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THE ELDERLY AND INTERNET USAGE
IN HOLLY SPRINGS, MISSISSIPPI

A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts at the Meek School of Journalism and New Media
The University of Mississippi

by

SHARON A. WHITE

December 2013

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ABSTRACT

The digital divide among senior citizens 65 and older has prompted a significant number of studies, surveys, and interviews of the barriers and benefits of Internet users and non-users.

This project surveyed 39 participants through focus groups, in-depth interviews, and radio shows in Holly Springs, Mississippi, a predominantly African-American retirement community 30 miles southeast of Memphis, Tennessee.

This study validates the difficulties senior citizens face when learning how to access the Internet. Cognitive issues revealed that senior citizens could not understand basic computer terminology or remember verbal or written commands during training classes. This project has showed that senior citizens must be given more time to learn basic computer skills before learning the Internet. Training can overcome barriers if senior citizens are trained properly on Internet usage.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Beatrice B. Sanders, my mother. My mother instilled in me the importance of obtaining a degree when she sacrificed and attended night school to complete her bachelor's degree at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois, at the tender age of 56. With perseverance, hard work, and faith in God, she would often say that there is no obstacle that I could not overcome.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express my deepest appreciate to my advisor, Dr. Kristen Swain and my committee members, Dr. Brad Schultz and Professor Joe Atkins. I could not have financed my studies without the minority scholarship provided by the Graduate School of the University of Mississippi.

In addition, I thank Dr. Jeanni Atkins of the University of Mississippi and Dr. Charles Williams of Rust College for your support and prayers in my endeavor to accomplish my educational goals.

Lastly, I acknowledge my husband, Lawrence White. Without you, none of this would be possible. You are the epitome of what is meant by the term a “godly man.” Thank you for making the difference in my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	11
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	16
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	27
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	32
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	35
VITA.....	48

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The way American families communicate today is changing dramatically with the use of the Internet. Senior citizens are increasingly joining the Internet revolution. A 2012 study by the Pew Research Center indicated 53 percent of American adults age 65 and older use the Internet or email.¹ Furthermore, a 2013 study conducted by the U.S. census bureau sampled 39,641 American adults over the age of 65 and reported over 60 percent live in a home with at least one computer with Internet services compared to 40 percent that access the Internet from other locations.²

The digital divide is the gap between users of the Internet and non-users.³ The digital divide among senior citizens 65 and older has prompted a significant number of studies, surveys, and interviews of the barriers and benefits of Internet users and non-users. National studies have indicated that older adults are living longer and healthier and they are accessing the Internet for vital information from health to government sites for themselves and aging parents.⁴ Most studies found that Internet usage is low among older adults who lack computer skills and confidence and among disabled, minorities, and those with lower education and income.⁵

Jenkins (2006) argued if institutions would provide the skills and content necessary to learn new technology that is most beneficial, the digital divide would close and not less likely depend on technology.”⁶

In 2011, Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi began a digital literacy program with the Mississippi State University Extension Service and Southern Rural Development Center to increase broadband adoption (high speed Internet access) in the state of Mississippi.

The digital literacy program is partly supported by a \$7 million grant from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's State Broadband Initiative (NTIA) to incorporate broadband Internet and to access and verify Internet usage among Mississippi residents.⁷

Mississippi State University conducted a telephone survey in 2011 using Random-Digit-Dialing sampling technology and reported that relevance, price, availability, and usability were barriers to the Internet. The report cited that 79 percent of Mississippians use the Internet and the adoption rate is linked to age. The survey found 90 percent of Internet adoption was classified into two age groups, 18-24 and 25-44. However, Internet usage dropped below 79 percent in those 45-64 and continued to decline to 45.3 percent in those 65 years and older.⁸

The digital divide is leaving those 65 years and older behind. The MSU survey indicated senior citizens 65 years and older are slow to adopt the Internet. The report cited that price was an issue, no access to computers or slow Internet connection and usability were barriers to adopting the Internet.⁸

Does the digital divide exist in Holly Springs, Mississippi? The purpose of this media project will examine Internet behavior and attitudes in persons 65 years and over in Holly Springs. The project will produce a series of radio stories that identify barriers and benefits in users and non-users of the Internet based on focus groups and individual interviews.

Also, this project will provide information on the level of interest, abilities, and experiences on the Internet, and as a result of the free Internet classes, it will produce new Internet users 65 years and older in Holly Springs.

Holly Springs, Mississippi, is a predominantly African-American retirement community 30 miles southeast of Memphis, Tennessee. The population in Holly Springs is 7,677, according to the 2010 census. The breakdown by ethnicity is 79.3 percent Black (6,166), and 19.4 percent White (1,511).⁹ There are 815 households, 11 percent of all households with adults 65 years and older. The breakdown of these households is 308 males (38 percent) and 507 females (62 percent).¹⁰ There is no prior statistical research literature regarding Internet usage among the elderly in Holly Springs.

Rapid diffusion of the Internet in Holly Springs is important to economic growth and job creation. Kelvin Buck, newly mayor of Holly Springs, has partnered with the state to broaden Internet access in the city for small businesses, schools, and residents. At the October 1, 2013, board of aldermen meeting, Mayor Buck reported that Holly Springs have issues with availability and affordability.

In that same meeting, Kourtney Hollingsworth, regional coordinator for the Mississippi Broadband Coalition, reported there are several areas in Holly Springs and Marshall County that do not have Internet access. Consequently, Hollingsworth is surveying Holly Springs and Marshall County school systems, businesses, and library branches in Marshall County to locate Internet users and Internet providers. Her data will map Internet availability so that the city can qualify for state and federal funds.¹¹ This media project parallels the mayor's vision to broaden Internet access to residents and businesses, and to provide training for the community on the benefits of the Internet.

Significance and Conclusion

This project is significant because national and local studies indicate people 65 years and older do not have Internet access or skills, and they experience cognitive and lack of trust issues relating to the Internet. Furthermore, this project will demonstrate that there are digital disparities that exist with persons 65 years and older and differences in Internet usage according to gender.

Everett Rogers' "Diffusion of Innovations" theory is the theoretical framework for this media project. It will examine the behaviors and attitudes that might influence senior citizens to adopt the Internet.

Studies in the literature review will show how Internet access helps to stimulate brain cells, reduce loneliness and depression, and produce a positive effect on senior citizens who communicate with friends and family members on a consistent basis.

In conclusion, educating the Holly Springs community about the psychological conditions and the social environment of people 65 years and older, what activities they are engaged in on the Internet, and spending time with people their age will produce a healthier lifestyle, less depression and lasting relationships with friends and family members.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

“This isn’t just about faster Internet or fewer dropped calls. It’s about connecting every part of America to the digital age. It’s about a rural community in Iowa or Alabama where farmers and small business owners will be able to sell their products all over the world. It’s about a firefighter who can download the design of a burning building onto a handheld device; a student who can take classes with a digital textbook; or a patient who can have face-to-face video chats with her doctor.”

–President Obama, State of the Union Address, January 25, 2011¹²

Hobbes’ (2011) timeline reported the Internet began in 1982 when computers sent and received messages from each other.¹³ The Internet has produced an abundance of jobs and services and can reach audiences worldwide with its entrances into the shopping world, e-books and newspapers, banking system, education, and relationships. Since 2013, the social networking site Facebook has surpassed one billion users worldwide.¹⁴

Social media consist of various online technology tools that enable people to communicate interacting among themselves. It includes texting, audio, video, images, podcasts, Facebook, Twitter, blogging, and other multimedia communications.¹⁵ In some households, social media have replaced the need for landline telephones, hand-written letters and cards or purchasing music on CDs.

Internet usage has increased over time, and recent data indicate significant growth among adults 65 and older. In 2011, studies conducted by the Pew Research Center found 41 percent of adults 65 years and older use the Internet in comparison to 22 percent in 2004.¹⁶

Moreover, one out of three adults 65 and older visit social media websites like Facebook and LinkedIn, according to a 2012 Pew report. The report indicates 86 percent of adults 65 and older use Email as a means of communication.¹⁷ Regular contact with family and friends via Email and visits to sites for health information, entertainment, and games were mostly used.

The benefits of Internet usage for senior citizens are abundantly clear. Ford (2009) conducted a study on the mental attitudes of elderly people and found that Internet usage reduces depression about 20 percent. Ford reported six million adults 65 years and older are affected by depression and that the nation spends \$100 billion in medical cost. Ford's findings suggest that the development of education programs for the elderly may produce positive benefits.¹⁸

Furthermore, a 2013 study of adults 63 years and older found that participants who played video games occasionally or on a regular basis reported higher levels of well being versus those who did not play video games. They had a higher level of depression and negative emotions.¹⁹

A 2013 Pew Report highlighted a number of barriers preventing adults 65 years and older from adopting the Internet. The report indicated 44 percent of adults 65 years and older do not use the Internet for the following reasons:

- 21 percent are not interested
- 13 percent don't have a computer
- 10 percent think it's too difficult or frustrating
- 8 percent said they lack the skills needed to use the Internet
- 7 percent don't have access
- 6 percent don't need it
- 6 percent said it's just too expensive
- 4 percent said it's a waste of time
- 4 percent are unable to connect
- 3 percent are too busy
- 3 percent are worried about privacy²⁰

Furthermore, Zickuhr (2012) examined adults 65 years and older with disabilities and found that they are less likely to adopt the Internet.²¹

Hanson (2001) argued that senior citizens with age-related disabilities are barriers that affect Internet usage. Vision problems affect senior citizens more than any other disability, including font sizes, colors, and background images. Besides this, physical limitations in the hands such as arthritis can make it difficult for senior citizens to control or move the mouse and type on the keyboard. The study recommended a number of solutions to aid the elderly to overcome difficulties with the Internet. In her study, she suggested large computer monitors can help senior citizens read font sizes, and special keyboards can help with motor impairments.²²

Dichter (2011) reported that senior citizens without disabilities encounter limited access to computers and usability issues. Generations on-Line, a non-profit organization in Philadelphia, provides free Internet classes to adults 65 years and older in 49 states. Tobey Dichter, founder and CEO, created software to simplify the learning curve for senior citizens and claims that senior citizens do not access the Internet because of fears related to age and knowledge. Dichter and her staff have trained more than 75,000 individuals on Internet access.²³

Tatnall (2003) reported cost and maintenance problems for those who have Internet access at home. In contrast, the study indicated that some barriers are avoided when senior citizens join computer clubs.²⁴

Richardson investigated myths that senior citizens are incapable of learning the Internet in his study. He indicated that there are studies that prove senior citizens can learn the Internet if training methods are taught at a slower pace, designed to have fun, peer advisors of the same age, and courses that stimulate interest.²⁵ He reported senior citizens are returning to school to learn basic computer skills and various software packages.

In conclusion, previous research, surveys, and interviews have highlighted the barriers senior citizens encounter with Internet usage.

These barriers include age-related disabilities, minority status, and lower education and income. There are also barriers to understanding Internet technology and terminology. However, limited national studies suggest how to empower a vulnerable generation to use the Internet. The proposed media project will explore the difficulties getting senior citizens to adopt the Internet.

Diffusion of Innovations

Everett Rogers' "Diffusion of Innovations" is the theoretical framework for this media project. The purpose is to examine the behaviors and attitudes that might influence senior citizens to adopt the Internet. According to Rogers (2005), studies of diffusion occurred some 60 years ago by researchers investigating hybrid seed corn. Since that time, diffusion studies have spread across academic disciplines, including public health, communication, political science, and others.²⁶

The disseminating of a new idea or practice can be often referred to as diffusion. Examples of diffusion are the Internet and cell phones. The diffusion theory is defined as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system, and innovation is a new idea or a practice" (Rogers, 1983). From this definition, the diffusion theory is a progression of four stages: innovation, communication channels, time, and social system.²⁷

The adoption of the Internet has been a form of resistance for senior citizens 65 years and older. Furthermore, many of the Internet features and basic computer knowledge are considered new ideas to senior citizens. For example, social media sites like Email, Tumbler, or Facebook are generally is the Internet for the younger generation; however, for senior citizens, they are considered new technology and are not readily embraced. So how can senior citizens embrace new technology into their retired lifestyles?

Rogers (2005) process of innovation consist of five steps: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. Rogers defines the process as a progression from gaining new knowledge to forming an opinion and accepting or rejecting innovation.

Rogers referred to knowledge as the first step when exposed to the existence of the idea and develops a concept of its purpose (p.20). Adoption of the Internet among the senior citizen population is not without difficulty. Senior citizens did not grow up with computers, so computers are perceived as new technology marketed to a younger generation. Senior citizens can become knowledgeable through their home environment, or from opinion leaders they trust or by hearing about the technology from friends or family members.

The second step is the act of persuasion, and it occurs when an opinion about innovation is formed (p.20). Senior citizens establish an attitude or opinion about innovation, whether to move forward and investigate or stand still and reject innovation this time. Senior citizens may show interest in the Internet by communicating to others about its features, cost, and usability. They begin to contemplate if innovation is easy to adopt into their lifestyle. The next stage is making the decision to incorporate the technology.

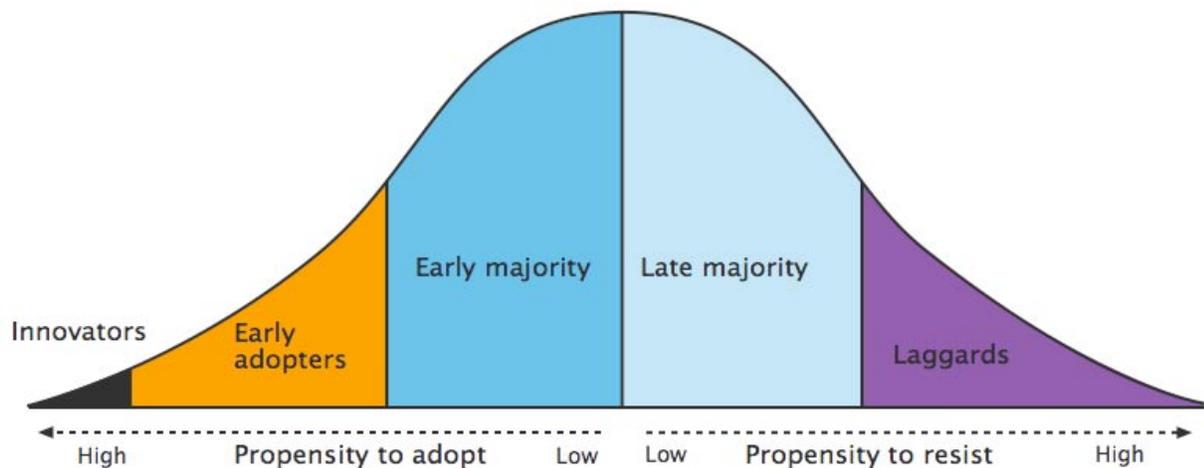
The third step is the decision stage. Rogers claimed that the individual makes the decision to adopt or reject innovation (p.20). Robinson (2009) argued that adoption of innovation involves communicating with people face-to-face who are known and trusted and who have made the transition successfully without embarrassment.²⁸

The implementation phase is where the decision is made to move forward on innovation and get technical training (Rogers, 2005). This is a major step for senior citizens for it takes them out of their comfort zone and it forces them to learn new technology with the hopes of not being humiliated.

The confirmation step is the final phase. Senior citizens seek guidance or confirmation regarding the decision to adopt the Internet, and sometimes re-visit the decision and implementation phases again before adopting the technology if inconsistencies are revealed (p. 20). As significant factors such as friends, family, and peer support may influence a number of senior citizens to embrace the Internet while others may find that the Internet offers them nothing to enrich their lives.

These five steps will be incorporated in this project as a guide to examine the behaviors and attitudes that might influence senior citizens to adopt the Internet.

*Rogers (1983, 2003) Stage of Adoption



A population can be divided into five characteristics

According to some diffusion scholars, any population can be categorized into five segments:²⁸

1. Innovators – visionary or opinion leaders
2. Early adopters – they join in because the benefits are apparent
3. Early majority – followers who join in if the innovation is easy
4. Late majority – do not want to be left out - fear of opinions of others
5. Laggards – last minute – waiting to the end to make a decision

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This project will explore Internet behavior and attitudes in persons 65 years and over in Holly Springs, Mississippi. The project will identify barriers and benefits in users and non-users of the Internet through focus groups, individual interviews, and radio interviews. Also, the project will provide senior citizens with free Internet and Email classes taught by a non-profit agency. Two sets of two-week classes will measure basic computer skills through pre-tests and post-tests from supervised Internet classes.

Step 1: Focus Group Participants (Appendix p.35)

Focus groups are the methodology of choice to better understand the behaviors and attitudes of those 65 years, because it allowed the participants to express what they had in common in a non-threatening environment, and to formulate a teaching strategy to train non-users on how to use the Internet. The participants were recruited by word-of-mouth and by community leaders from non-profit organizations and local restaurant owners.

The focus groups was comprised of 19 adults 65 years and over with a range of abilities (non-users and users of the Internet). Seven Caucasian females and five Caucasian males, six African American females, and one African American male, ages 65-86, participated in the focus groups. By gender, 13 females and 6 males participated in the focus groups. By education, five reported being high school graduates, three reported having some college experience, five reported having a bachelor degree, five reported having a master's degree and one reported having a Ph.D.

By occupation, the groups consisted of retired school teachers from the city and the county, a small business owner, two social services employees, a priest, retired factory workers, a librarian, a former city employee, and a former Rust College disabled employee. Fifteen of the participants had access to a computer at home or library, and four participants did not own or have access to a computer.

Each session ran one hour. The groups met in two different locations, St. Joseph's Catholic Church and Annie's Restaurant in Holly Springs. An audio recorder was used and the researcher acted as the moderator.

A report containing a brief summary and an interpretation of the responses was written. In addition, transcriptions of the focus groups as well as a follow-up observation of senior citizens learning to use the Internet were reported in a radio program. Selected participants were interviewed during this show.

Location of Focus Groups

St. Joseph's Catholic Church – October 5, 2013: Focus group #1 met in a conference room at St. Joseph's Catholic Church of Holly Springs. The room consisted of tables, chairs, a flip chart, audio recorder and a laptop. Each participant completed a consent form to record the session. Tent cards were assigned so the participants could remain anonymous. Six Caucasian females and five Caucasian males, ages 67-85, participated in the focus group. The participants were Internet users and non-users of the Internet. The majority had a computer at home, and one person did not have a computer.

Annie's Restaurant – October 28, 2013: Focus group #2 met at Annie's Restaurant located on Memphis Street in Holly Springs. The offer to provide free lunch to the participants after the focus group encouraged participation.

The banquet room consisted of two tables, chairs, a flip chart, audio recorder, and a laptop. Each participant completed a consent form to record the session. Tent cards were assigned so the participants could remain anonymous. Six African American females, one Caucasian female, and one African American male, ages 65-86, participated in the focus group. The participants consisted of retired school teachers from the city and the county, a small business owner, an 86 years old retiree, a city employee, and a former Rust College disabled employee. The majority had a computer at home, and three participants did not have a computer.

Step 2: Training non-users to use the Internet

Two Internet classes held at the Sacred Hearts Southern Missions in Holly Springs were observed. The purpose was to introduce the Internet and reduce the fear and difficulties people 65 years and over may have about the Internet. Participants were informed about the Internet classes through focus groups, newspaper ads, flyers, radio announcements, and from local community agencies and churches. Two Internet users from the focus groups served as peer coaches and worked along with the technical center administrator. The classes started the week of October 27, 2013, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Mondays and Wednesdays. Two sets of two-week classes measured basic computer skills through pre-tests and post-tests.

Step 3: Radio

Since 2000, the researcher has worked in the broadcasting field as an on-air radio personality and talk show host for Rust College Public Radio WURC-88.1 FM in Holly Springs. In addition to radio, she produces and hosts a regional television 30-minute talk show that covers North Mississippi and Alabama and airs weekly on WTVA-TV in Tupelo, Miss.

The show is pre-recorded in the television studios of RCTV2 Rust College and emailed to WTVA-TV. To conduct this project, the researcher will host a three-part 30-minute radio series entitled “The Elderly and the Internet” with community leaders, an expert in the field of human behavior, and two participants from the focus groups.

Key Questions

The city of Holly Springs has committed to broaden Internet access. What are the best ways to expand Internet access and training throughout the community?

Show #1 Friday, October 11, 2013

Guest: Mayor Kelvin O. Buck of Holly Springs

Guest: Kourtney Hollingsworth, Mississippi Broadband Coalition Regional Coordinator

Topic: Plans to broaden Internet access and training within Holly Springs.

Show #2 Wednesday, October 30, 2013

Focus Group Participants

Guest: Mary Joel Curcio, Program Manager, Sacred Heart Southern Missions, Holly Springs

Guest: Frances Underwood, Retired Holly Springs High School teacher

Topic: Highlights from the focus groups and follow-up interviews, including their views about overcoming the barriers of access, skill and feelings of intimidation about the Internet.

Show #3 Wednesday, November 6, 2013

Guest: Dr. Charles Williams, Ph.D., Director of Office of Research and Special Projects and The Wilkins/Smith Institute for Health Equity and Social Justice, Rust College

Topic: Digital Divide: The Elderly and the Internet

Step 4: Individual

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted and some were recorded with the consent of the participant. The purpose of the individual interview was to gather data on experiences, behavior, and opinions about the Internet. All of the twenty interview participants were senior citizens 65 years and older. The participants answered 18 questions on Internet usage and availability.

The questions consisted of the following:

- What features are accessed?
- What other media technologies are used?
- What is the education level?
- What is the age bracket?
- What is the ethnicity?

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Focus Group Summary

A total of 19 participated in the focus groups. Fifteen of the participants had access to a computer and the Internet, and four participants had no access to the Internet. The adopters of the Internet were the majority, and they expressed seeing tremendous benefits for themselves and others in their circle. For example, they felt that the main features of the Internet are shopping, banking and paying bills, booking travel, purchasing medication, and communicating with friends and family. A female participant preferred SKYPE to stay in touch with family members instead of writing letters and making phone calls. She expressed how thrilling it is to see and speak with her granddaughter using SKYPE. Her enthusiastic comments about its ease of use invoked the curiosity of another female participant, who is a non-user. The non-user expressed a desire to adopt SKYPE. The same thing happened again in the focus group when another female participant expressed how easy it was to bank and pay bills on-line. The same non-user expressed a desire to also adopt the banking feature.

A male participant felt that it takes a lot of time trying to reach somebody by phone, and that he and his wife preferred Email. He said, “You leave a verbal message and you won’t get a response, but if you email you can leave a very clarifying message you can get your message across.” He stated that he and his wife use Email at home to communicate with friends and family members.

In contrast, one male participant preferred writing letters and having someone else search the Internet for him. He felt that learning the Internet was not a priority.

The participants determined that fear and distrust of new technology was the major cause of the lack of Internet usage among those 65 years and older. In addition, computers intimidate senior citizens since they were not part of their environment growing up, and furthermore, another barrier was cost and lack of computers and Internet connections for those over 80 years old.

The participants felt that security was a barrier for senior citizens. The fear of the government spying because of recent events on the media, fear of others stealing their personal information, and fear of buying, ordering, and banking on-line prevents senior citizens from Internet usage.

A survey of the participants indicated four participants do not have access to the Internet or computers. The majority accesses the Internet from home or the library. One participant felt that the library was more secure than having home access. He preferred going to the library to use the Internet rather than purchasing a computer and having to buy Internet support. The majority accesses the Internet at home on a daily basis, and others more than three times a week.

The question was asked how to attract seniors to learn the Internet. This was a great question that stimulated a lot of conversation. Since senior citizens have declining health issues, some participants felt that sites regarding health issues and medication would be factors that would attract seniors to adopting the Internet, including learning how to use social media for contact with grandchildren. The focus group participants felt that peer-to-peer teaching would reduce anxiety for beginners. Also, providing free Internet classes at community centers and churches, simplifying computer terminology, and providing free transportation would attract seniors to take computer and Internet classes.

The participants felt more women than men tend to use the Internet for social interactions and purchasing goods. Facebook is very popular among senior citizens to connect to relatives, especially grandchildren, and Email is popular to communicate with friends and family. Men tend to use the Internet for research on a special project and sports monitoring.

Inside the Issues Radio Show - a radio show that discusses the issues that pertain to the city of Holly Springs.

Radio Show #1 Friday, October 11, 2013

Guest: Mayor Kelvin Buck of Holly Springs

Guest: Kourtney Hollingsworth, Mississippi Broadband Coalition Regional Coordinator

Topic: Plans to broaden Internet access and training within Holly Springs.

Mayor Buck has teamed up with the Mississippi Broadband Coalition to expand broadband Internet in the city. A meeting with businesses within Holly Springs pointed out some communication and financial problems without having broadband Internet.

Mayor Buck said, “We clearly have some issues with availability and affordable and with the magnitude of the systems that we have. We know that we have to do something about it. The key to it is working with organizations that can help us expand and make it a more compensate system to work with.”

Kourtney Hollingsworth presented Broadband Internet to local officials and Mayor Buck was very impressed with her presentation. He stated that he needed her assistance to help the city prepare for implementation of broadband Internet because some businesses were having problems with Internet connections.

Mayor Buck said, “Some issues came up in a meeting with industry recently where they were talking about communicating with industries outside of Mississippi, and outside of our immediate area connection was very difficult. They said other areas had a more efficient and effective broadband system. So we have to start basically from a very weak system to a system that can reach individuals in their homes, industry can use it and make it a profitable and effective source of tool as they try to conduct business.”

Hollingsworth explained the benefits of having broadband Internet in Holly Springs and how it can help improve the city, the school system, and the labor force.

Hollingsworth said, “The students are going lacking. You want students graduating at the top of their classes and getting scholarships, and that comes by technology. Without technology, they will not have the same opportunities as Desoto county or some other fast pace area.”

“We have tested the speed of your Internet, your Internet is slower than other places, and so it can be beneficial to have a faster Internet,” Hollingsworth said.

Mayor Buck asked what kind of timeline are we looking at, how can Holly Springs make this transition? Hollingsworth said, “We have to map out where people do not have Internet. We are working with your school district. The school district will be sending surveys home by the students. We will have surveys at the libraries and the mayor’s office. The public will fill the surveys out and get them by so you can be mapped. To find out where Internet is in the city will help you get federal and state grants and programs that come in later. And in order to do that Holly Springs must be mapped out correctly to find out where Internet is. It’s very important that people that are in their homes actually tell us if a provider is actually providing them with efficiently Internet or not. Because right now if you look at the map on our state website, it does not efficiently state where Internet is.”

Hollingsworth stated that having broadband Internet would help Holly Springs' economy and school system. She said, "With Broadband Internet we can bring in industry, benefits for the schools, bring in benefits for people who are trying to get jobs." Hollingsworth stated that people should test their Internet to see how fast the Internet is by going to the state's website at www.broadband.ms.gov. "We have lots of people that have Internet but its being cut off if the wind blows. So it is very important that citizens take hold to what they want and help the mayor by actually replying to the surveys," said Hollingsworth.

In reference to getting senior citizens up to speed on the Internet, Mayor Buck indicated that they are reluctant to new technology, but he is willing to try. "You can help them get over these apprehensions by working with them and training them," said Mayor Buck. He stated that senior citizens could also benefit from telemedicine where doctors can diagnosis a condition via the Internet.

Hollingsworth stated that once the surveys are completed and the city is mapped, the next step is to get a wireless downtown and locate state and federal programs to fund it.

Radio Show #2 Wednesday, October 30, 2013

Focus Group Participants

Guest: Focus group #1 - Mary Joel Curcio, Program Manager, Sacred Heart Southern Missions, Holly Springs

Guest: Focus group #2 - Frances Underwood, Retired Holly Springs High School teacher

Topic: Highlights from the focus groups including their views about overcoming the barriers of access, skill and feelings of intimidation about the Internet.

There are a number of barriers preventing senior citizens from Internet usage in both focus groups. Some of the issues were security, distrust of new technology, and difficulties learning the terminology.

In focus group #2, Frances Underwood stated that senior citizens are not comfortable with new technology. Underwood said, “Lots of people 75 years and up did not have access because they did not have Internet as a constant when they were young. They don’t know anything about it except what they heard and they have a fear or distrust of new technology because no one has ever explained it to them in very common ordinary language. Also, one individual said he rather connect with print media than technology.”

In focus group #1, Mary Joel Curcio stated that access to computers and the Internet was a problem. One individual liked the old method of communicating by writing letters and talking on the phone versus Email. Curcio said, “Availability and access to the Internet were obstacles to senior citizens. There are a lot of individuals who did not own a computer and were novices, and the old way of writing and having personal contact was better for one individual.”

The question was asked what value broadband Internet would add to the city. Underwood stated that many of the small businesses were very interested in the mayor’s decision to expand Internet access. Underwood said, “We have a lot of businesses signing up (completing the surveys). I helped distribute and collect surveys for the IT department among small businesses. Most of them have Internet access but they complain that it was extremely slow.”

What are the benefits for senior citizens to get involve with the mayor’s initiative? Curcio stated the some of the benefits for senior citizens accessing the Internet is communication with friends and family, and having more involvement with the world by becoming informed through Internet news media, researching ailments, ordering prescriptions and playing games.

Curcio said, “Senior citizens benefit by having more involvement with news programs and reading news papers on-line keeps them alert and keeps them interested in what’s happening around them, and that results in a healthy and happy person. They are finding that they can research and play recreational games on the Internet.”

Underwood stated that banking and Skype were benefits in her group. Underwood said, “Many of them can access via the Internet their banking for those who live on a fixed income like myself. You have to track what’s left so that you don’t have a nasty surprise one day. My granddaughter and grandchildren helped me to learn Skype.”

Underwood mentioned Facebook was a popular feature within her group because of the number of retired schoolteachers who had Facebook connections.

The question was asked what factors the focus groups would put in place to encourage senior citizens to take Internet classes.

- Coordinate a Buddy System to relieve anxiety
- Rotate Internet classes at community centers and churches within the community
- Provide transportation to senior citizen centers
- Provide basic computer skills – teaching how to use a mouse

Radio Show #3 Wednesday, November 6, 2013

Guest: Dr. Charles Williams, Ph.D., Director of Office of Research and Special Projects and The Wilkins/Smith Institute for Health Equity and Social Justice, Rust College

Topic: Health Disparities/ Digital Divide - A study of the elderly and the Internet

Dr. Williams received his BA (1969) from Rust College and his MS (1971) and PhD (1981) in anthropology from the University of Illinois at Urbana. Drawing upon an early interest in Third World cultures and the African Diaspora, Dr. Williams has developed active research interests in health inequities and social justice issues, HIV/STD and addiction, religion African and African American Studies, and urban issues. Dr. Williams served as founder and director of the University of Memphis' African and African American Studies (AAAS) Program from 1997-2000. Over the past thirty-three years, he has directed various research projects dealing with community health, mental health, homelessness, religion, alcohol and drug treatment and prevention, HIV/AIDS, mutual aid societies, and economic development.²⁹

There are many health disparities in North Mississippi among African Americans, and with the help of Rust College and community leaders some of these disparities can be eradicated. Dr. Charles Williams stated that the first thing that should be done to eradicate these disparities is to create a database and reach out to the medical community for their support. Williams said, “We will build a database to understand the problem, how severe is it and where to start. We want to work with the local doctors in the area, and Rust College is pivotal given its historical legacy.”

Regarding the elderly and the Internet, Dr. Williams defined the “digital divide” as being the gap between those that have or lack of access to computers and the Internet. Williams stated that senior citizens are in a demographic grouping that experiences the digital divide. However, they are not the only ones because those of a higher social class are also part of the digital divide. Williams said, “The digital divide exists among retired professions, who are afraid of the Internet and would often get someone else to access the Internet. In 1980, when computers were coming fast the digital divide existed among minorities, but minorities have embraced computers and the digital divide went out of the window.”

The question was asked why do senior citizens resist new technology, and what is the mindset of someone 65 years and older? Dr. Williams stated that senior citizens resist change because they want to be in control and do not want to feel inadequate. Williams said, “New technology is fearful, because it is new. Therefore, we are comfortable with what we know and how to do it. This gives us an advantage knowing what we know and how to navigate and how to maneuver.”

“Someone moves us back to a position where we feel inadequate then we begin to resist, because we don’t want to be uncomfortable. To be knowledgeable gives us a sense of confidence and when we have confidence and self esteem we are able to do better and function better,” said Williams.

Williams stated there are tremendous advantages when the elderly embrace new technology Williams said, “When the elderly learn and explore and accept new changes, it increases the brain size. For example, my mother in law was always interested in learning new things, reading and exploring. When she died, the doctors looked at her brain and said that it looked like the brain of a much younger person. Playing video games exercises the brain, and this would be a shot in the arm removing health disparities and depression among the elderly.”

How can Rust College assist in getting senior citizens to adopt the Internet? Williams said, “Rust College could be a resource to help get the elderly pass their fears and embrace the Internet by conducting Internet classes and utilizing Rust College students to help train the elderly. Keeping senior citizens in their comfort zone so that they won’t turn off when they make a mistake or feel bad would help encourage them to learn the Internet.”

Other obstacles pertaining to the elderly is income and education level. In order for the elderly to adopt the Internet, they must first learn how to read and write. Williams said, “The elderly do not have the income to purchase Internet equipment nor do they have access to the Internet because they don’t have broadband. Also, barriers exist in technology literacy regarding equipment and illiteracy, not knowing how to read.”

Individual Interview Summary (Interview Questions p.36)

The interviews generated a broad range of Internet and non-Internet usage among adults 65 years and older. Eleven of the participants were female, and nine were male, ages 65-85. By ethnicity, thirteen were African American, and seven were Caucasian. Fifteen of the participants were high school graduates, two reported some college experience, and three reported having a college degree. Seventeen were retired, and three work in the school system. The majority of the participants were recruited from the Garden Café, a ministry of the churches of Holly Springs and Sacred Heart Southern Missions and Catholic Social Services that feed the hungry.

Six male participants reported no interested in the Internet, six participants reported having no knowledge of the Internet, but expressed a desire to attend the free Internet classes provided by Sacred Hearts Southern Missions, Eight participants reported using the Internet at home accessing Email, Facebook, travel, news, medical and recreational sites. All of the participants had cell phones.

Internet classes - Sacred Hearts Southern Missions

The classes were scheduled for two days a week, Mondays and Wednesdays. The curriculum consists of basic computer skills, Email, and Internet usage. The classes started Monday, October 29, 2013.

After observing the cognitive skills of the participants, the classes were modified from two days a week, Monday and Wednesday, to four days in two weeks, Mondays and Wednesdays. The changes were necessary because the participants lacked basic computer skills and attention difficulties. The instructor reported lack of basic typing skills and memory lapses. The majority could not keep up with verbal and written instructions, due to age and the newness of computer terminology.

The participants were paired into groups of two and were taught how to sign on, create a password, use Email, open an attachment, scroll, reply, forward, and send Emails. Additional lessons include learning how to surf the Internet by visiting shopping sites, housewares, and search and print food recipes.

The majority of the participants are from the focus groups and from the individual interviews. The first class consisted on five females. The second class consisted of four females and one male. The instructor is an experienced software instructor with years of teaching basic computer classes to senior citizens within the Holly Springs' community.

The pre and post surveys measured the participants' knowledge of the computer and Internet. Before the class, the pre-test was given. The participants reported having no knowledge of how to use a mouse or how to send or receive Email, or how to access the Internet. After completing the two-week classes and the post survey, the participants reported having gain knowledge of how to use a mouse, how to access and send Email, and how to perform Internet searches. The instructor received excellent comments on how the classes were taught. The participants mentioned that the classes were enjoyable and that the instructor stimulated their interest.

The one-on-one interviews and the basic computer and Internet classes were essential to this project because it confirmed the challenges of getting senior citizens to embrace the Internet. Furthermore, training senior citizens properly on how to access the Internet can overcome barriers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Sample

The sample group consisted of 39 participants between the ages of 65-86 years old. Twenty-four of the participants were female, and 15 were male. By ethnicity, 19 of the participants were Caucasian, and 20 were African American. By occupation, 31 of the participants were retired, and eight were employed, and by education, 20 reported having a high school degree, five reported some college experience, and 14 reported having college degrees.

Ten participants reported not wanting to learn the Internet because of age, 23 participants have adopted the Internet, and six participants (non-users) have enrolled in the free Internet classes provided by the Sacred Hearts Southern Mission.

Summary of results

The project revealed that fear and distrust of new technology were barriers to adopting the Internet among senior citizens. Other obstacles reported were availability and access to the Internet because senior citizens live on a fixed income and cannot afford to purchase broadband Internet.

Furthermore, the project revealed that security is a barrier for senior citizens. The fear of the government spying because of recent events on the media, fear of others stealing their personal information, and fear of buying, ordering, and banking on-line prevents senior citizens from Internet usage.

The project revealed more women than men adopts the Internet. More women than men tend to use the Internet for social interactions and purchasing goods. Facebook is very popular among senior citizens to connect to relatives and especially grandchildren, and Email is popular to communicate with friends and family. Men tend to use the Internet for research on a special project and sports monitoring.

Overall, the project revealed the majority of the participants use the Internet to search for medical information, shopping, paying bills, religious information, purchasing medications, travel, checking the weather, playing games, and for social media.

This project had an immediate effect on the participants. Some participants who had little knowledge about the Internet expressed a desire to adopt the Internet to pay bills and use social media to contact friends and family members. Six participants who are non-users have since enrolled in the free computer classes provided by Sacred Hearts Southern Mission in Holly Springs. The participants mentioned that the classes were enjoyable and that the instructor stimulated their interest. Therefore, training senior citizens properly on how to access the Internet can overcome barriers.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Rogers' "Diffusion of Innovations" theory played a significant role in this project. Rogers' theory places people into five characteristics. The first are described as innovators or opinion leaders, followed by early adopters who join in because the benefits are apparent. Early majority are people who follow because it's easy to learn, and the late majority does not want to be left out. Finally, laggards are those who wait till the last minute to make a decision.

According to Hobbes' 2011 timeline,¹³ the Internet began in 1982. The participants who made the decision to adopt the Internet in this project are considered laggards.

Moreover, Rogers' process of innovation consists of five steps: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. Rogers referred to knowledge as the first step when exposed to the existence of a new idea and develops a concept of its purpose, followed by persuasion, then a decision to adopt the innovation, followed by implementation, and finally confirmation. As a result of this project, non-users of the Internet, especially women, embraced the Internet. They were persuaded of its benefits after hearing them expressed from opinion leaders and peers.

Rogers claimed that senior citizens establish an attitude or opinion about innovation, whether to move forward and investigate or stand still and reject innovation this time. During the implementation of this project, participants learned from their peers that the features, cost, and usability issues were not barriers impossible to overcome and decided to adopt the Internet.

Robinson (2009) argued that adoption of innovation involves communicating with people face-to-face who are known and trusted and who have made the transition successfully without embarrassment. The decision stage to embrace the Internet occurred during the implementation of this project. Two participants, with little experience of the Internet, decided to embrace the Internet to pay bills and to use social media based on the experiences of their peers, who made the transition successfully.

The implementation phase is where the decision is made to move forward on innovation and get technical training. This stage occurred when six participants decided to take the free Internet training classes taught by one of their peers.

The participants experienced the final stage of innovation, the confirmation step. This stage is when senior citizens seek guidance or confirmation regarding the decision to adopt the Internet from friends, family or peer support. This phase occurred after the participants learned that the Internet was not as intimidating as they thought and decided to embrace new features of the Internet and to take the free Internet classes as a group.

Limitations of the project

There are limited national studies on the barriers of senior citizens and Internet usage, and there are limited studies on marketing techniques towards senior citizens on the benefits of Internet usage.

Finally, this project was limited to the city of Holly Springs and 39 participants. This study validates the difficulties senior citizens face when learning how to access the Internet. From the conception of the Internet classes, cognitive issues revealed that senior citizens could not understand basic computer terminology, and many could not type or remember verbal commands.

Rogers suggested that innovation must be tried before adoption can occur. This project has showed that senior citizens must be given more time to learn basic computer skills before learning the Internet. Training can overcome barriers if senior citizens are trained properly on Internet usage.

Future Research

This is the first study on the behavior and attitudes of senior citizens and Internet usage in the city of Holly Springs. Holly Springs has a population of 815 households with adults 65 years and older. Therefore, more research and time is needed to continue to study their behavior and attitudes concerning the Internet.

Furthermore, more time is needed to follow the newly elected mayor's broadband initiative to see if more laggards adopt the Internet after Mississippi Broadband Coalition maps the city and what federal and state funds are allocated to produce a wireless downtown.

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LIST OF APPENDICS

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you use the Internet?
2. If no, circle reason why not
(Not interested) (Hard to learn) (Physical discomfort) (Too much effort) (Fear)
(No Computer Access) (Cost)
3. Where do you access the Internet? (Home) (Elsewhere) _____
4. How often do you use the Internet? (Daily) (Twice a week) (Weekly) (Occasionally)
5. Ethnicity: Caucasian__ African American__ Hispanic__ Asian__
6. Age Group: (65-70__) (71-75__) (76-80__) (81-90__)
7. Gender: circle (Male) (Female)
8. Send or read e-mail (Yes_____) (No_____)
9. Look for health or medical information (Yes_____) (No_____)
10. Play games (Yes_____) (No_____)
11. Look for religious or spiritual information (Yes_____) (No_____)
12. Research your family's history or genealogy (Yes_____) (No_____)
13. Get news (Yes_____) (No_____)
14. Buy a product (Yes_____) (No_____)
15. Look for information from a government Web site (Yes_____) (No_____)
16. Buy or make a reservation for travel (Yes_____) (No_____)
17. What other media technologies do you use? Cell phone__ DVR/TIVO__ Satellite/Cable
TV__ WIFI__ Other_____
18. Education (Less than a high school diploma) (Completed high school) (Some College)
(Associates Degree) (Bachelor Degree) (Masters Degree)

APPENDIX B: FOCUS PARTICIPANTS GROUP #1

FOCUS GROUP #1

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2013

NAME	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	ETHNICITY
3A	F	67	Associates Degree	Retired	Caucasian
3B	M	69	Associates Degree	Material Handler	Caucasian
3C	M	72	Masters of Divinity	Priest	Caucasian
3D	F	72	BA Degree	Retired	Caucasian
3E	M	74	BS Degree	Retired	Caucasian
3F	F	68	BA Degree	Retired	Caucasian
3G	F	82	High School Graduate	Retired	Caucasian
3H	M	85	3 Yrs. College	Retired	Caucasian
3I	F	72	Ph.D.	Program Manager	Caucasian
3J	M	83	High School Graduate	Retired	Caucasian
3K	F	73	Masters Degree	Social Services	Caucasian

APPENDIX C: FOCUS PARTICIPANTS GROUP #2

FOCUS GROUP #2

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

ANNIE'S RESTAURANT – MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2013

NAME	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	ETHNICITY
3A	F	66	College Graduate	Retired	Caucasian
3C	F	72	High School Graduate	Retired	African American
3D	F	86	High School Graduate	Retired	African American
3F	F	65	College Graduate	Retired	African American
3G	F	65	High School Graduate	Retired	African American
3I	F	65	College Graduate	Retired Teacher	African American
3J	M	86	High School Graduate	Self-Employed	African American
3K	F	64	Masters Degree	Disabled	African American

APPENDIX D: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Education	Occupation	Internet Usage	Reasons for Internet Usage	Reasons for Not using the Internet	Taking Internet Classes
PA1	F	AA	76-80	High School	Retired	Yes	Health, news, government, religion		No
PA2	F	AA	65-70	High School	Retired	No		“Not Interested”	Yes
PA3	F	AA	81-90	High School	Retired	No		Not Interested	No
PA4	M	C	71	High School	Self-employed	No		“Not Interested”	No
PA5	F	AA	71-75	BA Degree	Librarian	Yes	Does everything		No
PA6	F	C	76-80	BA Degree	Teacher	Yes	Health, news, government, religion, Email		No
PA7	M	AA	76-80	High School	Retired	No			Yes
PA8	M	C	73	High School	Retired	No			Yes
PA9	F	C	71-75	BA Degree	Teacher	Yes	Health, news, government, religion, Email		No
PA10	F	AA	65-70	High School	Retired	No		“I want to learn”	No
PA11	M	AA	65-70	High School	Retired	No		“Don’t need it”	No
PA12	M	C	71-75	High School	Retired	No		“I want to learn”	No
PA13	F	C	73	Some college	Retired	Yes	Does everything		No
PA14	F	C	71	High School	Retired	Yes	Does everything		No
PA15	F	AA	65-70	High School	Retired	No			Yes
PA16	F	AA	65-70	Some college	Retired	Yes			Yes
PA17	M	AA	71-75	High School	Retired	No		“Not Interested”	No
PA18	M	AA	69	High School	Retired	Yes	Health, news, government, religion, Email		No
PA19	M	AA	71-75	High School	Retired	No		“Not interested”	No
PA20	M	AA	71-75	High School	Retired	No		“Not interested”	No

APPENDIX E: INTERNET PRE-TEST

INTERNET CLASS PRE-TEST

DATE: _____

Basic Computer use

1. Do you know how to use a mouse? Circle: Yes No
2. Do you know how to send or receive email?
Circle: Yes No
3. Do you know how to get to a website? Circle: Yes No
4. Do you know how to connect to friends and family? Circle: Yes No
5. What websites would you like to visit? (Circle as many as needed) Hobbies, health information, picture sharing, grandparent's websites, shopping, social media, other _____

APPENDIX F: INTERNET POST-TEST

INTERNET CLASS POST-TEST

DATE: _____

Basic Computer use

1. Do you know how to use a mouse? Circle: Yes No
2. Do you know how to send or receive email?
Circle: Yes No
3. Do you know how to get to a website? Circle: Yes No
4. Do you know how to connect to friends and family? Circle: Yes No
5. What websites have you visited? (Circle as many as needed) Hobbies, health information, picture sharing, grandparent's websites, shopping, social media, other _____
6. How would you rate this class? Check a number (✓)
Fair _____ Excellent
(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
7. Would you recommend this class to friends or family members? Circle: Yes No

VITA

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EDUCATION

Rust College, Bachelor of Arts April 2009
Major: English/Liberal Arts

JOURNALISM AND TEACHING EXPERIENCES

Rust College Holly Springs, MS
Production Assistant/On-Air Personality 2008 - Present

Latter Rain Project Youth RAC After School Program Holly Springs, MS
Director 2007 - 2009

Mississippi State University Extension Service Holly Springs, MS
Nutritional Educator 2003 - 2005

Mississippi Chronicle Newspaper Holly Springs, MS
Field Reporter 2002

AWARDS

University of Mississippi NewsWatch 99
2012 Mississippi Associated Press Broadcasters Award (MAPB)
Project Youth RAC - Nationally recognized by the Historically Minority Colleges and Universities Consortium of North Carolina Central University

MEMBERSHIP

Member of Historically Minority Colleges and Universities Consortium
Member of Holly Springs/Marshall County Faith-Based Consortium
Member of the Marshall County NAACP
Member of Kappa Tau Alpha National Journalism Honors Society
Member of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ)