

K. Takashima, H. Umemuro. *Activating communications among family members living far apart by sharing common topics through television*. *Gerontechnology* 2008; 7(2):219. Communication with others is considered as a major factor to improve quality of life (QOL) of older people. Social supports including affection, affirmation, help, or encouragement, have significant influence on QOL of individuals¹. Among them, support from family members, friends, and spouses is especially important, and leisure activities with those may have the most positive influence on QOL of people². Older people living far apart from their family members, on the other hand, may have difficulties when communicating with other family members. One of the problems can be that they may not be able to find common topics for conversation even when they meet in person, because of differences in generations, interests, and lifestyles. Television (TV) programmes might be a clue for finding a conversation starter, because TV programmes and their related topics such as actors are shared by a large number population. The purpose of this research was to investigate how technology can help older people to share common topics and activate communications with family members who are living remotely. An intervention system was proposed to support common topics by sharing common experiences of watching TV programmes. The effectiveness of the intervention in activating communication among family members was evaluated. **Design of intervention** The concept of the proposed intervention was to share the experience of watching TV programme (Figure 1). Whenever any programme is watched at a household, information of the programme is transmitted to the other household, displaying the same programme in a sub-monitor next to the main TV set. Audio is not played back, because it may interfere with the programme currently watched in the main TV set. If the user finds the programme displayed in the sub-monitor interesting, the user can switch, using the remote TV controller to the programme from the remote household now displayed in the main TV set with audio. The proposed intervention was implemented as a network system. Video streaming technology over the Internet was employed to transmit the programme information to the remote household. Figure 1 illustrates one direction of information transmission, but the system was able to have two-way exchange so that each household can watch the programme seen at the other household. **Evaluation and discussion** The implemented system was evaluated by two groups of participants consisting of elderly parents and their children's households. Each group used the system for one week. The subjective evaluation by the participants as well as quantitative data of their usage suggested that the proposed intervention could support participants to have common interests in TV programmes watched at the remote household. It also supported the participants to have common topics when they met in person afterwards. The implemented system also helped the participants to feel awareness of family members.

References

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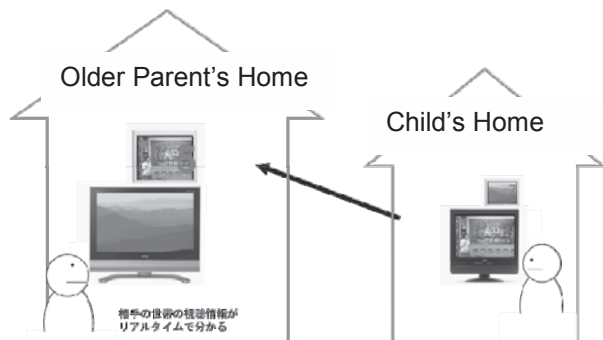


Figure 1. Concept of Intervention