EBS Business School

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Social-Cultural Impact Essay

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SCI Project Smartphone Workshop

The importance to integrate elderly people into the Smartphone world!

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1   Introduction

I conducted my SCI project this Fall Term in the Mehrgenerationenhaus (MGH) in Oestrich-Winkel. MGH's are not places to live in, they are more like meeting points for all people and generations. MGH's try to connect all generations in order to help, communicate and spend time with each other. This is important as so the people have a better insight in the life and the problems of other generations and therefore what they can do in order to improve life for others. Around Germany there are 450 MGH's and each MGH is highly personalised and unique to the specific location. Therefore, every MGH has a different focal point according to the needs of the society around it. In Oestrich-Winkel the main emphasis is on the support of seniors. As most of the people in the MGH's operate on a voluntary basis people try to give something back to other generations by offering different activities or programs. One activity of the MGH Oestrich-Winkel is the Smartphone Workshop. Alexander Schreyeck, Jan-Raphael Gritzmacher, Marc-Philippe Leitzbach and I conducted the Smartphone Workshop two times in the last year. This fit's good in the concept of the MGH's as for the younger generations the use of technology and smartphones is completely normal and self-explaining but for elderly people it is often something strange and complex as it is completely new. The aim of the Workshop is to teach the participants the basics and how they can turn the smartphone from an enemy into a friend and experience all the benefits it has. Especially for elderly people the use of smartphones can lead to huge benefits for them. Therefore, in the course of this paper I will explain the importance to integrate elderly people into the new smartphone world in order to allow them to benefit from these devices same as younger generations do.

2   Main Part

A main problem for elderly people is that their lifestyle is slowing down and also the abilities to learn new things. This is a problem as the technological world is rapid and changing all the time. Therefore, the technology does not look anything like that what elderly people are used to from their early days. This contributes to the huge respect these people have from these devices and the angst to do something wrong. Furthermore, the problem that the tactile sense, the eyesight and the movement of their hands adulterate with increasing age imposes new difficulties for the use of smartphones. This all leads to

the need for training and teaching how to use a smartphone. However sadly the possibilities for this type of teaching are still very limited. Most shops do not offer the explanation of devices or training courses. The courses that are available are often for advanced usage and not for the very basic skills. I think one reason for that is, that for us young people these devices are self-explaining, and we cannot understand the problems of the elderly until we are in the same age. We experienced this during the course of our workshop as a lot of participants told us about the problem that they are really interested and want to learn how to use such a device but did not had the chance to until now. This is a major problem in my eyes as the benefits that come along with a smartphone are immense for seniors. This reaches from the possibility to contact emergency services over the use off apps that benefit in your daily life to the possibility to always contact your family members. These possibilities could contribute to the wellbeing of elderly people as it will give them a new sense of security and therefore, they might try again activities and therefore become happier. During the workshop I often experienced how thankful and happy these people are if you explained them something and they finally under stood it. But for that to happen it was important to start at the very basics and do not expect that the participants have already knowledge about the software or the device. Often the little things which I just do and do not think about create the big problems for seniors as nobody really explains these steps. This again underlines that the need for such senior smartphone courses that start with the basics is high and have a huge impact on the participants. My grandpa also decided to buy a Smartphone a few years ago. For him it was the same case that me teaching him was the only way he was able to understand and learn about the device as in no shop they offered something like that. However, he and most of the participants in the workshop are very interested and after they understood the basics, they had a lot of questions and always wanted to learn more. As a lot of services depend more and more on the use of smartphones, like TAN services from banks or timetable information about trains, this kind of forces elderly people to adapt to new technologies. This creates a threat as people have to use it but are not able learn it which therefore can lead to people being frustrated and not happy. Another problem are the available devices. As previously mentioned, the eyesight and the tactile senses are reduced the small buttons are often not very practical for elderly people as they cannot press them easily and therefore the smartphone becomes again more a problem than a device that supports you.

3   Conclusion

In order to solve some of the problems mentioned I think it is very important to adapt the smartphone market also to elderly people and not only to young people. This should be executed by the manufactures by offering smartphones that have the functions more structured, bigger buttons and screen icons. If this is implemented a step towards an easy smartphone use for elderly people is made. This would also lead to removing one of the barriers as now it is possible to reach all the functions easily. If people do not have to make efforts to use the smartphone it is much more likely to involve more fun for seniors using their smartphone. If more and more businesses require the use of a smartphone, in my opinion, they have to make sure that everyone has the chance to use the smartphone by providing the required skills. If there are no private institution's that offer something like that it is also the responsibility of a government to intervene and provide such services to the population. These courses therefore allow to integrate elderly people into the smartphone world and contribute to improve their standard of living. For me personally the experience I made during the course was very interesting. I was able to improve my teaching and presentation skills. But also, I improved my teaching sensitivity as you have to adapt to the people you teach and cannot demand the same as from people my own age group. The workshop allowed us to return something to an older generation and therefore contribute a bit to the success of the MGH Oestrich-Winkel. To experience how thankful and happy the people have been after the workshop and the extremely positive feedback showed us that our work actually had an impact.