

June 2018

All Aboard? Seniors and Their Media

Adrian Smyth

Technological University Dublin, adriansmyth@icloud.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr>



Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Smyth, Adrian (2018) "All Aboard? Seniors and Their Media," *Irish Communication Review*: Vol. 16: Iss. 1, Article 4.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/D7QQ80>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr/vol16/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Publications at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Irish Communication Review by an authorized editor of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie, vera.kilshaw@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#).

All aboard? Seniors and their media

Adrian Smyth

Abstract

It is a plain chronological fact that personal digital technologies – such as the mobile phone, computers and the internet and digital television services – have arrived late in the lives of many older people. The ‘problem’ here – if it is to be perceived as such – is that this late arrival may present some older people with a particular set of challenges which may not necessarily apply to other, younger, people; and while it is important to acknowledge older people must never be considered an homogenous cohort when it comes to experiences of ageing, considerations such as late-life physiological changes are nevertheless important, especially if at the junction with digital device interactivity demands on the senses may prove significant and may be unforgiving. But there may also be other, less visible but equally important, factors at play which may set older people apart from any prevailing societal ‘flows’ in this regard – factors such as general and specific attitudinal stances of older people themselves towards technologies, especially if informed by personal technology experiences developed over comparatively long life-spans.

Using literature review and early-stage data I consider the view that some older people may respond contrarily to digital worlds in ways that may be more active – even benignly so – rather than necessarily resignedly passive. Such a proposition does not, of course, preclude consideration of what may be the consequences of more pointed digital ‘exclusions’ – such as deficits in digital and media literacy skills; rather the ambition here is to discern what may drive any attitudes, behaviours or indeed so-called ‘life-stage’ decisions which some older people may

deploy and which may simply place them not necessarily determinedly *against* technology's 'flow', but rather, perhaps, 'declining' its 'grasp'.

Introduction

Over the courses of their lives older people may have experienced numerous technological disruptions, but disruptions which may be said to have occurred more incrementally when compared to more contemporary rates of technology change. For instance, the national Irish radio service which began in 1926 was not joined by the national television service until 1961, and state monopolies of broadcasting and telecommunications services in Ireland were extant from the 1920s until the 1980s. Similarly, both the workplace and the home were largely free of computers until the 1980s, and it is here that those counted among the 'oldest old' (aged 80 and over) may only have known workplace or domestic settings largely free of at least computerisation. Furthermore, there may be other, self-generated, and understandable factors such as cultural or attitudinal resistances amongst older people, due in part to unfamiliarity, which may underpin certain behavioural proclivities towards new technologies.

In line with the wider curiosity here of how technologies may be transforming the lives of older people, the ambition is to consider the nature of their digital engagements with regard to any experiential exigencies or active contemporary agencies, such as so-called 'life-stage' decisions – including those which may place the 'value' of technology on a comparatively low rung – and which *may*, at their conclusion, simply place the older person *against* the flow of digital worlds. It is from such a perspective that the *character* of any agency may be considered, no longer necessarily viewed in terms of conventional polarisations of being 'in' or 'out' of digital worlds, but rather now perhaps along a more nuanced array of digital engagements, at which one end might sit the characterisation of the determined 'switched-on' 'silver-surfer', and at the other, the technology 'refuser'.

So while this study may be said to be attuned to the 'dynamics' of technological (linear) and human (non-linear) movements, grappling with such dynamics might be regarded as rather like preparing a meal on a moving train. As the ingredients are assembled and prepped, the whole is relentlessly being carried forward. The

analogy here of technology as 'host' is entirely appropriate and not without some fatalism in terms of its inexorable trajectory. Ultimately therefore, the best that may be hoped for here is to at least attempt an understanding of what may be happening at this particular 'moment' in the 'journey': the point at which some people – older people – may decide to 'alight' – if, that is, they had even climbed 'aboard' in the first place.

Why are digital engagements considered important for all citizens?

Societal participation, in all its multifarious forms, has become increasingly entwined with the facilitations of online worlds, not least of which by way of more ready access to rapid means of information and its exchange. It is unsurprising therefore that governments should seek to position themselves firmly within this new frame, particularly if such engagement may be described through narratives of citizen 'participation', and so, democratic legitimisation (Dubow, T, 2017).

While such engagements are often explained in broad modernistic, even fatalistic, terms – the inevitability and ubiquity of technological progress, and so on; and more prosaically by way of promised conveniences and cost-efficiencies for citizens in relation to government services – such as those relating to taxation, health and social welfare (www.dccae.gov.ie, 2017), they are, in truth, also driven by similar imperatives for the state itself. So, Irish governments have embarked upon strategies which aim to streamline state operations, stimulate economic activity and generally widen citizen engagement in digital, and so societal, spheres (www.dccae.gov.ie, 2017).

In the UK, the provision of government services around a 'digital by default' model has been prevalent for some time (West, 2015). Similarly, the European Union is unequivocal about the importance of digital activities in the lives of *its* citizens, but here, critically, and against the backdrop of significant deficits in digital engagements across Europe – where it is estimated around 45% of EU citizens do *not* have basic digital skills with around half of this figure having none at all – concerns are expressed for older people amongst others who may, it is stated, be missing out on, 'many life enriching opportunities and economic benefits' (www.ec.europa.eu, 2017).

Digital ‘divides’

The idea of a so-called ‘digital divide’ – that access and use of new technologies is not evenly distributed across all groups and individuals in contemporary societies – is not unproblematic. Gunkel’s (2003) main concern is that the term itself tends to change from study to study and has been variously applied to, amongst other categories, personal computer ownership, internet access and a further sub-delineation between those with high- and slower-speed internet connectivity, and also as a term to describe the levels of ICT skills and competencies of individuals (Gunkel, 2003, p5, 6). Add to these interpretations the further problematising of the notion of ‘digital’ individuals along socio-economic lines, and the idea of digital division just becomes more complex. Indeed, even if it is suggested the so-called divide as it relates to *older* people might be more accurately referred to as a ‘grey’ digital divide (Morris, 2007) does not mean that any of the above categories – including further sub-divisions along lines of wealth and disposable incomes amongst older people themselves – may be supplanted by this term alone.

Social exclusion is traditionally associated with the effects of poverty on individuals (Putnam, 2002). But the broader application of the term – of being excluded from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which signify the wider societal integration of a person (Room, 1998, in Kneale, 2012) – finds a ready home in any society where the digital lives of citizens are seen as critical to their wider societal integration. Here, amongst a range of domains identified as defining social exclusion for older people is the category of exclusion from civic access to information, and it is here, in the contemporary form, that any *digital* exclusions may be found. Natalia Khvorostianov et. al (2011) suggest in their study of the internet in the lives of older immigrants in Israel that ‘seniors lacking computer skills often feel that they are left behind and no longer part of the modern world... [also] the digital divide and the relatively poor new media literacy among seniors put them in both social and financial risks’ (Riggs, 2004 cited in Khvorostianov, N, Elias, N, Nimrod, G, 2011).

Digital ‘disengagement’ with age

Discussions around digital ‘disengagement’ must be considered when approaching questions of *digital* exclusion, and within such discussions is the suggestion that as people age, their contact with the wider world reduces, say, to the loss of a

spouse or friends or retirement from the workplace, thereby reducing wider societal network connections which may in turn lead to other social estrangements (Cumming and Henry in Stuart-Hamilton, 2012). So here, such questions may be considered in incremental terms – an accumulation of life-practices/experiences converted over time into routinised daily habits normalised and appropriated into the life-pattern of the individual. Such considerations must feed into any assessments of the digital lives of *older* people, especially in terms of understanding any attitudinal proclivities which may steer approaches either towards, or away from, digital/technology worlds.

The digital worlds of older people: tactics and strategies

One of the ambitions of this current study is to understand how older users of digital technologies may deploy techniques or construct their behaviours in and through their daily digital negotiations. In this regard, it is useful to consider the guidance offered by Michel de Certeau (1988) that private spaces may indeed be private domains in every sense of the word – designed, controlled, mastered, adapted and protected – contemporaneously, as well as over time (1988, p. 36). Here, by way of differentiating certain actions of control, the distinction is made between *tactics* and *strategies*, and this is a useful explanatory frame for this current study. Tactics, defined as operating in isolated actions, incrementally or ‘blow by blow’ (p. 37) must be regarded as opportunistic or reactive, and in this perspective must *always* operate from a position of weakness (p. 37). So, what is absent in a *tactic* is proximity to the *nexus* of power that may otherwise characterise a *strategy*. Therefore, if power and its relativeness is a deciding factor in whether an action deployed by an older person in their digital dealings may be deemed a tactic or a strategy, this would certainly be an important consideration in attempting to account for the shape of any presumed agency.

Working from the assumption that not all older people may be ‘victims’ when it comes to technological developments Hagberg (2012) suggests that among the actions *some* older people may deploy in their navigation of increasingly technologised societies are those which rely on family networks, especially through the recruitment of younger family members for assistance with the assembly and operation of home computers, accessories, home wifi, email and so on (p. 97, 98).

Another action that may be deployed by older people may be that of *anticipatory ageing*. Here, it is argued, older people may make consumer decisions partially based on a consideration of their life-stage (p. 99). Interestingly, according to Hagberg, this leads to a ‘moral’ question of whether older people – who are content with their current lifestyles and habits – should have the ‘right’ to remain outside of the technological fray if they wish, and to *not* adapt to new ways of living. In which case it must no longer necessarily be the case that older people are immune from defending their *non*-involvement in a technological society (p. 101, 102).

Resistances and barriers: the problem of ‘problem-solving transfer’

In practice, however, it is likely the image of the older person as the sole-controlling agent of their technological (digital) worlds may not be wholly secure; there may be some unbreachable barriers to technology access and use which convert for the older individual into either frustration with, or plain indifference towards technologies. For instance, a characteristic of contemporary domestic digital devices is that familiarity and competence in the operation of one may facilitate – or indeed be a requisite for – the efficient use of another. This is particularly the case with the on-screen digital television menu with its operational demand of the multi-functional remote-control device: accessing target menus, scrolling through menu options, and then entering commands. Here is a site for the examination of so-called ‘problem-solving’ transfer skills.

The idea of problem-solving transfer, in which the user transitions from a familiar to a novel situation may be increasingly assumed on the part of device manufacturers and service retailers, and may indeed be described as one of ‘imposed evolution’, based as it is on the assumption that the user *will* – even *must* – over time, and by whatever means not necessarily the concern of the technology provider, acquire such a knowledge-base as may be successfully converted into practical use (Mayer and Wittrock, 1996 in Slegers, K, van Boxtel, M.P.J. and Jolles, J 2007, p. 92).

The attendant physiological considerations here align to what Slegers, van Boxtel and Jolles refer to as the ability of – especially older adults – to expand their personal ‘schema’ or mental framework to allow them build upon the acquisition of problem-solving skills (p. 92) – providing of course the construction of such

mental frameworks can be successfully achieved in the first place – which, they say, is by no means a certainty. Worryingly, they conclude that while *their* study's participants 'most probably' acquired an expanded mental schema, the transfer of newly-acquired computer skills in their experiments did not occur – even to similar technologies (p. 105). A broad supposition here is that because older adults are more likely to have developed technical operational skills during the electromechanical as opposed to the more contemporary computer era, these early influences prove 'stubborn resisters' to new practices (p. 106).

Sample early-stage results: cohort

The total number of participants in this study is expected to number around thirty, equally divided between those living in rural and urban areas. There will be a further division based on the sex ratio by age statistics as per the 2016 Census in Ireland, which returned 871 males for every 1,000 females aged 65 and over in the state in April 2016 (CSO, 2017). Based on this ratio, and taking a participant median of 15, this study will comprise approximately 13 males and 17 females. The methods of data collection are the self-completed diary and the one-to-one interview.

The findings presented here refer to one female participant – a retired professional, aged 77 years – living in the greater Dublin area. Following an introductory meeting, the participant was briefed on the use of her diary, which she then kept without contact with the researcher for a total of twelve days – activities for seven of which were ultimately recorded with entries. The second meeting involved a review of the diary entries and the one-to-one follow-up interview. The gaps in diary-keeping here reinforce the value of the follow-up interview.

The digital devices and connections available in the participant's home are: a landline with broadband and wifi; digital cable television service; and a computer tablet and smartphone. Additionally, the participant refers to the use of a hand-held GPS navigational device which she uses in relation to her hobby, hiking.

Notes on the diary method

The great promise of the diary as a method of data collection is privileged access to the private digital worlds of older people – especially their activities *within*

those worlds; accounts of their mechanical operations, tactical and strategic thoughts and practices; and personal reflections on their interactions with digital processes, especially in terms of how they may, or indeed may not, be adapting their lives to fit these relatively new spheres of activity.

But more than just the promise of the record of a series of actual events, the diary exercise may be viewed rather as a catalyst which may facilitate deeper explorations of the diary entries, and this chimes with the idea of diary-keeping in social research as a means of revealing the social processes and rationalities which may contribute to individuals' decisions and actions (Alaszewski, 2006, p. 48). So, the notion of the diary – as both a trigger for, and repository of – personal reflection, may also serve as an invitation or prompt to the participant to dwell more than usual upon what may have previously been regarded as mundane routinised tasks. The follow-up interviews conducted so far have indeed drawn heavily on diary entries as prompts for more detailed reflections.

The design of the diary adopted here is quite open, with instruction for minimal prescriptive headings of no more than date and time of diary entry. Un-prescribed space is then left for as much elucidation on the activity in question as the diarist can manage. As with the traditional notion of a daily diary or common-place book, diarists are encouraged to use the opportunity to comment upon as well as simply record a series of events.

The experience of diary-keeping is likely to be different for each individual; while some people in this cohort may have kept diaries in their younger lives, for others this may be a novel experience; some may record the details of their activities meticulously, whilst others still may record the briefest of summaries. In this study, the diary-keeping period will vary from individual-to-individual depending upon the quantity and quality of information being recorded, but will typically last from between 10 and 14 days – usually a sufficient time period to establish a clear cycle of the individual's digital engagements within the cycle of their daily routines.

It should also be mentioned here that there may be some sensitivities around the practice of diary-keeping, especially amongst older cohorts – sensitivities which may relate to levels of literacy. According to the National Adult Literacy Association, historically, older people constitute the largest group in Ireland with literacy and numeracy difficulties (NALA, 2008). The reasons for such difficulties

are attributed to a number of factors, such as the relatively late introduction of free second level education in Ireland, large class sizes, histories of early school-leaving amongst older people – usually around the age of 14; also poor personal experiences of authoritarian practices in schooling (NALA, 2008). This current project is sensitive to these factors and is open to accommodating other ways of recording diary entries, such as by way of audio recording devices or, if needs be, by scheduled telephone interviews. It is also recognised here that the keeping of a diary may be an onerous or disruptive task for any individual, irrespective of age, and it is always the intention of this researcher to devise methods of information collection which respect the individual, their relevant abilities, their private worlds and their other life commitments. Consequently, diarists will be supported, where necessary, by way of regular telephone contact or interim meetings in which diary entries and the process for the participant will be reviewed. However, none of the measures have been necessary in the early results presented here.

Notes on the follow-up interview

Individual face-to-face follow-up interviews with diarists are generally semi-structured in nature, and mostly aim towards a tone of relaxed informality. There is, of course, some flexibility in this approach, depending on the persona of the participant, and it is here the researcher uses his discretion in deciding whether the opportunity may exist for the deeper and wider exploration of the data supplied. In particular, the researcher is especially attuned to allowing the interviewee to pursue trains of thought, reflections, recollections, or opinions which may have been triggered by the diary-keeping exercise or by questions posed during the interview. For the purposes of clarity of transcription, and with the permission of the interviewee, interviews are audio recorded.

Sample diary results: Female (77)

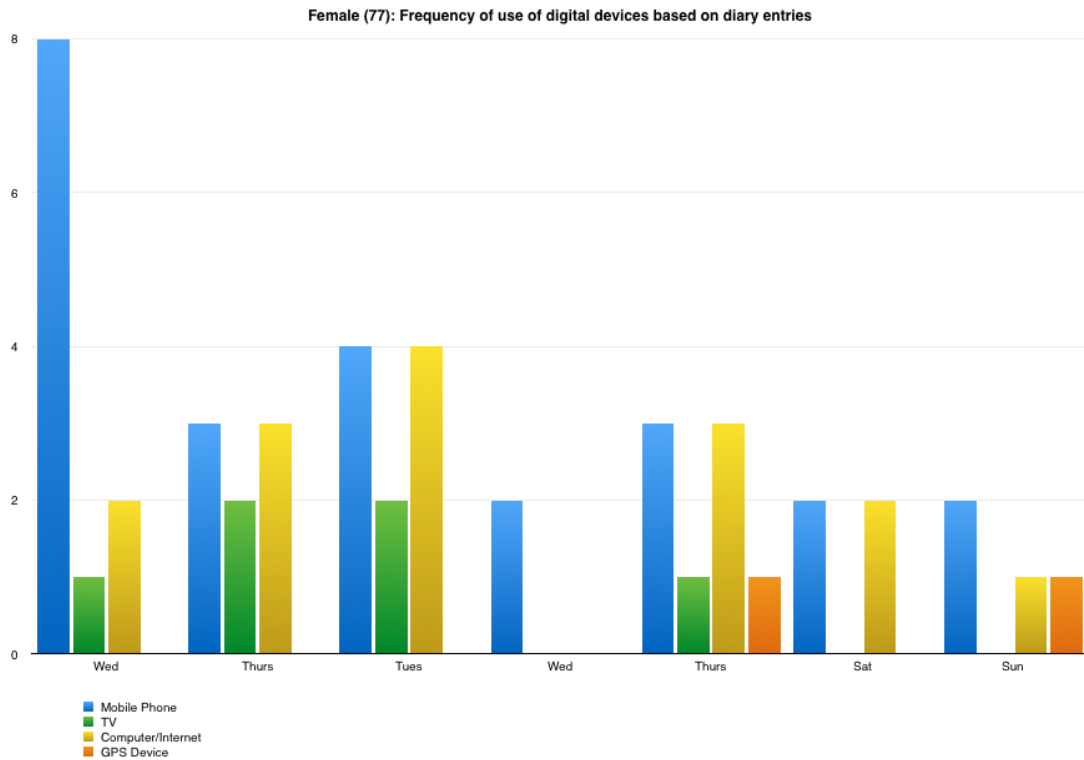


Fig. 1 Female (77): Frequency of use of digital devices based on diary entries

As with all participants in this study, the instructional briefing here stressed the importance of equally recording personal digital activities in three specific dimensions: the mobile phone, computers and the internet, and digital television services.

Over time in this sample, the number of daily diary entries diminished sporadically, starting with eight entries on the first day, dropping to four on day two, rising to five on day three, then three on day four, four on day five, three on day six and four on day seven, making the recording of an average of 4.4 digital activities per day across the seven days of entries. The greatest number of digital engagements across the seven day period refer to use of the mobile phone (24). The next most popular items were the computer (15), followed television (6), and then use of a GPS tracking device (2).

Most entries are recorded by just the time at which a series of engagements commenced, so it is not possible from these entries to track the duration of time allocated by the participant to each individual engagement within the series. In view of the intrusions the diary-keeping process already makes into the flow of the participant's routines it would, perhaps, have been counter-productive to expect the participant to break from the flow of each digital activity to record each switch; better, it has been judged, to allow the record of the engagements to stand as a single flow in the diary which may then act as a prompt for more detailed explorations in the follow-up interview. However, that being said, those entries bracketed by start *and* finish time do allow for some additional insights, and in attempting to construct a picture of the participant's digital life, it is worth considering this data in a little more detail.

Sample diary extracts

Thursday 24th March

8.30am-10am

Checked phone mail and messages and replied.

Checked computer for missing/expected email in spam/bin.

Downloaded map from computer onto GPS for hiking.

...

8pm-11pm

Watched TV and checked phone a couple of times.

Tuesday 29th March

9am-10.30am

Checked phone messages including one from Parcel DPD [parcel delivery service] giving details of delivery of parcel. Followed this up on computer as changes to delivery not clear on phone.

Watched RTE Player [on computer] for 15 minutes – found screen too small for comfort. Could not find how to turn up volume [of RTE Player] other than on phone. Also not sure how to cancel it.

Made phone call.

...

3.30pm-5.30pm

Made telephone call.
Checked messages.
Discovered you can speak messages into phone – very handy.
Checked website Google.
Downloaded map for hiking to GPS.
Checked a few sites on computer.
Made golf reservations on computer.

Discussion: sample diary extracts

The first entries of each day are typical of this seven-day cycle of diary-keeping in that they involve checking of the mobile phone for messages. In the 8.30am-10am entry on Thursday March 24, the morning check of the mobile phone leads to use of the computer as the participant goes in search of a ‘missing/expected email in a spam/bin folder’. The success or otherwise of this search is not recorded. The participant then appears to remain with the computer where a map is downloaded onto a GPS device (an activity related to the participant’s hobby of hill-walking).

The final entry of Thursday March 24, 8pm-11pm, records the participant as watching television and checking her phone ‘a couple of times’.

The first entry on Thursday March 29 records activities from 9am-10.30am and describes how use of the computer is first prompted by a message read on the mobile phone. Subsequent, and seemingly unrelated, computer activity describes the participant using the RTÉ Player for 15 minutes before abandoning the activity due to difficulties adjusting the volume and stopping the player.

The afternoon entry on Thursday March 29 (3.30pm-5.30pm) describes the discovery of a phone feature (voice recording of messages) which is described as ‘handy’. The entry then settles into a list of computer/internet activities: use of Google (described here as a ‘website’); the downloading a map to a GPS device is a repeated exercise from the March 24 entry; general internet browsing is described, before a more specific online activity is recorded: ‘Made golf reservations on computer’.

Following the cessation of the diary phase, the participant was then interviewed.

Sample interview extract

Q: I looked through your diary entries and I noticed you are mostly using your mobile phone for texts and email?

A: I check emails but I don't normally write them on it unless I have to. I do messages on it but emails, because I can type, are much better on the computer because I can use two hands a lot quicker. But I wouldn't often send emails unless they were very brief because the screen is so small and the keyboard is so small.

Q: So you can receive emails on your phone – you have Gmail set up, is that it?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you set that up yourself?

A: My son set it up.

Q: Do you use the camera on your phone?

A: I use it a bit, but not a lot.

Q: So when you take a picture on your phone, would you ever send it on to anyone?

A: I don't think I have that facility.

Q: Do you listen the radio or music on the phone?

A: No, never.

Q: Do you have a wifi network at home?

A: Yes, from the broadband.

Q: Did you set that up yourself?

A: No, my son set that up for me. What happens is [as she receives assistance from her son], I write down everything so I can go back on it...you know, how there's three or four steps to something, they're hidden within something in the settings. I might write that down, if its something I'm going to need again. [Phone message alert rings here and she apologises] That's just a message.

Q: Do you find there are some activities which become easier if you repeat them over and over?

A: Yes, but if it's something new, I need repetition. Something may not be obvious to me if you have to make three moves to get it. Like for example if you want to change something, I go into settings and it doesn't come up immediately. [Demonstrates here] So there's my settings now. So I have to go into more, and then I may have to go further. Sometimes I look on the computer to see how to do it.

Q: So you put a question to the internet?

A: To Google, and that's worked. For example, I wanted to block somebody and I didn't know how to do that. I knew it wasn't difficult because I had seen it come up. You see, sometimes I press things accidentally and it comes up 'do you want to block this number?' And so I knew it was possible. So occasionally Youtube might help, or Google.

Q: On balance, do you think the mobile phone has been beneficial to your way of living or detrimental?

A: I think it's beneficial, yes. But I hesitated a little before getting a smartphone. I didn't know whether I wanted to do things like check Google during the daytime, or away from home. If I didn't, then I could wait until I got home.

Q: So you knew you had the ability now to check anything, anytime, but you decided to step back from that?

A: I didn't want to be hassled. You know this thing about – and it's one of the things that bothers me a bit – people message you and expect an instant reply when there's no need for an instant reply. Sometimes I wait a day or two to reply and people say, 'Oh you didn't reply', and I say I did – it was just a couple of days later. People my age are not into this...I find it a little bit hassley the immediacy of the thing that you must reply. Say I set an arrangement to meet you today, and then if you're a certain person you'd be ringing me before or texting me before to confirm it, whereas if I don't hear from you, I assume it's ok. And then if you ring me I have to text you back. That was the way we always lived because you didn't have any [immediate] way of contact. You make a commitment and that was it, and if you can't, then you get in touch.

Q: If you upgrade your phone again, what would you be looking for next time?

A: I would be looking for something with a bigger screen, that's one of the reasons, with fading eyesight, the screen. If you widen the thing, you're losing part of the message, it's going beyond the capability of the screen. But I'm probably not going to change my usage of it terribly.

Q: Do you notice any difference in how young people use mobile phones compared to older people?

A: Oh yes, huge! They're constantly on the phone and they're constantly Facebooking and stuff like that – Twittering and whatever. To me, those things are of little or no interest. Also, I've observed in a restaurant, you can have a family and they're all on their phones and nobody is talking to anybody. I don't feel comfortable about having a [phone] conversation [in public]. If I'm in a social group, I regard it as rude. Unless it's something they have to do, in which case they can do it quickly, which is fine. But yes, I do regard it as rude.

Q: On balance, would you say you are in control of your mobile phone, or do you find increasingly that the phone is calling your attention, e.g. are you checking for emails?

A: Well, I would check a few times a day for emails. Messaging: I don't get that many and I get rid of anything from companies that are emailing me, or anyone I'm not interested in hearing from. I get rid of those. So I'd say I'm in control of the phone, but only because I make up my mind to.

Discussion: sample interview extract

There appear to be some tensions around the use of the mobile phone for this participant, with seeming reliance upon its use, coupled with some proclivities to resist its intrusions at the social level. In particular, when it comes to using the phone as a method of arranging social interactions, she describes how she steps back from its use because of the multiplicity of communications that can be entailed in arranging what should otherwise be a simple social engagement: 'I don't want to be hassled...this thing about people messaging you and expecting an instant reply. Sometimes I wait a day or two to reply, and people say: 'Oh, you didn't reply'. People my age are not into this. I find it a little bit hassley.' Furthermore, she has reservations about using her phone in public places, and if she is in a social situation and someone else's phone rings and they answer it, she would regard this behaviour as 'rude', unless the call was dealt with quickly. When

asked whether she thought she was in control of her mobile phone use, she agreed, but only, she says, because she has made up her mind to be so.

There is also evidence here of rudimentary use of the phone and its facilities. The phone's camera is seldom used and there seems to be no knowledge that photos taken may be forwarded by SMS or email; similarly, there is no declaration of using the phone for radio or music listening. Also, whilst she knows she may check and send emails on her smartphone, she doesn't use the phone for this purpose – here there are specific device operational barriers – she finds the screen and its keyboard too small to operate, she also describes difficulties when using the touch-screen, where she expresses frustration at information 'disappearing off' the screen once widened.

However despite the challenges she is clearly facing with this particular technology, it is apparent there is a curiosity about technologies and their processes, and willingness to learn: she describes using a GPS tracker when hiking; and she is clearly committed to learning how to use technologies, albeit at her own pace and in her own way: 'You know, how there's three or four steps to something, they're hidden within something in the settings, I might write that down – if it's something I'm going to need again'.

Conclusions

There are no apparent trepidations expressed here around the use of digital technologies, but there are frustrations at the point of access and where technologies and social worlds intersect – device operational difficulties are mentioned – screen size and touch-screen interaction; and when viewed through the lens of social comparison, there are very clear lines drawn by the participant around questions of social etiquette. But these latter considerations are, by definition, irritations with how other *people* are choosing to use their technologies, rather than any particular irritations with the technologies themselves, and they are balanced by declared intentions to get to grips with the processes of technology operation – through the use of technology itself (checking online for instruction), and by way of note-taking as a means of more clearly executing steps in a process, and by an awareness that operational competence is linked to operational repetition. There is however some validation of Hagberg's (2012) suggestion that older people may rely on younger family members for

assistance at key moments in the technical operation of technologies – the participant here describes without any self-reflection assistance provided by her son in setting up email on her phone, her home WiFi, and it is difficult to see how the patterns of technology use described in her diary entries might be so fulsome without such interventions.

Perhaps the key point of control for the participant here comes in the social/psychological determinations which emerge through the interview, such as attitudes towards others' use of technologies, and especially the erection of personal (protective?) boundaries against technology's 'intrusions' in established personal patterns of life – attitudes and actions which may indeed feed back to De Certeau's guidance that private spaces may be designed, controlled, mastered, adapted and protected – they may be ultimately driven by existential forces: 'I'd say I'm in control of the phone, but only because I make up my mind to.'

References

- Advantages of Being Online (2017) Available at: <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Digital-Strategy/getting-citizens-online/Pages/Advantages-of-Being-Online.aspx> (Accessed: 15 December 2017).
- Alaszewski, A (2006). Using Diaries for Social Research, London, Sage Publications Ltd.
- Central Statistics Office (2017). Available at http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/oduments/population/2013/poplabfor2016_2046.pdf (Accessed: 1 November 2017).
- Census of Population 2016 – Profile 3 An Age Profile of Ireland, Sex ratio by age Central Statistics Office (2017) Available at: <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp3oy/cp3/assr/> (Accessed: 28 January 2018).
- A Common European Response to Shared Goals : A concept for tackling the digital skills challenges in Europe (2017) Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=43900. (Accessed: 17 December 2017).
- De Certeau, M (1988). The Practice of Everyday Life, London, University of California Press, Ltd.
- Dubow, T (2017) Civic Engagement: How Can Digital Technologies Underpin Citizen-Powered Democracy? RAND Corporation and Corsham Institute.

Available at:

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF300/CF373/RAND_CF373.pdf. (Accessed 1 February 2018).

Gunkel, D. (2003). *Second thoughts: toward a critique of the digital divide*, New Media and Society Vol 5 (4): 499-522, London, Sage Publications.

Hagberg, J-E. (2012). *Being the Oldest in a Shifting Technology Landscape* in Hadden, L, Loos, E & Mante-Meijer, E. (2012). *Introduction. Generational Use of New Media*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Khvorostovianov, N, Elias, N, Nimrod, G. (2011) *Without it I am Nothing: the internet in the lives of older immigrants*, New Media and Society, DOI: 10.1177/1461444811421599. Sage. Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e310/eb58d183a9c1d4e1c2a7a60d527109ff42dc.pdf> (Accessed 28 January 2018).

Mayer and Wittrock, 1996, in Slegers, K, van Boxtel, M.P.J. and Jolles, J. (2007) *The Effects of Computer Training and Internet Usage on the Use of Everyday Technology by Older Adults: a Randomised Controlled Study*. Educational Gerontology, Taylor Francis Group, LLC ISSN: 0360-1277print=1521-0472 online DOI: 10.1080/03601270600846733.

Morris, A (2007) *E-literacy and the grey digital divide: a review with recommendations*, Journal of Information Literacy, 2 (3). Available at: <http://jil.lboro.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/JIL/article/view/RA-V1-13-2007-2> (Accessed: 10 January 2012).

National Association of Adult Literacy, (2008). *It's never too late to learn: a study of older literacy students in Dublin*, NALA, Dublin.

Putnam, R. D., ed (2002). *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Riggs KE (2004) *Granny @ work: aging and new technology on the job in America*, New York:

Routledge. Riggs, 2004, cited in Khvorostovianov, N, Elias, N, Nimrod, G. (2011). *Without it I am Nothing: The internet in the lives of older immigrants*, New Media and Society, DOI: 10.1177/1461444811421599. Sage. Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e310/eb58d183a9c1d4e1c2a7a60d527109ff42dc.pdf> (Accessed: 28 January 2018).

Room, 1998, in Kneale, D. (2012). *Is social exclusion still important for older people? The International Longevity Centre – UK*. Available at: www.ilcuk.org.uk/files/Is_social_exclusion_still_important_for_older_people_1.pdf. (Accessed 28 January 2018).

Stuart-Hamilton, I. (2012) *The Psychology of Ageing, an Introduction*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

West, S (2015) Later Life in a Digital World. Available at:
https://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Research/Later_life_in_a_digital_world.pdf?dtrk=true, Age UK,
London (Accessed: 3 January 2018).