ONLINE COMMUNITIES FOR SENIORS: THE BENEFITS TO WELL-BEING

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PARTICIPATION IN SENIORS’ ONLINE COMMUNITIES

• a significant trend in elders’ leisure-use of the Internet

• unlike other online activities, this activity is exclusive for older adults
PREVIOUS STUDIES REGARDED THE COMMUNITIES AS ONLINE SUPPORT GROUPS

- instrumental information
- emotional support
- companionship
- sense of belonging

PREVIOUS STUDIES – ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS

• Content analysis / in-depth interviews - Contents / interviewees from one community only
• Lack of quantitative studies
• Very little information about the audience
• Lack of differentiation between users
THE SENIORS’ ONLINE COMMUNITIES PROJECT

1. **Quantitative content analysis**
   (full year’s data from 14 leading communities →
   700,000 posts)

2. **Netnography**
   (online ethnography of selected sections / topics)

3. **Online survey**
   (216 members of 16 seniors’ leading communities)
MAIN FINDINGS FROM
THE QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS
THE MAIN SUBJECTS DISCUSSED IN SENIORS’ ONLINE COMMUNITIES

- "Fun on line"
- Retirement
- Family
- Health
- Work & Studies
- Leisure
- Finances
- Religion & Spirituality
- Technology
- Aging
- Civic & Social issues
- Shopping
- Travel

# of posts
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell us some quotes, anything will do</td>
<td>All kind of quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s next?</td>
<td>First player posts a short phrase. Next player uses the last word of that phrase to start a new phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s funny joke Thursday</td>
<td>Jokes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# RETIREMENT – EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where to retire?</td>
<td>Places to live in them after retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much is enough?</td>
<td>When to retire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement ideas and making the transition to retirement</td>
<td>What has worked out, what hasn't, things people wish to or wish they did, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# FAMILY – EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Grandma's Ethics</em></td>
<td>Genealogy. Humorous or poignant writings found in research of family histories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Are you and your mate affectionate?</em></td>
<td>Long conjugal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hurting, excluded from son’s birthday get together</em></td>
<td>Painful family relations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# HEALTH – EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Flu shot, best time to get it?</em></td>
<td>Advises concerning flu shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Walking, hiking, jogging, swimming, biking</em></td>
<td>Physical activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Diabetes</em></td>
<td>Symptoms, medications, and other related issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## WORK & STUDY – EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Companies that hire seniors</td>
<td>Links and names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beware of Tim Hortons jobs</td>
<td>Retired people exploitation in new job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to Learn Spanish</td>
<td>Advices, advantages and challenges of picking up a new language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LEISURE – EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>What are you reading right now?</em></td>
<td>People telling about books they have read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ER forum cookbook</em></td>
<td>recipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>American idol</em></td>
<td>Discuss the TV show</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TONE ANALYSIS

measuring the proportion between positive and negative expressions, based on the frequency and the intensity of more than 2,000 defined expressions.
POSITIVE/NEGATIVE RATE

SENTIMENT BALANCE

Sentiment Tonality

44%  56%
Negative  Positive

Sentiment Balance Index

+1.26
SENTIMENT INTENSITY

- Avg. Negative Intensity: -1.52
- Avg. Positive Intensity: 1.8
- Sentiment Intensity Index: 0.34
A PLATFORM FOR DISCUSSING EVERY POSSIBLE ISSUE

very private ← public
very serious ← very casual
exclusive ← general

In addition, wide range of emotions
very negative ← very positive
MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY STUDY
MEASUREMENTS

Quantitative:
- Participation patterns
- Interest in the 13 most-discussed topics (Nimrod, 2010)
- Perceived benefits (27 items, Tinsley & Kass, 1980)
- Constraints to participation
- Background questionnaire

Qualitative:
Respondents were invited to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (using a blank page)
PERCEIVED BENEFITS

1. Service – e.g., chance to help, responsibility
2. Self expression – e.g., improve skills, express feeling
3. Companionship – e.g., making friends
4. Joyfulness – e.g., easy going humorous attitude
5. Stimulation – e.g., excited by ideas
6. Standing-out – e.g., perform / show, “my own way”
7. Autonomy – e.g., “able to do by myself”
### THE HIERARCHY OF PERCEIVED BENEFITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joyfulness</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulation</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companionship</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing out</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. According to Robust Multichip Average (RMA) test, the difference between each pair of means is significant ($p < 0.01$)
THE EXTRA BENEFIT:
POSITIVE IMPACT ON OFFLINE REALITY

1. Impact on social life

“I’ve had a chance to make connections I would not have made any other way – some of my closest friends now, people whom I spend time “in person” with, I met through the online senior community. Had I not met them my life would definitely be poorer for it.”
2. Impact on interests and offline activities

“I run a help desk, work for an animal charity and am just starting setting up a seniors’ charity. All these have come about via forums in one way or another. I am only four years retired and feel too young to stop work just yet! There is a little self interest in the above. When I am older I will probably benefit from the work I do now for others…”
3. Instrumental contribution

“I am mostly interested in finding out about facilities and alternative accommodation availability for over 70s. Also as I am totally dependent on the Age Pension I need more information on what is actually available to people like me… Also being on my own I need to know who to contact if I am in need of care apart from the local GP or hospital.”
THE COMMUNITIES OFFER VARIOUS MECHANISMS FOR ENHANCING SENIORS’ WELL-BEING

• a virtual sphere where older adults can meet new friends with whom they can chat, play, and exchange ideas, information, and emotional support

• a sphere for expressing abilities and being of service

• a leisure experience affecting members’ offline activities, social life, and performance of daily tasks
CONCLUSIONS
THE SELF-MANAGEMENT OF WELL-BEING THEORY (STEVERINK, LINDENBERG & SLAETS, 2005)

Overall subjective well-being

Physical well-being
- Comfort
- Stimulation

Social well-being
- Affection
- Behavioral confirmation
- Status
ONLINE SELF-MANAGEMENT OF WELL-BEING

Overall subjective well-being

Physical well-being
- Comfort
  - Practical information (nutrition, investments, health care, housing, etc.)
- Stimulation
  - Intellectual discussions, games, and recreation-related information

Social well-being
- Affection
  - Online and offline companions, and family-related discussions
- Behavioral confirmation
  - Getting and providing peer support, humor, and a sense of belonging
- Status
  - Self-expression (knowledge, creativity, leadership skills, etc.)
THE SELF-MANAGEMENT OF WELL-BEING THEORY (STEVERINK, LINDENBERG & SLAETS, 2005)

Six key self-management abilities:

1. Self-efficacy beliefs
2. A positive frame of mind
3. Taking initiative
4. Investment behavior
5. Handling resource multi-functionality
6. Ensuring resource variety
ONLINE SELF-MANAGEMENT OF WELL-BEING

Six key self-management abilities:

1. Self-efficacy beliefs
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5. Handling resource multi-functionality
6. Ensuring resource variety
Gaining benefits from participation depends on

- *Investment behavior* – the willingness to spend time and invest efforts online. Without such investment, participation cannot constitute meaningful activity.

- *Multi-functionality of resources* - the ability to gain different benefits from the same resource. The benefits depend on what members *do* in the communities.

Circumstances $\rightarrow$ Needs $\rightarrow$ Use $\rightarrow$ Benefits
For additional information:


THANK YOU!