

Experiences of SIS linguists, aged over 65, using digital technologies

As the world is becoming increasingly digitised, particularly for access to and communication with public services, some demographic groups could face a disadvantage, e.g. .

- [Older people](#) are less likely to use digital technology
- People who are not White-British are 1.5 times more likely to be '[limited users](#)'.
- People whose [first language is not English](#) are less likely to use digital technology.

In December 2023 SIS supported Healthwatch Brighton and Hove with their research to gather insight into people's motivations to use digital technology, the barriers that some people face, and how people move to become more digitally capable,

SIS helped facilitate a focus group of 4 linguists with Healthwatch Brighton and Hove. Two further linguists had a one-to-one call with the Healthwatch researcher.

All linguists who participated are aged over 65 and speak English as a second language. They were asked about their views and experiences of digital technology – such as the extent of using devices for a range of things including messaging people via text, email or WhatsApp, video calls, or accessing the internet for general searching, online shopping, accessing health care, etc. SIS also asked the linguists in the focus group about their experience of using digital technology in the course of their work for the organisation.

General Experience

All participants use digital technology in their daily lives, with differing points on a scale of knowledge and confidence in their use. Some felt that they were able to manage anything that they needed, including backing up data, ordering prescriptions, attending virtual appointments, online banking etc. Some acknowledged gaps in their knowledge but felt in general ok whilst others lacked confidence, in particular when things go wrong.

“When something goes wrong, it scares me, I think it is something wrong with my computer... You start questioning yourself and my confidence goes down to zero. If I talk to someone face to face, I don't have that. A computer is unpredictable... if the electricity goes off you can't communicate. I don't trust computers”

Most participants shop online routinely, keep in touch with family living in different countries, and all use it as part of their work as interpreters. There was a mixed view of using internet banking, with some participants avoiding using it.

“I use online banking and that’s quite easy.”

“I’m determined not to use online banking and get so annoyed when they tell you to do that and I say ‘no’.”

In terms of online shopping, some feared getting scammed and felt that websites like Amazon are more trusted.

“I do some shopping on Amazon, everyone does that, but I try not too much as I bought something from China and they would not take it back, so I use Amazon most of the time.”

Others mentioned not trusting doing food shopping online as they wanted to go to shops in person to choose things for themselves. There was also a concern that increased reliance on doing things online leads to less jobs and businesses closing down, e.g. in retail.

Access to healthcare

Different GP practices offer varied options for appointments and booking or making contact. There was frustration with the complexity of some online booking forms or automated communications by SMS.

“The [GP] booking form, I get intimidated by that.”

“It’s annoying when you get a [health-related] message you can’t reply, like an appointment time, and they are not allowing me to reply.”

“When I want to make an appointment online – that’s the one that’s a nightmare, my GP, takes a long time, it’s really bad for older people, I’m ok but other people can’t do that. So, I go to the GP and make the appointment at the surgery.”

Some people preferred face to face appointments with the GP rather than on the phone. Others felt that phone or video appointments can be helpful for simpler appointments and can save travel time.

“I think there is room for both face to face and telephone”

“Now I must say I prefer the [GP] video call, saves time to get to the surgery, more convenient for a 10-minute conversation.”

Ordering prescriptions online was popular, as was being able to access medical test results very quickly either through email or options like Patient Knows Best.

“Recently I had a blood test and to my surprise I had an email which had a link... where you can see all details of your blood test. There was no way to print it, however. There was interesting comparison with previous tests, how it goes up and down.”

However, there was acknowledgment that those with both a language and digital barrier are at an even bigger disadvantage than average.

“DNAs [Do Not Attends] cost the NHS a lot of money but people who don’t know digital cannot reply or know when these appointments are. So, the lack of skills has a lot to do with this, they can’t deal with emails, they [older people for whom English is not the first language] don’t know what it means. So, for example, there was one person who was advised to stop caffeine two days before the scan, because she does not know what it means...she had two obstacles, the language number one and technology number two.”

SIS digital tools

Linguists were asked about their experiences of using interpreter booking apps. This is something that SIS does not currently use. Most linguists work for more than one interpreting agency and therefore have to use multiple apps.

“I would appreciate if agencies used the same app. It is difficult to manage when there are multiple apps to juggle from different agencies.”

They appreciated SIS’ system of emailing individual offers, and felt that overall email is more reliable as they don’t waste time responding to offers which someone else has already taken.

“SIS offers to one person and until that person responds, they don’t offer to someone else. This is better than the first come, first serve system.”

Some felt that they get so many notifications on their phone from different apps and messages, and commented on how stressful that can be leading them to turn off any notifications and then missing important messages.

When internet connectivity is poor, having to use apps as part of their work can be frustrating.

“You have to get the practitioner to ‘sign’ your phone. I have to carry 2 things – both paper form and the app. If the app doesn’t work, I have to ask them to sign the paper form. Then afterwards I need to ‘translate’ this signature e.g. by taking a picture of the form and emailing it. It just doubles up the work. If you just have paper forms it is easier, it can be used anywhere. It is definitely a problem in the hospital and some clinics.”

Currently, linguists submit their assignment forms and invoices to SIS online and there was mixed experience of this process.

“Sometimes the form doesn’t work. Sometimes the invoices don’t all go through and I don’t know why.”

“For me it always works, I use a scanner and upload as PDFs through the website. You cannot make the file too big; it is written on the website what is the max size of a file. Then it should be ok.”

One linguist shared their experience of applying online for a DBS check, which is needed before starting as a linguist with SIS.

“I had such difficulties with the DBS... it had to be done all online to create an online ID and I didn't manage to do it. I came into the office and somebody helped me, and that still didn't work. So that was a real big problem. Eventually, after quite difficult, but it was resolved. I missed a month's work because I didn't have DBS.”

Future

Linguists were asked their views on whether the world has gone too digital or whether it is a great thing and we should become more digital. The response was that there is no choice about becoming more digitized, but that is something which causes concern. Linguists gave a wide range of examples of situations that worry them or already cause people problems.

“I think we have no choice. Now in China you cannot use cash to buy anything unless you download apps. If you cannot download the apps and pay by the apps, you cannot get anywhere... even our air ticket is in the phone. Imagining if I lost my phone or it doesn't work. How am I going to get through the airport and identify myself. If your phone being stolen is worse than your purse being stolen, is worse than ID card is stolen. It's everything about you is in the phone, and the phone is so fragile you can drop it, if there's no signal, doesn't work anything... It's frightening.”

“It's got too digitised and getting worse, my iPhone didn't work so had to get a new one, because things weren't on it, it's getting worse and worse, digital watches, oh many things I don't know about.”

“people can't park their car because [the parking payment system] has gone online”

Training

Linguists were asked how they learnt to use digital tools. Most linguists mentioned getting support from younger family members, and some had accessed training courses, or made use of drop-in clinics for digital support.

“I went to City college in Brighton and did a course and did other ones to improve my skills, I said I need to learn. My daughters have helped me but mostly on my own.”

“Hop 50 is an organisation for retired people, they have all sorts of activities... they have a volunteer to help with IT stuff... that was really good, he used to be a professional [in IT]. I think there should be people in libraries or maybe even GP surgeries that can help... without that I couldn't have done it [changed from android to apple]”

“I only know the basics in my smart phone... If I get stuck I always have to call my children to help me.”

“I am a slow learner because of my age so doing bits [learning about Digital technology] here and there helped me and I do go back for more learning a couple of hours per week, takes me longer than the average person.”