

## **Research Proposal**

### **Investigating the impact of digital literacy on older people's social wellbeing in the context of Covid-19 outbreak.**

My research aims to investigate the effect of social wellbeing of the older generations on digital literacy, which involves the older people's use of computers and electronic devices and their engagement on social media platforms online. The Covid-19 outbreak led me to think about the importance of digital literacy for vulnerable individuals in the context of the lockdown, where they cannot meet with their friends and family members physically. The information technology skills, such as the ability of using computers, phones and tablets, allow older people to communicate with the others while living in alone, combating loneliness and reducing the risks of social isolation (NHS, 2018; AgeUK, 2020). Moreover, the use of technology enables older people to access information and internet-based services, such as banking, shopping, education and entertainment on a daily basis (Martinez-Alcala et al., 2018). According to Internet World Stats (2019), in Britain 94.9% of the population are internet users, which demonstrated the acquisition of digital literacy skills in the UK was relatively successful compare to other European countries, such as France (60.4%) and Poland (29.7%).

However, although digital literacy was advocated well in the UK, the application of digital literacy skills for older people can be questioned. Even some elderlies are curious about technology, their knowledge gap in digital practice means that they cannot fulfill their digital experiences (Costa et al., 2019). Moreover, the so-called digital divide labeled older generation as the generation living outside digital technology and assumed their disinterest in the digital world, which further prevented old people from becoming involved in the digital society (Paul & Stegbauer, 2005). This indicates that the influence of digital literacy for older generation on their social wellbeing, in reality, may not be as significant as previously proposed.

The problem existed for older generation to develop their digital skills leads to the question on how digital technology may influence older people's social wellbeing in the context of Covid-19. The research will assess the quality of digital literacy skills which older people have acquired and the efficiency of using these skills to support their wellbeing during the lockdown. The research will primarily focus on the region of the North East and Northern England where digital literacy programs were funded and encouraged by councils and charities.

A series of narrative interview will be conducted with the support from local councils, libraries and charities in the North East of England. First, volunteer participants above the age of 60 will be recruited and reviewed for suitability for the research. Satisfied participants will then be invited to complete a short questionnaire about their digital skills. If the participant is unable to complete a questionnaire online, they can meet with the researcher and conduct an interview instead. After this, all participants will attend an interview session with the researcher individually to share their thoughts on their wellbeing during the lockdown and their strategy of using digital technologies to combat social isolation. All interviews will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Reference:

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