

CARING COMMUNITY

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Bridging Grey Digital Divide

Despite the city's advanced ICT infrastructure, older adults face significant challenges in adopting and utilizing digital technologies. Dr. LAU, Hi Po Bobo and her interdisciplinary team aim to address the digital divide experienced by older adults in Hong Kong. This research seeks to empower older adults, enhance public awareness of intergenerational ICT inequality, and inform service and policy development to support equitable access to technology.

The research activities were conducted in four phases. The first phase involved focus group discussions with 146 older adults, revealing a digital divide moderated by their concerns about privacy and online security. It also highlighted the role of ICT in facilitating intergenerational communication, though rapid technological advancements often left older adults feeling unsupported. The second phase was a telephone survey with 910 participants, which identified three distinct classes of digital engagement and highlighted the mediating role of digital support and competence as the mediators between digital engagement and digital optimism among the older sample. The third phase included focus groups with professionals to discuss

the implications of the findings on healthcare, social care, and gerontechnology. The aim of the final phase, an ongoing survey, is to confirm the digital divide structure and explore neighborhood factors influencing digital literacy and usage.

The findings indicate significant disparities in digital engagement among older adults, influenced by age, socioeconomic status, and health. The research highlights the need for targeted interventions to bridge the digital divide and support older adults in becoming more digitally competent. These insights are crucial for developing responsive and age-inclusive ICT products and services.



ENHANCING DIGITAL INCLUSION

The team explores factors affecting older adults' willingness to experiment with ICT. By enhancing public awareness of the digital divide and challenging stereotypes about older adults' ICT capabilities, the research promotes a more inclusive and equitable digital environment. The findings also inform healthcare professionals about the association between ICT usage and health outcomes, aiding the development of telehealth services tailored to older adults' needs.

Social service professionals benefit from the research by identifying service gaps and diversifying support for different older users. The project highlights the importance of ICT clinics, device rental programs, and financial subsidies to ensure equitable access to technology. Additionally, the research informs community development initiatives that promote ICT usage among older adults by leveraging socio-spatial facilitators and removing neighborhood barriers.

The project also provides valuable insights for policymakers and advocates, such as the Elderly Commission, to develop policies that create an age-enabling ICT environment. By addressing the digital divide, the research contributes to the broader goal by promoting a caring and inclusive community where older adults can thrive in the digital age. These efforts contribute to the well-being and social integration of older adults, ensuring they are not left behind in the digital age.

“*Empowering older adults with digital skills not only bridges the digital divide but also encourages a more inclusive and caring community.*”

Related Publications and Presentations

Lau, B. H. P., Shum, E. N. Y., Lui, F. Y. F., Lam, G., Kwok, A. P. K., & Tsang, C. K. (2023). Admiration, skepticism, indecisiveness? Attitudes toward AI in Chinese middle-aged and older adults. *Innovation in Aging*, 7 (Suppl. 1), 1176.

Lau, B. H. P., Shum, E. N. Y., Lui, F. Y. F., Lam, G., Kwok, A. P. K., & Tsang, C. K. (2023). Where is the digital divide? Intra-generational divide on app usage in post-pandemic Hong Kong. *Innovation in Aging*, 7 (Suppl. 1), 1152.

Shum, E. N. Y., Lau, B. H. P., Cheung, K. S. L., Chan, C. L. W., Siu, J. C. Y., Luk, J. K. H., Kwan, J. S. K., Chan, G. M. Y., Pat, L. Y. C., & Martin, P. (2024). Multiple roads to success: A latent class analysis on successful ageing among Hong Kong near-centenarians and centenarians (NCC). *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 99(2), 152-178.

Funding: Mapping the grey digital divide and diversity in older ICT users post-COVID: A mixed-method research informing service and policy development [UGC/IDS(C)15/H01/22]

