Influence of ICTs on the Information Behavior of the Elderly in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The uptake of ICTs by the elderly to fulfil their diverse information needs is ridden with unavoidable challenges mitigating against their full exploitation of these technologies. In view of this, this paper examined the influence of ICTs on the information behaviour of the elderly in Nigeria. The methodology adopted for this research work was purely documentary and literature search in determining the extent of the influence of ICTs on the information behaviour of the elderly in Nigeria. Specifically, the research objectives for this paper addressed the Information needs of the elderly; sources of Information frequently consulted by the elderly; types of ICTs often used by the elderly; factors challenging the elderly in meeting their information needs, seeking and use using ICTs. Findings revealed that the information needs of the elderly are diverse, differ from person to person. The elderly was equally faced with personal challenges such as old age syndromes covering anxieties, disabilities, nervousness, and lack of good eyesight that affected their ICT usage.

KEYWORDS

Elderly, ICTs, Information Behaviour, Information Needs, Information Sources Technology

INTRODUCTION

The growth of information and communications technologies is transforming the individual, economic and social development all over the world. New Information and Communication tools are making people, industries and institutions more productive by enhancing skills and learning, improve processes and deliveries at all levels, and making it easier for services to be accessed both by the young and the old. ICT is a generic name used to describe a range of technologies for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analysing, and transmitting information. These include common technological hardware such as cell phones, personal computers and virtual technology such as the Internet, or other software applications.

Since the early 1980s, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have improved the way people access information irrespective of distance or geographical location across various age groups. ICTs have enabled people find, explore, analyze, exchange, and present information irrespective of location. It has also provided opportunities cutting across age range, sex, culture, race, physical impairment, and even educational background without discrimination. In spite of the benefits of ICTs, the uptake of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by everyone irrespective
of age comes with numerous challenges that people especially the elderly must successfully cope with in realizing fully the dividends of ICTs.

Social gerontologists have classified ‘the elderly’ into three groups: the ‘young old’, aged between 60 and 75; the ‘old old’, aged between 75 and 85; the ‘very old’, those aged over 85”. The elderly in the context of this research are those between 60 years and 85 years (Older & Bolder, 2012). The elderly people most especially, find it most challenging to cope with the use of various ICT tools due to their conservative nature and rigidity towards novel ideas. Therefore, the elderly are faced with the challenge of surviving as well as contributing actively in an ever-changing society. This implies that the elderly will need to acquire ICT tools to participate fully as active citizens of their countries and most importantly, learn to use these technologies in formal and informal settings.

Besides, ICT use has also influenced the information behavior of the elderly due to meeting their diverse needs and also accessing several sources and channels of information. In this paper, information behavior would be analyzed based on elderly people’s information needs, information seeking, and sources of information consulted by the elderly. Information behavior has been defined by Wilson (2000) “as purposive seeking of information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goals”.

In view of the opportunities and challenges faced by the elderly in the use of ICTs, the main objective of this research paper is to conduct a documentary search on the influence of ICTs on the information behavior of the elderly people in Nigeria. This paper will also focus on relevant theories on information behavior and ICT use by the elderly. It would further delve on the challenges the elderly face in meeting their diverse information needs, seeking behaviour and the use of ICT. The various sources of Information frequently consulted by the elderly; and types of ICTs often used by the elderly would be discussed. Lastly, policy recommendations would be to improve the elderly people’s use of ICTs in Nigeria.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Relevant and appropriate theories elating to elderly people’s way of life, pattern of living, information needs, seeking behavior and use of technology were reviewed. These theories are Disengagement Theory, Need Fulfillment Theory and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) respectively.

Disengagement Theory

The Disengagement Theory was propounded by Cummings and Henry in 1961. The theory opined that withdrawing from society and social relationships is a natural part of growing old. The theory premised on the fact that because everyone expects to die one day, and because we experience physical and mental decline as we approach death, it is natural to withdraw from individuals and society. As the elderly withdraw, they receive less reinforcement to conform to social norms and societal changes (Cummings & Henry 1961). However, critics of this theory opined that the theory does not allow for a wide variation in the way people experience aging having focused on the idea that the elderly universally naturally withdraw from society as they age. (Hothschild 1975).

Need Fulfilment Theory

Need Fulfilment Theory was propounded by Abraham Maslow in (1943). He was the first to identify that human needs are hierarchical through the design of a five-stage model which is expressed in form of a pyramid with the more basic needs at the bottom. The five stages from bottom are Physiological, Safety, Belongingness and Love, Esteem, Self-Actualization and Self-Transcendence needs. Although Maslow doesn’t specifically address old age, it is clear that hierarchy of Needs help to explain how these needs motivate the elderly in meeting their diverse needs. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs state that we must satisfy each need in turn, starting with the first which is Physiological, which deals with the most obvious needs for survival itself. Only when the lower order needs of physical and
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