

Older people's perspectives on virtual mobility

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M. Heward, Older people's perspectives on virtual mobility. Gerontechnology 2015;13(4):396-404; doi:10.4017/gt.2015.13.4.004.00 This paper explores older people's perspectives on virtual mobility, adding to the growing body of literature examining mobility and independence in later life. Drawing on qualitative data from 20 semi-structured interviews with older people in the South of England, three key themes are discussed: (i) types of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) used in later life; (ii) motivations and barriers to using ICT in later life; and (iii) older people's perspectives on virtual mobility. Participants had differing experiences in terms of accessing and using ICT. Half of the participants regularly used ICT, whilst the remaining participants had either tried and did not get on with, or had never used ICT. Motivations for using ICT were cited as: keeping in touch with family and friends, particularly those at a distance; a fascination for technology; a source for information; and receiving such technology as a gift. Whilst barriers to using ICT were identified as: lack of desire; affordability; and a lack of knowledge, skills and confidence. Participants reflected on how they currently substitute or supplement physical with virtual journeys, and saw particular benefit in being mobile through virtual methods if they were to become permanently immobile in the future. The most common ways that the participants were virtually mobile was through their use of emails, online shopping, and video telephone calls. This paper suggests virtual mobility is a timely alternative to physical mobility that could help older people to remain independent and living in their own homes for longer. Therefore, the economic and social benefits, alongside the drawbacks of supplementing or substituting physical with virtual mobility must be considered in policies that support older people, and improve their well-being and social inclusion, both now and in the future.

Keywords: older people, virtual mobility, independence, ICTs

The rising prevalence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is increasing opportunities for citizens to be virtually mobile. Virtual mobility is the supplementation or substitution of a physical journey with a virtual one, examples include: face-to-face communication replaced with email, and visiting town to go shopping replaced with online shopping¹. The potential for ICT, especially the internet, to 'provide accessibility without recourse to physical travel and this could alleviate some experience of exclusion within many of the dimensions of exclusion' has been noted². Others have argued that ICT provides older people with opportunities for social interaction that can improve social relations for excluded individuals by reducing social isolation and loneliness in later life³. For example, a webcam may enable an older person to communicate more easily with other people and therefore reduce their sense of loneliness³. However, gathering empirical evidence and conducting research that examines "the nature and scale of the influence of ICT on access and mobility is one of the major challenges of the 'information age'⁴. Virtual mobility is a relatively recent theoretical concept, which has developed out of theories about telecommunications changing travel (for example, Mokhtarian⁵; Salomon⁶) and studies

that have focused on phenomena such as teleworking ('flexible working' coined by Nilles⁷) and tele-shopping (Hepworth and Ducatel⁸). More recently, Lyons et al.⁴ have explored the substitution of communication for travel, and highlight the relevance of being able to substitute communications for travel, particularly when travel behaviour can be influenced by government policy, for example, rising petrol costs may influence levels of internet shopping. There are of course limitations of virtual mobility, which include the barriers that stop people from accessing the internet in general². There is evidence to suggest that use of ICT, such as computers, the internet, and mobile telephones, is increasing amongst older people within the UK⁹. However, there are still barriers that inhibit some older people from being able to make use of ICT, evidence that the digital divide could become an age divide¹⁰.

UNDERSTANDING VIRTUAL MOBILITY

The concept of virtual travel was first discussed by Urry^{1,11,12} who determined there are five dimensions of travel that can be substituted or supplemented with one another: (i) corporeal travel, (ii) the physical movement of objects, (iii) imaginative travel, (iv) virtual travel and (v) communicative travel. Corporeal travel is the movement

of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration and escape, including daily and once-in-a-lifetime forms of displacement (for instance, commuting versus exile)¹. The physical movement of objects is represented by the travelling undertaken by goods within a variety of contexts, such as industrial production and distribution or the exchange of gifts¹. Imaginative travel involves the sharing of events, personalities and happenings with many others who comprise a community, for example, many imaginatively travelled and attended Princess Diana's funeral through their television screens¹. Communicative travel is through letters, messages and the telephone¹. Virtual travel is where a physical journey is supplemented or substituted with some form of virtual one, examples of which are face-to-face communication replaced with email, and shopping replaced with online shopping¹.

There is a growing body of literature that examines the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of mobility, and the meaning of mobility through the perspectives of older people^{1,11-16}. Mobility is susceptible to the changes individuals experience in their day to day lives, and not a fixed state or condition¹⁷. The desire to be mobile does not necessarily disappear as people age; however, the onset of physical and mental impairments in later life can mean that older people need to adapt, or change, the ways they are mobile¹⁸. For example, age related driving cessation may lead to someone walking or catching a bus, or frailty may result in someone needing to use a walking frame. Mobility is therefore complicated by the underlying variety of physical and mental abilities. Being mobile (in the sense of ability to get up and move around, the desire to be free to come and go, and the ability to have one's own space) has been reported as enhancing notions of independence and positively influencing quality of life in later life¹⁹. Studies have explored the associations between well-being and mobility^{15,16,20} and independence and mobility in later life²¹. There is then consensus that mobility and independence are a fundamental part of well-being in later life^{13-16,22,23}. Studies have also examined how older people supplement one form of mobility with another, for example McKie²⁴ explored food and grocery shopping in later life, highlighting a number of ways that older people cope with grocery shopping. The findings show that older people ask carers and/or family members to carry heavier items for them, hire a car every six weeks or so to overcome the difficulties of carrying heavy items, and get items delivered to their home. Participants undertook their own grocery shopping, developing strategies if they experienced a problem²⁴. However, despite this growing interest in mobility in later life, little is known about older

people's experiences of virtual mobility. This paper examines older people's perspectives of virtual mobility therefore supporting the growing body of research focusing on mobility, wellbeing and independence in later life.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the intersection between transportation, technologies and gerontology, using an interdisciplinary qualitative approach to explore the experiences and views of older people about their mobility and use of transport and technologies.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 older people aged 65 and over in the South of England (Table 1). The sample has an equal gender split (10 female and 10 male), and the average (mean) age is 70. More than half are from a white British ethnic background (n=13), whilst just over half report being blind or partially sighted, having a chronic illness (such as asthma or arthritis), or mobility problem (n=11). Almost three quarters currently receive no care or support and self-report their own level of activity as fairly active (n=14). Three quarters self report their level of general health as good or fairly good. Participants had differing experiences in terms of accessing and using ICT. Half of the participants regularly used ICT, whilst the remaining participants had either tried and did not get on with, or had never used ICT. Following an inductive approach, the number of interviews undertaken was not limited, but continued until a point of data saturation was reached²⁵. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a data collection method to enable the participants to share their views and experiences with the researcher. Semi-structured interviews provide researchers with a series of predetermined questions (interview schedule) and flexibility to discuss other areas of interest that may come to light throughout the interview. The interview schedule was developed focusing on participants' mobility and use of ICT, this including questions to enable discussions about reasons for, and barriers to, using ICT, as well as the participants' perspectives on virtual mobility. Where appropriate, discussion during the interviews focused on the ways participants facilitate mobility, for example, during conversations about access and use of ICT, the notion of virtual mobility was explored. Each interview lasted between 50 and 70 minutes.

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the university ethics committee. Following local ethics and governance processes, participants were accessed through established support groups for

older people, including day centres. Individuals that lead established support groups were sent information sheets outlining the details of the study. Those groups who agreed were then provided with a poster to display at the support group venue, or the researcher attended the support group and delivered a presentation about the study to the members of the group. Individual members of the group then decided whether or not they wished to participate in the study. Those who did, formed a purposive sample; therefore these findings may not be representative of older people in general and further research may be required to be able to generalise about all older people.

Informed consent

Measures were taken to ensure that all participants based their decision to participate on full information about the project, and felt under no pressure to take part. Potential participants were provided with an information sheet that explained the purpose of the study, gave a brief description of the design and timescale of the data collection, indicated how the findings would be used, and stated the measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Individuals who agreed to take part were then asked to confirm their participation by signing a consent form. Interviews were conducted in the participants' own homes, except for one conducted in a bookable room in a local library, and another which took place at a day centre.

Data analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed and input into NVivo version 8 for analysis. Identifiers were anonymised, or removed from the transcripts, prior to analysis. The analysis followed a constructionist grounded theory approach, on a continual basis from the first interview^{26,27}. A constructionist grounded theory approach stems from the constructionist paradigm. The constructionist paradigm is part of the post-modern sociological perspective, and was established from the ontological and epistemological concepts of construction and interpretation²⁸. A constructionist approach to grounded theory prioritises the phenomenon of the study; "data and analysis are created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data"²⁶. This approach "theorizes the interpretive work that research participants do", whilst recognising the 'resulting theory is an interpretation'²⁶. This approach enabled the researcher to understand the views and experiences of the participants and look reflexively at their perspectives to understand or interpret their world²⁶. An initial coding framework based on the research aims and interview questions was developed and

the interview data was preliminarily coded using a thematic content analysis method^{29,30}. Any additional codes that became visible during the analysis were also applied to the transcripts. Transcripts were read and re-read to identify links between the codes^{26,27}. To enhance the rigour of the analysis, after two interviews were analysed, the analysis process and emergent codes were scrutinised by the project supervisory team (formed of two phd supervisors who have asked not to named as authors but to be acknowledged at end of paper). Once the analysis was complete the codes were then scrutinised by the same project supervisory team.

FINDINGS

Three key themes emerged from the interview data: types of ICT used by older people; motivations and barriers to using ICT in later life; and older peoples' perspectives on virtual mobility (Table 1). These are discussed in turn.

ICTs used by older people

Participants had differing experiences in terms of accessing and using ICT. Half of the participants regularly used ICT, whilst the remaining half par-

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of interview participants

Variable	Value	Frequency (n=20)
Age, years	65-69	11
	70-74	3
	75-79	5
	80-84	1
Gender	Female	10
	Male	10
Ethnicity	Black - Caribbean	1
	Indian	2
	Mixed heritage - white and Asian	1
	Taiwanese	1
	White - British	13
Disability	White - South African	2
	Blind; partially sighted	2
	Chronic illness, including asthma, arthritis	7
	Mobility problems	2
	None	9
Level of care or support	As and when needed	3
	Family carer (unpaid)	2
	Part-time carer (paid)	1
	None	14
Self-reported level of activity	Active	4
	Fairly active	14
	Not active	1
	Don't know	1
Self-reported level of general health	Good	6
	Fairly good	9
	Not good	4
	Don't know	1

ticipants had either tried and did not get on with, or had never used ICT. All but one participant owned and regularly used a landline telephone, the remaining participant instead chose to use a mobile telephone, stating that he could not afford to have both. Almost half of the participants owned a mobile telephone, a third of whom kept it in case of emergencies, whilst two thirds used it once a month or more. When probed about the functions that they used on the mobile telephone, it became evident that there was a difference between using the mobile telephone for making calls and texting.

"The best way to communicate is the way we are doing now, face-to-face, the next best way is to talk to somebody on the phone, I don't really enjoy texting". (Male, 70 years)

A third of participants who owned a mobile telephone stated that they enjoyed using the texting option, whilst the remaining two thirds said that they did not use it and probably never would. All participants felt that a mobile telephone should be simple and easy to use, valuing this over a mobile telephone with all the latest gadgets:

"A mobile phone is a mobile phone not a camera, I'm afraid I am still at that stage". (Male, 70 years)

It became apparent that use of a personal computer is not necessarily correlated with use of the internet. Over half of the participants had previously used a personal computer, although only a quarter of them had also used the internet. The participants who had used a computer and/or the internet discussed a variety of experiences in terms of access and use. A quarter of these participants stated that they did not have access to a personal computer and the internet within their own home, gaining access at the public library or in the communal area of the Sheltered Housing complex where they resided. They stated that they would prefer to have instant access to a personal computer and the internet within their own homes, although they could not afford to do so.

Motivations

Those participants who used ICT cited a number of motivations for this usage, all of which were connected to a sense of being independent and able to do things for themselves. Participants that had used ICT within their working lives, talked about how they transferred this usage into their private lives:

"I used a computer in the office just before I retired, at that time computers were pretty new...they forced them on me.... I used it when I had to and that was all. I had no idea what I was doing, and so I went on a course a few years ago when I decided I ought to keep up with what's going on in the world, that's why I got it". (Male, 78 years)

Participants that were employed at the time of the interview discussed their use of mobile telephones, computers and the internet in their day-to-day role at work, which gave them the skills and confidence to be able to use information technologies within their private lives:

"...I actually enjoy new technologies....I think I have learnt some of it through experimental learning...but yes I have learnt most of it through working, it's been absolutely essential, I probably wouldn't have accessed them at all had I not needed to". (Female, 65 years).

Keeping in touch with friends and family and affordability was a key motivation for using ICT, especially those who live overseas or at a distance within the UK:

"Actually Skype is what my father uses, he lives abroad and he is almost ninety, it's essential because the cost of sending information and even talking on the telephone is high, so he has pushed me into using it". (Female, 65 years)

"I prefer to hear my kid's voices [over the telephone] so that I know they are okay, I can tell by their voices what's going on, you know that sort of thing". (Female, 75 years).

However, participants felt differently about using email services as a form of communication. In contrast, email was considered more suitable for keeping in touch with friends and colleagues, rather than family members, as it is less personal than using the telephone. Those who used email were likely to use it weekly or twice per week. Email was considered to be less intrusive than the telephone, and so some of the participants felt that it suited certain communication situations better than others:

"... if you telephone somebody unless they are going to ignore the telephone it demands that they deal with you in your [timeframe], whereas with email and texting to a large extent what you do is you can drop an idea or a thought into someone else's mind and they can respond in their own time, so I find it's not intrusive and that's why I use it". (Female, 65 years).

Participants also described the internet as a valuable source for information, which they liked being able to access so readily:

"...but now we are getting more and more where the only way you can get information is on the internet, in fact the only information they give you is on the internet". (Male, 68 years).

There were examples of participants accepting ICT once they had had an opportunity to use it. One participant admitted that he did not like the idea of having a private conversation in a public space and so was not willing to purchase a mobile tel-

ephone, however, after being given a mobile telephone by a friend he stated that he had overcome his concerns about using it in public by not answering in particular surroundings. He also indicated that once he had gotten used to this particular telephone he was highly likely to upgrade it to something newer on the market, interesting to see how he had changed his perspective once given the opportunity to have a go with the technology. This reflects the findings of previous research that found older people are happy using new technology once they have had an opportunity to have a go, particularly if they feel it makes their life easier³¹. Conversely, other participants stated that they regularly used ICT purely out of 'fascination'. These participants used the internet on a weekly or daily basis, and they personally owned lots of the 'gadgets' that were currently on the market, such as satellite navigation systems, the recently released models of mobile telephones, and digital cameras. Before purchasing ICT they described how they would conduct detailed research into the products via the internet. This fascination did not mean that they were confident in using the technologies, as some discussed difficulties with instruction booklets. However, the fascination did mean they were more inclined to have a go and try out the technologies.

Barriers

Barriers to using ICTs in later life were highlighted by participants that did not use ICT regularly. The most frequently cited reason for not using ICT was the lack of desire to do so:

"I'm just not interested [in using a computer], I never have been you know". (Female, 75 years)
"I have never bothered with it; I have never desired to use a computer". (Male, 77 years).

Other participants discussed how they felt that they could not afford to use ICT:

"Yes the cost of a computer is an issue for me, I am only entitled to a small amount of pension and so I cannot afford to have a computer and run it, I have got other concerns that I spend my money on". (Female, 67 years).

A lack of knowledge or skills, and confidence in using ICT, particularly computers and the internet, was also mentioned:

"I really don't understand computers, they are a complete mystery to me and I have got no reason to use one, and I'm not very brainy when it comes to it". (Female, 77 years).

Many of the findings discussed so far have been reported in previous research, however, little is known about how older people themselves feel about being mobile through virtual methods which the next section explores.

Perspectives on virtual mobility

All of the participants reflected on whether they currently substitute or supplement physical with virtual journeys. The most common ways that the participants were virtually mobile were through emails, online shopping and video telephone calls. None of the participants stated that they used instant messaging or social networking. The participants had differing opinions about virtual mobility. For instance, half thought that online grocery shopping was a good idea, although they did not use it themselves; whilst a third believed it only to be of benefit to people who were immobile. Participants felt that during temporary spells of immobility they would be more likely to ask for help from family and friends rather than use an online service; however, they would be more likely to use internet services, such as online grocery shopping and email, if they became permanently immobile:

"I just don't do it [shopping for groceries online]... especially when I can just go down the road myself. And anyway you can't see what they get for you, they will give you rubbish.... the answer is that you would just go and do your own thing while you can. Now if I was in a state where I couldn't get out of the house that's a different matter, I might be forced into it, I wouldn't like it but I might be forced into it". (Male, 78 years)
"If I am mobile then I have no need to use online [shopping services] in the first place because I think the participation of going shopping is a physical thing which I wouldn't want to lose, but if I became totally immobile then yes I would do things online". (Female, 67 years).

Most of the participants stated that they preferred face-to-face communication over virtual communication:

"The best way to communicate is the way we are doing now face-to-face, the next best way is to talk to somebody on the phone. I really don't enjoy texting". (Male, 70 years)

"I have tried [using ICT to communicate with my friends and family] but it's not got the same magic in it, there's something about the computer as a system it's an impersonal thing, I don't seem to be able to express my feelings. When you write a letter you can express your feelings but with the computer you cannot do it". (Male, 65 years).

Although they acknowledged the usefulness of several forms of ICT including mobile telephones:

"They [mobile telephones] are handy if you are out and about and you want to phone someone or something happens and you can notify them but apart from that I can't be bothered with it. It's not that I'm old fashioned it's just I don't like that type of technologies you know what I mean,

I have got a landline phone, and I much prefer that". (Female, 75 years).

Some participants felt that a drawback of encouraging older people to substitute physical with virtual journeys was that it may lead to physical journeys not being undertaken at all:

"Well this sort of thing [virtual mobility] I should think could make them lazy, and not to make the effort because it's easier and less stressful than to make the effort and go out. I think that is why lots of people like to go out because it is what they have done all of their life and they know if they stick indoors you are going to get more and more into that habit and you are going to get more into that rut. When you have actually become immobile then it [virtual mobility] will come into its own for older people, but I think until such time as that happens if you can make the effort then you should most definitely get out". (Female, 65 years).

Theoretically the concept of virtual mobility specifies "supplementing or substituting physical with virtual journeys"¹. In this way, virtual mobility is not concerned with discouraging older people from undertaking physical journeys, instead it demonstrates that there are a range of alternatives which can support older people to remain independent, for as long as possible into later life. The heterogeneity of later life means that there is no 'one size fits all' answer as to what extent virtual mobility can help any individual; this is ultimately dependent on their personal circumstances. Participants felt that future generations who have grown up using ICT would be more confident in using it and so they would benefit more from virtual methods of mobility.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that the participants were choosing to use ICT or not. The reasons that participants gave for not using ICT were: (i) that they no longer used ICT because they had lost interest and did not need to use it for any reason; (ii) that they had never had the opportunity but would like to in the future; (iii) that it was too expensive; (iv) that poor health (for example bad eyesight) had stopped them; and (v) that they did not use a computer and the internet because they had no interest in doing so. On the other hand motivations for using ICT included: (i) keeping in touch with family and friends, particularly those living at a distance; (ii) a fascination for technology; (iii) a source for information; and (iv) receiving such technology as a gift and not wanting to offend the person who gave it by not using it.

These accounts reflect previous research that reports on older people's use of ICT^{32,33}. In par-

ticular, the participant's dialogue around their use, or non-use, of ICT corresponded with Selwyn's³² discussion over the 'relevance' of ICT in individual lives. The findings reflected this agency, in that the participants who used ICT discussed the 'purposes' of that use. In all cases the participants suggested that their motivations for using ICT were directly linked to a personal need, for example the need to maintain contact with family abroad. Selwyn³² also commented on the structural circumstances that prevent people from using ICT, such as "social and economic forces" that an individual is unable to change. An example was that for many of the 'younger old' participants it was their use of technology during their working lives that had sparked an interest which they had pursued during their retirement. Participants cited very few examples of 'surfing the internet' for enjoyment and entertainment. Instead they stated that they used the internet to find out information on a specific topic or question, or to complete a task such as send an email or book a holiday. This usage may not be typical of all older people that use ICT, however, it is important to note that this type of usage is different from younger generations or 'net generations'³⁴. These younger generations have been immersed in modern technology all their lives, and use the internet more widely for entertainment through, for example, social networking sites, chat rooms, and online gaming sites, as well as the internet as a source of information³⁴.

Substituting physical with virtual

Some of the ways that older people substitute physical with virtual journeys and how they feel about it have been explored within this paper. In general, participants made use of email, online shopping and video telephone calling services, although none of this sample made use of instant messaging services or social networking sites. Nevertheless, this is not necessarily the case for older people in general, who have been cited as making increasing use of this type of technology³⁵. There were mixed attitudes towards the idea of substituting or supplementing physical with virtual journeys. It was clear that individual attitudes were often linked to their previous experiences with ICT, and those who have had the opportunity to use ICT were more likely to express positive feelings towards virtual mobility. For example, the participants who had used a typewriter or a computer in their current employment, or before retirement, owned their own computer and have internet access in their own homes. Whilst those who had not used ICT before retiring stated that they had no desire to use ICT in later life, and often stated that they owned a mobile telephone, although rarely used it, as it was often left at home in case of an emergency. Current patterns of access and use of ICT have

contributed to the debate over whether the digital divide is becoming another, 'façade of social exclusion'^{10,36}. Research shows that those with a higher income, who are younger, more educated, and of Western ethnicity are more likely to have access to, and use, the internet¹⁰. People aged 65 years old and over are least likely to have access to, and use ICT, within their own homes³⁷.

Individual or collective exclusion

In this study having 'access to', and 'use of', ICT was not necessarily correlated with the other. This mirrors the distinction between 'individual' exclusion from services where a service is unaffordable, and 'collective' exclusion where the service is unavailable or unsuitable³⁸. For example, an older person who may have access to a computer and the internet at his or her home, but not have the necessary skills to be able to make use of it, would therefore be experiencing 'collective' exclusion from services. On the other hand, an older person who has the necessary skills to use a computer and the internet, although does not have access to one at home, would be experiencing 'individual' exclusion from services. Thus, it is important to consider the type(s) of exclusion from ICT that older people are experiencing. Further quantitative research could explore whether there is a link between these attitudes and the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of individuals, such as social class and gender.

ICT and independence

All of the participants reflected on the circumstances when ICT could support mobility and independence in later life, agreeing that virtual mobility would be most useful in certain situations, such as keeping in touch with friends and family abroad, during spells of immobility, and as a non-intrusive method of communication that would enable them to leave a non-urgent message for others to retrieve at their leisure. This they felt could enhance later life mobility by providing older people with an alternative to physical mobility. Participants suggested that virtual mobility may be more beneficial to them if they were to become less mobile or immobile, again they would use internet grocery shopping services as a strategy if they were busy or unable to get to the shops, this suggested that they were open to the possibility of supplementing physical with virtual mobility. McKie²⁴ found that the participants felt that their involvement in social networks through activities such as grocery shop-

ping was of positive benefit to their well-being. Being able to supplement and/or substitute one form of mobility for another may have a positive or negative outcome for an individual, and this is dependent on whether it was their choice, or undertake out of necessity. Therefore, the example of ordering grocery shopping over the internet maybe an empowering experience, or may lead to a feeling of dependency, subject to the individual circumstances behind the situation. Thus it is the context of the situation, as well as the personal circumstances of each individual, that impact on the appropriateness of virtual mobility as an alternative to physical mobility.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper argues that ICT has the potential to expand trajectories to mobility and enhance independence in later life, whilst maintaining the principles of individual choice and control. Virtual mobility is not a replacement for physical mobility, however, in the right context it can provide an alternative form of mobility that can be used as much or as little as an individual needs or desires. Virtual mobility has particular benefits for individuals who may be less mobile, such as older people and people with disabilities. This will be of increasing relevance in the future, when generations that have grown up using ICT enter the period of later life; yet this potential is recognised in accordance with the limitations of virtual mobility and the barriers that restrict access and use of ICT. For future generations there are then important points to consider; given the phenomena of increased use of ICT amongst younger generations, does virtual mobility have the potential to reduce the physical interaction with the real world amongst future generations? Although virtual mobility is not intended to discourage older people from undertaking physical journeys, could the convenience of virtual mobility enhance the segregation and exclusion of older people, even when they are physically able to make a journey? In summary, this paper suggests virtual mobility is a timely alternative to physical mobility that could help older people to remain independent and living in their own homes for longer. Considerations must be given to the economic and social benefits, as well as the drawbacks of supplementing or substituting physical with virtual mobility, in future policies that support older people, and improve their well-being and social inclusion. To fully achieve this there is a need to ensure digital inclusion strategies prevent the digital divide being an age divide.

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