



## ENVIRONMENTS OF AGEING

# Exploring the perceptions of and attitudes towards using social media in later life

Carol Cleary (MSc Ageing Studies student)

Supervised by Charles Musselwhite

Briefing Sheet: July 2013

### Background

As the world's population ages at an unprecedented rate during a time of rapid technological advancement, governments are faced with the challenge of ensuring the social inclusion and engagement of older adults in society. The internet has revolutionised the way in which we communicate with each other making it easier to keep in contact with friends and family, pursue hobbies and interests, access information and learning, buy goods and services, pay bills and participate and comment on local and national issues. However the older population are not as digitally engaged as their younger counterparts and are therefore at risk of social exclusion and disengagement from society. Research suggest that 91% of 16-24 year olds in the UK have access to the internet at home and despite a considerable rise in internet access among older people there are still 5.4 million people aged 65 and over who have never used the internet (Fink, 2012)

Over the last decade the growth of social media has added a new dimension to the way in which we interact and communicate with each other. The term social media is used to describe the media that organisations and individuals use to access, share and publish material and information on the internet. Social networking sites are a form of social media (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) but other social media outlets include You-tube, blogs, uploaded photos and videos. Research by Ofcom (2009) showed that only 8% of users over 55 have a profile page on a social networking site compared with 38% of all users.

Research suggests that this digital divide apparent in the older population can lead to social isolation, exclusion and disengagement from society with potential effects on health and wellbeing which may subsequently impact on health and social care provision.

### Aims and Objectives

**Aim** The aim of this proposed study is to examine the perceptions and attitudes of older adults to using social media in later life and determine whether its use supports social inclusion in the non-virtual world.

**Objectives** To undertake a review and critique the literature on social media use in later life, social inclusion and older adults. To explore the main reasons why the participants do or do not use social media. To identify and disseminate research findings appropriately in order to add to the current body of research evidence and influence future policy.

### Methodology

The study will comprise of a social media users focus group carried out on Twitter (which you will not be involved in) and a non social media users focus group comprising of older adults with little or no experience of using social media. Both groups will be comprised of a mixture of participants over the age of 50 and we want to hear your views, learn more about your experiences, and find out what you believe are older peoples' perceptions, attitudes and views on using social media in later life.

