PREFACE

Online Social Environments for Active Ageing

The ageing of the world population alongside the rapid advancements in an Information and Communication Society have heightened the importance of addressing both age-related benefits and barriers of technologies.

Whereas some benefits of using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are often highlighted (e.g., [1-3]), there are also some drawbacks associated with the use of ICT by the older target group. For instance, some benefits are social support, a decrease in the feeling of loneliness, an improvement of the mental state, an increase in quality of life, and reinforcement of self-concept. As for the barriers, these include the fear of using computer equipment, cost, and functional sustainability, biopsychosocial changes related to ageing, and the complexity of the interfaces. Indeed, these are some of the concerns that one should consider when designing and developing digital products and services for active ageing.

Even though we may rely on the World Health Organization's three-domain framework of active aging [4] for developing these products and services – i.e., health, security, and participation in society, the individual specificity of the ageing process must be also considered, being this (a) physiological; (b) social; and (c) psychological [4]

Beyond these mentioned considerations, additional challenges emerge with the increasing demands of an info-communication era characterized by its interconnectedness, flow, and networking. As such, these online spaces need to be more social and inclusive being this necessity exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemics in which the "Online Social Environments for Active Ageing" were started to be perceived somewhat as the "new" environment.

The purpose of this Focus Section is to discuss the design, development, and evaluation of digitally mediated products for active ageing, older adult's sense of belonging and perceived wellbeing. The older adult public has been doubly excluded in terms of technology access and appropriation owing either to the inability to adapt to new contexts or the design of digital artifacts, being the following topics under focus in the accepted manuscripts to this issue: Theories on Online Social Environments for Active Ageing, and Design, Development, and Evaluation of these Online Social Environments.

Overview of the Focus Section. This Focus Section on "*Online Social Environments for Active Ageing*" was a result of the miOne World conference – i.e., the 1st International Conference on Online Social Environments for Active Ageing, which gathers researchers, practitioners, and industry representatives to discuss the design, development, and evaluation of digitally mediated products for active ageing, sense of belonging, and perceived wellbeing, organized by the Department of Communication and Arts – DigiMedia, University of Aveiro jointly with University of Porto (FLUP) and Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (ESEV).

This conference is a result of the SEDUCE 2.0 research project, constituting a forum in which researchers, associations, Universities of the Third Age, and other entities share their concerns, initiatives, and advances in the involvement of older adults in the usage or/and development of technology and integration in communities. Despite the two typologies of participation in this conference, namely, researchers who may present their scientific work in the field; and Universities of the Third Age / Daycare centers / Associations or other entities that can share and present their experiences.

This Focus Section reflects the researchers' contribution with their scientific work, especially the experiences that were used in online social environments during the COVID-19 outbreak to mitigate social distance and older adults' isolation. This Focus Section contains four papers, being structured as follows:

The paper "*ICT-Mediated Learning as a Form of Socio-Emotional Support for Older Adults*" from the authors Carmen Llorente-Barroso, Olga Kolotouchkina, Luis Mañas-Viniegra, Mónica Viñarás-Abad of the Department of Applied Communication Studies, Faculty of Media & Communication Science, Complutense University of Madrid, gives a significant contribution on the factors that play a role in the inclusion of online learning experiences for older adults, namely in platforms as YouTube and WhatsApp, and their main implications for researchers and practitioners in the field.

The authors Cláudia Pedro Ortet, Francisco Regalado, Sónia Ferreira, Liliana Vale Costa, and Ana Isabel Veloso of the DigiMedia, Department of Communication and Art, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, and the Polytechnic of Viseu, School of Education/Centre for Studies in Education and Innovation, Viseu, Portugal present in the paper "*Staying Connected with Aged Populations in Times of COVID-19: An Interview Study of the Role of Portuguese Institutions and Municipalities*" a total of 72 interviews of Portuguese entities which develop initiatives addressed to aged populations with the perspectives of the challenges and practices of using platforms to involve the ageing population in the communities.

In "*Active ageing with digital technology: seniors' usages and attitudes*", Santos Urbina, Gemma Tur, and Irantzu Fernández, from the Universitat de les Illes Balears, surveyed 182 older adults in Ibiza (Spain) to assess their attitudes towards the use of technology, in which they emphasized the role of these digital devices to be in contact with family and friends, and being informed. Supporting digital skills seems, therefore, to be key to enhancing the participants' sense of agency and the cultural capital for society.

Lastly, the paper "*Involving older adults in the design process: a human-centric Design Thinking approach*" presented by the authors Inês Dias, Elísio Costa, Óscar Mealha, from Porto4Ageing, Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Porto, and DigiMedia from the Department of Communication and Art, University of Aveiro, Portugal, explained how a Design-Based Research (DBR) empirical study with 25 participants was used to compare the acceptance of a set of two audiovisual artefacts: the one designed with adults older than 55, and a design process relying only on the designer's expertise. The audiovisual artefacts for the online platform ICTskills4All have shown to be more effective when co-designed and validated with the end-users.

Conclusion. This Focus Section highlights the pervasive role of online social environments in the promotion of active ageing. Focusing on older adults, it characterizes digitally this age cohort, reinforcing that communication with friends and

family is one of the main uses of ICT; and underlines the importance of co-designing to enhance the effectiveness of digital products. Moreover, it also demonstrates the importance of online social environments for older adults' online learning experiences, and the importance of involving communities through digitally mediated strategies when imposed to social distancing contexts.

As digitalization continues to be prominent in senior citizens' lives, the need to improve digital literacy, and develop strategies and products that promote active ageing increases. We believe that these articles bring important contributions to the continuous integration of older adults in the digital World, while fostering their social connections. With this Focus Section, we are confident to have taken another step in that direction and contributed to its further discussion. Lastly, we expect that these articles will inspire readers to create new and innovative approaches to online social environments for active ageing.

References

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