What are the Reasons for and Attitudes to IT use and Non-use of IT among Urban Older Adults?

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Abstract

This study was an exploratory research to empirically examine the subjective evaluation on the reasons for and attitudes to IT use and non-use among urban older adults according to socio-demographic factors. The subjective evaluation of IT users included the reasons for using or learning IT, awareness of IT or informatization and evaluation on social influence of IT or informatization, while that of non-users included reasons for non-use, intention and ability to use IT, types of non-users, awareness of IT or informatization, evaluation on social influence of IT or informatization, and expectation of IT use in future. A questionnaire survey was conducted to retrieve data from a sample of older adults aged 60 and over in Seoul, Korea. 785 cases were used for the data analysis using SPSS 18.0 for Windows. The results showed that there were differences in the subjective evaluation on both IT use among IT users and non-use of IT among non-users according to six socio-demographic factors such as age, sex, family structure, occupation, education and income. The results imply that users or non-users within urban older adults are not homogeneous in different socio-demographic contexts; and the digital divides in old age may be in a multiple and complex manner. Thus, there is a need for differentiated approaches to enhance IT use and narrow the gaps among older adults.

Key words: Information Technology(IT), IT use, non-use of IT, digital divide, urban older adults

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I. Introduction

Technological development as well as population aging seem to be the biggest impetus behind social changes, and have enormous impacts on all aspects of social, economic, cultural and political life. Information technology (IT)\(^1\) is seen as a necessary tool to live daily life well. In Korea, informatization and population aging are quite rapid and outstanding, and social changes represented by an informatizing and aging society have given rise to an important social issue about older adults’ lives. IT seems to have much potential for better daily lives for older people in terms of social participation, social support, entertainment, physical and mental health as well as social communication and diverse information (Kim and Jun, 2014; Yoo and Son, 2012). In addition, there is a growing interest in the welfare aspects of IT and the welfare state in an information society (e.g. Castells and Himanen, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2001; Kim, 2013; Kim and Jun, 2014).

The distinctive IT development and social changes mean opportunities and challenges, which at the same time have brought about new kinds of social problems such as disparity in diffusion of IT and information life. The digital divide in old age is the differences or gaps in using computers and the Internet between the generations and within older adults. The digital divide is both generational between different age groups and intra-generational within older people (Kim and Jun, 2013). In general, IT use among older adults has been low, especially very lower compared to younger age groups. In comparison with the young generations, older people are in general considered as the information poor, have-nots, or weak, and also as a social problem, in terms of generational digital divide. In addition, IT use or the digital divide in old age is described as the ‘grey digital divide’ (Millward, 2003), the ‘information aged’ (Selwyn, Gorard and Furlong, 2003) or ‘silver surfers’ (Cody, Dunn, Hopping and Wendt, 1999).

\(^1\) IT was defined as the technological systems and applications for storing, retrieving, manipulating and communicating data or information. Here, IT is simply represented by computers and the Internet.