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Grannies on the Net: Grandmothers' Experiences of Facebook in Family Communication

Abstract

Despite ageist stereotypes about older people's abilities to engage with information and communication technologies, grandparents are increasingly engaged with digital media. Grandmothers, in particular, are primarily responsible for using of web-based services to communicate with their children and grandchildren (Quadrello et al., 2005). Photos and news from children and grandchildren, especially grandbabies, act as important incentives for grandparents to go online. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to investigate how grandmothers use Facebook to facilitate family communication with children and grandchildren who move far away from home. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with grandmothers living in Romania and Canada, having a Facebook account and relevant family members (children or grandchildren) far from home. Three themes emerged from the data indicating: 1) the tendency to switch between different platforms to facilitate family communication; 2) the relative passive use of Facebook, focusing on photos and quotations as content that trigger emotions; 3) that Facebook usage is influenced by social norms around decency and privacy. Findings suggest that family relationships play a central role in grandmothers' motivations and behaviours surrounding Facebook use.

Keywords: grandmothers; social media; Facebook; family communication; grandparenting.

Introduction

In a globalized world, it has become increasingly common for grandchildren to live far away from their grandparents. Transnational migration adds even more pressure to the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, as older people are often left behind (Sigad & Eisikovits, 2013). Although we might think that the immediate effect of increased national and transnational migration might be a diminished role for grandparents, several authors (Harper, 2014; Hasmanová- Marhánková, 2015) suggest that grandparents continue to play an important role because: (1) increased life expectancy increases the opportunity for long-term grandparent-grandchild relationships (Harper, 2014); (2) the changes in the structure of modern families (as for example the increased rate of divorce, single parent families, and work mobility for both parents) create new space for redefining the role of grandparenting in maintaining family stability and intergenerational support (Szinovacz, 1998; 2007); (3) dis-

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courses of ageing are changing what it means to age and are redefining “ageing” by putting more pressure on individuals to stay young and be active. This impacts the way grandparents themselves construct their involvement with their grandchildren. Consequently the active ageing rhetoric has shifted the perspective around grandparenting from an obligatory mission inside the family to a voluntary activity in perpetual negotiation over the level of grandparent involvement in the lives of their children and grandchildren (cf. Phillipson, 2013).

The grandparent role, however, continues to be a gendered one. Women spend a greater proportion of their lives being grandparents compared to men (Hasmanová-Marhánková, 2015) due to longer life expectancies for females. Grandmothers are more likely to be expected to perform the role of “grannies” (Sorensen & Cooper 2010; Tarrant, 2010). Furthermore, grandmothers are more involved in family bonding, emphatic and supportive communication acts with their children and grandchildren, compared with grandfathers who are focused on micro-coordination and factual communication topics (Burke, Adamic, & Marciniak, 2013). Grandmothers play a more important role in family communication not only because they are expected to do so, but also because “being a grandmother” offers them a positive identity in old age (Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Tarrant, 2010).

We expect grandmothers to continue to play a role in family bonding and to make efforts to maintain their role as “grannies”, as a part of their identity, even as children and grandchildren are moving far away from home. The use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) could serve such purposes. In the current paper, therefore, we focus on remote grandparenting, by analysing the ways in which grandmothers use Facebook to facilitate family communication with children and grandchildren who move far away from home. Using data collected in a cross-cultural case study in Romania and Canada, we critically reflect on grandmothers’ use of social media in their family relationships. We explore grandmothers’ motivations for using web-based communication platforms [with the focus on Facebook] in everyday interactions in order to understand how intergenerational communication practices are enacted through social media.

Grandparents’ use of ICTs to communicate with grandchildren

Over the past 25 years, technology has transformed the world in which we live. Political and journalistic rhetoric suggest that the world has become an information village in which people are connected to each other in a global network society (Castells, 2010). Older adults, however, have been rendered virtually invisible in this discourse (Hebblethwaite, 2016). Until very recently, limited research has focused on understanding the technology needs of older adults. When older people are studied, they are often included in an age category of 50+ that effectively homogenizes an extremely diverse group of individuals.

Existing studies of ageing and technology have, however, highlighted the fact that strengthening communication among family members and maintaining intergenerational relationships are important reasons for older people to use email, social media, and other web-based communication platforms (Bosch & Curren, 2015; Napoli 2014; Siibak, & Tamme 2013). Moreover, building relationships with grandchildren constitutes an important incentive for grandparents to go online (Chesley, & Johnson 2014; Yuan et al., 2016). Some studies (Harley et al., 2012; Tee, Brush, & Inkpen 2009) indicate that photos and news from children and grandchildren, especially grandbabies, motivate grandparents to start using ICTs. As Harley

and colleagues (2012) suggest, the motivation to learn to use new computer-based technologies increases in the case of remote grandparents who are forced to build a relationship with their grandchildren over great geographic distance. Grandparents eventually react to social media opportunities which respond to their need to play (Raffle et al., 2010) and to get emotionally involved with their families and social networks (Breheny, Stephens, & Spilsbury, 2013; Forghani, & Neustaedter, 2014).

Despite the often reported benefits of technology and digitally-mediated leisure, the rapid evolution of media and the increased complexity of technologies create an uneasiness that cannot be ignored. We must acknowledge that some actors and agents have more power than others in this digital world (Hebblethwaite, 2016). Grandparents may face inequalities in access to ICTs and may be less skilled in using computer based applications, resulting in increased alienation and social exclusion (Friemel, 2016). Although there is a continuous development of systems designed to support family connections in these remote conditions (González, Jomhari, & Kurniawan, 2012; Judge et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2015), including video communication, photo-sharing, family gaming, and story boarding applications, they all require rich technological infrastructure and some level of computer familiarity. As a recent study conducted in the rural areas of northern Canada proves, the way individuals stay in contact with family members is challenged by the communication infrastructure: people's natural desire to maintain family connectedness is adjusted when infrastructure is poor or if they had unpleasant experiences with computer based technologies. Furthermore, negative impressions of ICTs are difficult to change once the infrastructure improves, as family communication practices are time enduring (Melvin et al., 2015). Moreover, with a relative low percentage of Romanian people aged 65 and over using the internet (6%), compared to higher rates in Canada (48%) (Blanche, 2015), our comparative case study is particularly relevant to explore grandmothers' practices in using social media.

Using Facebook for family connections

In today's increasingly networked society, web-based communication platforms are used more and more in everyday social interactions (Taske & Plude, 2011). Family members admit spending increasing amounts of time to communicate on such platforms, especially on video calls via Skype or social networking via Facebook, particularly in the case of geographically distant families (Siibak, & Tamme 2013).

In the case of older people, video chat is preferred because it replicates the authenticity of everyday interactions (Yuan et al., 2016). Grandparents, in particular, have been found to prefer video chat interaction (usually Skype) since it replicates the type of social interaction that older people are familiar with (Ames et al., 2011). Among social networking websites, Facebook is widely used by older adults (Braun, 2013; Hayes, van Stolk-Cooke, & Muench, 2015), but most research on family communication has focused on video chat compared to social network sites such as Facebook. Although adults admitted they predominantly use the telephone to communicate with their parents who are living afar, video chat technology has become a common place for remote grandparenthood (Forghani, & Neustaedter, 2014), allowing people to multitask and participate together in daily family routines (Turkle, 2011).

The routine of a family video chat is similar to a ritualized face-to-face visit between grandchildren and grandparents, often arranged by parents to reinforce family identity. In

such “ritualized” online visits, remote grandparents enjoy the interaction and feel that they are part of their grandchildren’s lives. They can use visual cues in order to find more topics of discussion, they can talk longer, and find that it is easier to build intergenerational relationships. Grandparents experience the feeling of “being there”, getting to know their grandchildren better, and witnessing the way they grow up, while picking up the conversation from where it was left (Ames et al., 2011).

Less is known about the way grandparents are using Facebook or similar social network websites to build their relationships with their grandchildren. Social networking sites are often used with the intent of strengthening family ties between grandparents and grandchildren (Cornejo, Tentori, & Favela, 2013). Ames and colleagues (2011) report on the intensive preoccupation that grandparents have for photos of their grandchildren. They suggest that this need is partially fulfilled with video chats, but made no reference to the way in which social network sites are used in this respect. Instead of being a substitute for video chat, social network sites, such as Facebook, could be used as a tool for everyday reminiscing (Forghani, Venolia, & Inkpen, 2014), thus providing more topics of discussion for geographically distant families. Work by Cosley and colleagues (2012) has reinforced the value of Facebook in supporting collaborative online activities for remote families.

Sensitized by the literature on video chats, we have chosen to focus on Facebook in order to extend our understanding of the role of social media in family communication. Although we might expect that grandmothers would prefer video chat (i.e. Skype) over telephone or social network sites to communicate with their grandchildren, we explore whether Facebook could also be used as a tool to reminisce, to bring new topics of discussion from everyday life into the digital world, and to provide the opportunity for grandparents to express continued relationship availability. We presume that Skype calls with grandchildren rarely occur daily, so the *perpetual contact* (Turkle, 2011) may be revealed through the use of complementary communication practices, as for example Facebook posts and status updates.

Several authors have explored this phenomenon of so called “phototalk” (O’Hara et al., 2012) as a family communication practice whereby mementos (i.e. Facebook photos and posts) are used to trigger conversations, stories, and family engagement. Digital photos in particular are preferred by grandparents and grandchildren (Forghani, Venolia, & Inkpen, 2014) not only due to their visual effect and ease with which they convey messages, but also because they stimulate communication practices that provide opportunities for sharing stories and talking about everyday routines that are highly valued in the case of remote grandparenthood. O’Hara and colleagues (2012) point out that that personal digital photos often become the subject of enjoyable conversations once families reunite in relaxing moments, for example during family meals. This need by older people to share small things from their everyday lives with their children and grandchildren constitutes a strong incentive to go online to communicate (Santana et al. 2005). Nevertheless, sharing “everyday routine” is not only emotionally driven and enjoyable but a very useful tool to prevent alienation between grandparents and grandchildren. We explore, therefore, how phototalk might occur among three-generation families involved in retrospective storytelling, using personal photos shared via Facebook as memory triggers.

In sum, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the ways in which grandmothers engage with social media, specifically Facebook, in family communication practices through the lens of remote grandmothering (see Sawchuk & Crow, 2012). We regard challenges in the grandparents-grandchildren relationship over the remote situation as influenc-

ing the way in which grandmothers approach new web-based communication platforms in their quest for intimacy and connections with their families.

Moreover, our study focuses on grandmothers specifically, as they are more involved in family bonding and supportive communicative acts. Furthermore, we choose to investigate, in a cross cultural case study, the way Facebook is used as a communication tool to build the relationship between grandmothers and their geographically distant grandchildren. Arguably, the choice of analysing Facebook communication in the current study is supported for at least two reasons: (1) the fact that previous studies have documented the importance attributed by older people to web-based technologies which allows sharing everyday routine (i.e. by the means of photos, videos); (2) the fact that video chat has been shown to play a role in the way that remote grandparents are building relationships with grandchildren, whereas complementary tools involved in expressing continuous relationship availability (such as social network websites) are scarce.

Method

Given the exploratory nature of this cross-cultural case study, an inductive qualitative approach was judged to be appropriate to explore the use of social media in family communication among grandmothers in Romania and Canada. Internet use among adults aged 65 and over differs dramatically between the two countries (48% in Canada compared to just 6% in Romania) (Blanche, 2015).

Participants

In Romania, grandmothers were recruited through a public Facebook group of pensioners who were sharing their experience as grandparents. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit additional participants in Romania. No such publicly accessible Facebook page existed in Canada. Grandmothers in Canada, therefore, were recruited through snowball sampling in the community.

Eligibility was not based on age. Grandmothers were included in the study if they had a Facebook account, opened for more than six months, and on which they were active (checking, posting, reading) at least once per week. They were included if they had permanent internet connections in their homes and proper technological infrastructure. Additionally, they had to have at least one grandchild who lived at a distance of over 200km from their grandmother.

The study included 13 grandmothers: 8 from Romania and 5 from Canada. They varied in age from 60-80 years. The Romanian sample consisted of two grandmothers having grandchildren living in Romania (more than 500 kilometers from their grandmothers' homes) and six grandmothers having grandchildren and children living abroad. In the Canadian sample, all of the grandmothers had grandchildren living in Canada, but all at a distance of over 200 km from the grandmothers' homes. One Canadian grandmother also had grandchildren living abroad. Five of the grandmothers had a secondary school education (3 Romanians and 2 Canadians). The remainder had completed postsecondary education (5 Romanian and 3 Canadian). Most of the grandmothers were married except two Romanian grandmothers who were widowed and one Canadian grandmother who was divorced. All of the grandparents were retired.

All participants owned mobile phones (2 cellular and 11 smart phones). Two Romanian grandmothers owned only tablets while six used desktop computers. The Canadian grandmothers were more likely to own and use multiple devices: four used desktop computers, three used a tablet, and two used laptop computers.

Data Collection

Grandmothers were interviewed in-person using a semi-structured interview approach. The interviews in Romania were conducted by the first author and the interviews in Canada were conducted by the second author. Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. The Romanian interviews were translated from Romanian to English for analysis purposes.

The interviews included a discussion of general technology use to determine what types of ICTs that the grandmothers used and how they engaged with these ICTs. Specifically, they discussed the time that they spent using ICTs; the types of activities they participated in, both with their families and individually; the meaning of these experiences; and how these experiences influenced their communication with their family. Participants were then asked to reflect upon the same questions but specifically related to their use of Facebook. They were also asked to reflect on their use of Facebook compared to other people in their social networks.

These interviews were audio-recorded, with participant consent, and then transcribed verbatim. Detailed field notes and a reflective journal were maintained by the researchers throughout this process, the data from which further informed the emergent understanding of participants' experiences. Participation in the study was strictly confidential and any identifying information has been removed to ensure that confidentiality was maintained.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis of the interpretive interviews employed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a means to process the data. This facilitated coding and comparison of data both within and between participants. Data were stored and organized using the QSR NVIVO software package to facilitate the development of categories and comparison of codes applicable to each category. Analysis began with open coding, followed by axial coding, and then selective coding (Strauss, 1987). This analysis was grounded in the experiences of the participants and data were systematically compared to the current literature on social media and intergenerational relations. Although the researchers were sensitized by the literature, the interviews were coded inductively based on the broad questions outlined in the interview guide. The findings presented here represent the common themes that were constructed from the stories of the grandmothers and the researchers' interpretations of these stories.

Findings

Data analysis revealed three themes relevant to the discussion of the use of social media in family communication for grandmothers with families living at a distance. These themes illustrate; 1) the tendency to switch between technologies and use different devices and pro-

grams to communicate with their families; 2) the relatively passive use of Facebook, focusing on reading and sharing information rather than posting original information; 3) the influence of social norms around decency and privacy in social media use.

Shifting technologies

As we expected, video chat (i.e Skype) was preferred over Facebook based on the ability to build authentic relationships with their grandchildren and the feeling of being present in their lives at a distance. Facebook was seen as a way of presenting daily life using photos. In fact, although Facebook allowed individuals to engage in collaborative communication practices by posting comments, grandparents rarely used Facebook media in this manner. Instead, they used Facebook as a platform to view photos and read posts, but then preferred to use other ICTs such as the telephone or video chat in order to engage in more in-depth conversations. They relied more exclusively on Facebook to keep in touch with more distant relatives (2nd or 3rd cousins, nieces and nephews), but engaged in a blending of technologies with their children and grandchildren. For example, one Romanian grandmother shared her family's experience, saying:

I looked on Facebook and I saw pictures with my son's house and how he decorated it, and I just picked up the phone and said to him, "I don't like it that much". I asked him to add new photos on Facebook so I can see more clearly.

We found evidence for Facebook being used as a complementary technology relative to video chats or telephone calls. Grandmothers perceived Facebook as an opportunity to keep in touch with the everyday lives of their families, but they preferred to be able to speak directly to their grandchildren, either by video chat or on the telephone. These personal communications provided a better opportunity to foster deeper personal relationships, as noted by one Romanian grandmother who said,

I like seeing their [grandchildren's] photos on Facebook, but I prefer calling them when I have something to say. And now, with the Skype, anytime I miss them I can call them, and talk with them. We talk like crazy and it is nice that we can see each other. Sometimes, when I really miss them, I just call.

The Canadian grandmothers spoke about similar experiences, emphasizing the increased depth of the conversations that happened over the telephone, as compared to Facebook or email. One grandmother stated, "It [Facebook] kind of allows you to stay in touch but it's not maybe the depth of personal connection". Another grandmother reflected,

I can sit and talk on the phone to [daughter] for an hour and, of course, you get more out of that that you get from a text or email. So I still prefer actual contact. I still like to phone.

There was one particular instance when Facebook played a more important role in family communication. One grandmother from a small town in Romania was experiencing difficulties in talking with her grandchildren and her son-in-law, as a part of an intercultural family. The grandchildren spoke only a bit of Romanian and her son in law spoke only Greek, so she had difficulties communicating with them over the phone or via video chat. She expressed her preference for sharing content (photos, quotations, videos) on Facebook, as her grandchildren and son-in-law would react to that content (giving a "Like"). In return she also learned

how to give positive feedback to the content posted by her family members. This particular participant brought into discussion a topic that needs further development: the remote grandparenting role and the use of ICTs in multicultural families. This raises new challenges to the grandparenting role and opens new possibilities for the social networks (as Facebook) in reshaping family communication practices.

Passive use of Facebook

Both Romanian and Canadian grandmothers used Facebook in a relatively passive way, despite frequent (usually daily) use. They spoke predominantly about using Facebook to view photos and read news stories and inspirational or humorous quotations. They would 'share' or sometimes 'like' stories and quotations, but none of the participants ever posted original content in this respect. One Canadian grandmother reflected, "I didn't put anything on. I was busy reading what other people were posting". A Romanian grandmother spoke about wanting to learn how to post photos, but that she had not yet been able to accomplish this task, stating, "I like to see photos. I would like to learn how to add photos on Facebook with my grandsons. It will make me happy".

This passive use of Facebook was not viewed as a significant problem by the grandmothers. While some of the Romanian grandmothers reported technological challenges with Facebook, the Canadian grandmothers all created their own Facebook account and "just figured it out on my own" without the assistance of their families. They were quite content to use Facebook to simply view items, rather than converse about them. Staying in touch with the day-to-day developments with their grandchildren was perceived to be the biggest advantage to using Facebook. As one Canadian grandmother said:

I get to see that sweet little face. She [daughter] will put pictures of the children. That's the best thing ever, when I open Facebook and I see a little video when they're [grandchildren] all involved in something so serious. They're just so sweet and I don't get to see them enough. So the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages for Facebook.

All of the grandmothers thirsted for more photos, particularly of their grandchildren and their children.

Enacting norms of decency and privacy on Facebook

Grandmothers were concerned about privacy issues, although not primarily in the sense that they were concerned about Facebook owning their information. Their concerns related more specifically to what information they perceived to be "decent" or "appropriate" to share in a public forum. One Romanian grandmother reflected,

I simply don't like people, women who undress themselves on internet. I don't want to share my problems with strangers. I have seen a lot of people on Facebook talking with others they don't know or just showing everything. I do not see myself doing this.

Another Canadian grandmother explained her reasoning as follows,

I'm not such an introverted, extremely private person, but why would I do that [post pictures of myself]? It's like going around and putting pictures of myself on my car and at my workplace saying 'This is what I look like'. It's ridiculous.

Concerns of how others would judge what the grandmothers shared on Facebook was troubling for the grandmothers. In some instances the fear of a negative judgement was more diffuse, whereas in others, such reflections directly included the relationship with the grandchildren. For example, one Romanian grandmother shared her concern over managing her identity via her photograph on her profile page.

First, I did not know how to create a page. My son, who helped me, took a photo of mine using the camera from the tablet. Then people called me and told me the photo is really ugly and I should change it. I also did not like it but I did not know how to change it. Now is better, I put a photo of my grandchildren.

Others were more concerned about teaching their grandchildren about these norms of decency and privacy. One Romanian grandmother said,

I would like to be a model for my grandchildren, to teach them well and share my wisdom. I would not like to interact with whomever on Facebook, people that I do not know well and to share things with them.

Lastly, there were concerns about how the instantaneous nature of social media can negatively influence how people converse. One Canadian grandmother reflected on this challenge, stating:

Well, what people are raising now is the privacy issues. You know, people are not very circumspect when it comes to Facebook. It's so instantaneous. People can get really hysterical and angry so quickly on Facebook.

Discussion

By engaging in a cross-cultural, comparative case study of grandmothers' use of Facebook in family communication, we have begun to develop a more detailed understanding of the role of social media in the lives of older people. Grandmothers continued to be highly involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren, despite substantial geographic separation. Our findings also indicate that we need to attend more carefully to issues surrounding not only adoption, but also the use of ICTs among older people. As a relational identity, being a grandmother impacted the experience of ICTs, particularly social media. Staying connected to the everyday lives of grandchildren was the main motivator for grandmothers' use of Facebook. Emotions played an important role in grandmothers' choices and experiences surrounding ICT use. This supports previous work that has emphasized the opportunity for social media to meet these emotional needs (Breheny, Stephens, & Spilsbury, 2013; Forghani, & Neustaedter, 2014).

Our case study provides a more nuanced understanding of how ICTs, both devices and platforms, are experienced by older people. Grandmothers engaged with multiple media (e.g., social media and video chat), often alternating between the two. The telephone was still the predominant and preferred communication medium. As Sawchuk and Crow (2010) suggest, scholars need to attend to the range of communication media with which older people engage. Singling out one device or platform to study minimizes the complexity of the experiences that older people have with ICTs. Grandmothers shifted back and forth between devices and platforms to facilitate family communication and enhance their experiences of remote grandmothering. Similarly, they also used a mixture of 'new' and 'old' media, preferring telephone

conversations to facilitate deeper family connections. While we concur with research that suggests that social networking sites were important to older people, contributing to enhanced communication with family and friends (Bosch, & Currin 2015), our findings suggest that this is a multilayered experience that involves multiple ICTs and illustrate that grandmothers have different motivations for using different ICTs.

This multilayered experience shared by the grandmothers in our study exemplified what O'Hara et al. (2012) referred to as 'phototalk'. Grandmothers accessed Facebook on a regular basis with the primary motivation being to view photos of their grandchildren. These photos allowed the grandmothers to participate, albeit remotely, in the daily lives of their grandchildren. Our findings support previous research that has shown that instead of being a substitute for video chat, social network websites could be used as a tool for everyday reminiscing (Forghani, Venolia, & Inkpen, 2014), thus providing more topics of discussion for geographically distant families. Our work also supports Cosley and colleagues' (2012) assertion that Facebook can support collaborative online activities for remote families. Facebook was used as a complementary communication medium in order to enhance communication via other media.

In addition to individual behaviours exhibited by older people using social media, our findings indicate that it is vital that we attend to the systems in which older people are embedded and focus on how these systems intersect with the technology experiences across the lifespan. ICTs are experienced within the broader social, political, and cultural systems. The growth of the so-called 'Information Society' is undermined by the fact that the benefits of digital media are not flowing evenly within countries or across the world. Unequal access to technologies results in digital exclusion at both international and local levels (Cammaerts, Van Audenjove, Nulens, & Pauwals 2003). Ricci (2000) indicates that several groups within Western society are most vulnerable to this digital exclusion, including low-income communities, individuals with little formal education, individuals who are un-employed or under-employed, foreign or diasporic communities, women, and older adults. Our comparative case study explored a population that is routinely neglected or, at best, homogenized in the study of ICTs. Findings highlight common experiences among Romanian and Canadian grandmothers and point to a complex experience of social media for older people. Our study focused specifically on grandmothers who were using Facebook.

It should be noted, however, that ownership and access do not necessarily translate to use in all cases. Nearly 50% of older adults in Canada, yet only 6% of older adults in Romania have reported using the internet at least once over the past 12 months, despite widespread internet access in both countries (Blanche, 2015). Warschauer (2004) cautions, however, that when we focus only on providing hardware and software, we pay insufficient attention to the human and social systems that must also be in place for technology to make a difference. He suggests that a complex array of factors must be taken into account if meaningful access to new technologies is to be provided, including: physical, digital and social resources and relationships; content and language; literacy and education; community and institutional structures. When marginalised groups do log on, there is often scarce content that applies to their lives and their communities. Importantly, Van Dijk (2005) points out that access also includes motivational access whereby people see a relevance or potential benefit in using ICTs, as well as having the skills to effectively use the technology, along with the ability to use the technology. Our findings suggest that family communication, particularly in relation to grandchildren, is a key factor that contributes to the relevance of social media for grandmothers.

Future research should also endeavour to explore the motivations and experiences of older people who choose not to use Facebook and develop a better understanding for the reasons behind this choice. We mustn't assume that lack of access or poor technological skills are the only reasons that older people don't engage with social media.

The findings from the current study also expand Szinovacz's (1998, 2007) work around redefining the grandparent role. Social network sites such as Facebook create a third place for intergenerational relations, endowed with specific emotions, intentions and meanings. Kyle and Chick (2007) indicate that place is a state of mind and our cultural and individual identities affect how we ascribe meaning to our experiences. Meanings that individuals and collectives ascribe to a place are considered reflections of both their cultural & individual identities (Kyle & Chick, 2007). Delamere (2011) suggests that digitally mediated third places such as Second Life, facilitate the development of social capital. Further, meaningful place experiences often occur in the presence of significant others, including grandparents and grandchildren. As such, family and close friends have been found to have particular influence on the social world perspectives of individuals (Kyle & Chick, 2007). Our findings expand this thinking and indicate that remote grandparenting benefits from the use of Facebook as a third place, allowing grandmothers to participate in the everyday lives of their grandchildren. Taking space and place into account when studying grandmothers' experience of social media can help us to derive a more nuanced understanding of the intergenerational experience of ICTs.

Participating in Facebook as a third place with their grandchildren also provided an important opportunity for grandmothers to act as role models. This was particularly salient in their actions relating to decency and privacy on Facebook. Grandmothers modelled what they felt to be 'appropriate' social behaviour by taking care not to 'overshare' personal information about themselves, in what they perceived to be a fairly public forum. This supports the idea that grandmothers use Facebook not only as a "phatic technology" (Wang, Tucker, & Haines, 2012) but also as a "socialization tool". Their choices not to actively post content about themselves on Facebook could be interpreted as 'passive' use, particularly in studies that utilize research methods that only focus on behaviours of the participants. Our case study interview methodology provided us with deeper insight into meaning and experience of social media for older people. Rather than being 'passive' users, grandmothers in our study used their participation on Facebook to model behaviours that reflected a commitment to norms of decency and privacy.

Conclusion

Although some older people may not have been early adopters of new media, generalising this as the experience of all older adults is misleading. Not all older people reject technology. Indeed, a recent Pew study has found that "older" people are the fastest growing population to use social media (Madden, 2010). Older people are agentic in their choices around ICTs. Subjective meanings attached to ICTs warrant deeper investigation. Older people have been exposed to a multitude of new technologies imbued with promises that these technologies would change the way they live (Carey, 1988). Attention to the social and historical context can deepen our understanding of their experience of today's 'new' media. Further studies are needed to explore other uses, and non-uses of social media. Our work highlights

the multilayered experience of social media among grandmothers who use Facebook to stay connected to the everyday lives of their grandchildren and use the medium to facilitate socialization and communication among family members.

Our exploratory case study comparing Romanian and Canadian grandmothers raises important methodological questions. Current research needs to move beyond the extremely basic statistics that we currently have, such as the number of households with internet connection. We need to ask more informative and critical questions such as: What factors influence acceptance or non-acceptance of specific ICT innovations? What impacts older people's choices to *not* engage on social media? Are there differences based on gender? How do race and class influence their choices? How is (dis)ability implicated with respect to new technologies? What do older people need in order to engage with social media in a meaningful way? Social inequalities are a reality in the world of digital leisure. How can this case help us to explore this issue? Studies that have been more respectful of older people's use of these technologies have argued that we must take these socio-cultural considerations into account (Horst & Miller, 2006; Sawchuk & Crow, 2010). Grandmothers are routinely rendered invisible in ICT research. By bringing the voices of these women to the forefront, we provide a foundation for a more nuanced understanding of the way in which grandmothers engage with social media to facilitate family communication.

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