SEDUCE: challenges of the co-design approach with older adults

According to the United Nations (2001) the world population is aging, predicting that the demographic aging is further aggravated in developed countries by 2050, the youth population continues to decrease, and the elderly population continues to increase.

According to EU (European Union) data by the year 2020, 25% of the EU population will be over 65 years old. Given this demographic growth and aiming to find answers to the challenge, the EU Council of Ministers approved a plan to promote a set of initiatives for the development of digital technologies to help senior citizens maintain an independent living at home.

The aging population is exposed to greater vulnerability, due to the biopsychosocial losses that may be associated to the process of individual aging, which is very heterogeneous, it cannot be generalized, and each case is unique.

There are several studies pointing to the benefits of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the elderly population especially at the social support level.

The project "SEDUCE" main objective was: (a) assessing the impact of Information and Communication technologies' use on older adults' emotional variables (mood, self-concept and quality of life); and (b) building an online social community, involving older adults during the design process.

The study was conducted in the context of social community, both in co-presence, face-to-face communication, as in the social community online, technology-mediated communication.

The evaluation of the emotional variables - mood, self-concept and quality of life was made before and after the use of ICT. Regarding the online social community, this follows a community-centered design approach, which involves the active participation of older adults in all phases of the multimedia applications' development cycle.

Several studies indicate that the ratio of distance between the elderly and ICT is related to several factors, including the existing inappropriate Internet content for seniors, both at the information level provided and at its organizational level; difficulty to recognize the interaction paradigms on the Internet for those not familiar with the current language of interaction, or for people who never worked with them; difficulty to understand the conceptual models of portal operation, increase in the complexity of interfaces, neglect of usability issues.

In order to promote quality of life of the senior citizens, the online social community should be built taking into account the specificities of the target audience for which it is designed with the active participation of senior citizen of the institutions' focus groups. The welfare institutions are Day Care Centers and/or Seniors Center Homes of Aveiro's council. There are several institutions of Aveiro's council that participated in the SEDUCE project. This digital platform aims to promote communication, information sharing and entertainment among the seniors of the various institutions where focus groups are identified, mitigating some problems that can arise daily, such as, reduced or difficult mobility of some seniors; the absence of social events; promoting their health and well-being; reducing the feeling of loneliness and promoting the feeling of usefulness to the community.

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