EXAMINING OLDER ADULTS' DIGITAL INCLUSION THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERSECTIONALITY AND CONTINUITY THEORY

Cora van Leeuwen
imec-SMIT, VUB and University of the Western Cape

An Jacobs
imec-SMIT, VUB

Ilse Mariën
imec-SMIT, VUB

Introduction
The possible ubiquitous presence of technology connected to the internet and a growing ageing population has necessitated a renewed interest in the digital inclusion of older adults. The digital inclusion of older adults stumbles partly because digital technology is perceived as unneeded or useless by them, as has been observed while assessing the applicability of digital assistive technology. Where older adults stated that these solutions were not applicable to their situation (Astell et al., 2020). The differences in older adults' digital technology adoption or skill is still not completely understood. And it is unlikely that one explanation will suffice as studies have shown that older adults are not homogenous and their level of digital in/exclusion are not easily explained based only on chronological age (i.e. Hänninen et al., 2020; Loos, 2018). By introducing a conceptual framework incorporating the intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1990) and the continuity theory (Atchley, 1989, 1999) it is possible to explain the differences found in digital inclusion that go beyond chronological age and proposes a more individualised approach to the current curriculum of digital skill acquirement and to help affect lasting change in digital technology adoption.

Background
The theory of intersectionality aims to explain the complexity of "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). This means that it tries to understand the identity of a person based on different facets that contribute to this identity, i.e. race and gender intersecting

in the treatment of a black woman which prompted Crenshaw (1990) to develop her theory. The continuity theory posits that although a large portion of older adults experience changes in their health, functioning and social circumstances while ageing, for a large segment of this population there remains a consistency in thought patterns, activities and social relationships related to their previous life experiences (Atchley, 1999; Victor, 2005). The continuity theory attempts to explain why older adults continue in these patterns and behaviours even though they do not always benefit the individual, and continuity theory assumes that these endure due to the selective investment and energy of the individual (Atchley, 1999). Meaning that these were important enough for the individual to invest their (limited) time in and have therefore become part of their identity or a means to differentiate themselves from others.

Findings
The conceptual framework was created through desk research and tested by a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) on a sample of 37 semi-structured interviews with self-proclaimed digital technology users, aged between 66 and 84. The participants were recruited in December 2020 and January 2021 and due to the Covid-19 restrictions the interviews took place online. The researchers received additional training in ensuring that their interview techniques were adjusted for the video conferencing setting. The thematic analysis showed that although *professional experience* indeed partly served as an explanation for their digital proficiency it was not the sole factor for their continued use. Indeed, influence of *family communication needs,* and *historic interest* were identified as reasons for use in their current circumstances. Framing this within the theories of continuity theory and intersectionality it was found that habits formed in, for example, university years were continued throughout their lives well into their retirement. Furthermore, few of the participants indicated fundamental changes in their use of social media which did not fit within the existing patterns of social behaviour known even when it was not possible to connect physically.

Further analysis based on the intersections encountered in the participants made is possible to theorize that their relative preferential position (gender, race, education and/or geographical location) attributed to their ability to maintain their acquired skills. Their identity enabled them to create and sustain thought patterns and behaviours that encourages digital skill acquirements, and to see these as an essential part of their self-identity. Furthermore, the fact that they are part of a community and have intergenerational contact further encouraged their digital technology use. Several participants were able to describe friends or family from a similar background who had difficulties with technology. It is necessary to use the continuity theory as the participants indicated that those lacking in digital skills often did not invest in digital skill acquirement in previous life stages as they did not see the need or use of it. Chronological age was not a factor in these stories, as some of the family or friends were significantly younger than the participant. Only with the use of both theories it was possible to explain why chronological age cannot be used as an indicator of use or non-use. Rather examining the intersections of their identity in combination with their investments in habits and skills can explain why some older adults benefit more and are able to make use of the internet in comparison to others.

Conclusion
The applications of this conceptual framework to explain the digital inclusion of older adults are theoretical as well as practical. From a theoretical point of view it helps to explain the differences encountered in age groups, and is indicative as to why age alone is not enough to determine a person's level of inclusion. Practically, this understanding of the interaction between continuity theory and intersectionality can lead to new practices of digital inclusion where digital initiatives are no longer aimed solely at chronological age but target the individual's interest. This means that different initiatives need to be developed that consider the willingness to invest time in skill acquirement as well as ensuring that the skills correlate to the practices and thought patterns that they invested in previously. As not all aspects of the digital world are of interest to all individuals, and a more specific individualised offer would be more successful.

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