

## **Digital Technologies for Older Persons and Healthy Ageing**

May 17<sup>th</sup> is celebrated as World Telecommunications and Society Day, which commemorates the founding of the Information Telecommunications Union (ITU). The theme for 2022 is chosen as "**Digital Technologies for Older Persons and Healthy Ageing**". Healthy ageing refers to a society creating environments and opportunities that support older generations to be and do what they value throughout the end stage of their life. ITU has prioritised identifying the generational, gender, and affordability gaps that are prevalent in our society, particularly amongst older persons as they age. That is, we can use technology to support older generations to live their lives according to their values with dignity and respect.

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed technology faster than the virus itself. Across the globe, businesses that were initially reluctant to adopt technology and cloud computing were left with no choice but to place technology at the forefront of their agendas. We have witnessed the immediate addition of the "e" factor alongside all sectors—governance, banking, entertainment, health, insurance, and marketing, to name a few. Internet service providers (ISPs) have had to scale up due to the exponential growth in demand for broadband communications. Across the globe, the ISPs suffered disruption since they were not equipped to support the abrupt transition. Cybersecurity, too, became the new buzzword during the COVID-19 era. Guaranteeing that technology is being used effectively by the intended target group defines the success of the digital transformation. Failure to embrace digital transformation convergence might force governments and organisations to use the traditional systems parallelly, resulting in split societies and less efficient working styles. This would be an overhead due to the redundant resource allocation and associated maintenance.

The impact on the lives of the aged population should be carefully considered during this technology boom. Older generations, over the years, have contributed to helping us reach where we are now. The wealth of experience that they have in hand should never be underestimated. They come from an age where access to information was not at their fingertips. No search engine's database will contain information about the skills they have mastered. While today's generation uses search engines to get a task done, older generations had to rely on their memory and paper resources. With the rapid shift in technology, governments, businesses, and the younger generation all have a responsibility to ensure that the elderly are encouraged, supported, and not left. They should be able to reap the rewards of their contributions. According to ITU, over 1 billion people aged 60 or above are not using technology. Thus, the objective of digital transformation to enhance the social and economic paradigm is faced with failures.

## **Awareness**

The benefits of using technology need to be made aware so older generations feel motivated and excited about learning new skills. Even though cognitive decline is unavoidable, studies have shown a slow decline in the mentally stimulated population, suggesting that most of the population is able to successfully gain new skills. It is important that the target population is made aware of such health benefits in addition to the obvious benefits of better communication, staying connected, and information access at their fingertips. The younger generation must observe patience and use appropriate methodologies to help the elderly easily understand the use of digital tools/technology. The use of digital tools can be taught through non-digital means, such as easy-read guides.

## **Accessibility**

Technology is now playing a supportive role, powering all sectors, and hence the regulations and governments should ensure that it is both accessible and affordable. Technology which is not affordable is not accessible. Internet access should be considered a human right, and governments should take the necessary steps to ensure that streamlined quality services are being offered to populations with less economic support.

## **Simplified User Interface**

A simple user interface is fundamental to assisting the elderly. Since the older population make up a large proportion of the overall population, software developers and designers must make the design less complicated to help them interact well, or, at the very least, create versions which are more user-friendly and easier to follow. The ageing population forms a diverse and larger consumer base that is too often overlooked. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) estimation of 2021, 20% of Seychelles population is over 60 years old, which is a significant figure. Businesses must ensure inputs from the elderly are sought during the different stages of the software development lifecycle. This could be done through surveys, for instance. If the elderly find technology simple and intuitive, surely individuals of all ages will embrace it.

The United Nations has declared 2021-2030 as the “**Decade of Healthy Ageing**”. This is a call for the governments, academia, private sector, media, and professionals to team up and enhance the lives of the elderly, especially as our healthcare continues to improve and populations live longer fuller lives. The country's youth should also see this as an opportunity to appreciate the contributions that the elderly has made in their prime age. The change should happen first in each of our homes and then in society. Let us strengthen research to understand their health care and well-being needs and devise elderly-friendly tech solutions to combat the barriers.

## References

1. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/telecommunication-day>
2. <https://www.itu.int/wtisd/en/>
3. <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Decade%20of,improve%20the%20lives%20of%20older>

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