

Exploring the acceptance of mobile technologies using walking interviews

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Abstract

To investigate aspects of acceptance and use of digital technologies an ethnographic method was developed to elicit responses and opinions of older persons on new mobile technologies. Large numbers of older people in Europe never use the internet or a computer, and miss out on communication and travelling benefits new mobile devices could bring. A scenario was designed in which people over 65 years old could experience the use of a tablet computer. In the scenario participants and researchers walked around the university campus, using a tablet computer with Google maps and other relevant applications. Firstly, a route was previewed on Google maps and Google Earth, and then it was walked. Activities in the scenario were: navigating by using map and a GPS signal, using landmarks, searching for information about nearby services including bus stops, using Skype for a video chat, taking photographs, and using a travel-planner for a bus journey home. During the 1.5 hour interview, questions were asked about the participants' experiences. Walking and talking stimulated naturalistic and informal conversations, and was an excellent method for (a) getting a deeper understanding of the impact of technology on older people's daily life; (b) their concerns and problems in using technology and mobile technologies; and (c) the importance of the social context for positive benefits.

Introduction

Throughout the world the largest group of people who are not, or only to a limited degree, engaged with new technologies are the oldest age group of 65 and over. Large numbers of older people in Europe never use the internet or a computer. In 2010, 60% of people over 65 years old in the UK reported never to have used the internet, see Table 1 (ONS, 2010). In the groups that have never used the internet, females, those on lower incomes and with lower levels of education are over-represented. 68% of UK widows never used the internet; they are a group where the different demographic characteristics of the several groups who do not use the internet come together.