Gerotechnology. Understanding Older Adult Information and Communication Technology Use

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The purpose of this book is to present a theory-driven typology of five Information and Communication Technology (ICT) user types developed through the author's own case study research with 17 older adults aged 65–75 years. A goal is for the book to have practical utility to those who may want to engage with or target marketing at older persons to encourage them to embrace technological initiatives. Birkland's 156 hours of fieldwork have underpinned five user types that 'explains, describes and predicts an older adult's use of multiple ICT forms across various life contents: family, work, leisure and community' (p. 2).

The comprehensive nature of the steps leading to development of the theory underpinning the typology presented gives confidence that the theory is robust. Interviews and observations with a variety of stakeholders in work and non-work settings is appropriate not least as family members and co-workers may have valuable insights into ICT technology use by Birkland's participants which participants themselves may be less conscious of. Self-report alone would have weakened the author's claims to the applicability of the typology which comprises the Enthusiast, Practicalist, Socializer, Traditionalist and Guardian. By way of example, a key aspect of the Socializer is using ICT to engage actively with a large intergenerational network of contacts whereas the Guardian is suspicious of ICT and limits its use. Using personas in this way succeeds in helping the reader to understand users' needs, experiences, behaviours and goals, which in turn could lead to more targeted and fitting interventions such as introduction of new ICT. Birkland points out the lack of previous research in this field which, where it does exist, has tended to focus on single ICTs and not considered the full context or interrelation of ICTs in users' day-to-day lives.

Each typology has a chapter of its own which is important as to not do so would have been a major weakness of the book. This depth of articulating what each type is about meets the essential need to explain how the typology was developed and shows that it is informed by evidence. Having a strong theoretical underpinning is important otherwise criticism would be invited concerning whether the types are a product of the author's imagination or personal biases and not truly from rigorous groundwork. Importantly, there is sufficient transparency about how

each type was created. Furthermore, one chapter is dedicated to synthesis of the five types to illuminate how they interrelate and differ.

A key strength of this book is using lots of extracts from conversations with individuals representing the range of ICT user types. These bring the points being made to life and again give confidence that the types have been tried and tested, rather than formulated on the views of a few. There is no 'force of fit' evident here. A further strength is the recognition that the typology fits across the lifecourse and is not specific to those in later life. A person's type may shift over their lifecourse as they embrace (or not) new technologies available to them. This book is true to its claim that it is not proposing a theory of older adult ICT use.

One limitation or weakness in the book is perhaps that there is no mention of ICT use in people with cognitive impairment such as dementia or a learning difficulty. Certainly in the dementia care field, ICT is being introduced with vigour to support people to live as well as possible and stay connected to their communities and I would have liked to see some acknowledgement of that and perhaps the challenges people experience due to visual impairment and such like. The image used on the book cover does little to promote positive images of ageing.

The book is of interest to a wide readership as the author acknowledges. I see the book as particularly relevant to charities and social care organisations whose workers are engaged in the front-line implementation of ICT solutions. The typology may have similar appeal to commissioners of domiciliary ICT care initiatives as in my experience commissioners have not always fully understood the application of ICT solutions in a person-centred way, often seemingly viewing older adults as a homogenous group. The book has obvious appeal to gerontologists but also to those introducing or working with ICT throughout the lifecourse, including schools. What this book adds that is novel is that it explains well why each user type may have developed in the way that it has, including the influence of childhood experiences.