

Digital transformation and its impact in a cashless society on marginalised communities

**Faculty of Wellbeing Education
and Language Studies (WELS)**

Call for PhD projects starting in October 2025

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Project description

School

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

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Background

Age friendly cities and communities (AFCC) framework developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2007) comprises practices and policies aimed at improving quality of life by enabling people across all ages to live and age well.

The AFCC framework, consists of 8 societal domains, 1) Housing, 2)

Transportation, 3) Civic participation and employment, 4) Respect and social inclusion, 5) Social participation, 6) Communication and information, 7)

Community support and health services, and 8) Outdoor spaces and buildings.

Contemporary AFCC discourse spans social gerontology, gerontechnology,

engineering, architecture, social sciences, health, and wellbeing (van Hoof, et al., 2021).

Since the turn of the 21st century, technology has undergone phenomenal developments, including greater access to Internet/Wi-Fi, and from early beginnings in 2010, social media, smartphones, apps have become increasingly integrated into our daily lives and activities. This coupled with growing digitalisation of urban services (e.g., online tickets, housing and benefits applications, retail self-service checkouts, health services) demands engagement with technologies.

Yet increasing digitalisation has exacerbated the digital divide with some groups of people such as, women (Sullivan & Todd, 2023), people aged 65 and over (Marston, Shore, & White, 2020; Freeman, Marston, et al., 2020; Marston, Genoe, et al., 2019), minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities or ageing without children (Hadley, 2021), people on low or fixed incomes (van Hoof, 2023; Dikken, et al., 2020) are more likely to experience barriers to accessing and using everyday digitalised services (Marston, van Hoof, & Yon, 2023; Marston, et al., 2022; van Hoof, Marston, et al., 2021). Such exclusion can shape users' engagement (or not) with technology affecting social participation and with implications for health and wellbeing.

Recognising the ever-increasing societal role and embeddedness of technology in daily lives, Marston and colleagues (2023; 2022; 2019) have argued for incorporating technology as another key domain of the WHO age-friendly framework to fully attain an AFCC ecosystem. Promoting inclusivity and accessibility, AFCC ecosystems through addressing social, environmental,

technological, and structural barriers within and across the domains aim to benefit everyone, regardless of age (Marston, van Hoof, & Yon, 2023; Marston, Shore, Stoops, & Turner 2022; van Hoof, Marston, et al., 2021; van Hoof & Marston, 2021).

Aim and objectives

Set within the context of age friendly ecosystems, this project aims to understand the impact of technologies such as smartphones and apps on users including marginalised communities (e.g., people on fixed incomes, older and younger adults etc.) in society when purchasing online paperless products. For example, clean air zone permits (e.g., ULEZ – London, CAZ – Sheffield Clean Air Zone etc.), public transport tickets (e.g., train tickets) and car parking tickets where there is greater emphasis to use a smartphone and an app to purchase/share ticket and travel information upon request.

The research objectives are:

1. To understand the extent to which different users access and use everyday technologies and how digital literacy plays a role in the AFCC.?
2. To explore users' experience of engaging with technologies for purchasing online products and its impact on health and wellbeing.
3. To examine the challenges posed to accessing, using, and supporting engagement with technologies.

Methodology

The methodology is open to further development but can include a mixed method approach combining interviews and surveys targeting users and employers or taking a case study approach focusing on a small sample of users over a period of time. Theoretical and methodological underpinning of this work could (and is not exclusive to) life course theory (Elder, 1985), transgenerational approach (Marston et al., 2022), grounded theory (Chamaz, 2017; 2014; 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), or social gerontology (Dannefer & Phillipson, 2010).

This project could be based in two cities, one in the north and one in the south of England, to explore regional differences and include surveying people using the train station/s and local car parks as well those using local centres e.g., for young people, older residents. These surveys could then identify people willing to participate in a semi-structured interview or workshop. The case studies will include interviewing station staff, car park attendants and the local council to gain multiple perspectives on the issues.

Contribution

Since the Covid-19 pandemic UK society is edging towards a cashless society (The Guardian, 2023; UK Parliament, 2023), because of greater digital transformations during this period to reduce the risk of disease transmission in our communities and society at large.

The contribution and impact of this proposed work will explore, and understand the challenges and concerns of marginalised people and communities such as older or younger adults living on fixed incomes who may have limited digital

literacy and/or access to technologies, when required to purchase online items such as train or car parking tickets via a smartphone app. The potential impact of this work is 3-fold. For example,

1. Findings from this proposed work would be a leading authority in a multi-disciplinary academic domain,
2. Findings would feed into regional and national policy discourse pertaining to the levelling up agenda set out by the UK Government.
3. This project has the potential to impact a UK-wide societal issue from the standpoint of public transport, online purchasing habits and behaviours by many (marginalised) populations.

PhD project

The expected contributions by the doctoral researcher are 3-fold:

1. Contribution to multi-interdisciplinary fields (i.e., gerontology, technology, transport, health, and wellbeing/quality of life)
2. Contribution to cutting edge societal issues and potential UK-wide impact
3. Contribution of findings to regional and national government directives and strategies surrounding transport, marginalised communities, digital literacy, and digital transformation.

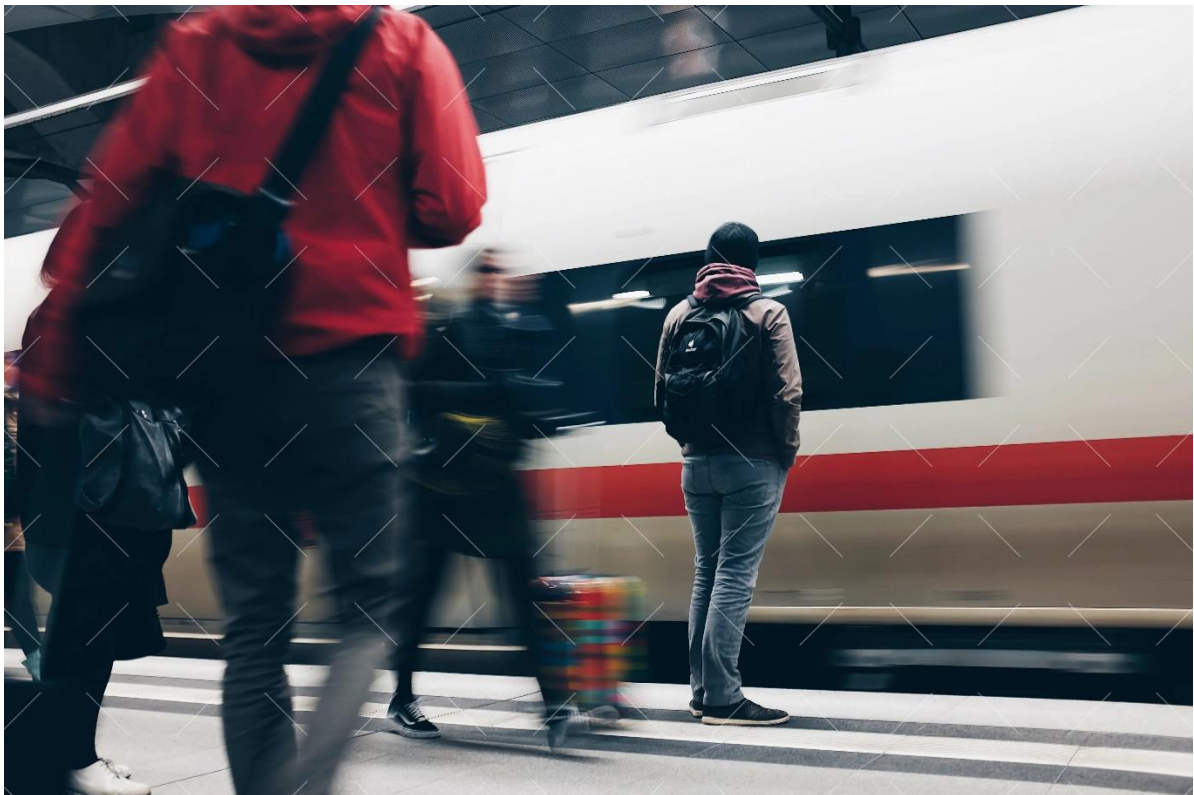


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