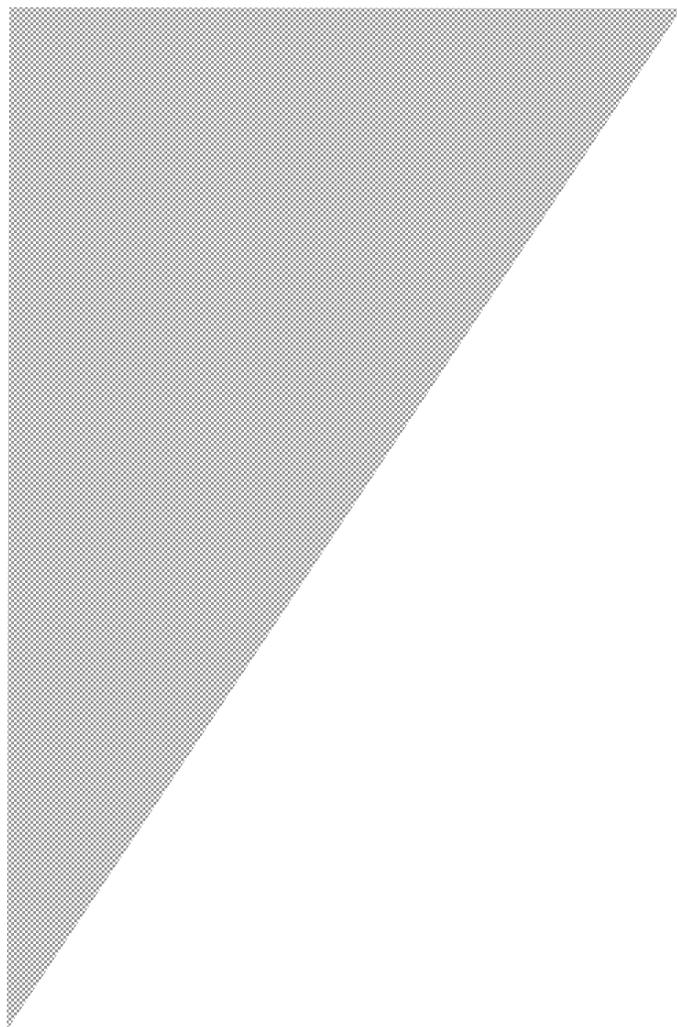


# **IMPACT OF THE INTERNET ON OLDER ADULTS: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Technological advances in all forms of electronic communication have expanded the availability of information as well as person-to-person communication. As technology becomes more accessible and its use more commonplace senior adults, defined as age 60 and older, join the growing number of people in the United States using the Internet and computers.

More specifically, the use of the Internet and email can provide new opportunities for older adults to stay in touch with friends and family members and provides the opportunity to make new friends and find people who share common interests. Discussion boards and user groups can provide support and information on subjects seniors may know little or nothing about.

Additionally, the group of people in the United States who are approaching or are already senior adults is also expanding. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by the year 2020, the number of people age 60 and older will be 53,348,000. The sheer number of people in this demographic will have a major impact on society in many other areas as well. Studies show that older adults will continue to be active well into their retirement years and those years should be as enjoyable as possible. Many researchers already believe this to be true of the baby boom generation.

However, senior adults have unique visual, technical and other special needs associated with using computers and the Internet. In the current electronic environment, a majority of web designers and technical communicators do not yet incorporate elements into their design of information and its subsequent delivery that would make it easier for senior adults to utilize. This becomes a communication barrier, which impairs the ability of senior adults to gather information and engage in social contact.

Given the expansion of the older adult segment of the population in the United States, I believe we as a society owe it to this segment of the population to help them continue to live viable lives for as long as possible. There are many reasons and benefits for doing this.

Other services and businesses will increasingly continue to make use of electronic communication. By discovering the needs and purpose for using the Internet, web designers, technical writers and illustrators can create web pages user-friendly for senior adults. This will enable seniors to continue to make use of the services they need such as ordering prescriptions or groceries online or communicating with a healthcare provider. It will have an impact on how

senior adults spend their dollars due to fixed incomes and the services and businesses they patronize.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Nie, Norman H. *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 45, No. 3, November 2001, pg. 420-435. "Sociability, Interpersonal Relations, and the Internet: Reconciling Conflicting Findings".

This article written for a scientific journal, discusses four major studies all of which were all conducted by different entities within nine months. Each study was dedicated to analyzing the effects of Internet use and e-mail on social relationships. The author compares the studies as well as noting some of their deficiencies and attempts to resolve the differences in them. He specifically addresses the topic of e-mail and how it can be an enhancement to communication among friends and family who are more frequently distant. In addition, he points out that the technological advances of computers and the Internet have been greeted with the same enthusiasm as radio, telephones and television were in the past. He concedes that it's just a matter of time before society decides that the Internet is yet another technological advancement that will become commonplace. Written for a largely academic audience, Dr. Nie reiterates that by and large the Internet will continue to grow and be a great advancement of our society; however, a warm, empathetic, heartfelt e-mail will never replace a personal visit and a hug from a friend or family member.

Chen, Yiwei and Persson, Anna. *Educational Gerontology*, 28: 731-744, 2002. "Internet Use Among Young and Older Adults: Relation to Psychological Well-Being".

This article reports the results of research conducted by the authors and funded by the university where they are employed. The authors begin with the premise that much of the research conducted on Internet use has focused on children, teenagers and young adults and has been met with results that Internet use among these groups can and is very often a negative factor in sociological development and general well-being.

This was in direct conflict with the emerging information regarding Internet use among older adults, which so far has shown more positive effects. The goals of the research project were to examine age differences in psychological well-being, to compare the impact of Internet use on psychological well-being of young and older adults and to explore group differences of psychological well-being and personal characteristics between older Internet users and nonusers. Directed to an audience who interact with older adults, the authors were very thorough in their research, integrated charts and tables in the article to explain some of their findings and included interesting dimensions of personality including autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance and emotional stability.

White, H., McConnell, E., et. al; *Aging & Mental Health* 2002; 6(3) pg. 213-221.  
"A randomized controlled trial of the psychosocial impact of providing Internet training and Access to Older Adults".

Heidi White, MD of Duke University Medical Center, conducted a randomized trial of the psychosocial impact of providing Internet training and access to older adults. Her experiment found that more research in this growing area is needed in order to more precisely define how and in which areas older adults will utilize ever-increasing options for information and communication. This study expands on an earlier experiment by using a much larger population of older adults and focuses on those mostly confined to communities. She supports her argument that older adults whose mobility is confined either by health or by access with examples and results 20 weeks after the origination of the study. She purports that older adults begin to feel less isolation, find a common ground with others through similar interests or "meet" new people through discussion boards. They can explore and gain more information on hobbies, research health conditions and read books and articles that they may not have had access to previously. All of these are factors in which older adults can expand their environment and removes the barriers to mobility. Gerontologists, social workers and others who work with the elderly would find this information most informative.

*New York Times*, November 23, 1999, Section F, Page, 6 Column 5, Science desk.  
"E-Mail and the Internet Brighten Nursing Homes". <http://www.nytimes.com>

Dr. David Lansdale, a geriatrics expert from Stanford University, is director of a 12-week program called "LinkingAges" that teaches nursing home residents how to use the Internet and email to communicate with family, friends and health care providers. He has researched the effect of computers on nursing home residents and found that learning this new skill has revitalized their lives. Dr. Lansdale's finding support the theory that people who master the technology, usually after just a couple of training sessions, gain confidence in other areas of their lives as well as reducing loneliness, boredom and keeping their mental skills sharp. This article was published in a large metropolitan daily newspaper for general reading

Hamilton, Anita. *Time* magazine, August 21, 2000, vol. 156, Issue 8, pg 67.  
"Meet the New Surfer Girls".

The author of this article discusses the increasing popularity of the Internet with women, especially teenage girls and women over 60. Research from two independent firms is cited and discussed in order further explain the popularity of specific types of websites. The article talks about what appeals to women specifically in websites and their surfing habits. Published in a weekly magazine with a wide circulation, this article is brief, contains statistics from 1996 to 2000 for comparison and quotes a teenage girl and a retired school teacher.

Census 2000, Administration on Aging, Older Populations by Age: 1900 to 2050  
Retrieved February 16, 2002 from the Internet: <http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/aoa/STATS/Age/Pop2050.html>

This resource was consulted for reference regarding the demographic of older adults and at what age the federal government classifies U.S. citizens as being 'senior' or 'older'.