



The Digital Competences and Agency of Older People Living in Rural Villages in Finnish Lapland

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Older people's Internet use & digital competences

- Compared to younger people, less use, esp. in rural areas
- More Internet non-users
- Lower levels of media literacy & digital competence
- Concerns about risks for being excluded from society
- Compared to younger people, less research.
However, research interest is growing!

(Official Statistics of Finland, 2015; Dennis, 2004; Hakkarainen, Hyvönen, Luksua & Leinonen, 2009; Livingstone, Van Couvering, & Thumim, 2005; Ofcom, 2006; Tisdell, Stuckey, & Thompson, 2007)



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Communicating in an Ageing World: Challenges and Opportunities



Research Design

Data	Research Questions	Research Methodology
<p>Focus group interviews (N = 16) of Finnish older people living in small rural villages in Finnish Lapland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• age: 62-86 years• from three villages• 11 Internet users, 5 non-users• 11 females, 5 males	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do the respondents assess their digital competences and the need to enhance them?• Do the respondents report feeling social or societal pressure to use the Internet? If so, how does this pressure manifest itself?	<p>Content analysis according to digital competences (Ferrari, 2013) and modalities of agency (Jyrkämä, 2008)</p>



Digital competence

- **Information:** Identify, locate, retrieve, store, organise and analyse digital information, judging its relevance and purpose.
- **Communication:** Communicate in digital environments, share resources through online tools, link with others and collaborate through digital tools, interact with and participate in communities and networks, cross-cultural awareness.
- **Content-creation:** Create and edit new content from word processing to images and video, integrate and re-elaborate previous knowledge and content, produce creative expressions, media outputs and programming, deal with and apply intellectual property rights and licences.
- **Safety:** Personal protection, data protection, digital identity protection, security measures, safe and sustainable use.
- **Problem-solving:** Identify digital needs and resources, make informed decisions on most appropriate digital tools according to the purpose and need, solve conceptual problems through digital means, creatively use technologies, solve technical problems, update own and others' competence. (Ferrari, 2013, p. 11)



Modalities of agency

- Seeing the behavior of humans as the result of the dynamic interaction of the modalities of agency:
 - *knowing how to*
 - *being able to*
 - *having to*
 - *having the opportunity to*
 - *wanting to, and*
 - *feeling.*

(Jyrkämä, 2008)



Results

Digital competences from a time perspective

- Digital technologies viewed as newcomers, thus their significance is partly constructed in relation to the individuals' past
- The meanings assigned to Internet use and digital competences were often subordinate to other, more meaningful *previous, present, or future* activities and competences (see also Hakkarainen, 2012; Hakkarainen & Hyvönen, 2010; Kilpeläinen 2014).

Diverse individual and distributed digital competences

- A diverse group in terms of their self-reported Internet use and digital competences
- Digital competences are very much distributed competences of:
 - elderly dyads (couples living together)
 - families with three generations, and
 - informal networks of villagers.



Results

I give my bills to my daughter [name omitted], [and] she pays them. I don't even have the machine. Yes, they [her children] would have bought a computer for me, but I said I won't take it. I don't want to learn how to use it.
(Female, 86 years, Interview 1)

I don't use the computer at all. [...] Not in any way, I don't even open it. I have such a great secretary [refers to her husband] that I don't need to.
(Female, 69 years, Interview 2)

I manage very well [without the Internet] because my daughter uses it. [...] She does everything for me.
(Female, 78 years, Interview 3)



Social or Societal Pressure to Use the Internet

- Experiences of pressure from society to use the Internet, partly social and partly self-inflicted in nature
- The *having to* modality was talked about both in positive and negative ways
- The respondents also had several examples about not complying with the social pressures to use the Internet, thereby showing *media agency* that entails resisting and deviating from customary ways of thinking and acting (Lipponen, 2007, p. 57):



Conclusions

- Digital competences are related to the dynamic interplay of the modalities of agency (Jyrkämä, 2008).
- Solely belonging to a certain chronological age group does not define a person's digital competences or media preferences.
- The concept of digital competence:
 - Seeing digital competence only as an individual characteristic provides a limited view
 - Situated and distributed competence (cf. Lipponen, 2007), which cannot be described using generic, context-free knowledge and skill specifications →
 - It is central to understand that a person learns to master, in particular, the tools of thinking and the action of the communities to which he or she belongs (see Lipponen, 2007)



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