

Abstract

Purpose and background: The Internet is still a young medium, not only in terms of Internet providers, but also in terms of web designers. Therefore, it is not surprising that particularly young people use the Internet. Despite an increasing number of elderly users, they only use a relatively narrow range of web content. Therefore the question arises, of whether there is a difference between younger and elderly users with regards to the magnitude of needs associated with the Internet. Differentiated Internet promotion programs for elderly people in Germany and South Korea imply that cultural differences exist with regards to Internet use. Hence, this thesis seeks to investigate the effect of age and culture on Internet needs. Moreover, the relationship between subjective Internet needs and actual Internet surfing behavior is examined.

Design and method: An Internet needs construct served as the conceptual basis for the design of a questionnaire that sets out to assess the magnitude of Internet needs of young and elderly, German and Korean participants. The cross-cultural Internet Needs Assessment (INA) questionnaire was distributed in two phases (design and experiment phase) among 273 subjects from both cultures. Age-related as well as culture-related impacts were analyzed using ANCOVA. Internet behavior was investigated in a computer-based scenario and analyzed in a multinomial logit regression to gather information on the predictive power of subjective Internet needs on actual Internet behavior.

Results: The findings indicate a difference with regards to the underlying structure of Internet needs for the four groups: elderly Germans, young Germans, elderly Koreans and young Koreans. Using a validation approach the 4-way structure of Internet needs developed in the prestudy was replicated in the main study, indicating construct validity of the INA questionnaire. On the basis of these findings, it was stated that there is a difference between the magnitude of needs among elderly and young people mediated through the four-fold structure of Internet needs. At the same time culture turned out to have an effect on the magnitude of Internet needs whereas the actual behavior when using the medium was not related to culture. The magnitude of the INA score, however, appeared to have only marginal power for the prediction of Internet behavior.

Conclusion: The results show that elderly and young people from Germany and South Korea are different with regards to the Internet needs structure, which implies the need to adapt the Internet for elderly people in each culture.