Determinants of Internet Use by Senior Generation: A Cross Cultural Study

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to investigate and compare the determinants of Internet use by senior generation among Tunisian and Romanian context that have different economic and cultural backgrounds. Research data were taken from a survey carried out on 400 online senior citizens (200 Tunisian and 200 Romanian). Data were analyzed by using confirmatory factor analysis and multiple regression analysis. Results show that cognitive age, Familial Loneliness and Social Anxiety have a significant effect on internet use for surfing and seeking information and not for buying. It was also found in the Romania sample the most determinant of internet use was Familial loneliness, while, social Anxiety was the most determinant of internet use, in the Tunisian sample.

KEYWORDS
Cognitive Age, Elderly People, Internet Use, Loneliness, Romania, Social Anxiety, Tunisia

INTRODUCTION

Despite the growth of the Internet, one area that has not really been discussed is the elderly’s use of the Internet (Eastman & Iyer, 2005). Russel and Schofield (1999) suggest that senior citizens are one of the fastest-growing groups using the internet. Russell (1999) state that online technology is overwhelmingly dominated by adults, “Twenty-three percent of adults under 55 have been online in the past 30 days, compared to only 5 percent of adults aged 55 and older”.

On the other hand, McMellon and Schiffman (2000) state that internet activities (such as personal communication, financial matters, entertainment and information) offer opportunities that could be beneficial for seniors limited in mobility. Many elderly people also turned to the internet to escape from the pressures and discomfort of their lives (Morahan-Marting & Schumacher, 2003).

The age of elderly people causes change in attitude, personality and needs (Kennett, Moschis, & Bellenger, 1995) and it may influence their willingness to maintain social contact. Only individuals who are socially inhibited may find the anonymity of the Web particularly attractive to socialize on the Web (Das, Echambadi, McCardle & Luckett, 2003).

So the purpose of this study is to investigate and compare the determinant of internet use by senior generation among Tunisian and Romanian context such as loneliness, social anxiety and cognitive age. Because the Internet, an important modern means of gathering information and establishing communication with others and has become an increasingly essential element of human life (Odaci & Kalkan, 2010). Nowadays, in Tunisia, older people are very interested in the internet.
as a recreational way of spending time, on the other hand, they enjoy many home activities such as social network, research information, payment invoice, email, chat and instant messaging etc… In Romania, according to the study entitled “In the Spotlight: Older people in Germany and the EU”, published by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Mischke & Hagenkort-Rieger, 2011), only 3% of the population between 65 and 74 years old used Internet services at the level of 2010. In the last three years, Romanian senior citizens’ interest in Internet slowly increased, mainly due to their registrations to social networks and their communication with their children or relatives, who are living in other countries, via Skype. The typical profile of an old person from Romania, as an intensive Internet user, is the following: resident of large cities, highly qualified and whose children provided support in using Internet technologies.

Many studies are interested in the use of Internet by elderly persons, but few studies have examined in detail older adults’ access to and use of Internet from the cultural perspective. In Tunisia and Romania this nature of research is relatively new and not explored. For example: According to Cresci, Yarandi and Morrell (2010), 31.66% of urban older adults were identified as No-Nets while 68.3% were identified as Pro-Nets. Demographic, health, and leisure activity factors could have influences on Internet use. Peterson and Prasad (2011) recently established that ICT help older people overcome isolation and loneliness by means of increasing opportunities to keep in touch with friends.

Another topic for debate involves the effect of culture on internet use; Age is a key factor as to whether an individual has used the Internet. The focus on age as a means to differentiate groups of Internet users doesn’t represent a relevant targeting criteria, taking into account the diversity that exists within a group of people of a particular age. It is generally assumed in all the cultures that older people embrace the idea to use Internet services, as its opportunities improve their quality of life. However, elderly people (65 years of age and older) are significantly less likely to use the Internet than the average population. A research conducted in UK proposes a pattern of Internet engagement, based on specific social moderators, which have particular utility in providing a full understanding of the extent of Internet adoption, access and use amongst older people (Hill, Beynon-Davies & Williams 2008).

So another question arises: Do the determinants of Internet use by older people vary across their own culture?

To our knowledge, there haven’t been developed studies that compared the determinant of internet use by senior generation between different countries, in a general way, and studies which involve a cross-cultural comparison between two developing countries in a particular way.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unique study is to identify and compare determinants of internet use among Tunisian and Romanian older people.

In the following: a relevant literature on senior generation, loneliness, cognitive age and social anxiety is first presented. In the second section, the methodology is detailed. Then, the paper concludes with a discussion of finding, managerial implications, limitations and future research opportunities.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the following paragraphs, the authors define the core concept used in this research; then drive hypotheses and summarize them in a theoretical model.

Senior Generation

What is a senior? He/She usually responds to this question by a threshold age: over 50 years, more than 60 years, over 65 years. Many researchers and organizations define senior citizens as those 65 years of age and older (Eastman & Iyer, 2005; Miller et al., 1998), while other studies set the limit