**Type of Contribution: STUDENT SHOWCASE PROPOSAL**

**Online information behavior of older adults: pilot-study from Osijek Retirement Home**

**Ivona Grgić,** Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Croatia, ivonagrgic96@gmail.com

**Cvijetin Vidaković,** Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Croatia, vidakovic.cvijetin@gmail.com

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# Introduction

### The proportion of senior citizens (usually defined as aged 60 or 65 and over) is expanding in the population of countries all over the world, leading to the expectation that this particular group of population should have growing importance from a research perspective (Williamson and Asla, 2009). The number of people using computers and the Internet is on the constant rise as well and it is fair to say that in many cases older adults are extremely fast growing group of computer and Internet users (Wagner, Hassanein and Head, 2010).

### Therefore, as the size of the senior population increases and people are living longer, the demand for information on how to navigate and cope with issues faced in later life is expected to increase (Brossoie, Karen, Willis-Walton and Reynolds, 2010).

### The latest census (2011) in Croatia shows that 24 per cent of population belongs to the age-group of 60+, whereas only 21 per cent belongs to those under 19 year of age (Statistical Yearbook, 2017, p. 107, 109). Due to substantially increasing number of older adults in Croatia it is crucial to consider them as valid users of online information and many institutions that provide information interesting to them (newspaper agencies, libraries, medical institutions, etc.) should consider their information needs as well as the natural physical and cognitive changes that come with old age and prevents them from using the online information as younger generations.

**2. Theoretical framework**

Previous research has shown that older adults, in most cases, search information regarding health, medications (Tinker, McCreadie, Salvage, 1993) banking, transportation, shopping and physical activities (Wagner; Hassanein; Head, 2010). The same is true when they use computers and the Internet in order to find information – most common areas are health information, education and productivity, including mental stimulation (Rosenthal, 2008).

Older adults also, due to natural physical and cognitive changes that accompany their old age, have different needs and concerns when it comes to using the computers and the Internet. Therefore, older adults require customized interface for online research. In order to facilitate their research, interfaces should have larger fonts, sound navigation, icons which require less precise clicking. Furthermore, cognitive changes such as decreased concentration, memory reduction and lack of interest demand an interface which is simplified, with less distractions and which is appropriate for senior citizens (Wagner, Hassanein and Head, 2010).

**3. Methodology and research questions**

The aim of this pilot-study is to learn about information needs, information behavior and obstacles to acquiring information of older adults in Osijek Retirement home (Eastern Croatia) who use the Internet to find necessary information with the end-goal of creating the simpler, older adults'-friendly interface which will serve as a gateway to their most frequently used information sources on the Internet.

During Spring 2018 authors will conduct ten short semi-structured interviews with residents of Osijek retirement home using the critical-incident technique. The interview questions will deal with information needs of our respondents, type of online information sources they use, obstacles they encounter while searching online, ways of learning about online information sources, and most frequently used online information sources.

Interviews will be followed by three simulated search tasks. The simulated search tasks will address respondents' ability to find medical/health information, local news information, and information about the loan of a recent bestseller from the local library. Through the think-aloud method respondents will be asked to verbally account all their thoughts while searching for the information to solve the simulated search tasks. Those tasks will give us insight into the thought process of our respondents and reveal possible problem areas for their retrieving the required information*.*

**4. Concluding discussion**

Since older adults have their own research needs and require customized search interfaces there should be an interface which will allow them to get quick access to required information. Key point of this pilot-study is to single out some of the most used online information sources by older adults in our sample and create the interface that will suit the respondents' needs. In this way, older adults in Osijek Retirement Home will have a quicker and user-friendlier access to information. Since this study is limited in the coverage, a large scale research should be conducted in order to collect more reliable data about online information behavior of older adults and an interface that would be better suited for the use of older adults at the level of Croatia.

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