Chapter 11
Older Adults as Internet Content Producers: Motivations for Blogging in Later Life

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11.1 Introduction

Many previous studies have examined how older adults use and benefit from the information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Selwyn et al. 2003; Wagner et al. 2010). Research has underlined the barriers that older adults may face in understanding and using ICTs. Accordingly, there is an increasing body of literature on how to design older adult-friendly ICT interfaces and promote their use through learning activities (Kuo et al. 2013; Robinson et al. 2009).

However, this barrier-centered approach is limited in at least two ways. Firstly, it could lead to viewing older adults as exclusively passive ICT users, overlooking the ways in which older adults use ICTs to enrich themselves and their communities. Secondly, it omits other factors that could also influence the adoption of ICTs, such as motivations. In this chapter, we will adopt a proactive participation approach regarding older adult interaction with ICTs by exploring the specific motivations that lead them to start and maintain a blog.

11.2 Body of the Chapter

Human-computer interaction (HCI) research has predominantly focused on compensating the negative consequences of aging (particularly cognitive ones) in order to help older adults embrace new technologies (Chu and Chu 2010; Gutman et al.

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2017). However, this approach has been criticized for perpetuating the perception of older adults as passive recipients, reinforcing the traditional narrative of aging that emphasizes decline and vulnerability (for example, Righi et al. 2017). From this perspective, older adults' relationship with ICTs has been viewed as intrinsically problematic.

Older adults themselves are challenging this negative conceptualization of their relationship with ICTs. The current generation of older adults has a better educational and occupational level than previous cohorts, and therefore they are more likely to have had previous experiences with ICTs in their careers (Hong et al. 2017; Pew Research Center 2017). For instance, the percentage of people in Spain aged 55–64 years old with a tertiary education has grown from 15.9% in 2007 to 23.2% in 2016 (Eurostat 2017). There is also evidence of a growing interest among older people in using computers or the Internet (Pew Research Center 2017). For example, the percentage of Spanish older adults using a computer has increased from 7.5% in 2006 to 36.4% in 2017 (INE 2018). Rates are even higher for Internet use, rising from 5.1% in 2006 to 43.7% in 2017 (INE 2018).

Far from being a homogenous group in terms of their relationship with technology, the increasing number of older adults adopting ICTs in their daily lives has generated a variety of different user profiles, as illustrated by research specifically focusing on Internet use. Van Boekel et al. (2017) identified four different kinds of user: "minimizers" (those making low use of the Internet); "maximizers" (those using the Internet for a wide range of activities); "practical users" (those who search for information or use online banking), and "social users" (users of social media and web-based games).

However, van Boekel's profiles do not include a fifth type of user: older adults as producers, rather than mere consumers, of content. In fact, proactive users, those who use the Internet to create something new or disseminate their ideas through writing or videos, have rarely been studied (for an exception to this trend, see Ferreira et al. 2017). Writing a blog may be a paradigmatic example of this kind of productive role mediated by ICTs. Blogs generally consist of a series of posts or entries that appear in reverse chronological order, in which a person or group presents their writing, opinions, photographs, or videos, usually on one particular topic (Boulos et al. 2006).

11.2.1 Adoption of Blogging

Regardless of a person's age, creating a blog is not a frequent activity. For instance, the average percentage of active bloggers in the EU is only 6%, being highest in Denmark (10%) and Hungary (9%) (Eurostat 2017). Spanish data indicate an even lower participation rate, whether for the general population (6.9%) or among people aged 65–74 years old (1.5%) (INE 2015). In the same vein, research literature is scarce compared with other recent Internet activities, such as social media or instant messaging.

Previous research on blogging has analyzed either the content of blogs or the benefits that bloggers obtain from carrying out this activity. Regarding the first line

of inquiry, Schler et al. (2005) found that sex and age influenced both the writing style and content of blogs, while Miller and Pole (2010) found that writing a health blog was associated with a range of socio-demographic characteristics, such as being female, employed in the health field, and highly educated. As regards the benefits of blogging, it has been found that this has a positive impact on a range of psychological and social aspects, such as self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social support (Baker and Moore 2011; Oostveen 2011; Chung and Kim 2008).

However, other issues, such as the motivations that prompt people to start and maintain a blog, have been much less studied. Those motivations could be particularly interesting given the higher level of resources and personal effort needed to undertake this activity in comparison with the adoption of other, more frequently researched ICTs. Blogging demands more resources than other productive activities such as writing on Twitter or Facebook, including the time, creativity, and writing skills required to produce each post, prior ICT skills in order to create a blog, and the self-confidence to expose oneself by expressing ideas, values, or feelings on a blog.

The few studies that have addressed blogging motivations have found that these can be classified as either self-focused or other-focused. The first type of motivation includes aspects such as using blogging to fulfill personal needs (e.g., contact and communication with family and friends), achieving ego-enhancing motivations (e.g., exhibitionism or the need to be seen and recognized by others), organizing thoughts and personal ideas, or fulfilling creative needs (e.g., sharing literary writing, paintings, or pictures) (Fullwood et al. 2015; Hollenbaugh 2011; Nardi et al. 2004).

Regarding other-focused motivations, it has been found that the idea of helping others or informing others on a specific topic or issue can spur people to write a blog. Hsu and Chuan-Chuan (2008) stressed that altruistic motivations such as sharing one's knowledge were positively related to attitudes toward blogging. In the same vein, Ekdale et al. (2010) found that other-focused motivations increased over time in political bloggers. Other-focused motivations could be an expression of generativity, defined by Erikson as "a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson 1963, p. 267). Although generativity has been mainly a characteristic of middle-aged adults, generative concerns and behaviors may still be present in older age (Villar 2012). Blogging could serve as a medium to fulfill these generative desires if posts are used to create or maintain bonds or to exert a positive impact on upcoming generations, especially young adults (Villar and Serrat 2014).

Either self-focused or other-focused motivations to start a blog could have a similar root that is, facing personal life transitions. So, personal life transitions may trigger blogging adoption as a way to facilitate (and share) reflections on certain vital circumstances and their consequences. Previous literature has studied examples of normative transitions, such as motherhood (Arias 2017) or adolescence (Boniel-Nissim and Barak 2013), and non-normative events, such as the death of a child (DeGroot and Carmack 2013) or overcoming a cancer (Donovan et al. 2017). Similarly, aging-related events such as retirement, widowhood or grandparenthood could also be turning points acting as an initial motivation to start writing a blog.

11.2.2 Older Adults as Bloggers

Of the range of variables that have been explored to understand ICT adoption, age has traditionally been the focus of studies on other ICTs such as smartphones (e.g., McGaughey et al. 2013) or social media such as Facebook (Braun 2013). Unfortunately, there are few studies on older adults as bloggers and even fewer that analyze their motivations.

Previous research on older bloggers has addressed either the benefits of writing a blog or the barriers to starting this activity. Regarding the first type of study, Brewer and Piper (2016) found that older adults seemed to benefit from blogging as a form of self-expression that fosters a sense of identity and provides a powerful form of social connection. Regarding the second type of study, Sayago et al. (2011) found that older adult non-bloggers did not seem to reject the idea of starting a blog, but appeared to be more interested in using computers as a way to communicate with family or friends rather than as a means to create something new of their own (Sayago et al. 2011). In addition, they expressed doubts regarding their capacity to create interesting content for a personal blog (Xie et al. 2012), and were also concerned about issues of privacy and security (Sayago et al. 2011).

To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies on motivations for starting a blog have focused solely on older adults, and few have compared their motivations with those of younger bloggers (Fullwood et al. 2015; Hollenbaugh 2011; Nardi et al. 2004). Hollenbaugh (2011) found that older participants usually maintained a blog in order to help and inform others, whereas younger adults generally viewed blogging as a pastime, while Fullwood et al. (2015) found that older participants were more motivated to maintain their blog as a way to fulfill their creativity needs. However, Hollenbaugh's measure of blogging motives was based on a previous study on undergraduate students and Fullwood's Blogging Motivations Questionnaire was based on previous blog literature that did not specifically address older adult bloggers, raising the question of whether older adults might have specific motivations that are different to those of younger cohorts and have not been explicitly stated in previous literature. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the motivations that lead older adults to write a blog.

11.3 Method

11.3.1 Participants

Sixteen Spanish older adults were interviewed. Study participants were required to be at least 60 years old and have an active blog at the time of the study (defined as having published a post at latest three months before the study). Table 11.1 presents descriptive characteristics of the sample. Blog topics were highly diverse, including politics, sports, traveling, and others.

Table 11.1 Description of the sample

No.	Sex	Age	Marital status	Educational level
1	Male	63	Married	University degree
2	Male	66	Married	–
3	Female	65	Married	University degree
4	Female	69	Widowed	University degree
5	Female	67	Married	University degree
6	Male	67	Married	University degree
7	Male	75	Married	University degree
8	Male	77	Married	Secondary
9	Female	65	Married	Primary
10	Male	69	Divorced	University degree
11	Male	67	Divorced	University degree
12	Male	68	Married	University degree
13	Male	74	Married	University degree
14	Male	65	Married	University degree
15	Male	65	Married	–
16	Male	83	Widowed	University degree

Participants were recruited using a purposive-snowball approach and a web search, and recruitment concluded when a variety of different thematic blogs had been selected and when new interview data reached saturation (Fusch and Ness 2015).

11.3.2 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview was designed to explore the process of blog creation and maintenance. To this end, questions were divided into three specific moments: (a) antecedents (how the blog started), (b) present moment, and (c) future perspectives. In this study, we analyzed participants' responses to the first set of questions.

Specifically, the present analysis focuses on an open question regarding how participants had started their blogs and their motivations.

11.3.3   Data Analysis

Verbatim transcripts of the responses were analyzed thematically to identify common features in the participants' answers (Vaismorari et al. 2013). Atlas.ti software was used to carry out these analyses. Thematic analysis is ideally suited to capture and organize descriptions of people's experiences (Gubrium and Sankar 1994). The data were carefully scrutinized in different phases. First, verbatim transcriptions were read by two researchers (authors 1 and 2) in order to begin isolating the units of meaning generated by the question on older adults' motivations to start a blog. Second, these units of meaning were condensed into categories using inductive thematic analysis, "a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 83). The researchers compared their ideas in this second phase and reached a consensus when differences were found.

Finally, peer debriefing was performed, in which a third researcher (author 3) reviewed themes and subthemes and challenged the previous researchers' interpretations of the data (Creswell and Miller 2000). As part of this reflection on the data, regular group meetings were held to discuss issues related to the study (Meyrick 2006).

Each interviewee was given a code (e.g., blogger_14), which appears after each extract cited in the chapter. The code included a random number that was assigned to each transcription.

11.4   Results

Two main categories were identified in the thematic analysis: self-focused motivations and external motivations to start a blog. The former could be described as those motivations that fulfill a self-need, such as a desire to write and express ideas or an attempt to cope with a life transition, whereas the latter was related to the role of a third person (usually a relative) in encouraging participants to start a blog.

11.4.1   Blogging as Self-expression

Ten bloggers talked about their inner need to start a blog, which resembled the self-focused expression motivation described in the introduction. Six of them reported that love of writing was their main motivation to start a blog. Writing a blog seems to be a continuation of a previous meaningful activity. As can be seen in the following extract, blogging can be used to convert a participant's previous activity (e.g., notebooks,

diaries) into a technological format, and can also provide the opportunity to reach a larger audience:

"*I liked reading books and discussing them in a book club, and I started to write an opinion essay on each book after every session that I would send* via *email to the book club members. Then I heard about blogs and I thought I could reach more people if I started a blog with my book essays, and that it is how I started my blog*". [blogger_14]

Writing a blog endowed participants with at least two new advantages. Especially for those used to writing in notebooks or emailing their texts to friends or acquaintances, being a blogger enabled them to reach more people.

"*At the time, I thought that blogging opened new opportunities to communicate with everyone, that a variety of people and members of the public were beginning to use these new technologies. […] In a way, my blog served as a loudspeaker for my political activity*". [blogger_1]

Participants were surprised by the opportunities to connect with people worldwide, something they had not expected when they started their blogs.

"*One advantage of blogging is that it connects you worldwide… It really surprised me that only few days after I had started my blog, I saw that someone from Mexico had reached my blog!*" [blogger_2]

The second advantage came from the freedom they felt that writing their own blogs gave them. That was particularly important for those participants who during their professional career had had direct or indirect contact with the media, working on a newspaper or collaborating sporadically on a magazine.

"*I have collaborated with different media for many years, but there's a kind of self-censorship in operation, everything has to be expressed in a politically correct manner, whereas on a blog you can express yourself with much more freedom*". [blogger_11]

Thus, blogging enabled participants to exert total control over each post produced, guaranteeing that their voice and ideas were conveyed as the author wished.

"*The great advantage of a blog is that you write and publish everything yourself, what you really feel you want to write, and no-one is going to change it*". [blogger_13]

Blogging could serve on those occasions as a means to compensate previous experiences of writing that were not satisfactory for the participants. On these occasions, their blog could help them fulfill a failed vocation as a writer, journalist, political activist, or chef.

"*My blog started in response to this curiosity about journalism that one has*". [blogger_8]

"*I studied sociology but I haven't worked much in this field, so… as I've always been interested in politics and I also like writing… having a blog enabled me to do both, that's all there is to it*". [blogger_6]

A second theme of self-motivation to start a blog concerned personal life transitions. Participants expressed their need to start writing their thoughts and concerns in order to cope with a difficult situation. These life transitions included work-related changes, usually around retirement time. Some felt the need to start a blog when they were facing the last years of their working life in order to clarify their ideas and cope better with retirement, as illustrated by the following extract:

"*I was facing my last year of teaching and it was hard, caught between the simultaneous desire to stop and to continue working. So I started another blog where I poured out all my feelings and contradictions… I also told stories about being a teacher… The blog was a kind of therapy for me. And then other teachers started to read it, which was really nice, and there were even moments when they cheered me up*". [blogger_3]

Others started their blogs soon after retirement, as a way to put their ideas in order.

"*When I was preparing for my retirement, I mean, for my retirement party, I made an effort to prepare an enjoyable event that would be unforgettable for those who went, and when I saw that people found the event interesting, I decided to write about it, to capture it in writing*". [blogger_2]

Retirement gave participants more free time, and blogging was seen as a good way to keep active and participate in different and meaningful activities.

"*Let me tell you something: Retired people have time, a lot of time, and you have to get involved in different activities, and blogging was a good activity to start with!*" [blogger_8]

This kind of participation seems to provide a good excuse to show interest in current problems and issues that occur and might be important for a participant's topic. This may be particularly important during retirement, as people may lose social contact or slowly lose interest in what is going on in their communities or in a particular issue.

"*For people my age, writing a blog forces you to make an effort to keep up-to-date with ideas and events*". [blogger_15]

For others, blogging was related to health and family changes, and a blog appeared to be a way to moderate the psychosocial adversities that accompanied an episode of illness.

"*I retired at 61. I thought that it would be the time to do what I really wanted, but I was going through a really difficult personal moment because of health and family reasons, so I didn't have enough energy to start anything. When things started getting back to normal, I began thinking about taking up a new activity and I asked myself what I really liked. Old photographs. And that's how I started my blog*". [blogger_9]

11.4.2 Others as Blogging Prompters

"Others as blogging prompters", as external motivations that explain older adults' adoption of blogging, emerged as another theme in starting a blog among our participants. In this case, participants did not even know what a blog was and someone suggested this activity to them. Thus, some older bloggers reported that the idea of writing a blog came for their previous work.

"*In 2004, a Catalan newspaper started a new series of online products and one of them was the chance to have a blog in one of the newspaper sections. At that time, I was a literary critic for that newspaper and one of four who started this kind of blog there… nowadays, I think I've been the most prolific of those who started a blog that year*". [blogger_15]

Another example of this external suggestion came from a case in which another person created the participant's blog.

"*The idea of writing a blog came from the secretary of the advisory board for older adults, with the aim of creating blogs written by older adults to raise their profile on the Internet through blogging. She encouraged us to start the project and in fact she helps us with everything*". [blogger_16]

Children also seemed to play an important role in the adoption of blogging for some participants. Firstly, children could act information agents, motivating older parents to start using a new technological application that the parents might not even have known about until then.

"*I had taken early retirement and one day, my son asked me "Dad, why don't you start a blog?" and I said "What's a blog?" He told me about them and I started the next day. It was as simple as that*". [blogger_6]

Secondly, children helped their parents to create a blog and acted as consultants or technical advisers.

"*My daughter still helps me when I have no idea. She's good at marketing and I sometimes laugh at her because I don't understand her language. She says that sometimes, when she's giving an online marketing course, she tells her students "I'll explain this as if I was talking to my mum!"*" [blogger_5]

When asked why their children had suggested this kind of activity to them, older adults mentioned good writing skills or the belief that they had interesting ideas to share.

"*I started because my daughter told me to, and she created the blog for me. I liked to write things in my notebooks, so she said to me "Mum, I'll start a blog for you" and I asked her "What's a blog?" and we started working on it*". [blogger_4]

11.5 Discussion

The aim of this chapter was to explore older adults' motivations to blog. Our results suggest that some motivations are similar to those found in previous studies, but also that there are others that may be specific to the older population.

Previous research on motivations for blogging has classified them as self-focused and other-focused. At least when it comes to their reasons for starting their blogs, the older adults in our sample seemed to be more driven by self-focused than by other-focused motivations. Our results are thus in line with previous studies which have highlighted organizing thoughts and personal ideas, and fulfilling creative needs as potential motivations to start a blog (Fullwood et al. 2015; Hollenbaugh 2011; Nardi et al. 2004).

Nevertheless, we also found new motivations to start a blog in our sample, which could be interpreted from a life course perspective. First, transition to retirement seems to play a key role in explaining participants' adoption of blogging. Although blogging could be conceptualized as a new activity for older adults because of its relatively short history, the motivations underlying its adoption seem to fit better with theories such as continuity theory, in which retirement adjustment, i.e., the process of psychosocial adaptation following retirement (Wang and Shi 2014), reflects people's need to maintain consistency in life patterns over time (Atchley 1999). In other words, blogging allows older adults to continue with a previous interest, motivation, or hobby, but leveraging the benefits that publishing online can offer. This argument suggests that older adults do not start blogging randomly or spontaneously, but rather as the result of a previous trajectory or interest. Thus, blogging could serve to compensate for the restrictions that retirement can impose on one's life, and as far as our participants were concerned, this compensation could take two forms: (1) developing their professional interest through blogging, or (2) regaining a past motivation for a hobby or project.

The higher frequency of self-focused motivations could lead to a conception of blog writing as a kind of self-expression activity in which the blog itself, the ideas conveyed in posts, the graphical content, and even the title are a reflection of the author. However, our data gave no indication that exhibitionism was a motivation, although previous studies have described blogging as a way to gain attention and even fame (Hollenbaugh 2011). The following extract illustrates this lack of exhibitionism:

"*My daughter told me "Mum, you could have more readers if you had a good niche for your blog" [laughter], and I said "Look, I'll have a niche… in the future…." "But the most successful blogs are those with a specific topic such as diet, beauty, romantic novels, or whatever". But because I write on my blog about anything and everything that comes into my head, I told her "I don't want to be successful, I just want to write!"*" [blogger_5]

Besides self-focused motivations, another kind of motivation appeared in our analysis that has not been specifically mentioned in previous research. We called it "external motivations", and it encompasses all the ideas in which a family member,

a friend, or someone close to the person encouraged him or her to start writing a blog. This key element of social support is of particular importance in activities in which older adults are not especially engaged and therefore social support facilitates or hinders the initial interest an older adult could have in a given activity. In the case of blogging, it seems to be important for the older adult to perceive society or their close social network as approving their interest in blogging and publishing personal ideas or thoughts worldwide.

Our results also suggest that older bloggers still needed to overcome several barriers to participation in specific ICT activities such as blogging. Even older adults with a good educational background or career did not see themselves as producers of content on the Internet. Self-deprecating beliefs, such as assuming that blogging is only for younger adults, or feeling that no-one would be interested in reading their posts, can act as self-imposed barriers to starting this activity, self-barriers that has been described previously in older adult's technology non-users (Knowles and Hanson 2018). Children could serve on these occasions as generational gatekeepers, enabling their parents to see themselves as potential users of blogging, cheering them up, and helping them in the initial stages of blog creation. Hence, although the digital generation gap is decreasing in the use of some programs or devices, there is still room for improvement in the potential uses and benefits of ICTs for older adults.

Lastly, our data indicated a lack of other-focused motivations such as helping others who read the posts or the generativity desire to leave content for future generations. This result can be partly explained by our research focus on initial motivations to start a blog, rather than on the changes that may occur while maintaining a blog. One could hypothesize that once someone realizes the impact that a post can have on readers, he or she may start changing the topics discussed or even the writing style. Further studies are needed in order to determine whether this is the case among older adults and if there is a higher presence of generativity concerns, especially when their blogs are read by younger adults.

This study has certain limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Due to the qualitative, retrospective, and descriptive nature of our study, the data cannot be interpreted as being a representative result for older adults who blog. It also focused on one particular moment, the initial motivations to start this activity, which although essential to understand blogging activity, do not encompass the complexity of this behavior. Further studies on the changeable nature of blogging motivations, such as comparing initial motivation with motivation to maintain a blog over time, could shed light on other kinds of motivation that are more related to other-focused motivations. In fact, some of our study participants were quite surprised to see that anyone worldwide could read a post on their blog, and this may affect how they write and their motivation to continue doing so in the future.

11.6 Conclusion

This chapter broadens our knowledge of older adults' participation through ICTs by examining older adults not just as Internet consumers but also as content producers. This idea of proactive participation through ICTs could expand the diversity of older adults considered in previous research and could also have an impact on how educational programs are designed in order to promote this kind of activity. Such specific training may be challenging, as it should have the two-fold goal of providing older adults with the ICT skills necessary to create and maintain a blog while also empowering them so that they feel their ideas and creativity are sufficiently interesting to be shared worldwide.

This profile of content-producer older adults is likely to be more typical in the next cohort of older people, as they become more digitally skilled, and have a richer experience using content creation tools, such as traditional blogs, wikis, videoblogging or microblogging. Future studies may explore how aging-related life events and transitions might inspire new technologically savvy older generations to create and express digital content in ways probably different to the ones used at present. In turn, such content could also transform the way such life events and transitions are experienced both by the content producers and by their audience, an aspect that has not been studied so far.

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