Chapter 10

The Aging and Technological Society: Learning Our Way Through the Decades

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides information and support for researchers, family, and medical providers concerning how technology can improve the quality of life for older adults while remain independent as they age in place at home or a community. In examining the available research, the researchers did find continuous developments in Gerontechnology to be beneficial as the aging population is rapidly increasing worldwide. There is increased recognition of the advancement in technology to help the aging in areas of autonomy, socialization, and mental and physical wellbeing. This chapter covered areas of change, independence with a better quality of life, technological devices/adoptions, generational differences and learning with technologies, and university-based retirement communities. This chapter concludes with suggestions for future development in accessibility of technology-based educational programs and the Internet, how to infuse technology to advance the older adults’ independence and quality of life, and how older adults are adapting to living in life span communities.

INTRODUCTION

Younger generations such as iGen, Gen Z, or Centennials/Millennials who grew up with technology, integrate many components of technology into every aspect of our lives. Baby Boomers/Traditionalists or the Silent Generation did not grow up with the pervasive technology that surrounds us today.

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Individuals who embraced change when they were younger have the ability to make the transition to newer technologies much more readily and easily than those who resisted change. We have become so accustomed to and dependent on it, that having to put in the time and effort to use new technology generally does not pose any issues.

In addition, using new technology may also take minimal time for younger generations to adapt to, compared to older generations. However, although older generations grew up without the constant use of technology this does not mean that they are incapable of learning or using new technology, but learning and using technology for older generations may require more time and effort than younger generations who are more accustomed to it. “Older adults have special learning needs that differ from younger adults when it comes to technology. Younger adults have not lived life without technology whereas older adults were introduced to it and are challenged to learn it” (Heaggans, 2012, p. 1).

This chapter provides information and support for researchers, family, friends, and medical practitioners as it pertains to how technology can improve the quality of life for older adults. The chapter describes tools that help aging adults remain independent, or as they age in a variety of settings. This chapter also explores how people handle change, remain independent with a better quality of life, technological devices and adoptions, generational differences in technology, learning and technologies, and university-based retirement communities.

BACKGROUND

Heaggans (2012) opined that the baby boomer generation as well as generations prior discover challenges to stay current with the advancement of technology. The older adults find it intimidating to use technology compared to the younger generations as they need to have the readiness to learn and to develop a knowledge base in experiential learning. There is a need to have some sort of assimilation to deal with change, especially with technology. Woods and Clare (2008) mentioned that as people age, they have several challenges (i.e., biological, psychological, and social) that pose anxiety to their “construction of self and personal continuity” (p. 20). Heaggans added that if older adults are taught not to be fearful of the unknown in technology, it would assist them socially, physically, and mentally. In addition, to conform to changes in technology, individuals strategically and actively attempt to change their behavior to deal with the rapid change and need to work with technology. These strategies can assist the aging adult use higher-level functioning skills, especially based on a tech-enabled environment.

Change is part of everyone’s life, it takes time and understanding and a long-term commitment by any person or group, or organization to adapt to change. What affects people so dramatically is not the change per se, but the rapid rate of change. Technology is definitely a process that has changed radically over the past few decades. As the rate of change increases, people will have to increase their willingness and ability to adapt and at the art of anticipating the need for productive change. For example, it is imperative that the aging adult keep both body and mind active and healthy moving forward (e.g., exercise their brains, keep active, and engage in social situations).

Older adults will have a better understanding of technology and how it can influence their daily lives; however, they must be willing to embrace it (Heaggans, 2012). This will also help them develop new and stronger social networks and build a better quality of life for health communication with others. Exercising the body facilitates a healthy brain, and a healthy brain facilitates a healthy body. Physical activity has been shown to inhibit the onset of dementia and relative diseases (Lautenschlager, Cox, & Cyarto,