

Implications of Ageism on the Use and Design of Digital Technology for Older Persons

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Abstract:

Involving older persons in the design process of digital technology (e.g., social robots, apps) is considered a best practice that may promote the development of technologies that are appealing, beneficial and actually used. Nevertheless, negative discourse on ageing and ageism are potential underlying factors that could influence which and how digital technologies are designed and how older persons are involved in the design process.

Ageism comprises of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards people because of their age. Compared to sexism or racism ageism is still considered socially acceptable. Consequently, this affects older persons in many life domains such as in the workplace, healthcare as well as in the context of digital technology. Although people do not necessarily have intentions to do harm, ageism often operates on an implicit level and is also internalized throughout the life course and self-directed.

In my presentation I will present results of several studies from my PhD. Specifically, the results of a scoping review on ageism in the discourse and practice of designing digital technologies and a focus group study with older persons who participated in the design process of various technologies (including robots) are presented.

Generally, a discrepancy was found between an ‘ideal’ discourse regarding the involvement of older persons throughout the design process and actual practice. Various manifestations of ageism, errors, and biases of designing digital technology with older persons were identified such as exclusion of older persons from the design process, low involvement, upper-age limits, and sample biases toward relatively ‘active’, healthy and ‘tech-savvy’ older persons. Critical discourse analysis revealed use of outdated language, stereotypical categorizations and/or design decisions based on ageism. The perspective of older persons revealed that ageism is experienced during the design process and can influence the perception of the usefulness and usability of the design outcomes. Nevertheless, positive experiences of older persons as well as designers point to the importance and need for “partnership” in the design process, as a facilitator of good practice and successful design.

Short bio:

Ittay Mannheim is a PhD student in the [‘EuroAgeism’](#) Innovative Training Network at Tilburg university and Fontys School of Allied Health Professions, the Netherlands. Ittay received his MA in Social and Organizational Psychology from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and his BA in Psychology and Management from the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. He has previously worked at the Division for Research on Aging at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, where his work focused on loneliness, early detection of dementia, the use of technology and legal guardianship. Ittay's current research focuses on the role of ageism in the use and acceptance of digital technology, implicit and explicit effects of ageism on the design process of digital technology and interventions to change negative attitudes.