

ABSTRACT

Helena Tuorila, National Consumer Research Centre People over 50 as users of the Internet

The study examines what kinds of positive and negative attitudes and experiences are associated with the use of online services. Study data include an inquiry addressed to the members of the National Consumer Centre's consumer panel as well as their interviews, and interviews of ageing consumers from the town of Oulu in northern Finland.

According to the results of the study, people aged over 50 years use the Internet actively but not long at a time. The Internet and network connections are used mainly for various utility purposes. They are mostly used for e-mail correspondence with family, friends or fellow workers, for searching information in general, for bank connections and money matters, and for surfing. Internet users feel they have a good command of the programs and functions they generally use. Yet, there is considerable demand for information technology training that would take into account the specific needs of ageing persons.

People over 50 find that the Internet makes it easier and faster to take care of shopping and bank matters, and that it helps to save related costs. Nevertheless, they would not want to transfer all matters with the authorities to the Internet. They continue to regard personal service as important. Moreover, they see the Internet as broadening their worldview and bringing new content into life. In their opinion, the Internet does not alienate people from their immediate surroundings; whatever alienation there is, is due to other factors.

Consumers consider the use of the Internet to be expensive. Still, they had not needed to give up anything important because of the costs of the Internet connection. Consumers feel there should be more public, free-of-charge Internet terminals. On the other hand, society is not expected to finance free Internet connections for its citizens; paying for the connection is the citizens' own responsibility. However, as more and more services are transferred to the Internet, they think that society should see to it that its citizens have equal access to the use of these services.

Good data security on the Internet is an aspect that is regarded important. Moreover, people who do not use the Internet are not in an equal position with Internet users – for example, with respect to their chances of obtaining information. Internet non-users are, in fact, at a risk of becoming excluded from the information society. Yet, the ageing participants in the study did not particularly feel that they had been left behind in the progress of information technology.

Keywords: information society, Internet, electronic shopping, elderly people