

Old age and the use of the internet: two progressing phenomena.

A research project on the popularity rating expressed by senior visitors of the portal "www.guidanonnisereni.it".

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The article offers an experimental contribution to the development of knowledge both in the gerontological and technological field.

In reply to the needs expressed in a previous research project by a group of 160 elderly people, the portal "www.guidanonnisereni.it" was created, with the aim of offering them the constant possibility to communicate with the world at large and to get information on social, political, cultural events...

After one year, the popularity rate of the portal among elderly people was tested by means of a semi-structured questionnaire set in the portal itself, which included 20 areas of investigation.

100 elderly people (fifty women and fifty men), 50% aged 65-74, and 50% aged 75-85 (mean age: 73,77) were examined.

Statistical investigation dealt with popularity rate of the portal, frequency in the use of the Internet, accessibility to the services provided by the portal, usefulness of the service, suggestions for the improvement of the portal graphics, and an informational meeting about computer and Internet potentials.

For each item, correlation with gender and age range were analysed using the non-parametric Chi² test ($p = 0.05$).

We found a very high popularity rate of the portal. The service provided was judged as useful. A lot of elderly people suggested new activities and new courses.

So far, more than 1000 people have visited the portal (more than 50% of them have been elderly people). Two-hour monthly meetings about specific topics were organised on demand in the chat rooms; those meetings gave the users the possibility to discuss and examine together the topics dealt with in the portal.

The newsletter service has already got about one hundred enrolled people. At last, the editorial staff is organizing on demand a service of "target-oriented research" in order to provide a list of web sites with additional information.

Results of the research project highlighted elderly people's interest and curiosity for web-surfing; moreover, "elderly-tailored" technology seems to encourage social integration and independence among third age people, thus meeting the human natural need of knowing and communicating at any age.

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