

Why do older adults own and use technology?

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Purpose

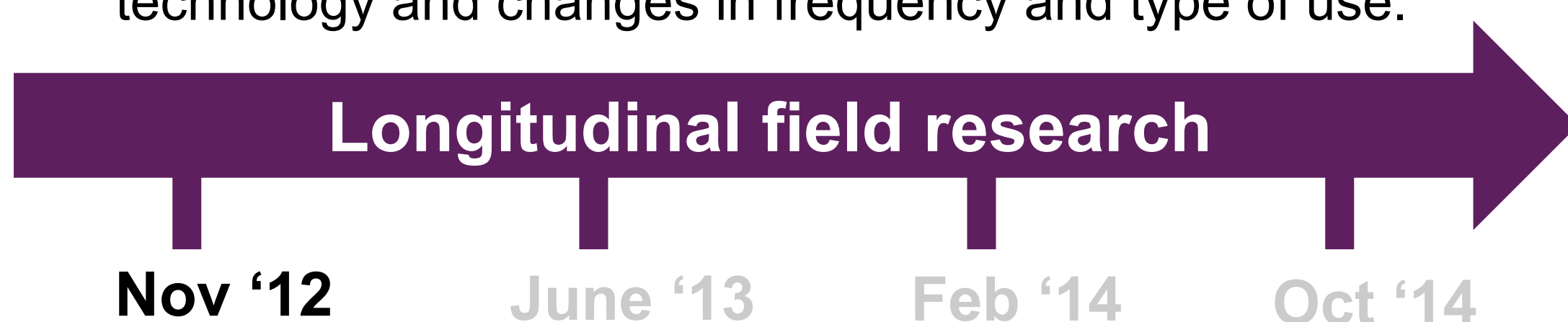
To evaluate a broad variety of technology already present in the houses of older persons, and to discover factors encouraging and discouraging the purchase and use of these devices.

We are interested in technology for: communication, entertainment, food preparation, performing hobbies, housework, managing money, mobility, personal hygiene, personal safety, physical activity and taking medications.

Method

A mixed-methods longitudinal field study of community-dwelling older adults. During each house visit:

1. an inventory is drawn up of electronic appliances capable of supporting ageing in place, including frequency and type of use;
2. chronic diseases, major life events, frailty, cognitive functioning, quality of life are assessed;
3. respondents are interviewed on their reasons for purchasing technology and changes in frequency and type of use.



Preliminary results

53 participants, acquired through homecare providers (18), a local senior volunteer organisation (15), an Android tablet pilot project (13) and the local shopping center / mouth-to-mouth (7).

Respondents were 68-95 years old; 33 males and 20 females. Most respondents have (multiple) chronic conditions and live alone. The average MMSE score was 28. On average, the respondents owned 41 devices, of which 15 percent was not used.

Acceptance into the home

- Children frequently buy mobile phones, but also technology for food preparation, entertainment and housework;
- When participants buy technology it is usually because of a special offer or personal advice by a salesman. They hardly buy technology online;
- Half of the participants of the Android tablet project were not intrinsically motivated; they took part because they were advised to, and because they could try out the tablet without financial risk.

Not accepted into the home

- Participants reject technology because of having an alternative and seeing no acute perceived need;
- Also because of several concerns: privacy issues, cost, technology addiction etc.;
- Participants did see benefits to technology they rejected.



Full use

- Mostly occurs with technology that helps participants pass the time, or provides them with safety. Participants feel that they need these type of technology;
- Participants frequently report a sense of enjoyment.

Limited use

- Due to low self-efficacy and ineffective coaching (Android tablet project);
- Because they were pushed by family members and felt no need themselves.

Abandonment

- Caused by difficulty in learning and/or remembering how to use devices such as computers and dvd players;
- Mobility devices were abandoned due to deteriorated health and ergonomic issues;
- Participant had not received help with devices they abandoned.

Conclusion

Older adults can be stimulated by others to start using technology, but their use of technology is more sustained when it meets their needs of being safe and passing the time. Low self-efficacy and lack of support are important causes of limited use and abandonment of technology.