

Full title of the manuscript: Are elders able to produce TV News content?

Short title of the manuscript: The case of Senior TV

Luís Miguel Pato

CEIS20 – Centro de Estudos Interdisciplinares do Século XX, ISMT – Coimbra | lpato@ismt.pt

ORCID ID: [0000-0002-9087-3168](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9087-3168)

Patricia Torrijo Fíncias

USAL - Espanha | patrizamora@usal.es

ORCID ID: [0000-0001-8183-1284](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8183-1284)

Cristóvão Margarido

ESECS IPLeiria | cristovao.margarido@ipleiria.pt

ORCID ID: [0000-0002-2479-5114](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2479-5114)

Ricardo Pocinho

ESECS IPLeiria | pocinho@hotmail.com

ORCID ID: [0000-0003-1307-5434](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1307-5434)

Hugo Miguel Carvalho

ISCIA | hmc@iscia.edu.pt, <https://www.cienciavitae.pt/9910-CE7F-E405>.

Abstract

When examining the current media landscape, we can see that technologies play a major role in our daily lives. No one is immune to its effects even elders, who are typically seen as being removed from these situations, have long since given up their role of "laggards" (Rogers, 1995) and are now "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001). It represents an opportunity for them to express themselves creatively as anyone, they can generate, publish, and broadcast content if they have the necessary tools and acquire the right know-how. A study being conducted at Leiria Polytechnic Institute's ESECS (Higher School of Education and Social Sciences) for the Senior TV project, the aim is for a group of seniors (from the Polytechnic's 60+ project) to produce, record, direct,

and edit TV news programming (interviews and reports). This content is already accessible via YouTube.

We believe that, by being taught how to produce TV, elders might benefit from this experience in a wide array of areas. It helps in their social relationships as well as raise their levels of media and digital literacy and impose a moment of permanent education.

Key-words: television, elders, TV production and TV News.

Introduction

In demographic terms, we are living in an unrivaled era. There have never been so many old people living with quality and equipped to continue portraying useful roles in society. According to the United Nations, by 2050 there will be three elderly persons for every child (UN, 2023). In fact, the current decade (from 2021 to 2030) has been declared as the decade of healthy aging. In Portugal, there will be three million elderly persons (those over 65), which means that in 2080, there will be 300 elderly people for every 100 young people (INE, 2020). In other words, the demographic aging is now a major issue.

We live in a time where technical democratization supports the enduring participatory culture. These are times where each one of us can create media content. We are a part of a hybrid ecosystem in which media are fundamental to lived experience. We live in media rather than alongside it (Deuze, 2009).

The concept that not only exposure to technology but also its use may enhance people's quality of life is still prevalent in this environment, with the elderly being a particular focus (Celdrán, et al. 2019). However, elders have been forgotten. They are seen as passive people when it concerns to using technology (Ferreira, *et. al.*, 2017). However, when looking at technology, video producing is an aspect that interests elders (Waycott, *et. al.*, 2013). This is shown as something which demonstrates an increase in what concerns quality of life (Slodkowski, *et. al.*, 2022). Besides, it also shows a greater digital inclusion of elders in today's technologically enhanced life. They are slower than younger generations, but there is occurring a digital turn (Bergström, 2020).

This paper results of a doctoral study in Education in the Knowledge Society – specialization in Communication and Education that is being conducted in the University of Salamanca (Spain). It is built around three distinct moments. The first is to try to understand the function of TV and attempt to profile the elder consumer in Portugal. The second and third moments are based on trying to comprehend which modifications occur when older people produce TV contents. In this study, nine senior students from the Polytechnic of Leiria's 60+ project program make up the time and will oversee all steps and processes involved in the production of these contents. In this case we are talking about producing TV News (interviews and news reports) broadcast style. We will concentrate on how pertinent knowledge from television can be for these people and go through the specifics of how these TV contents are produced. We will attempt to understand senior citizens as media content producers (in this case TV), and we will also address the applied methodology and the expected outcomes and their discussion.

TV in the elders' lives

In the life of older people, TV performs two important roles. It is used ritualistically and strategically. The first suggestion results from its increased focus on entertainment. Watching TV is fun. While the second discusses using media with practical implications. TV is more utilitarian. Viewers are mostly older people (Hilt, *et. al.*, 2004; Rubin, 1983). TV has two purposes: one is structural (it helps individuals in their lives), and the other is relational (has a socialization usage). People watch TV to feel comfortable, entertained, accompanied, informed, integrated into society, less bored, aroused, and have a way to evade their daily lives (*ibid.*, 1983).

It also fosters amusement, self-identification, social interaction and ontological comfort. TV plays a formative role in these lives. It offers them information, amusement and company. It also helps schedule a daily routine. It schedules daily duties (Grajczyk, *et. al.*, 1998). TV also imposes a parasocial relationship that avoids less enjoyable activities - such as loneliness (Ongun, *et. al.*, 2016). This way, this medium of communication helps deal with both physical and mental issues. It is a coping tool (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2002).

The role portrayed by TV News in the elderly's lives

In the case of TV News, we are faced with a media consumption that is driven by an intentionality. It has practical repercussions in daily life, like other media, such as responding to educational needs, being aware of one's surroundings, and being amused (Ruggiero, 2000). Regarding TV News, elders find these contents as being more credible and useful in their lives (Hilt, *et. al.*, 2004; Rubin, 1987). Thus, these contents serve as a means of arranging their daily activities.

When we examine the contents of TV News, we can notice that they allow the older viewers to avoid the quirks of their age group.

They enable them to get more involved in their communities, this way they feel more helpful (*ibid.*, 1987). They believe that these programs address the needs for vigilance, amusement, interpersonal connection and parasocial interactions (Levy & Windahl, 1984). Besides, their contents address informational and educational demands (Ferreira, 2016; *ibid.*, 1987). In this perspective, health-related news is regarded as being an essential aspect - e.g.: during COVID-19 (Scopelliti, *et. al.*, 2021; Wang & Gantz, 2007).

Media production by elders – scenario layout and perceived benefits

It is crucial to recognize that we live in a world where everyone can create media and video material (Ferreira, *et. al.*, 2009). Regarding communication research and technology advancements, Elders are disregarded. They are thought of as being distanced from technological advances (Waycott, *et. al.*, 2013). However, they also produce contents.

However, because today access to digital technologies is normal for everybody – including elders, stereotyped theories such as "technophobia" or "digital ageism" are being challenged (Bergström, 2020). In fact, this is now considered policy because there is a need to increase digital literacy and comprehend the adoption of digital technology among older users (Reuter, *et. al.*, 2021).

The possibility of producing media contents is now ubiquitous. They use social networks – such as Instagram (McGrath, 2018), Youtube (Sayago, *et. al.*, 2012), Blogs (Celdrán, *et. al.*, 2019) to promote contents. Today they also produce photographic contents (Waycott, *et. al.*, 2013). In what concerns video production, we can see that the creation of video contents allows elderly to have better quality of life (Brewer & Piper, 2016).

This occurs not only because they can watch TV content in a much easier manner, but because this exposure and use of technologies improves their quality of life and makes health issues easier (*ibid.*, 2019). For instance, old age is associated with poor eyesight, and clips are easier to watch than text or pictures (Li, *et. al.*, 2022; *ibid.*, 2019). It is an improvement of their living conditions (Slodkowski, *et. al.*, 2022; Reuter, *et. al.*, 2021). It provides them with a voice and helps them to be more active in their communities, specifically through civic actions (*ibid.*, 2021). TV also allows elders to have a role in society as storytellers (Viel, *et. al.*, 2019).

Thus it is normal for them to create home videos that reflect on their life experiences (Ferreira, *et. al.*, 2017). Besides this heritage aspect, these produced contents can be ludic or formative (Harley & Fitzpatrick, 2009). They also repurpose existing web video and image collections as new contents (*ibid.*, 2017). Mobile technologies and digital emancipation allow people to create videos.

Nowadays, mobile technologies (e.g.: smartphones or phablets) allow people to create short videos. Studies have shown an increase in the number of older people who use these videos for practical purposes (e.g., staying in touch with family members and friends through videos) (e.g., TikTok) (Ng. *et. al.*, 2022; Li, *et. al.*, 2022). It gives them a first-person production and consumption perspective (*ibid.*, 2022).

When discussing media production with older people, we notice an upward trend - e.g.: in 2012, 99.9% of Portuguese citizens (aged 15-74) had a television, with 51% owning and using computers and telecommunications (Pordata, 2023). In the United States, 61% of this age group owns and uses a "smartphone," and 45% use social networks. In the United Kingdom, 83% use "YouTube" (PEW, 2022), and 27% use mobile devices, while 48% use social networks for communicating and engaging (OfCom, 2022; 2023; PEW, 2022]. Elders use media and share media content as a routine.

We can also see that senior universities and other projects that promote active learning through the creation of media material, have grown in recent years. Through several programs done in Portugal, it has been shown that the elderly can create media material.

These are some examples: newsletters (Nova Antena, Linda-a-Velha, I Create, Penacova), and picture magazines (iHumanus, Escola de Senior University of Odemira; Senior Academy of Covilhã; Senior University of Torres Vedras) and radios (Senior

University of Nelas, USCARM - Rio de Moura, and Senior Line - Grândola, Santa Casa da Misericórdia da Pampilhosa do Serra). When it comes to news production, we can also outline projects such as Repórter 60+ (available online at: <https://www.reporter60.com.br/>) and LLARC (available online at: <http://laterlifeaudioradio.org/>). This last one is a project dedicated to producing PodCasts with this population.

When it comes to TV/Video production, besides YouTube channels (Carvalho & Santos, 2022; Sayago, *et. al.*, 2012), we can see that Coimbra's iHSénior Channel stands out. In addition, we cannot overlook YouTube channels, by elders, that are dedicated to amusement and information. In all these projects, the use of technology helps elders improve their:

- i. quality of life;
- ii. manners of expression;
- iii. methods of increasing information inclusion;
- iv. increased civic participation.
- v.

In sum, we can see that the possibility of producing media contents presents the elders with ways of expression. It helps them be more included in their communities and to have a more significant role. It also helps them understand their media ecology in a more profound manner and fight of issues such as misinformation.

The role of media and digital literacy in the elderly population

When we talk about media literacy, we are addressing the skills necessary to access, comprehend, critically assess, and produce communication contents in several contexts (Lopes, 2018). Understanding the evolution of mediations, the technical landscape, and the reception and comprehension of messages are key to its genesis (Christ *et. al.*, 2020). According to Piscitelli & Ferrés (2012), media literacy is concerned with language, technology, interaction, the creation of media content, ideology, and aesthetics. It is important because it involves the creation of material and involvement from the general population (Rasi *et. al.*, 2021).

Digital literacy is described as the "ability to access, handle, understand, integrate,

communicate, evaluate and create informative content in a safe and correct way through digital technologies in multiple digital contexts" (Law *et al.*, 2018; p. 07). The peculiarities of active aging must be addressed in the case of the elderly because education is one of the foundations of this idea. The process of developing and maintaining capacity - which contributes to well-being - of elderly people, with functional capacity being the result of the interaction of the person's intrinsic capabilities (physical and mental) with the environment (OMS, 2015), is one of optimizing health, participation, and security opportunities to improve quality of life as people age. It concerns both the development of the elderly's functional and cognitive capital as well as the improvement of their social capacity (Kavé *et al.*, 2012; Ribeiro & Paúl, 2011).

When it concerns elderly people, it helps them have better quality of life (Reuter, *et al.*, 2021; Slodkowski, *et al.*, 2022). They use technologies lesser than younger generations and are less trustworthy regarding digital media (Carenzio, *et al.*, 2021, Baran & Alpaydin, 2018).

However, while media literacy has shown to boost younger people's abilities to identify misinformation, it is not clear that elders follow this tendency (Moore, *et al.*, 2022). It might have to do with their struggles concerning with digital media skills and skepticism concerning these technologies (*ibid.*, 2022). We consider that, for media and digital literacy enhancement to occur with elders, it should be a policy issue. This has been seen by the European Union since 2020 that has underlined the importance this issue has for all countries (*ibid.*, 2020). It is also vital to understand how traditional and digital media can be combined for this age group (Nimrod, 2017). Projects, such as Sénior TV, are important in this way.

Methods

For elders to create media contents – in this case TV News, they need theoretical and practical knowledge. They need to understand how to use tools and software that are needed to create, edit and distribute media material. In this case – TV News.

Even though this project is still in its early stages, it is already producing TV content. It started with theoretical classes (on December 6, 2022) and practical sessions which began on December 16, 2022 with the production of interviews and TV News reports.

This project is based on traditional lectures, practical and laboratorial classes. In their theoretical lectures, students learned that producing TV essentially involves the convergence of two factors. One is based on understanding how TV, as a medium, works both symbolically and linguistically. The other is of a technical nature and refers to the tools and programs used especially in the pre-production and post-production moments (Zettl, 2006; Millerson, 2009).

During these sessions, topics like communication sciences, philosophy, cinematographic studies, sociology of media, television studies, and multimedia (video editing and sound design), were discussed. YouTube and other movie snippets were used to highlight what was being addressed in these sessions. This way, students can understand what is addressed in a theory by looking at these contents.

They also learned how to use lights, record sound, and use digital cameras. They learned how to dolly, pan, and zoom and addressed composition, camera angles, TV lighting and audio recording (Hughes, 2012). These students talked about how to use this equipment in the studio and in outdoor settings for creating TV news contents. They understood professions related to television's production reality; in addition, they addressed this medium's production processes which consists of pre-production (the organizational phase of the television program), production (recording the content), and post-production (editing the program) (*ibid.*, 2012; *ibid.*, 2009; *ibid.*, 2006).

After mastering media theory through more traditional classes, older people were taught how to create news content in practical sessions. While these classes were being conducted, they also undertook practical sessions - that resulted first in small interviews (called: "Conheça a Equipe"). In this production, the students that are part of this project conducted interviews among themselves. Later, as the project became more mature, they began producing bigger, more traditional, interviews ("Revelações") and TV Reports – that are more difficult to do because they demand that people get close to the motif (Coelho, et. al., 2021). All these contents are available online on the project's YouTube channel.

Image 1

Sénior TV's YouTube channel.



These contents were recorded with the team that consists of nine students (aged between 62 and 74), who learned the theoretical aspects of producing TV in a classroom and later applied them in these contents.

They have covered topics related to education, gerontology and other issues, such as biographical issues of the interviewees. These topics are regarded as critical for the project's elements and editorial aims. Through this, besides enhancing their understanding of the medium from a symbolic and linguistic nature, they have increased their knowledge of technical aspects – all aspects that might result in an increase of their media and digital literacy levels.

Image 2

The project's production process and some produced contents.





Conclusion

TV continues to play a significant role in the lives of seniors. Acquiring more complex technology domains reflects an improvement in the elderly's living circumstances, namely in their degrees of active aging, rather than just a struggle that is present in some sceptic studies.

As the sessions went on, it became clear that learning TV production skills and techniques was perhaps leading to some changes in the elder's media diet. It enhances their individuality, and they participate in communal activities. In conclusion, it is believed that the originality of the concept depends on seniors producing TV in addition to the potential quality of the programs that will arise from this initiative.

By having a lifelong learning process which addresses inclusive strategies concerning media techniques, we believe that we will allow the elders not only to produce contents, but to understand the mediascape in a more thorough manner. Thus, becoming more effective members of society.

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