



**\* An In-Depth Emotional Research Study**

**sig\***

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# Intro\*

The North American population is undergoing a revolutionary demographic shift. Average life expectancy is increasing as a result of medical and technological advances. As a result, people 65 and older are the fastest growing segment of the population. Furthermore, the average age of the baby boomer generation will be 65 by 2011.

Although it is widely recognized that technology can improve the lives of older adults (e.g. socialization, access to information, goods and service purchasing, etc.), they are still among the least likely users of computers and internet utilities such as social media tools, with an even smaller population representation for use of other technologies (i.e. PDA's, navigation systems, smart phones, etc.).

Research has suggested that "technophobia" may exist due to the fact that a large part of the lifespan of many older adults was spent without the advanced consumer technologies that exist today. Secondly, it is understood that older adults face accessibility obstacles related to income and education, and usability difficulties related to physical, mental, and cognitive impairments.

To date, accessibility (limited income and education) and usability (functional barriers) have been the most cited reasons for why the older adult population has not embraced the advantages of new technologies such as online banking and social media tools. As such, their behaviour has been understood strictly in light of these reasons. The possible contribution of emotion based research has, to date, remained largely unexplored.



## **Aim\***

**An internet-based company specializing in social media technology and media sharing platforms has requested the current study.**

**Two objectives were identified during the front-end meeting:**

- 1. To identify emotional and perceptual barriers related to the adoption of new technology by older adults.**
- 2. To identify emotional and perceptual barriers related to the usage of social media technologies by older adults.**

**The insights gained will be used to direct marketing and branding strategy, specifically with regard to older adults.**

## **Research question\***

**What emotional needs and barriers influence the adoption of new technology and usage of social media platforms by older adults?**

# Process\*

## Subjects:

14 subjects were recruited for the study (8 males; 6 females). The mean age for male subjects was 69.75 years; female subjects, 67.42 years.

Subjects for this study were recruited by a professional market research recruiting agency based in Vancouver, BC. Parameters included:

1. Age (65 and older)
2. Representative gender ratio
3. Adults living alone or with a similar aged partner (minimum 5 year age difference)
4. English as the first language

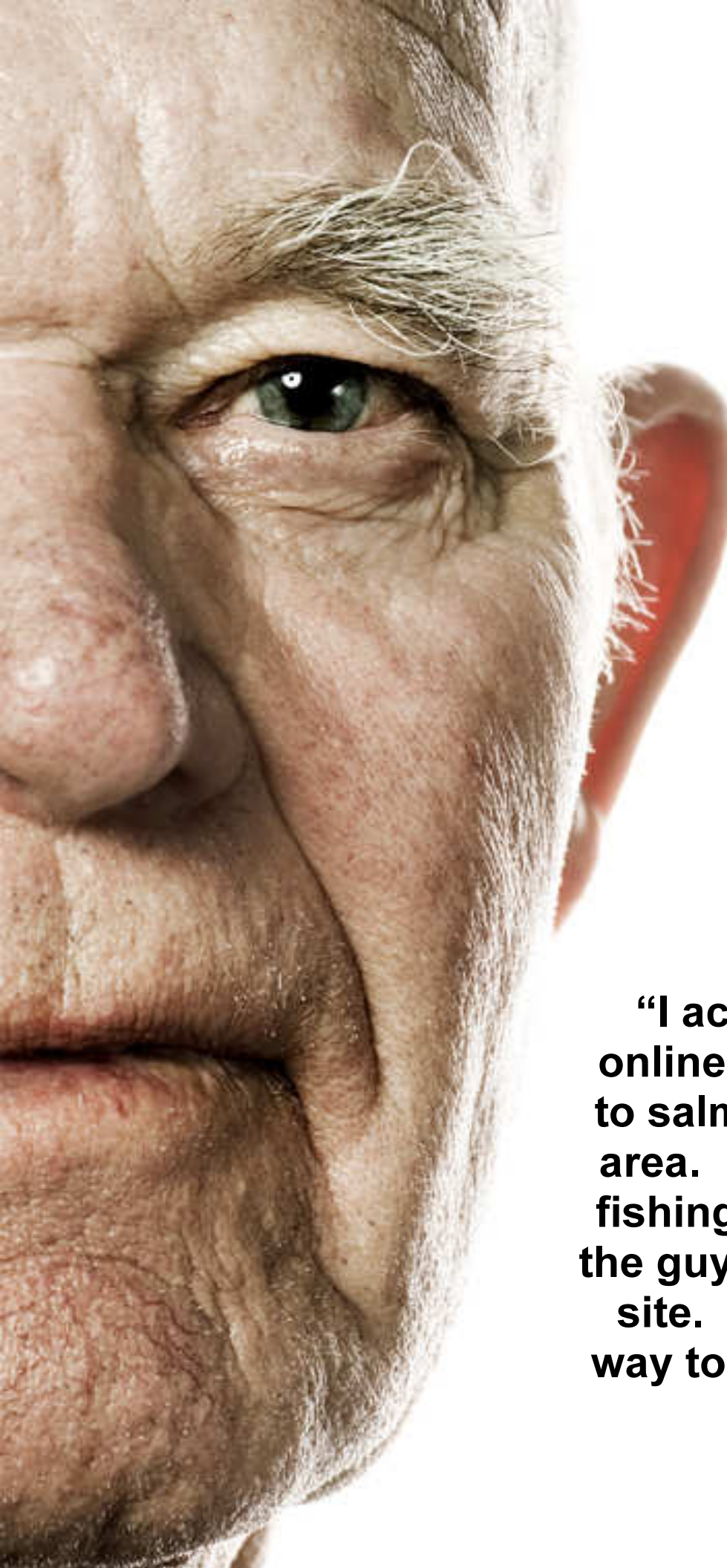
## Methods:

The in-depth emotional research process consists of two methodologies, multi-sensory visualization (IDEA) and creative expression (MARS), utilized independently and in collaboration with one another.

IDEA utilizes non-directive in-depth interviewing in combination with visualization exercises to identify emotional and unconscious factors shaping consumer perception and behaviour.

MARS utilizes visual media (pictures, photographs, etc.) to uncover the cognitive frameworks consumers use in relating to a product or brand, and to identify language and imagery used by consumers to conceptualize this relationship.

14, two-hour Interviews were conducted by Sigmund's two principle researchers, both of them doctoral-level psychologists. Ethical research consent requirements were followed. At the conclusion of each interview, subjects were provided a \$100 gift card to a local shopping mall for their assistance in the study.



**“I actually found an online group dedicated to salmon fishing in my area. I have even gone fishing with a couple of the guys that post on the site. It’s been a good way to meet new folks.”**

**“If you look at all the commercials and advertisements for computers, they are all young people. I don’t think I’ve ever seen somebody my age in a computer commercial. I guess they think I probably wouldn’t know how to use one anyway.”**



**Key Insight**

**Technology  
as  
Connection\***





## **Connection\***

Throughout our discussions with older adults around the emotional needs and barriers impacting their usage of new technology and social media, the metaphor of ‘Connection’ emerged as the unifying concept by which their feelings and perceptions were expressed. ‘Connection’ as a metaphor in consumer research refers to experiences of connecting or relating to someone or something, being a part of something, understanding or being understood, and feelings of empowerment, intimacy, love or hate.

## Connection vs. Disconnection\*



Contained within the metaphor of 'Connection' are both positive and negative emotions and perceptions functioning as behavioural motivators and barriers respectively. These dual aspects are referred to as 'Connection' and 'Disconnection'. Associated with 'Connection' are those emotions and perceptions that serve as motivators to older adults adopting new technology, including **Connection as Accessibility** and **Connection as Generativity**. Associated with 'Disconnection' are those emotions and perceptions that act as barriers inhibiting older adults from adopting new technology, including **Disconnection as Depersonalization** and **Disconnection as Neglect**.

**Connection  
as  
Accessibility\***



The world has changed dramatically, and continues to do so at an ever increasing pace, leaving many older people feeling unable to catch up. Modernity has progressed, and left them behind. Doors appear to close faster than they open. Structural, physical and cognitive barriers reduce their ability to participate in activities most people take for granted. To some of these people, new technology represents the opportunity to gain a foothold in the modern age, to participate in progress, and to gain access to places, people and services previously beyond reach. Embracing new technology offers a sense of hope and opportunity, a chance to be participate fully in the modern age.

## Connection as Accessibility\*

New technology such as social networking tools, provides an escape from the debilitating isolation that so often accompanies the physical and social confines of old age. Friends have passed away, and children have grown and moved on. Technology provides the opportunity for developing new friends and communities, and for reacquainting with people that time and distance have led apart. As physical mobility declines, technology means social mobility doesn't have to.

known support  
interests community  
friends belonging  
contact

## Connection as Accessibility\*

adventure unlimited student  
culture global  
learning exciting explore  
freedom

Technology allows access to people, places and experiences beyond the barriers created by physical limitations. As people enter the twilight years of their lives, the realization occurs that there are dreams and goals whose 'somedays' may never come. They will probably not travel to China, sail around the world, or learn to speak Spanish. Yet, with technology, they are able to explore the world around them, uncover new interests, and engage with other people and cultures in ways they previously believed was behind them.



**“My grandson lives out East. Last Christmas, he taught me to play chess online, and we’ve been playing together over the internet. It’s nice to have something in common with him again. I am even playing games against a guy in Europe**

**“I have a website that has pictures of all of my carving work. I have actually had people from as far away as Brazil contact me about doing work for them. It’s nice to be able to show off my work to people all over the world.”**



**Connection  
as  
Generativity\***

## Connection as Generativity\*

For many older adults, once the thrill of retirement and the appeal of daily rounds of golf have worn off, an emptiness is left in its place. The self-esteem and pride once felt in 'a job well done' begin to fade, replaced by feelings of inadequacy and loss. Technology and social media offer the opportunity to contribute to the world of ideas, to facilitate change, and to be creative. The opportunity to once again create and contribute promotes a sense of meaning and purpose, and contributes to a positive self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

knowledge<sup>growth</sup>  
 value  
 create  
 purpose important  
 contribute

## Connection as Generativity\*

For many people, comfort comes in the realization that their life goes on through the lives of their children and grandchildren. Yet, families are living farther apart, and opportunities for grandparents and parents to engage with younger generations have become fewer and farther between. The chance to create a legacy, and to pass on the wisdom and knowledge that comes with age, has become limited to the occasional phone call or holiday visit. The adoption of new technology and social media offers an opportunity to reconnect, to ‘speak the same language’ as their children and grandchildren, and to continue to play a formative role in their lives.

legacy <sup>wisdom</sup>  
<sub>influence</sub> immortality  
 family relationships  
 generations

**“My daughter and grandson live far away, and I only get to see them a few times a year. But my son-in-law set it up so that I can see them over a video on the computer. My grandson actually recognizes and points at me when we’re talking online.”**



**Disconnection**

**as**

**Depersonalization\***

## Disconnection as Depersonalization\*

Ironically, many older adults view social media and technology as depersonalizing and socially isolating. Gone are the days of letter writing, family reunions and church picnics. These folks perceive a loss of identity and personal worth associated with communicating through email or other internet-based format. Many older adults already sense a growing disconnect between themselves and their family, friends and communities. This sense of anonymity and depersonalization is only exacerbated by the use of such 'impersonal' and 'cold' tools as email and social media. Email and blog postings have made it too easy to 'stay in touch' without actually feeling touched by anybody.

inauthentic    cold    alone  
 dishonest    lost    mask  
 impersonal    fake  
 distance

**“I’ve been using the same bank since I first moved into the area 32 years ago. I used to know all the tellers, and it was easy to do all my banking stuff. Now I don’t know anybody at the bank, and keep being told I have to use online banking if I don’t want to wait forever to see somebody when I have a problem.”**



**Disconnection  
as  
Neglect\***

## Disconnection as Neglect\*

Older adults are considered the forgotten age group within Western culture. In a society that values physical prowess, professional achievement and financial success, older adults with physical limitations and retirement budgets often feel devalued and ignored. This sense of neglect is manifested in the way they perceive themselves to be viewed as secondary and unimportant by the technology industry. As technology has progressed, they have felt 'left by the wayside', struggling to catch up, but falling steadily behind.

incapable      unheard  
disabled      left behind  
deaf      worthless      ignored  
forgotten

## Disconnection as Neglect\*

A perceived lack of resources, and minimal effort to reach out to them as consumers have communicated a general disinterest in enabling older adults to utilize those tools that are quickly becoming essential to everyday functioning. Underlying the sense of anger at this neglect is a real fear of being unable to function in a society that is increasingly dependent on technology. A fear of becoming 'technologically disabled' now accompanies the threat of physical and cognitive decline felt by many older adults.

**“Sometimes it seems like you become invisible as you get older. Companies seem to forget you’re even there.”**



**“I’m not stupid. I know that computers are used for everything, but I don’t have any way of learning to use one. I tried for awhile, but I had to keep getting help from my neighbor when things wouldn’t work. I don’t want to have to bother somebody every time I need help, so I just stopped using the computer.”**



## Appendix\*

# Sample MARS\* Collage:

A creative expression of the  
subjects relationship to  
technology

## Sample Collage

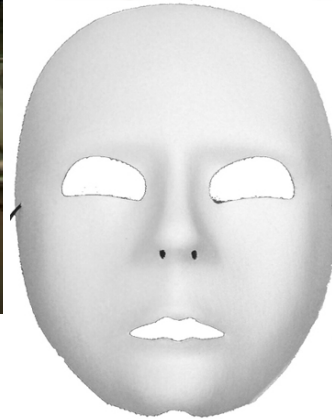
“The steps represent what it’s like not being able to use a computer these days. You can’t do things that everybody else can. It’s like trying to go up steps in a wheelchair.”



“The keys show that computers are the key to doing just about anything these days. They’re being blocked by the steps.”



The books represent all the stuff I would have to learn to use a computer. They’re far away from me because of how much there is to learn.”



“The mask is because you aren’t actually dealing with real people on the computer. If you need help, there’s nobody actually there to help you.”

“The money is my money in the bank. Supposedly it’s easier to do online banking, but I don’t trust it. The money is being guarded by the person in the mask.”



“The wheelchair represents me. Not that I use a wheelchair, but that’s how I feel with computers. Like I am disabled.”

# Summary\*

Older adults conceptualize their usage of new technology and social media through the metaphor of 'Connection'. 'Connection' refers to experiences of connecting or relating to someone or something, being a part of something, understanding or being understood, and feelings of empowerment, intimacy, love or hate.

## \*Connection as Accessibility

Older adults view new technology and social media as providing the opportunity to access people, services and experiences beyond the physical and geographic confines that develop with age.

## \*Connection as Generativity

Older adults view new technology and social media as providing the opportunity to continue to learn, create and to impact their world. It also offers the opportunity to engage, relate and impact younger generations, specifically through the lives of their children and grandchildren.

## \*Disconnection as Depersonalization

Older adults experience internet-based forms of communication as impersonal and as exaggerating a growing disconnect they already feel with society.

## \*Disconnection as Neglect

In response to a perceived lack of teaching resources and efforts to reach out to them specifically, older adults feel neglected and undervalued by the technology industry.

## Contact\*

**Sigmund Consulting Group specializes in providing companies valuable insight into the emotional and motivational factors influencing consumer behaviour.**

**By getting at the deeper, less tangible influences on thinking and behaviour, we help companies understand themselves and their customers at a deeper, richer level, thereby helping them do what they do even better.**

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