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Digital technologies and healthy ageing – potentials and downsides

Seniors' creative ways of navigating the technological take over

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The ageing populations of Scandinavia are growing rapidly, and put extra burdens on the health care systems. Digital health and welfare services are presented as the solution (Erlingsdottir & Sandberg, 2019), but there is limited research on how this actually works.

This paper draws on a small set of interviews (<10) from the research project “Healthy Ageing in a Digital World” which examines how Swedish citizens aged 75+ engage with digital media technology in relation to their health. We build on previous research that complicates the categories of internet users and non-users (Rasi, 2018; Rasi-Heikkinen, 2022) to understand how seniors domesticate media technologies by creating their own practices of technology use (Couldry, 2012; Haddon, 2011).

Our preliminary results indicate that they are all engaged with digital media and more or less part of the “technological takeover”. But the ways in which they engage with digital media is not straightforward or done in the way that those behind health solutions have planned. For example, in Sweden 1177 is both the phone number and website where Swedish citizens can access their health records and book appointments with health care professionals. When our respondents have been asked to find a vaccination appointment, as part of a media go-along protocol, none of them have managed to successfully navigate the 1177-website for this purpose. Some tried hard but were unable to finish booking due to technical difficulties. Others only made a brief effort before giving up when they “got lost” after visiting the website. Several forgo using the website completely and prefer calling; one respondent chooses to physically visit her health care provider due to a Parkinsons diagnosis that makes it difficult typing and speaking.

Several of the respondents actively choose not to use the 1177-website, but this did not mean that they abstained completely from all technology. The respondents were often proficient at some aspects of digital media, while selectively avoiding others.

Couldry, N. (2012) *Media, society, world: social theory and digital media practice*. Cambridge: Polity.

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Haddon, L. (2011) ‘Domestication Analysis, Objects of Study, and the Centrality of Technologies in Everyday Life’, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 36(2), pp. 311-324. doi: 10.22230/CJC.2011V36N2A2322.

Rasi-Heikkinen, P. (2022) *Older People in a Digitalized Society. From Marginality to Agency*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited. doi: 10.1108/9781803821672.

Rasi, P. (2018) ‘Internet Nonusers’, in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Internet*. SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781473960367.