.

Much of the previous research about older people and digital or internet-based technologies focusses on the lack of uptake and efficacy, particularly for more dynamic online skills such as content creation, sharing and engagement. There is good reason for this research focus; there is still a considerable link between older people's digital exclusion and poor health and social outcomes (Hunsaker and Hargittai, 2018). While older people derive many health and well-being benefits from digital and online engagement (Bath and Deeg, 2005), a number of factors may influence whether digital engagement in later life is possible, or even wanted. These issues can range from reluctance to engage with online public sharing, to difficulty finding digital technologies that cater for older people with declining physical ability (Warchauser, 2002). Furthermore, there is little research on older people's more everyday and informal uses of digital and online tools by older people, much less the various negotiations and complexities that occur by using these tools in various social and cultural contexts.

Suggested Citation (APA): Milne, E., McCosker, A., Albury, K., Grønning, A., Cabalquinto, E., Bossio, D., and Schleser, M. (2020, October). *Older People's Digital Lives*. Panel Presented at AoIR 2020: The 21<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Virtual Event: AoIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.

This panel explores some of the key reasons for the differences between older people who are engaging with the benefits of having more digital tools and skills, and the way these play out in the everyday lives. The panel's central argument is that many seniors experience a rich social life integrated with digital technologies. How these digital lives are negotiated and developed, and the particular frustrations and barriers to their digital participation, are particular to their cultural context for use of communication tools.

The papers within this panel will consider:

- How digital practices emerge in older people's everyday activities and social contexts;
- How older people negotiate digital skills such as safety, communication, engagement and representation;
- How older people's confidence and motivation to engage with online and digital technologies may change in certain contexts.

In doing so, this panel contributes new understanding of how older people's digital lives are emerging, moving away from simplistic descriptions of lack of digital skill, to the multi-faceted and complex negotiations occurring when older people make decisions about how and why to connect with digital tools and online environments.

Milne's paper provides theoretical framework for some of the complexity around older people's use of online digital technologies. Milne's analysis reveals older people's varied, and often sophisticated use of online and digital media, for formal and 'telegrammatic' forms of digital communication, but this is tempered with very reluctant consideration of new forms of social media sharing. Cabalquinto and Grønning add to Milne's theoretical analysis by indicating some of the social and cultural uses of digital communication tools within older people's everyday lives. Grønning's research about e-health consultations recently rolled out across Denmark have had a marked success rate with older people. Preliminary data indicates that far from eschewing digital health care, older patients prefer e-consultations to going to see the doctor. Extending Grønning's work on digital care practices amongst older people, Cabalquinto builds on the intersections of care practices, wellbeing and digital media in the migration context. He argues that elderly CALD people deliver multigenerational care practices among Australian-based loved ones while using smartphones, social media and mobile apps on the move. Bossio's paper completes the panel by indicating that older people's lack of participation in, and access to, their own digital representation has often perpetuated ageist stereotypes about older people. Facilitation of increased access to digital tools and opportunities to tell digital stories helps to disrupt ageist assumptions by framing ageing as a positive experience and representing older people as active, positive and socially connected.

## References:

Bath, P. A., & Deeg, D. (2005). Social engagement and health outcomes among older people: introduction to a special section. *European Journal of Ageing*, 2(1), 24-30.

Hill, R., Betts, L. R., & Gardner, S. E. (2015). Older Adults' Experiences and Perceptions of Digital Technology: (Dis)empowerment, Wellbeing, and Inclusion. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 48, 415-423.

Hunsaker, A., & Hargittai, E. (2018). A review of Internet use among older adults. *New Media & Society*, 20(10), 3937-3954.

Warschauer, M. (2002). Reconceptualizing the digital divide. *First Monday*, 7(7), Retrieved from: <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/967>.

# **DOES ANYONE WANT A FACEBOOK MESSAGE FROM THEIR GRANDMOTHER? OLDER PEOPLE'S USE AND ANXIETIES ABOUT SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION TOOLS.**

Esther Milne  
Social Media Research Group  
Swinburne University of Technology

Anthony McCosker  
Social Media Research Group  
Swinburne University of Technology

Kath Albury  
Social Media Research Group  
Swinburne University of Technology

Much of the existing research about the age-related 'digital divide' (Friemel, 2016), focusses on lack of access to digital tools (Gonzales, 2016) or lack of relevant digital literacies (van Deursen and Helsper, 2015). However, more recent statistical evidence points to increasing numbers of older people (aged over 50) are gaining access to digital technologies through personal computer use and WiFi- or data-enabled mobile devices, and social media tools such as Facebook. Despite increasing access to these tools, uneven participation in online social and digital media cultures persists, most often linked to older people's low self-efficacy in the face of new technology (Hernández-Encuentra et al. 2009).

This divide has historically been most evident amongst older people, particularly when considered in relation to motivation, skills, physical access and usage (van Dijk 2006). The negative outcomes of the digital divide have been discussed in regard to health and wellbeing (Dobransky and Hargittai 2012), social inclusion (Livingstone and Helsper 2007), and social and political participation. In response, social policy, along with a wide range of digital skills and literacy programs have been developed in many countries to address digital inclusion as social policy, with the aim of 'getting older people online'. One of the problems, however, with these established approaches is that they take an individual, psychological perspective, emphasising skills deficits or seniors' low self-efficacy in the face of new technology (Hernández-Encuentra et al. 2009), at the expense of examining cultural and social barriers related to what platforms ask of their ideal (i.e., young) users.

This paper addresses older people's use of online social and digital media communication tools by focusing on the complex personal and social factors that contribute to older people's decision making around use (or non-use) of social and digital media communication tools. There is little research on these more informal and unstructured

uses of digital and online tools by older people, much less the various negotiations and complexities that occur by using these tools in various social and cultural contexts. In this paper we argue that older people's use of social and digital communication tools is predominantly formal and 'telegrammatic'; that is, their use of communication tools is largely administrative, informational or familial in context. Furthermore, a number of factors may influence whether digital engagement is possible, or even wanted, especially existing cultures of digital communication use and anxieties about new forms of online public sharing.

This paper reflects on the research question: how do older people perceive their decision making and use of online social and digital communication tools?

The research methods chosen for the evaluation and exploration of seniors' digital lives were in-depth interviews (n=19) with older people aged 65 years or over in participants' homes (n=16), with a home technology tour, and digital skills self-efficacy survey. Sixteen interviews took place in the participants' home, and following interviews, a 'technology tour' was conducted to provide some further domestic contextual information about participants' internet access, use and capacity. The in-depth interviews included a simple survey to capture participant demographics, internet technology and device ownership and access, and self-reported confidence rating on online and digital media communication skills, following the digital inclusion and participation research work of van Deursen et al. (2016). Data collected through interviews and focus groups was thematically analysed through an open coding process to establish broad themes. Narrative analysis was used to bring these themes together around the personal contexts of the participants, with a selection of focus case studies presented.

Our analysis reveals varied, and often sophisticated use of online and digital media by older people, tempered with very reluctant consideration of new forms of social media sharing. Each of the homes visited had a central computer set-up, whether this was a desk with a PC and printer, or a space for a laptop and tablet devices to be used, indicating a degree of everyday access and use. For many participants, digital technologies offer a means of fulfilling banal administrative tasks, while for others, it offers an informational purpose with the possibility of fulfilling gaps left by physical services, and for others the pursuit of personal relationships and interests.

Digital technologies were most often linked to banal administrative tasks and, as such, were associated with domesticity. Digital technologies are often used for what Jane (Knox) describes as "home business": banking, online shopping, and paying bills. Other participants indicated sophisticated strategic and critical internet skills, citing instances where they had used the internet to make sure that information they had seen elsewhere was legitimate. Internet, social media and everyday communication digital technologies were also consistently mentioned as a means for maintaining social ties whether individual and personal, or within and across groups. For most participants email was the most used method for keeping in touch with friends and family while overseas, due largely to the immediacy of the platform.

But the analysis also highlights the gaps in knowledge and skills, difficulties negotiating processes of learning new devices, applications or tasks, and some of the frustrations

and barriers to learning. Many remained hesitant in applying current communication practices to social media platforms and suggested that it seemed somewhat age-inappropriate to be using social media. Anxieties about social media use were exacerbated by a range of personal and social factors, but in particular by the data-intrusive requirements imposed by platforms that often do not match older people's use or interest of communication tools.

## References

Dobransky, K and Hargittai, E. (2012). "Inquiring minds acquiring wellness: Uses of online and offline sources for health information." *Health Communication*, 27(4), 331–343.

Friemel, T. (2016). "The digital divide has grown old: Determinants of a digital divide among seniors." *New Media & Society*, 18(2), 313-331.

Hernández-Encuentra, E., Pousada, M., & Gómez-Zúñiga, B. (2009). "ICT and older people: Beyond usability." *Educational Gerontology*, 35(3), 226-245.

Livingstone, S and Helsper, E. (2007). "Gradations in digital inclusion: children, young people and the digital divide." *New Media & Society*, 9(4), 671–696.

Van Deursen, A and Helsper, E. (2015). "A nuanced understanding of Internet use and non-use among the elderly". *European Journal of Communication*, 30(2): 171-187.

Van Deursen, A. J., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016). Development and validation of the Internet Skills Scale (ISS). *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(6), 804-823.

van Dijk, J. (2006). Digital divide research: Achievements and shortcomings. *Poetics*, 34(4-5), 221-235.

# “DEAR DOCTOR” E-CONSULTATION AND AGEING: PERCEPTION, MEDIATION AND ETHICS FROM A SPATIO-TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE

Anette Grønning  
University of Southern Denmark

E-consultations are online consultations that allow general practitioners (GPs) and patients to communicate without requiring their physical and/or temporal co-presence (Andreassen, 2011; Ball & Lillis, 2001; Recupero, 2005; Ye, Rust, Fry-Johnson, & Strothers, 2010). E-consultations, which are intended to supplement rather than replace the dyadic encounter in the clinical setting, take place through closed messaging systems that encrypt the exchanges and integrate them into patients' medical records. Uptake of this relatively new form of consultation is contingent on aspects such as political will, technical infrastructures, and the motivation and resources of GPs and patients (Newhouse, Lupiáñez-Villanueva, Codagnone, & Atherton, 2015; Ye et al., 2010). Currently, six different software systems (websites and apps) are used in Danish GP clinics to manage e-consultations. Clinics decide on which system to use, the amount of text that patients can produce and whether pictures can be uploaded.

In 2009, a collective agreement made it mandatory for all Danish GPs to offer digital consultation (econ) to “increase efficiency and quality through the digitisation of health care” (PLO, 2010). E-consultations were introduced as a cost-effective, convenient means of providing access to GPs, primarily for communication of test results and quick questions. In Denmark, e-consultation use has increased steadily since its introduction. A recent study found that Denmark had the highest numbers of doctor-patient emails sent/received in Europe (Newhouse et al., 2015), making it a forerunner in the adoption of e-consultations and thus an important case to investigate. By 2018, the number of e-consultations in Denmark had risen from 1.3 million in 2008 to 7.1 million per year, corresponding to 19% of all GP consultations (PLO, 2018).

Aged patients (65–89 years) participate in these digital consultations with the highest frequency, women more than men, generally. As part of a larger Velux funded project (2018-2021), this presentation focuses on senior patients born 1954 or earlier and their perception and use of econ.

The project was carried out as a perception analysis exploring the questions: How do senior patients perceive and practice econ with their GPs? What are the potential barriers and perceived advantages? The empirical data was collected during spring 2019 and consists of semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted as *talk around texts* with 20 patients, four GPs and two nurses around concrete examples of their econs. The analysis is carried out focusing on selected spatio-temporal aspects: here, there, my time, your time, our time.

Preliminary results show that the aged patients are happy not to have to attend the clinic in person as they find that e-consultations are more convenient than going to see the doctor. The patients emphasize that they do not want to be any bother, and that e-consultations are perceived less disruptive than face-to-face consultations. For

example, one patient says, “I don't want to be any trouble because it's probably nothing”, and another, when asked why she prefers e-consultations states: “Because [that way] you are not any trouble. They answer when they have time”.

Patients appreciate close contact with their GP which they consider to be facilitated by e-consultations. At the same time, they know that GPs are busy as they have many other patients to take care of. As one patient states, “I also think that by using e-consultations, it must take some of the pressure off [the doctor] in [face-to-face] consultations”. Several patients consider their GP's workflow and mention that if they send an e-consultation message in the morning, the GP will answer in the afternoon or the next morning, at the latest. Thus, patients perceive e-consultations as less disturbing for GPs, which makes it easier for them to communicate with their GP without feeling stressed or under time pressure.

The non-physical shared contact space of e-consultations breaks the traditional association between social presence and physical proximity, creating a new form of mutual presence or co-access. For patients, e-consultations are perceived as facilitating new conversations with their GP, which give them a sense of equanimity. Most patients find that they can ask their GP about anything in e-consultations including their worries and concerns.

The study brings new knowledge about aged patients' perception of time and space through digital consultations. The analysis is of relevance not only for scholars interested in understanding the implications of new technologies for our health systems and everyday life, but also for the aged patients themselves, GPs and policy makers involved in the application, regulation and guidance about such technologies. The research results will also benefit the health care education sector, since programmes within the area do not at present include digital consultations.

Moreover, there is a need for further studies in different countries as our findings are likely to be inflected by the local Danish context (e.g. the triage system may operate differently). Finally, we also need to highlight the likelihood that as our patient interviewees were those who chose to use e-consultations, they may be quite technology-savvy and thus not be representative of the general population.

All participants provided informed written consent. The study was approved by the institutional review board of the University of Southern Denmark, the Research and Innovation Organization (RIO) (Journal no. 10457) and conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Declaration of Helsinki (Association, 2013).

## References

Andreassen, H. K. (2011). What does an e-mail address add?-Doing health and technology at home. *Social Science & Medicine*, 72(4), 521-528.

Association, W. M. (2013). Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 310(20), 2191-2194.

Ball, M. J., & Lillis, J. (2001). E-health: transforming the physician/patient relationship. *International Journal of Medical Informatics*, 61(1), 1-10.

Newhouse, N., Lupiáñez-Villanueva, F., Codagnone, C., & Atherton, H. (2015). Patient use of email for health care communication purposes across 14 European countries: an analysis of users according to demographic and health-related factors. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 17(3), e58.

PLO. (2010). *Praktiserende Lægers Organisation [The Danish Organization of General Practitioners]. Lægernes overenskomst om almen praksis [Doctor's agreement]*.

PLO. (2018). Praktiserende Lægers Organisation [The Danish Organization of General Practitioners]. Aktivitet og økonomi i almen praksis i dagtid og vagttid 2007 til 2017. [Activity and economy in General Practice 2007-2017]. Retrieved from [https://www.laeger.dk/sites/default/files/aktivitet\\_og\\_oekonomi\\_i\\_almen\\_praksis\\_2006-2016.pdf](https://www.laeger.dk/sites/default/files/aktivitet_og_oekonomi_i_almen_praksis_2006-2016.pdf)

Recupero, P. R. (2005). E-mail and the psychiatrist-patient relationship. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, 33(4), 465-475.

Ye, J., Rust, G., Fry-Johnson, Y., & Strothers, H. (2010). E-mail in patient-provider communication: A systematic review. *Patient education and counseling*, 80(2), 266

# **AGEING IN THE AGE OF MOBILE MEDIA: THE CASE OF ELDERLY LABOUR MIGRANTS IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**

Earvin Cabalquinto  
Deakin University

Mobile communication technologies are crucial in enabling the conduct of family life in contemporary times. The experiences of labour migrants, who were employed overseas during the 1960s and 1970s, and who are now ageing in their host countries, reflect how everyday mobilities, relationships and settlement have been revolutionised in a networked environment. These labour migrants no longer use digital communication technologies to sustain transnational ties (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Smartphones and social media channels are also utilised to activate and maintain connections among loved ones who were born in or who migrated to Australia. Notably, these labour migrants, who typically come from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) population, are part of Australia's ageing population. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), there are 1.38 million overseas born 65 years old and over as part of a total 3.67 million people aged 65 years old and over in Australia. The leading groups are Southern and East Africa (36,800), Chinese Asia (65,400), and Southern Asia (50,400) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Ultimately, societal and technological transformations are impacting the lives of elderly CALD people in Australia. A sense of 'doing family', belongingness and wellbeing is performed, interrupted and constantly negotiated in a highly tech-based arrangement.

As part of a broader project that seeks to examine how elderly CALD people use mobile media in managing their wellbeing, this paper investigates how elderly CALD people in Melbourne Australia utilise mobile communication technologies to forge and sustain multigenerational care practices among their Australian-based children and grandchildren. It explores how multigenerational and mobile caregiving practices contributes in shaping the wellbeing (Baldassar, Kilkey, Merla, & Wilding, 2016) of elderly CALD people. The research inquiry revolves around four questions: How does mobile devices shape the interactions between the elderly CALD people and their Australian-based children and grandchildren? What are the impacts of mobile interactions in the wellbeing of the elderly migrant? What are the forces that engender the provision of mobile caregiving? What are the possible tensions that might arise in such mediated relations, and how these ruptures are managed to sustain familial ties? In addressing these inquiries, the paper involves an in-depth interview among elderly CALD people in Melbourne. Drawing upon methodological considerations in a migration context (Baldassar, Baldock, & Wilding, 2007; Madianou & Miller, 2012) through a biographical-narrative interview (Brandhorst, 2020), the study maps out the migration pathway, technological profile, and familial relationship and arrangement of the informants.

The paper builds upon a growing study on the intersections of care practices, wellbeing and digital media in the migration context (Baldassar et al., 2007; Wilding & Baldassar, 2018). It acknowledges that support networks of elderly people play a huge role in the

uptake of mobile technologies among elderly people (Baldassar & Wilding, 2019; Baldassar, Wilding, Boccagni, & Merla, 2017). However, a gap remains in exploring how elderly CALD people deliver multigenerational care practices among Australian-based loved ones while using smartphones, social media and mobile apps on the move. Interactions while moving with digital devices may impact notions of co-presence, carework, familyhood, and a sense of wellbeing.

In analysing the motivations, perceptions and outcomes of multigenerational and portable care practices, I deploy a critical mediated mobilities lens (Keightley & Reading, 2014). I identify the role social structures and technological affordances (Keightley & Reading, 2014) in shaping mobile practices. In the first instance, mobile caregiving is understood as shaped by care regimes in a multigenerational household, including familial or gendered expectations (Merla, 2014). For instance, elderly CALD people deliver practical and emotional care to their non-proximate family members through mobile device use. To stay involved in the lives of their family members contributes to one's sense of worth and well-being. Significantly, the technological affordances of communication channels shape interactivity and lessen loneliness and isolation.

However, mobile device use is not detached from communicative challenges. One's access to resources (Madianou & Miller, 2012), socio-technological competencies (Parreñas, 2014; Wilding, 2006) and even familial expectations on care (Baldassar & Wilding, 2019) impact communicative capacities. In some situations, the technological affordance of the platform can become a barrier in digital media use (Thomas et al., 2017). It is through personalised tactics that elderly migrants sustain ties in a multigenerational familial setting.

It is important to note that this paper draws upon a critical mediated mobilities perspective to offer a multi-scalar approach in analysing multigenerational care practices. This means that a migrant's agency in sustaining ties or managing one's wellbeing is not only shaped by personal capacities, social networks, and broader policies on cross-border migration and settlement (Ciobanu, Fokkema, & Nedelcu, 2017). I highlight that factors such as socio-technological abilities (micro), online social networks (meso), and globalising digital care policies and services (macro) are fundamental in moulding the dynamics and textures of a multigenerational familial arrangement. By doing so, this paper foregrounds the complexities, nuances and paradoxes of digital media use among elderly CALD people.

## References

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020). Estimated resident population, Country of birth, Age and sex - as at 30 June 1996 to 2019.

Baldassar, L., Baldock, C., & Wilding, R. (2007). *Families caring across borders: Migration, ageing and transnational caregiving*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Baldassar, L., Kilkey, M., Merla, L., & Wilding, R. (2016). Transnational families, care and wellbeing. In F. Thomas (Ed.), *Handbook of migration and health*. Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 477 - 497.

Baldassar, L., & Wilding, R. (2019). Migration, Aging, and Digital Kinning: The role of distant care support networks in experiences of aging well. *The Gerontological Society of America*, 1 - 9. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/advance-article/doi/10.1093/geront/gnz156/5669942>

Baldassar, L., Wilding, R., Boccagni, P., & Merla, L. (2017). Aging in place in a mobile world: New media and older people's support networks. *Transnational Social Review*, 7(1), 2-9.

Brandhorst, R. M. (2020). A regimes-of-mobility-and-welfare approach: The impact of migration and welfare policies on transnational social support networks of older migrants. *Australian Journal of Family Research*, 3, 1-19.

Ciobanu, R. O., Fokkema, T., & Nedelcu, M. (2017). Ageing as a migrant: vulnerabilities, agency and policy implications. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43,164-181.

Keightley, E., & Reading, A. (2014). Mediated mobilities. *Media, Culture & Society*, 36(3), 285-301.

Madianou, M., & Miller, D. (2012). *Migration and new media: Transnational families and polymedia*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Merla, L. (2014). A macro perspective on transnational families and care circulation: Situating capacity, obligation and family commitments. In L. Baldassar & L. Merla (Eds.), *Transnational families, migration and the circulation of care: understanding mobility and absence in family life*. New York: Routledge, 115 - 132.

Parreñas, R. S. (2014). The intimate labour of transnational communication. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 3(3), 425 -442.

Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Wilson, C., Ewing, S., MacDonald, T., Tucker, J., & Rennie, E. (2017). *Measuring Australia's digital divide: The Australian digital inclusion index 2017*. Retrieved from <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Australian-Digital-Inclusion-Index-2017.pdf>.

Wilding, R. (2006). 'Virtual' intimacies? Families communicating across transnational contexts. *Global Networks*, 6(2), 125-142.

Wilding, R., & Baldassar, L. (2018). Ageing, migration and new media: The significance of transnational care. *Journal of Sociology*, 54, 226-235.

# **ACCESS TO DIGITAL OLDNESS: A REFLECTION ON THE OPERA PROJECT AND DIGITAL INTERVENTIONS INTO EXPERIENCES OF AGEISM**

Diana Bossio  
Swinburne University of Technology

Max Schleser  
Swinburne University of Technology

This paper presents the results of the OPERA (Older people, equity, respect and ageing) Project, which used extensive community consultation to perform a 'digital intervention' into ageism as a primary driver of abuse against older people in Victoria, Australia. We argue that older people's lack of participation in, and access to, their own digital representation has resulted in top-down approaches to primary prevention strategies and campaigns about elder abuse. These digital representations have consistently shown older people and abuse survivors as vulnerable, frail, unhappy and lacking independence or social connection. Thus digital representation of older people in the context of elder abuse has often actually perpetuated ageist stereotypes about older people.

Abuse against older people, more commonly known as 'elder abuse', is best understood as an umbrella description for a broad range of abusive behaviours against an older person in a family or care context, including financial abuse, physical, sexual and emotional violence and isolation and neglect (Respect Victoria, 2019; Elder abuse, n.d). In 2016, the Australian Royal Commission into Family Violence identified elder abuse as a complex form of family violence requiring further research about successful intervention and prevention strategies (State of Victoria, n.d). Compared to other forms of family violence, elder abuse is not well understood by the general public and continues to be underreported in Australia (Volmert et al, 2016: 11). Similarly, while there is a growing understanding and acceptance of elder abuse as a form of family violence, successful prevention strategies are lacking in many parts of the service sector (Joosten et al., 2017).

The Victorian State Government's Office for Women funded the OPERA (Older people, equity, respect and ageing) Project to design and implement a 'digital intervention' into ageism as a primary driver of elder abuse. The project focussed on understanding firstly, how ageism is perceived and experienced by older people in one area of metropolitan Melbourne, and secondly, how that evidence can be used to frame a co-designed digital intervention to disrupt ageist assumptions and behaviours as part of a community-led primary prevention strategy. The digital intervention comprised a series of co-designed digital stories made with smartphones and providing micro-insights into older people's perspective on ageing and ageism (Davis et al. 2019

The OPERA digital intervention recruited 27 participants with an equal split between the 61-70 and the 71-80 age groups and representation of the community's different ethnic and Indigenous groups. Participants were predominantly female (21 females to 6 males)

and retired, receiving a pension and living in their own home, with almost all participating in some kind of recreation, hobby or exercise group. A quarter identified as having a disability. During the project, consultation and co-design workshops were conducted with participants to create and evaluate key storylines and design of the videos. This evaluation was conducted with a flexible feedback model to allow researchers to change and develop video messaging and production styles to accommodate the participant attitudes and evaluations. To evaluate the project and its methodology, surveys, interviews and focus group evaluations of the project methodology were conducted to evaluate whether the project outcomes were understood and supported.

The OPERA project indicated that traditional governmental primary prevention strategies have focused on changing perpetrator attitudes – and thus have consistently focused on presenting frail or vulnerable ‘victims’ of abuse as a consequence of ageist and abusive behaviours. Participants in the OPERA project consultation and co-design suggested that this approach to elder abuse perpetuated ageist stereotypes of older people as vulnerable, unhappy and lacking independence or social connection. This was seen as problematic by participants because these stereotypes impacted on older people’s perception of their social visibility, relevance and led to feelings of decreased purpose and efficacy in society, and thus less social power.

The findings of the OPERA Project indicated that while older people generally reported enjoying the ageing process, and leading “active” and “full” lives, they lacked access to digital representation of their lives. Evaluation of the project found that co-design methodologies for the digital intervention were successful because they were necessarily reflexive; the method gave access and agency to older people’s voices in construction of elder abuse primary prevention strategies. Digital stories differ from traditional broadcast in that they are generally first-person stories, shot and edited individually and have a more intimate quality of production (Schleser et al, 2013). However, digital storytelling often assumes the access to, and agency over, the means to production, editing and distribution of digital stories and representation. For older people, this is not always the case. A number of participants suggested that while older people and ageing was presented in a negative light, this was based on the ageist assumptions perpetuated by the focus on younger people’s lives on digital media. Unsurprisingly in this context, ageism and the notion of ageing itself, seemed to trigger negative responses for some participants, and a strong desire not to be associated with this language. As the direct questioning in the workshops was aimed at the co-design of their own digital stories, one of the main issues with confronting ageism as a primary driver of abuse was that they would have to align themselves with the negative language that they felt described older people and ageing. Indeed, most participants felt that the negative ‘baggage’ associated with ageing did not adequately represent their own lives. Most participants described themselves as having very active lifestyles, though the activities themselves varied according to physical ability, work status and personal interest. During the workshops, participants acknowledged that the busy lives they were describing were different from the stereotyped view of ageing they were so afraid of.

These active and engaged lives are largely in line with the specific demographics of the older community in the EMR of Victoria, which shows a higher than average social engagement amongst older people, as well as better educational, socio-economic and health outcomes. While the outcomes of the digital storytelling intervention would no doubt have differed in communities with poor socio-economic, health and inclusion outcomes, in this specific community almost all the workshop participants suggested that prevention strategies should focus on disrupting negative assumptions about ageing.

The OPERA digital storytelling intervention subsequently produced nine digital stories documenting different phases of transition in older people's lives, including moving into assisted living, keeping healthy and active in older age, dealing with chronic illness or physical pain and finding social connections after bereavement. The stories openly acknowledge some of the difficult transitions associated with ageing including disability, bereavement and loss of a career-focussed identity in retirement, but also positioned these as surmountable difficulties in what could be an otherwise active and independent lifestyle.

The OPERA Project showed that compared to the more traditional methodologies, the co-design and digital storytelling methodologies resulted in a much more nuanced conceptualisation of ageism and experiences of ageing. The subsequent co-designed digital story-telling allowed researchers to understand how older people understood and experienced the interconnections between ageism within larger social structures and their own ageing journey. Thus the OPERA indicated that digital storytelling is both an effective data-gathering and primary prevention methodology because the process of co-designing, creating and viewing digital stories captures the inherent complexity of abusive behaviour towards older people, without positioning ageing itself as problematic, or older people as helpless or frail victims of abuse. Thus, in the context of primary prevention, the OPERA project showed that community interventions need to facilitate appropriate access and agency over the means to digital representation of older people's lives. Further, that increased access to digital tools and opportunities to tell digital stories helps to disrupt ageist assumptions by framing ageing as a positive experience and representing older people as active, positive and socially connected.

## References

Crichton, S. J., Bond Jr, J. B., Harvey, C. D., & Ristock, J. (1999). Elder abuse: Feminist and ageist perspectives. *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 10(3-4), 115-130.

Davis, H., Waycott, J., & Schleser, M. (2019). Digital Storytelling: Designing, developing and delivering with diverse communities. In S, Miettinen & M, Sarantou (Eds.) *Managing Complexity and Creating Innovation Through Design*. Oxon: Routledge, 15-25.

Dow, B., Gaffy, E., & Hwang, K. (2018). *Elder abuse community action plan for Victoria*. National Ageing Research Institute Ltd (NARI). Retrieved from: [https://www.nari.net.au/files/files/documents/elder\\_abuse\\_community\\_action\\_plan\\_for\\_victoria\\_feb\\_2018.pdf](https://www.nari.net.au/files/files/documents/elder_abuse_community_action_plan_for_victoria_feb_2018.pdf)

Elder abuse. (n.d). *World Health Organisation*. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder\\_abuse/en/](https://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder_abuse/en/).

Harbison, J. (1999). Models of intervention for “elder abuse and neglect”: A Canadian perspective on ageism, participation, and empowerment. *Journal of elder abuse & neglect*, 10(3-4), 1-17.

Joosten, M., Vrantisidis, F. and Dow, B. (2017). *Understanding Elder Abuse: A Scoping Study* National Ageing Research Institute. Retrieved from: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017/08/apo-nid112716-1208041.pdf>.

Meadows, D. (2003). Digital storytelling: Research-based practice in new media. *Visual Communication*, 2(2),189-193.

Neave, M., Faulkner, P., & Nicholson, T. (2016). Royal Commission into Family Violence Volume III. Retrieved from: [https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/file\\_uploads/1b\\_RFV\\_284ppA4\\_ReportRecommendations\\_VolumeI.WEB\\_yhw6Fgch.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/file_uploads/1b_RFV_284ppA4_ReportRecommendations_VolumeI.WEB_yhw6Fgch.pdf).

Nelson, T. D. (2005). Ageism: Prejudice against our feared future self. *Journal of social issues*, 61(2), 207-221.

Phelan, A. (2008). Elder abuse, ageism, human rights and citizenship: implications for nursing discourse. *Nursing Inquiry*, 15(4), 320-329.

Respect Victoria (2019) *Respect older people: call it out*. Retrieved from: <https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/campaigns/respect-older-people-call-it-out>.

Schleser, M. (2013). Collaborative mobile phone film making. In E Milne, C Mitchell & N de Lange (Eds.) *Handbook of Participatory Video*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: AltaMira Press.

Seniors Rights Victoria. (2019). *Older, Better, Together: The Primary Prevention of Elder Abuse by Prevention Networks*. Retrieved from: <https://seniorsrights.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-06-28-Older-Better-Together-full-report.pdf>

State of Victoria. (2014–16). Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations, Parliamentary Paper No. 132.

Volmert, A., & Lindland, E. (2016). You only pray that somebody would step in: Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of elder abuse in America. *FrameWorks Institute*. Retrieved from: [http://frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/elder\\_abuse\\_mtg\\_report\\_formatted\\_final.pdf](http://frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/elder_abuse_mtg_report_formatted_final.pdf)

