CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP WITH ELDERLY PEOPLE: LEARNING HOW THEY INTERACT AND HOW THEY WOULD LIKE TO LEARN TO USE SMARTPHONES

Eron Rocha [1], Stephania Padovani [2]

100 Francisco Alves Guimarães St. apt 141 Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil. Zip code: 80050-210.

[1] eronmoreno@gmail.com, [2] s_padovani2@yahoo.co.uk

1   Context

Brazil is becoming a country which population is composed of mostly elderly people. According data from [1], there are currently 24.85 million people over 60 years in Brazil, representing 12.6% of the population. The group of people aged 60 or more will be greater than the group of children under 14 years back in 2030. Currently, smartphones are used to perform many different task by people of different ages, among them included people 60 years or more. It is perceived the lack of accessibility on the smartphone tools in Brazil for the elderly. This factor makes it difficult for these people to learn these devices. Considering this difficulty, the following question arose: How would the elderly like to learn to use smartphones?

This article intends to raise suggestions of the elderly public that can contribute with teaching-learning notions in the elaboration of a basic course of smartphones. The focus group method was used to obtain data concerning the audience experience with the device and what were their expectations in relation to the device's learning. The result of this work was compiled in to a list, which gathers relevant subjects related to the teaching-learning of smartphones for the elderly. There are also specific suggestions of participants that are part of this public.

2   Method

Focus group is a well-known qualitative method often used by researchers to collect market strategy data. According to [2], it is a dynamic performed by a small group of chosen people and guided by a moderator, which can provide insight into themes, patterns and trends. The purpose of the focus group in this research was to take cogni-

zance of the experiences of the selected elderly in relation to the course already done on basic computer training, to know their experiences and needs in relation to smartphones, and also their expectations regarding the learning of these devices.

The research occurred at CELEPAR (Companhia de Informática do Paraná – Computing Company of Paraná). The project coordinator invited 11 former students, but only 9 actually could join the activity. For a more direct and wide communication, participants were arranged in a circle with chairs to sit.

The meeting was divided by three different moments in order to avoid confusion regarding the treatment of the content to be discussed. Also, this strategy was useful to a smooth approach of the content. The three following themes were addressed sequentially:

1st moment – Ice-breaker
2nd moment - Experiences and impressions regarding smartphones
3rd moment - Expectations regarding smartphone learning

For each moment was elaborated what should happen, topics to be discussed and questions to be asked.

3   Results

In the focus group made with CELEPAR former students, the main objectives were: to understand the experiences and impressions regarding smartphones, and expectations of the elderly in relation of learning smartphones. With the results obtained it was possible to gather the participants' suggestions on subjects relevant to design a smartphone course for the elderly.

The following topics sumarize of the most relevant suggestions obtained in the focus group:

- Content exposure: There must have a camera to capture images of the instructor interacting on the smartphone and Project those images by using a multimedia projector.
- Room format: Students' layout in "u" format.
- Duration of the course: Four days, each class day must have 3 hours long, with interval.
- Individual service: Have at least 5 people in a classroom (instructors and monitors) to assist students individually.
- Classroom review: At the beginning of each class, there should be a brief review of the previous class.
- Use of analogies: Analogies mus be used to ease the understanding of contents.

4   Conclusions

This research aimed to identify the learning preferences of older people in relation to smartphones, with the intention that learning about these devices allow greater socialization and autonomy for these people. The use of the focus group technique served to generate discussions about the topics addressed. The moderator's encouragement of verbalization was essential so that the opinions and suggestions of participants could emerge and contribute to the study. The approach used by the research team in the dynamics was based on patience, education, and encouraging stimuli (e.g. discussing adding relatives in social networks), seemed to contribute to verbalization.

This research also contributed with suggestions on how the elderly would like to learn smartphones, enabling the development of courses based on these suggestions, and thus enable the elderly to interact with these devices. The content of the activity described in this article indicates items that need more attention from interface designers to meet the preferences of the elderly audience, especially regarding customization. It is expected that educational institutions or other institutions that have social projects can use the suggestions of the elderly participants in the development of smartphone courses for this public.

5   References

1. CENSO DEMOGRÁFICO 2010. Características da população e dos domicílios: Resultado do universo. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2011.
2. MARTIN, B.; HANINGTON, B. Universal Methods of Design: 100 Ways to Research Complex Problems, Develop Innovative Ideas, and Design Effective Solutions. Rockport Publishers: Beverly, 2012. 208 p.

6   Acknowledgments