Why it is easier to slay a dragon than to kill a myth about older people’s smartphone use

We collected smartphone activity logs over four consecutive weeks (28 days) between February and May 2019 in Canada, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. The total sample included older adults aged 60 to 79 (N=303).

Participants (60 to 79) use smartphones...

... practically the same amount of time regardless of their age.
... more than 100 times per day on average.
... with very different interests: from Google Maps to Candy Crush.
... with the same frequency regardless of their age.
... throughout the day.
... it is not only their health that conditions its use.
... to play, like many other adults.
... to go on Instagram, Facebook and even Tinder.

Myth #1 Old people don’t like or are unable to interact with technology
If so, why are they so attached to their smartphones throughout the day?

Myth #2 The older you are, the less you use your smartphone
If older individuals weren’t attached to their smartphones, they wouldn’t use them much. However, participants use their mobile phones (they turn the screen on) more than 100 times per day on average. Such usage is distributed throughout the day, marked by the social uses of time (sleeping, lunch, etc.).

Myth #3 Old people are homogeneous
Data split by age group (60-69, and 70-79) challenges the idea that older people use their smartphones less.

Myth #4 There is nothing to be learned from older people’s digital habits
The way older people use their smartphones changes over time, due to different digital and life interests. Particularly, their digital practices are different from those of the adult population.

Myth #5 Old people are defined by their medical conditions, and so are their digital needs
The types of apps the participants use appears to be shaped not only by their medical conditions, but also by personal interests, social life, shopping and citizenship.

Myth #6 Old people don’t use their smartphone to play, they don’t need fun
They do play, as the two examples show (Candy Crush and Pokemon Go). And those who play games spend more time on gaming than on other activities.

Authors:

Supported by:
uoc.edu