

60+ Online: Enhancing digital inclusion of seniors via mobile digital stories and social media participation

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Seniors are amongst the most digitally excluded in Australia. Despite the increasing popularity of social media, seniors often lack access to technology and to basic digital skills. Thus many seniors do not derive the social benefits and service realisation that arise from online forms of communication and engagement. One barrier to digital inclusion for seniors is learning how to make use of digital and online tools in a way that incorporates their specific needs, interests and capabilities.

The 60+ Online project fostered digital inclusion amongst 22 Australian seniors with varied digital skills and from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Within workshops, researchers encouraged seniors to learn basic digital skills, addressed seniors' concerns about confidentiality and privacy, and introduced them to safe and regulated online social media platforms. Seniors were encouraged to draw upon personal and community interests to inform storyboarding and digital story development. Digital stories were generated and edited using personal mobile technology. Social media sites (a closed Facebook page and personal Instagram accounts)

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facilitated sharing of digital skills development and experiences outside the workshops. Regardless of digital skill levels at outset, every senior who completed the workshops 'graduated', and produced their own digital story. These digital stories were showcased at festivals, City Council events, and hosted on YouTube.

This article outlines the framework used for this project, from the first co-design workshop to YouTube dissemination. We provide links to workshop resources and tools (iPads, smartphones and apps used) in order to provide a model for digital inclusion that may be replicated for other disadvantaged or vulnerable groups in diverse community-based settings.

Keywords: Seniors, digital stories, mobile technology, social media participation, Facebook, YouTube

Introduction

While many older adults are embracing digital life through online engagement, there is a disproportionate number who do not understand, have access to, or experience with, newer digital and online technologies (ACMA, 2016). A digital inclusion and participation gap has been identified for older Australians in particular (Thomas et al., 2016). This can affect participation in the education, health, social and economic benefits of the emerging digital society. While we increasingly understand the challenges of digital inclusion at the population level, there is a need for further research to understand the experiences, challenges and potential opportunities for seniors navigating digital technologies in their everyday lives. By focusing on social media activities and digital storytelling, *60+ Online* sought to build a model to overcome many of the key barriers to effective and sustained social and digital participation for seniors.

This article explores *60+ Online*, a collaborative partnership project in Australia between University researchers, a major internet service provider and two local Victorian councils: Knox and Boroondara (from the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia). The project team developed a workshop series and skills development model involving seniors in digital storytelling and social media activities. The *60+ Online* project focused on developing and sustaining seniors' use of digital technologies by drawing on personal interests to produce digital stories, as well as addressing uncertainties and concerns regarding online security, privacy and sharing when engaging with social media platforms.

The interests-participation model was co-designed with seniors and council staff working in Active Aging programs, and was put into practice and tested through a series of three skills development workshops, with an additional introductory workshop to secure buy-in and address concerns about social media, online safety and privacy. This article outlines the project design, resourcing and workshop activities, and discusses the findings of the program evaluation. We briefly examine some personal accounts of the challenges seniors faced while using online platforms, managing digital communication

tools, and the different modes of learning and forms of digital and social participation achieved through the program. However, the primary focus of this article is the framework used for sustained engagement of seniors, from the first co-design workshop to local showcasing of digital stories, and global sharing via YouTube dissemination. We provide details of the apps used to create, edit and refine the digital stories and how they were integrated into the workshops, to detail a model for digital inclusion that may be replicated for other digitally excluded community groups. The *60+ Online* project and process is available in an overview video featuring participants' digital stories (<https://bit.ly/2MpL8Ig>).

Background

With the rapid integration of digital information and communication technologies into all parts of society, a significant research literature has traced the implications and unevenness of access, use and skills, and digital literacies. For around two decades, 'digital divide' research has had the goal of monitoring and understanding increases in social stratification as a result of uneven access to digital communication and internet technologies. This work has led to a wide range of social programs, policy initiatives, research projects and community-based enterprises that aim to address not only a divide, but also a skills, digital literacies and participation gap. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII), offers a comprehensive and deep monitoring instrument, and highlights ongoing gaps in access, affordability and ability that characterise the contemporary digital inclusion challenges some Australians face (Thomas et al., 2016).

The ADII highlights that Australians aged 65 years and over experience the lowest levels of digital inclusion, and as digital technologies evolve, and services, information and communication applications continue to move online, this gap remains a pressing social issue. This is qualified in a recent Pew Research Centre report that states: 'Roughly two-thirds of those aged 65 and over go online, and a record share now own a smartphone – although many seniors remain relatively divorced from digital life' (Anderson & Perrin, 2017). This issue can be best understood as moving from a binary digital divide, to a set of complex personal and social factors contributing to digital and social exclusion – a 'participation divide' (Hill, Betts & Gardner, 2015). That is, while seniors are increasingly gaining access to digital technologies through personal computer use and WiFi- or data-enabled mobile devices, uneven digital participation persists generally, especially in the use of internet technologies for content creation and sharing (Hargittai and Waleiko, 2008). While access remains an issue to be addressed, it is the participation gap that has become more pressing for seniors as a factor of digital exclusion (Selwyn, 2004).

Digital literacy programs have sought to address these issues, often with a focus on local institutions and community spaces like libraries or community houses (Jaeger, Bertot, Thompson, Katz & DeCoster, 2012). Techniques for developing digital literacies vary greatly, but mostly apply tutorial models building instrumental and operational skills with the aid of step-by-step online materials (see for example the Tech Savvy Seniors program, Suchowerska & O'Zinn, 2014).

The 60+ *Online* Point of Difference

60+ Online applied an alternative approach focusing on two tools of interests-based participation and engagement: individual digital stories and social media engagement. This approach addresses the difference that persists in the way older people perceive and use digital technologies, targeting their preference for functional or instrumental uses to ignite interest in creative and social interaction capabilities and other strategic uses (Hill et al., 2015). By targeting creative digital content production and social interaction, the *60+ Online* model engages explicitly with seniors' personal lives and community contexts. The research reflects the development of mobile story making (Schleser & Berry, 2018) embracing the entire process from storyboarding to sharing on social media through a collaborative mode that sees all participants as creators. Moreover, this bottom-up approach means that participants will relate to the digital stories as they have a connection with their co-producers.

Digital Stories

Creating personal narratives can be of therapeutic benefit to people who have experienced trauma or who are living in difficult circumstances (e.g., Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; McCosker, 2008). Visual communication provides unique benefits, particularly sharing stories or experiences that might be difficult to express through words alone (Gubrium, Hill & Flicker, 2014). The digital storytelling approach involves small group workshops where amateur storytellers learn to use technology to create short narratives, using digital photographs, video footage, music and a voice-over from the storyteller. Digital stories have been used in many projects where the aim is to empower and give voice to marginalised people and to build connections through the power of shared experiences (e.g., Clarke, Wright, Balaam & McCarthy, 2013; Gubrium et al., 2014; Vivienne, 2014).

Digital stories have been used in numerous contexts, empowering individual voices and stories for those who might be less visible in the community, and for improving wellbeing (see Waycott et al., 2015; Davis, Waycott & Zhou, 2015). Digital storytelling can be defined loosely as 'the whole range of personal stories now being told in potentially public form using digital media', and it encompasses 'the ability to represent the world around us – using a shared infrastructure' (Couldry, 2008).

Digital stories are a particularly useful mechanism for engaging diverse and marginalised community members. They 'give voice' to people who have not been heard, and allow the audience to see places and spaces previously unseen. In short, they allow the audience an opportunity to understand the lived experience of diverse community groups (Davis, Waycott & Schleser, in press; de Jager, Fogarty, Tewson, Lenette & Boydell, 2017). For example, personal and confessional-style videos shared online on YouTube by video bloggers (or 'vloggers') recount personal and emotive experiences, such as living with cancer or chronic illness. Liu Huh, Neoghi, Inkpen, and Pratt's (2013) research examined how health vloggers chronicle their illness trajectories and provide an outlet for connecting with others who are experiencing similar difficulties. This research found that vloggers used specific techniques to share messages with viewers,

and explicitly sought interaction with their unknown audience members. While YouTube is one potential outlet for modern-day digital story creators, many seniors might be unwilling to share their stories online, concerned about potential negative feedback and privacy issues.

Digital stories are also a useful mechanism for developing digital literacies because they afford potential for moving beyond the process driven focus of device and operational internet skills, to content creation skills. Creating and sharing images or other digital media content brings personal motivations and interests to the fore and can help to place greater emphasis on social interaction. A number of studies have shown that digital literacy training is most likely to be successful when tied to the interests and existing skills of participants (e.g., Blaschke, Freddolino & Mullen, 2009; Millward, 2003; Beh, Pedell & Doubé, 2015).

Interests Based Learning

Interests-based learning has previously been successfully modelled and tested with seniors, demonstrating potential for a deeper, longer term engagement with technologies (Beh, Pedell & Doubé, 2016). Specific applications have been designed to aid seniors' content creation and digital story sharing, and hence digital participation, (see Waycott et al., 2013) but we contend that the pathway from digital skills to participation and inclusion is best addressed through already entrenched social media platforms and digital storytelling tools. Entrenched social media apps like Facebook or Instagram, and simple free video editing apps, have the best accessibility for all participants across operating systems and devices (smart phones, tablets or personal computers). Our goal was to maximise the potential for sustained use beyond the instructional setting. That participants are more likely to be able to connect with family and friends through the dominant platforms, means they have a strong advantage over bespoke apps targeting seniors.

60+ Online builds an interests-participation model that brings together what we know about the empowering use of digital storytelling and content creation with social media participation. There are a wide range of reasons why older adults avoid using social media technologies, such as low trust, lack of perceived usefulness, and low self-efficacy or confidence with new technology (Anderson & Perrin, 2017). However, there is evidence to suggest that engaging strategically with social platforms can help to embed a wider range of digital skills into seniors' everyday lives and improve social connections (Brewer & Piper, 2016). The *60+ Online* project explores these connections in new detail and offers a model for addressing the digital participation gap that can be adapted and tested in other sites and contexts.

The *60+ Online* Project: Workshop Design and Resourcing

The *60+ Online* project was created in partnership with Swinburne University of Technology; two local councils in Melbourne, Australia; and Telstra, a large telecommunications service provider. The project received ethical approval.

Workshop Participants

Recruitment strategies were based on specific age criteria (60+, with a mix of 60-70 and 70+), as well as self-reported range of digital skills, socio-economic range, and cultural variation (though with English language capability). Recruitment of participants was coordinated by representatives from the partnering councils. In total, 22 people signed up to the project, with 13 participants at Knox Council and 9 participants at Boroondara. The average age of participants was 73; the youngest was 64, and the oldest 86. There were nine men and 13 women, representing a variety of cultural backgrounds including Australian, English, Filipino, Greek, Indian, and Chinese descent. Many of the seniors attending the workshop did not know any of the other participants, some participants knew one other person. Therefore, the workshops provided an opportunity for participants to meet and engage with people they did not know.

The telecommunications company provided participants with iPads, as there is much research which shows that iPads are useful tool for engaging seniors due to the size of the device, ability to enlarge text, light-weight nature of the tool and so on (Delello & McWhorter, 2017). However, workshop participants could use their own mobile technology, including smart phones, if they preferred. Overall 13 participants received iPads, nine used their own devices, which consisted of a mix of phones (Android and Apple, tablets, or their own iPad). Tutorials and workshops were delivered primarily using the Apple operating system and app environment, but with some translation into Android for the two participants who preferred to use their own Android phones.

Workshops Co-Design and Participation

A co-design workshop in mid-2017, explored the broad aims of the project with staff from the two councils, and members of each council's Active Aging Advisory Groups – seniors who have volunteered to advise council on programs and initiatives in the design or post-implementation phase. Input was sought about three key issues feeding into project design: boundaries around online sharing and social media use; interests around which participants would be motivated to create social media content and digital stories that also encouraged social participation; and skills, issues and concerns around device and app use.

One of the main outcomes of the co-design workshop, was broad agreement with the interests-participation approach for developing digital skills and social participation through social media and digital stories in relation to personal and local area social interests. Three key themes were nominated to guide production of digital stories and social media engagement: a) personal or local histories, b) social groups or clubs, and c) a walk in the local neighbourhood. These themes reflected the interests of participants (many were retired seniors) and key council interests for future engagement. These themes were nominated to give participants in the program guidance and direction for their social media and digital story production.

Following the co-design workshop, it was felt that participants would benefit from an additional discussion-based workshop that introduced the project aims of improving

digital skills and social participation through social media and digital stories. This workshop allowed participants to raise concerns about social media and communicating online and discuss some of the benefits of creating personal videos and sharing online.

Three skill-building workshops were then delivered with the two groups in meeting rooms at the respective council. Workshops ran for two hours and 30 minutes, including a half hour break, and were generally divided by focus on social media skills in the first hour and digital story making skills in the second. Workshops ran across three months, roughly two weeks apart to allow participants time for between-workshop activities. Figure 1 outlines the workshop series, process and evaluation methods.



Figure 1: 60+ Online workshop series, process and evaluation methods

Social Media: Instagram and Facebook

Participants were introduced to two social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram. The social media component of the workshops focused primarily on Facebook as a tool for connecting and engaging with peers, and finding local services or organisations based on participants' personal interests. The workshops assumed no basic knowledge of either platform. Approximately half of the participants already had a Facebook account, but only a few actively used it. No participants had an Instagram account.

Facebook was chosen as the main social media platform for learning and participation because it offers the greatest potential for connecting socially with services, organisations, resources and groups that might benefit or interest participants. Facebook is the most popular social media platform in Australia, with around 15 million users (Social Media News, 2018). Therefore Facebook is also most likely to facilitate connections with family and friends and introduce mechanisms for social participation.

Instagram was introduced to the workshops to allow participants to have an alternative venue for creative output and exchange. However, unlike Facebook, it was not used directly as part of the exercises and group exchange because it does not afford the same closed group sharing functions; rather, it was used to explore photo content creation, issues of privacy and publicness, and to explore personal interests through shared images.

The 60+ *Online* Facebook Group

A closed Facebook Group was established at the end of Workshop 1 and participants were invited to join. The 60+ *Online* Facebook Group was designated as a space for learning, experimenting, sharing, and practicing among a supportive cohort. The participants were encouraged to post both in and outside of the workshop setting to practice skills or ask questions of the workshop facilitators and other participants.

Throughout the workshops participants were encouraged to engage with particular exercises such as finding a Facebook Page relevant to their interests or social needs and re-posting to the 60+ *Online* Group. A ‘Selfie exercise’ was used in Workshop 1, where participants were asked to take a direct or indirect selfie (i.e., showing their face, or something related to them, such as shoes or an umbrella). This instigated the development of new skills related to use of the device camera, and in negotiating the use of the image as a profile picture for their Facebook profile, or sharing personal images within the closed Facebook Group. The exercise helped participants to explore issues relevant to setting up an account, presenting oneself through a profile picture, and managing privacy settings. It encouraged discussion and understanding of specific social media cultures and behaviours, and how these might be limited or expanded using particular settings.

Interaction with the Facebook Group

Over the course of the project the 60+ *Online* Facebook Group had 27 group members, 83 posts, 49 photographs (of which seven were selfies), and 20 videos (primarily digital story works in progress). Analysis of participants’ use of social media during the workshop period, and their digital story outputs, provides valuable insights into the application of digital skills gained or reinforced through the workshops. An important aspect of the Facebook Group was the facilitators’ consistent modelling of typical social media behaviours by posting content and commenting on, or ‘liking’ other posts. This augmented the workshop approach, where facilitators actively illustrated their own everyday use and problem-solving techniques on social media. This approach was successful *firstly* because it demystified the tools and practices that seniors were not accustomed to, *secondly*, it easily illustrated the different ways communication on social media could be sustainably incorporated into their everyday lives, and *thirdly* it helped to unify members across the two groups.

Interactions in the Facebook Group between group members and facilitators encouraged learning through discovery and independent problem solving. For example, a participant might post a question about an issue they were having to the Group, which would

encourage others to answer, ask further questions or even encourage the participant to discover the answer themselves and post about it. Rather than viewing the facilitator as the only authority, or the classes as the only source of knowledge, the Facebook Group created possibilities for extending independent discovery and learning. Building sustainability into social media use thus requires a flexible approach in workshop delivery. Future workshop facilitators should discuss both social media use and seniors' interests broadly (perhaps along particular themes) and change or add content to the workshops as necessary. Facilitators should be wary that they do not fall into the trap of simply providing 'tech support', but instead focus on creating a workshop environment that encourages independent and sustainable development of skills, as well as peer support.

The enthusiastic use of the Facebook Group indicated that while most participants wanted individual attention, they were more comfortable and adept with social and digital media technologies than they actually perceived themselves to be. Indeed, as we detail in the final our analysis, many of the participants developed their skills using interest-based learning much more rapidly, and to a much more advanced standard, than initially expected.

Mobile Digital Stories

The development of portable and mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets (e.g., iPads) with very good camera and video-recording capabilities has led to the promise of creating mobile digital stories much more easily. For instance, now that smartphones and apps for filmmaking are more accessible, improved in quality, and easier to use, a range of film-makers, designers and creators have used them for mobile digital storytelling and mobile documentary making (Schleser, 2011). While this is currently a fairly new approach, it has begun to be embraced as a mechanism for engaging diverse community groups (Davis et al., in press). For example, the 'Local Mobile Filmmaking Workshops' (Schleser, 2012, p. 398) worked with East and South London communities in partnership with Tower Hamlets and Sutton Youth Services (UK). Projects engaged youth in East and South London's multicultural communities in the lead up to the 2012 Summer Olympics in London to reflect on their aspirations, hopes and dreams for the future as part of the Tower Hamlets Summer University, now called FutureVersity. The organisation provides free courses 'to raise aspirations, reduce youth crime, break down racial tensions and get unemployed young people off benefits and into work' (FutureVersity, 2018).

Other initiatives include projects with young Pacific Island people living in Wellington, New Zealand; and women living in Rarotonga, the Cook Islands. This project aimed to use mobile documentary making as a mechanism for encouraging participation in governance and leadership (see <https://vimeo.com/55147342>). We argue that the mobile digital story creation concept has potential for engaging other groups experiencing digital exclusion, in this case seniors from diverse backgrounds living in outer Melbourne, Australia.

The concept of making simple, two to three-minute digital stories with mobile devices was discussed in the Introductory Workshop. Participants were enthusiastic about learning to make videos within the three guiding themes (discussed above). Workshop 1 introduced basic techniques for facilitating mobile video making using either an iPad or smartphone. This included the structure of the digital story (e.g., introduction, progression, conclusion); what types of data might be used for the story; and technical tips (e.g., how to hold the technology, focus in, pan out, take clear photographs) best suited to recording audio and or video using mobile technologies. The technical aspects of digital story creation were led by Max Schleser from the Swinburne Film and Animation department.

Storybooks and Storyboards

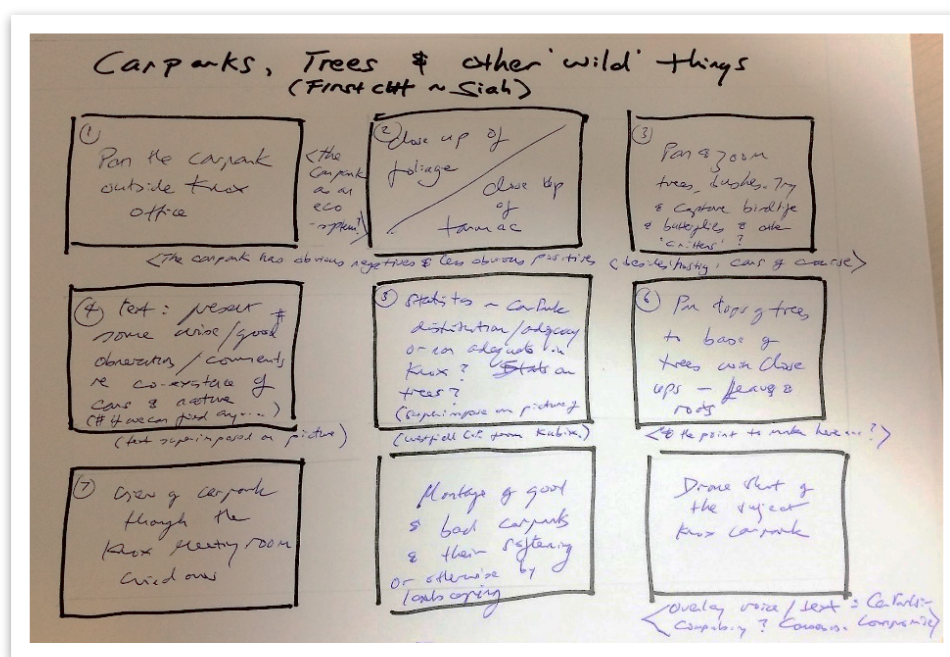


Figure 2: Storyboard posted to Facebook for comment

Workshop participants developed a ‘storybook’ (i.e., dividing the story into small manageable pieces of data which shaped the story) using the metaphor of creating a video ‘shopping list’. Participants discussed the general topic or theme they wanted to explore, and then workshopped the ‘ingredients’ needed to turn the idea into a two-to-five-minute video. This was achieved with a pen and paper template and facilitated by the workshop leaders. Some data for digital stories and Storyboards were shared with peers in workshops or online on the Facebook page.

The storyboarding process was a significant element of the designing participation. The storyboarding helped to reassure participants about their ability to construct a story. Many were initially concerned that they did not have a story to tell, or that others would not be interested in hearing/seeing it. The physical aspects of storyboarding, using pen and paper, adding colour, outlining the order of events, considering how to locate resources for the story, were all important. We noticed participants sharing their ideas with others in the workshop, discussing their stories, contributing ideas, and generally

co-supporting storyboard creation. In this way, the storyboard design supported senior participation. *Firstly*, it reassured participants that they had a story to tell, *secondly* that while each story was unique, they were transferable – and understandable – by others, and *thirdly*, that each participant had similar concerns about the storyboarding process but were able to work through these in the course of the workshop and between workshops. This resulted in a sense of familiarity and comfort amongst workshop participants early on in Workshop 1, potentially helping to break down some barriers to digital participation later on in the workshop series.

Building Digital Stories and Using Editing Apps

Between Workshops 1 and 3, participants were asked to undertake activities and tasks to begin building their digital stories. This involved local outings, attending events, conducting research or obtaining old photos or artefacts to film. At Workshop 2, participants were introduced to simple editing skills through the Adobe Premiere Clip app (<https://www.adobe.com/au/products/premiere-clip.html>) and Adobe Spark Video (<https://spark.adobe.com/about/video>) and were assisted to begin putting together a video project from the short clips and images they had gathered.

Specifically, the participants were encouraged to use the mobile technology to take photographs or short video clips of a subject of their choice, these were automatically saved on their devices. Some participants were unsure how to do this, and were supported in basic techniques, such as selecting various shots, such as close ups or long shots. In the workshops we engaged seniors in the basics of visual storytelling including shot compositions and framing. Some seniors were comfortable taking their iPads with them and recording segments of interaction, such as walking with a ramblers group, or recording activity in a local fruit market. During the workshops, Premiere Clip was launched, and a new project instigated on each device. The participants chose the videos and photos they wanted to include in their projects, and imported these to the free video-editing app. The participants compared the ordering of their data within the project with the correct ordering in their storyboards, and manually reordered the clips using the Sequence view, as shown in Figure 3.

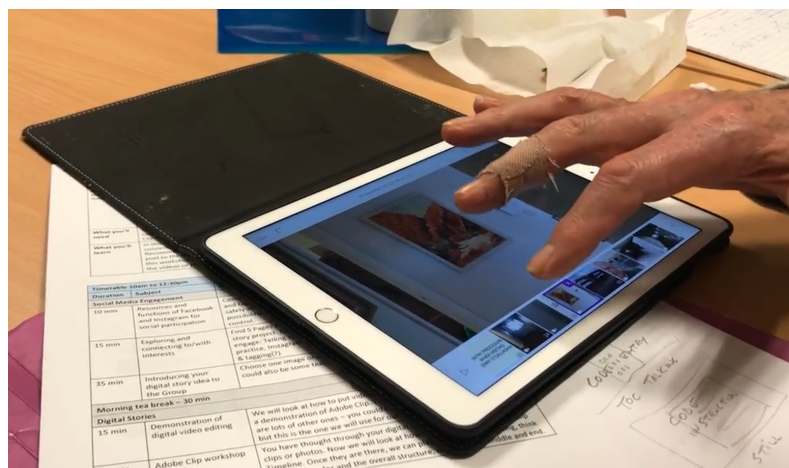


Figure 3: A participant editing their digital story using Adobe Premiere Clip and iPad

Voiceover was introduced in Workshop 3, and participants were aided in finishing their videos through a practiced two-minute voiceover narrative conducted in a quiet room. We recorded the voiceovers for participants and then added these in Adobe Clip. Workshop instructor Schleser created a step-by-step video to demonstrate the process (<https://youtu.be/FUbMYxY2us0>). We chose Adobe Clip as the software is available at no cost on iOS as well as Android. At the time of the workshop Adobe Spark Video was not available on Android, which has now changed as the Adobe Spark public beta is now available (<https://spark.adobe.com/make/android-beta/>). Adding a voice over is a three-step function in Adobe Spark Video and would thus be the choice for future workshop iterations. While researchers provided some additional support to perform final edits on videos before and after workshops, many attendees exceeded researcher expectations and were able to use their newly acquired digital skills to edit both video and audio independently. An example of this process can be found here <https://helpx.adobe.com/au/mobile-apps/how-to/create-videos-automatically.html>

The 60+ *Online Digital Stories*

The participant's digital stories fell within the traditional digital story format. The traditional format is digital stories a few minutes long, co-created in facilitated workshops in which participants are supported to create narratives that describe some aspect of their individual life experiences. However, despite the similarities in style, they each convey unique and personal stories. Traditionally digital stories are filmed with video cameras and edited on computers. While the storyboards were generated within the workshop, the digital stories were created using readily-available mobile technologies primarily within and outside structured workshop hours, edited using a free on-line app, and supported through online social media engagement.



Figure 4: A screenshot from a participant's digital story hosted on YouTube.

These stories were as diverse as the participants who made them. We now discuss some of these thematically. Stories which explored ‘personal or local histories’ included a discussion of a mansion and surrounding area in outer Melbourne, finding and purchasing a home, a poem written from a deceased father to his daughter and many about personal hobbies such as making cider, gardening and travel. ‘Social groups or clubs’ included a local walking or ‘rambling’ club, a discussion of the local University of the Third Age (U3A) an educational group for seniors, and a group supporting children orphaned by the Tsunami. ‘A Walk in the local neighbourhood included’ a video about whether Melbourne, Australia is really the worlds ‘most live-able city’, and walking tours of a local fruit and vegetable market (Figure 4) and local public garden space, amongst others.

It is important to note that all the workshop attendees who attended all three workshops and engaged with the process completed their own digital story. This was a considerable source of pride and satisfaction for workshop participants and was celebrated with a video viewing at ‘graduation ceremonies’ held at the respective council offices. Dignitaries such as the local mayor presented participant achievement certificates.

Finally, with participant permissions, all the videos have been hosted on YouTube, on the council websites, and on a website dedicated to digital participation for diverse and marginalised community members (see <https://digitalparticipationhci.wordpress.com/60-online/>). A video which provides an overview of the whole project and showcases segments from some of the seniors’ digital stories is also available on YouTube(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCr8mSqSCsXMQPjbTTOQop5w>).

Outcomes: Towards Sustained Digital Skills and Participation

The relatively small cohort size for the pilot suited a predominantly qualitative design for project evaluation and participant research. The main aims of the evaluation were to a) test the applicability of the interests-participation model that underpinned the workshop design; b) explore the role of digital technologies in the lives of the participants; and c) understand the participants’ personal approaches to learning and their perceptions of the approach taken through the workshops.

The research methods chosen for the evaluation were in-depth interviews (n = 19 out of 22 workshop participants) held mainly in participants’ homes (n = 16), with a home technology tour, and digital skills self-efficacy survey, one-hour focus group interviews with the two groups at the conclusion of the workshop series, and descriptive social media analysis. A more complete report focusing on program evaluation is available online (McCosker et al., 2018). Participants chose a pseudonym for themselves, in line with ethical consent granted by Swinburne’s Human Ethics Research Committee (2017/187). The focus groups were conducted by an independent facilitator.

We draw mainly on the focus group interviews, as these were targeted most specifically toward: a) feedback on the workshops in relation to workshop aims, learning, methods, equipment and outcomes; b) participants’ everyday use of social media and content production skills, including whether they engaged social media outside of the

workshops, or made connections with family, friends, groups, organisations or services through social media; and c) the sustainability of digital media and social media use for them, along with ongoing barriers and hurdles to using digital media. Data collected through interviews and focus groups was thematically analysed through an open coding process to establish broad themes. The selection of themes presented here sets out participants' accounts of the workshop model's applicability and successes, as well as persistent concerns and roadblocks hindering their digital participation.

The two groups expressed an overall high level of satisfaction with the program, this matched a high participation rate. Participants who were unable to attend a workshop sought alternative ways of catching up such as attending the other council area workshop, or following and contributing online through the Facebook Group. Several successful aspects of the program were highlighted including the format for the workshops (i.e., learning by doing) and a preference for group learning and inter-group sharing throughout the program.

The pathway from skills to social participation is not straightforward; there are numerous contextual factors contributing to participation barriers. There were a number of unknowns for participants: 'I think it's that you don't know what you don't know, until you know'. Learning new digital tools, let alone using them for engaging with family and friends, can be like learning a new language, as one participant eloquently put it: 'I'm following you. I'm using the terminology. I have no idea what I'm talking about but I'm using the terminology'. Despite this, the participants typically presented a clear understanding of the connections being made in the workshops between the creative-digital skills activities and the extended use of social media as a method for improving social participation.

Overall, the participants expressed the view that the social media mechanisms (closed Facebook Group and Instagram) were valued as a means for social participation and connectedness, during and outside of the workshops, and had potential for creative uses of digital technologies as they connect with personal contexts and social lives. Many participants still spoke about ongoing concerns, difficulties and learning roadblocks as well as areas in which the workshop program could be improved or adjusted. Some details from participants' perspectives are presented below. These concerns and difficulties point to the ongoing need for dedicated responses and resources for seniors' digital inclusion and participation.

Workshop Model: Learning by Doing

The learning and instruction model featured in the focus group discussions, along with discussions of personal learning processes or preferences. Feedback on these aspects of the program was primarily positive. Distinctions were made between other forms of learning; for example, classroom-based learning that involved listening, watching and then doing, or the role younger family members or friends play in assisting, showing or 'fixing' problems with digital technologies. Workshop participants were nominally self-motivated for ongoing learning, and while this is perhaps not universal for the age group, for many the program affirmed the '...need to constantly practice so you're

familiar with it'. The active learning model was appreciated as motivating and effective: 'That's what we're all about, lifelong learning and it's not the sitting in a classroom, being taught by someone who believes that they know everything. It's sharing our knowledge, sharing our skills and just learning'.

Because the workshop design revolved around participants creating their own content, the do-it-yourself (DIY) learning model was understood as part of the process. This approach had positive outcomes in relation to self-confidence: 'I think this also gives us a degree of self-confidence to look into something new, develop new skills and also searching for information. [...] Just more confidence to try more things'.

The participation model of learning, and mobile devices played a big part for participants in both groups. Participants emphasised that they had learnt a great deal from creating the digital stories, themselves. Further, the mobile nature of the technology was appreciated: 'Yes, and that's the beauty of the iPad; it's so much more transportable than having to set up a whole room of laptops'.

The participants enjoyed the group learning approach stating this was 'easier' than working one-to-one, 'Because if we sit here and we try to do it and we have issues, you've got other people to talk to it about it or to help you out'. The participants contrasted the approach taken in the workshops to that when receiving assistance from children and grandchildren: 'a lot of seniors will ask their children or their grandchildren. The grandchildren take the device from them and say, "You do this, this, this, this" and hand it back and they're none the wiser'. While this approach solves a short-term problem, it does not support sustained learning.

Digital Stories as Skills Learning through Interests

Discussion of new digital skills focused on the making of digital stories, along with new abilities in the use of Facebook, Instagram, Messenger or other social platforms. One participant had a particular use in mind and was planning her new project. This project incorporated elements of both traditional methods of capturing past people and events through scrapbooking, and moving this methodology to a digital storytelling approach:

I definitely want to try and do a digital storytelling about my sister who's turning a (big) '0' very soon. So that's one of the reasons why I want to be able to put that audio into the visual. I could see this replacing the storybooks, this is your lifetime book type of thing. To be able to give this on a USB and say to her, 'Here you go. Here's your life and what I thought about your life.

Another participant had already undertaken a new project, making a special trip to a small town of interest to her to make a new digital story. Interestingly, this also involved thinking about how to share her story and make connections with others with similar interests and connection to the town:

I've made a little video of a dear little place that I love, not many other people love it, but I do. It's called Fryerstown. It's near Castlemaine and I just was up there a few weeks ago and I put a little video together. I'd quite like to put that

out more generally because I'd be interested in catching up with other people who are interested in Fryerstown and its history. Some of my family members in the past lived there and that's why I feel an attachment and I'd like to be in touch with other people who might feel the same way. I might do that. What I'd really like to do is just put that out generally and keep all the others to my friends.

In response, another participant commented on this independent learning outcome: 'I think that's absolutely fantastic. That would, to me, if I was teaching would really give me a buzz to say that she's flown with it, really'.

These examples show that not only have some participants learnt digital storytelling techniques in workshops, and understood them sufficiently to be able to generate digital stories within the program, they intend to continue to generate these stories after the workshop series has been completed. Further, they feel confident that these stories are of sufficient interest and quality to share with others, whether as a 'gift', as a means of reinforcing existing connections, or as a means of making new connections, as seen in the examples below.

Creating New Connections: Social Media and Participatory Learning

A common theme of discussion was new uses of social media for improving or extending connections with others. For example, one participant reported that: 'I've got a son in the UK who's been there for 30 years or so and I caught up with him on Facebook'. One participant at the Knox focus group commented on a simple benefit in relation to connecting with distant family through Facebook, and engaging in ways she hadn't considered before:

I had really stopped using [Facebook] for quite some time, but then I restarted again with this group and what I found is, it's gorgeous, because I found how to save images of my grandson.... And of course, I did 'like', and add beautiful hearts and emojis.

New methods of communicating with family members and close friends featured consistently in discussions. Typically, this involved staying in touch with family living elsewhere, sometimes through new channels that overcame communication barriers. For example:

I've got a daughter who's overseas at the moment travelling around and a message came back that she wanted to contact me through Messenger. It took me about three or four days to get it installed. I got there in the end and it was really good. She's in South America and there's no phone contact much but we sent a couple of messages to her.

For another participant, keeping informed about a friend's illness through social media helped to negotiate what she thought to be more intrusive methods of communicating:

One of the good things I found about Facebook, one of my friends is going through medical issues at the moment and she just puts (it) up on Facebook – a

little post for all her friends. ...that I think helps us to know, okay, we know where she's at, at this stage. We don't need to be ringing and finding out and all of that sort of thing.

The theme of improved social connections also carried through to discussion of the learning model, and most of the participants were both surprised and enthusiastic about the Group feature on Facebook. As one participant explained, the Group feature of the workshop extended communication networks, and introduced the potential for meeting others face-to-face:

I just enjoyed in particular the whole communication aspect of the group and also the involvement of Knox (the other council group), albeit just through Facebook. I would have liked to go (to) that next stage and physically meet the Knox people.

The Group functions of Facebook were new to all participants, even those who had been using the platform for some time. One participant emphasised her new understanding of

...the technical aspects of Facebook and the way in which groups can work. I like the notion of this closed group and I didn't realise that was possible. We can create a closed group for example with people in a book group.

Another had made use of this new knowledge and skill set and in her own social context and for her own needs:

I started a secret group. I knew nothing about secret groups and I've got – There's a particular project I'm working on with a particular group of friends and it's been a really useful way of gathering all the information together. I knew nothing about that (before).

One Knox participant noted that they used the 60+ *Online* Facebook Group to post a question about dealing with spam email. A fellow participant replied and explained a blocking processes, drawing on knowledge gained from his son who 'works in IT'. A Boroondara participant posted images about her quilting work, and another participant raised this in the focus group discussion: 'I got blown away when K put up her quilts because I've got a great interest in quilts rather than quilting because I don't know how to do it'. Another participant encouraged her to 'make a little video of them'.

These experiences and interactions were hoped for outcomes of the workshop design, where ongoing contact among participants, especially in relation to personal interests, was encouraged and given a platform through the Facebook Group. A Boroondara participant explained the benefit of this process: 'I think it's lovely that it's beyond just whatever might be a designated topic and instantly as soon as you know (the) interests of different people and something more about them there's a personal bonding'.

The interests and participatory aspect of the learning process also brought out new knowledge and understandings that were less predictable from the outset and formed a secondary outcome of the process. About half of the participants spoke about self-directed application of social media tools outside of the workshops, or experimentation in relation to their own interests. While Instagram was not a major focus of the

workshops, one participant adapted her new knowledge of the app, and skills for public health advocacy:

I used Instagram in “Being Seniors” week. I took a photo and put it up on Instagram about reminding people who fall into the AIDS group about getting their shingles vaccine... I’m going to use Instagram as a way of reinforcing health teachings... I think that’s what I’m going to use it mainly for.

Several others talked about downloading and playing around with Pinterest. Pinterest is a social media app used for collecting visual pieces of multimedia such as photographic images, pinned to ‘boards’ that are made available publicly for others to view or re-pin.

Concerns and Roadblocks

Focus group discussion included issues of ongoing concerns, roadblocks and any issues with the format or activities undertaken through the workshops. Some participants stressed the view that particular activities do not always transfer beyond the workshop. As one member put it: ‘I posted my photo on Instagram when we were here. Now I don’t have a clue what to do. I haven’t done any more. I just look at it’. This indicates that simply posting or viewing images on Instagram is considered non-use. However, we note that viewing and monitoring the activities of others within social networks is a form of social connection and contributes to the ongoing maintenance of those networks.

Many difficulties revolved around basic ‘button skills’ and device use or compatibility issues. For example, one participant noted that: ‘One of the things I think is important, I’ve got a Samsung that’s Android so I’ve had a lot more problems than probably a lot of you, so I’m not even up to you. I’m not even finished’ (Knox). In one instance this meant that time was lost between the first and second workshops: ‘I just found that a bit – I had trouble at first because the first cord I had wouldn’t charge. [...] It seemed to be a comedy of errors’. The device did make a difference in some participants’ ability to undertake the workshop activities, some participants changed devices for ease of use: ‘I started off with the phone but once you gave me the iPad I found it much easier’.

There were some difficulties with the specific skills involved in producing digital videos, and particularly with the more complicated part of adding voiceover to the edited final cut of the video. One Knox participant laughed at her own slip-ups when videoing: ‘I videoed a lot of my feet walking’. Many participants in both groups noted that adding a voiceover was a difficult skill to master, and most talked about needing more time and practice.

In the group discussion, the issue of motivation arose, specifically why they needed to learn new digital skills:

My difficulty was trying to work out why I should do it. I will do things if there is a benefit or a reason just because I can do it is not sufficient reason for me to do it. That was at the start of the workshops and to post something on Facebook – why? What do I want to say? Why are other people interested in what I’m – so

it's why, why, why that gave me the greatest difficulty. [...] I think I'm slowly coming to it. I haven't embraced the concept completely if I'm honest.

Use of social media caused some concerns for a minority of participants in both groups. One member of the Knox group remained reluctant to interact through the two social media platforms used: 'I can do that quite happily with email and I have no intention of going any further with Facebook or Instagram... I'd rather personally interact'. For this participant, social media as a method of communication should not replace more personal forms of interaction with family and friends.

The publicness of social media raised anxieties and uncertainties about how to act: 'I personally was very, very nervous about going public. To be able to go private reassured me a lot that was very important'. As did making new connections through Facebook: 'I'm a bit wary about taking on unknown friends, as was mentioning before, you might like to meet this friend or what-have-you but if their name isn't someone I know or the connection I know I'm wary'. Others agreed, but there was some change in perspective also: 'I haven't got over that, but I think...I've got over the notion of privacy a lot more'. Another asked whether many people use Facebook to connect with people they don't know in person. A discussion then followed this line of concern. One member of the group said he had 'hit a wrong button in Words with Friends and I'm now playing a game with someone who I don't know at all'.

Discussion

The evaluation of the 60+ *Online* project demonstrated that the interests-participation and co-design model of teaching digital and social media skills to seniors was successful. Analysis of the focus group data showed that seniors were interested and enthusiastic about sharing content that they had created and that this focus on individual content creation and online sharing may help to overcome some of the barriers that typically limit seniors' participation online. This project had a range of key successes, including that interest-based learning was a successful approach to teaching digital and social media skills to seniors, mainly because it established a context for using technologies that were not already embedded in seniors' everyday lives. Further, individual content creation through the sharing of digital stories was highly valued by senior participants as a method of learning digital skills. It empowered seniors to both use digital technologies and to choose how to represent their identity to peers online.

Peer mentoring in online environments, particularly with the closed Facebook group page encouraged seniors to continue to develop sustainable online skills, and to create an online culture of helping others based on their own learning. The choice of a traditional digital storytelling workshop environment, rather than a classroom structure, was useful for teaching both digital and online skills. This format encouraged both group discussion and individual skills development. This was reinforced by interaction on 'safe' social media (e.g. the closed Facebook group page) between workshop sessions. Finally, links to individual interests, personal connections and useful services and organisations were key to encouraging use of digital and social media skills over

time, this encouraged sustained digital technology use beyond the lifetime of the workshops/project.

Despite these successes, some potential barriers to sustained use of newly acquired digital and social media skills over time were identified. These included a personal lack of access to relevant technology and devices to enable use of digital, online and social media tools (as the borrowed iPads were returned after the workshop sessions were completed). Further work is needed to ensure that the workshops can be applied to any smart phone device to ensure the greatest possible accessibility. Further, some participants found technological change frustrating, which has the potential to reinforce their sense of digital exclusion. Despite relaying that they were more knowledgeable and confident than before the workshops, some participants remained wary of aspects of digital culture that others might take for granted; for instance, sharing aspects of their personal lives online, privacy settings and choices, the complexity of choice around 'friendships' and 'groups' online, and data security.

For some participants, despite their interest and engagement with social media and digital story creations, face-to-face contact will always be valued over online contact. Finally, it is important to recognise that this program, despite its successes, was limited to 22 seniors residing in outer Melbourne, Australia. These participants are not privy to some of the disadvantages experienced by older Australians residing in less affluent areas, or places/spaces in which such programs are not readily available, and technological connections are much more variable, or even non-existent (Davis & Farmer, 2018). Nonetheless, despite the tyranny of distance, the 60+ *Online* model could be easily adapted to these environments, if facilitators are willing to visit, and key community members are engaged to encourage participation. Indeed, it is in regional and rural parts of Australia that seniors experience the greatest social and digital exclusion, and it is here that this project will turn next. In the interim, Telstra and the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services are helping to provide the program to a wider population, focusing on areas of socio-economic need, high ethnic and cultural diversity and low digital inclusion according to the ADII, under the new program name of *Social Seniors*.

Conclusion

To conclude, future iterations of the program should explore and evaluate the program more explicitly in the context of specific barriers to online participation, including language ability, geographic location, disability and chronic illness, and socio-economic status. Throughout the workshops, some participants explored personal stories about difficult current or past life experiences. Creating and sharing personal stories has been an effective strategy for addressing the needs of marginalised populations for some time. However, this combination of giving voice to personal life experiences through digital stories, augmenting them with new modes of social engagement and participation through safe social platform use, and showcasing them to supportive local populations, has been shown to better build confidence and sustainability into digital inclusion programs for seniors and potentially digitally-excluded and diverse community members.

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