

The ultimate role model: Queen Elizabeth II at age 90

Anthea M. Tinker PhD^a

Johanna E.M.H. van Bronswijk PhD^b

^aKing's College London, Department of Social Science, Health and Medicine, Institute of Gerontology, London, England, E: anthea.tinker@kcl.ac.uk; ^bEmerita professor, Department of the built environment, Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, the Netherlands, E: j.e.m.h.v.bronswijk@tue.nl

A.M. Tinker, J.E.M.H. van Bronswijk. The ultimate role model: Queen Elisabeth II at age 90. Gerontechnology 2016;15(1):1-2; doi:10.4017/gt.2016.15.1.003.00 Older people lag behind in the adoption of new (communication) technologies. In WWII Queen Elizabeth II of England (*1926) obtained training as a driver and mechanic of military vehicles. This probably made it easier for her to keep undated on new digital technology. At the age of 90 she mastered them all, including Twitter. It makes her the ultimate role model for older people struggling with new technologies.

Older people have not usually been early adopters of digital technologies, because of fear of incompetence, lack of interest, or fears of addiction¹. Adoption of a new, perhaps health-related, technology depends on many factors and the presence of role models among their peers is one of these^{1,2}. As the European Commission stated when designating 2012 as the 'European Year of Active Ageing' keeping-up with new technologies is needed to increase older people's contribution to the society.

This may be working longer, acting as volunteers, and staying healthy and independent longer³. A monarch as role model for 'active ageing' has been noted earlier with the Dutch Queen Beatrix who resigned at the age of 75⁴. In England monarchs rarely resign and the current Queen, Elizabeth II, born as Elizabeth Alexandra Mary on April 21, 1926, is still actively reigning at the age of 90. Not only that, but for more than half a century she appears to be an early adopter of new technologies.

Table 1. Queen Elizabeth II age at adoption of new technologies

Technology	Age, yrs	Comments
DURING EDUCATION		
Transatlantic telephone call	13	To her parents touring North-America ^{5p54}
Radio broadcast: BBC's Children's Hour (together with her sister)	14	"We are trying to do all we can to help our gallant sailors, soldiers and airmen, and we are trying, too, to bear our share of the danger and sadness of war. We know, every one of us, that in the end all will be well" (Heir presumptive Elizabeth) ⁶
Driver and mechanic	18-19	Promoted to honorary junior-commander at Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service, July 1945 ^{5p75,6}
DURING REIGN		
Coronation on television (except for anointment and communion)	27	Broadcasting network expanded to the whole nation, 20.4 million people watched at least part of the event ⁸
Live Christmas television broadcast	31	"That it is possible for some of you to see me today is just another example of the speed at which things are changing all around us" (Queen Elizabeth II) ⁹
Sending e-mail	50	When christening UK's first computer network ¹⁰
Website	51	www.royal.gov.uk, launched during a visit to Kingsbury High School, London ^{8,9}
Christmas speech Podcast	80	Freely downloadable from the website, or iTunes ^{9,11}
You-Tube channel opened	81	https://www.youtube.com/user/TheRoyalChannel ¹⁰
Uploading her first clip herself	82	During a visit at Google Corporation ^{9,10}
Twitter account	83	@ BritishMonarchy, later changed in @RoyalFamily ^{9,10}
Facebook & Flickr accounts	84	https://www.facebook.com/TheBritishMonarchy, https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishmonarchy/ ¹⁰
Christmas message in 3D	86	https://youtu.be/9rNUHu65VMg ⁹
Instagram account	87	https://www.instagram.com/the_british_monarchy/?hl=en ¹⁰
First tweet on a iPhone	88	"It is a pleasure to open the Information Age exhibition today at the @ScienceMuseum and I hope people will enjoy visiting. Elizabeth R." ⁹

The ultimate role model

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY

The current Queen of England had been exposed to modern technologies in her youth, which began with her training as a driver and mechanic of military vehicles during WWII at the age of 18-19 (Table 1).

Later, as Queen of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, Head of the Commonwealth of Nations, she became an even more prominent early adopter of the new technologies that have developed during her 63 years of working life (Table 1). This started at her coronation in June 2, 1953, when the service was televised, but without seeing the actual anointing and the communion. These were still considered too private or sacred. It must be noted, however, that this adoption of this new-technology by the Queen was not easy. The Archbishop voiced strong views about this development, and the young Queen herself felt uncomfortable with so many eyes on her. Some eminent older people, such as the 68 year old Lord Swinton, succeeded in changing the young Queen's mind. From that date she embraced new communication technologies. From the age 31 she adopted them all (Table 1).

The Queen's early adoption of television broadcasting had a nation-wide effect. When it became known that the coronation would be on television, the national broadcasting network was immediately expanded and sales of television sets increased nationwide. Twice as many people watched television compared to listening to the radio on coronation day⁸. The effects of her later adoptions of technology were less extensive, perhaps, but especially from the age of 80 she clearly showed that being older does not mean losing contact with modern society (Table 1). Yet, like many other older people, she still feels com-



Figure 1: Queen Elisabeth II sitting in the Green Drawing Room, part of Windsor Castle's semi-State apartments in Windsor, London, England, surrounded by classical technologies from the 19th and early 20th century and amidst her five great-grandchildren and her two youngest grandchildren; This picture was taken by US celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz and has been released by Buckingham Palace on Wednesday April 20, 2016, to mark the Queens 90th birthday (Photo by Annie Leibovitz via Getty Images)

fortable surrounded by the old technology of her youth in the Green Drawing Room (Figure 1).

ROLE MODEL

What does this teach us about the adoption of new-technologies? First of all, it helps if there has been exposure to technology in youth, such as working as a mechanic on military vehicles as was the case for the Queen. Secondly a certain curiosity is needed towards new developments, even when these are surprising, as the Queen stated in her first television-broadcast Christmas speech of 1953 (Table 1). The combination of youth-exposure and life-long curiosity made this 90-year old the ultimate role model for continued new-technology adoption by older people.

References

1. Wright P. The internet's potential for enhancing healthcare. *Gerontechnology* 2012;11(1):35-44; doi:10.4017/gt.2012.11.01.005.00
2. Write, P. Helping older adults conquer digital tablets. *Gerontechnology* 2016;14(2):78-88; doi:10.4017/gt.2016.14.2.005.00
3. Matzke S. 2012 European year for active ageing. *Gerontechnology* 2011;10(1):61-62 doi:10.4017/gt.2011.10.01.014.00
4. Bouma H. Accommodating older people at work. *Gerontechnology* 2013;11(4):489-492; doi:10.4017/gt.2013.11.4.001.00
5. Pimlott BJ. *The Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth II and the Monarchy*. London: HarperCollins; 1996
6. BBC archive; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/princesselizabeth/6600.shtml?all=1&id=6600>; retrieved April 30, 2016
7. The London Gazette, Supplement 37205, July 31, 1945, page 3972; <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/37205/supplement/3972>; retrieved April 30, 2016
8. Moran J. Why Elizabeth II's 1953 Coronation is the day that changed television. *RadioTimes*, June 2, 2013; <http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2013-06-02/why-elizabeth-ii-1953-coronation-is-the-day-that-changed-television>; retrieved April 30, 2016
9. Wood A. Why Elisabeth II is Queen of technology. *The Memo*, September 9, 2015; <http://www.thememo.com/2015/09/09/why-elizabeth-ii-is-the-queen-of-technology/>; retrieved April 28, 2016
10. Bonazzo J. Queen Elizabeth II: A High Tech Monarch: She's embraced everything from television to Twitter over her 63-year reign. *Observer Business & Tech*, September 9, 2015; <http://observer.com/2015/09/queen-elizabeth-a-high-tech-monarch/>; retrieved April 28, 2016
11. Piece A. Christmas message to go out as a podcast. *The Telegraph*, December 22, 2006; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1537603/Christmas-message-to-go-out-as-a-podcast.html>; retrieved April 30, 2016