



Kathleen Erickson Library Science Blog — Just another School of Information Community site

Zoomers

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The Information Community of Zoomers

I am exploring the information community of zoomers, also known as active seniors. Hirsch defines the term *zoomers* as “active people ages forty-five and older” (Hirsch, 2018, p. 504). Originally coined by gerontologist David Demko in 1995, the term was defined as active boomers who are positive about aging and planning. Zoomers are a subset of the large community of boomers that make up 34% of the population (U.S. Census, 2010) and will remain a large group for decades. The zoomer community fits Fisher and Bishop’s (2015, p. 24) definition of information communities: “comprise large sets of complementary stakeholders and last for long periods of time.”

Many boomers didn’t plan on being as active as they are in 2019. The Great Recession of 2008 meant many older people stayed at work (didn’t retire) or went back to work (as retirement funds and pensions shrank, homes were lost, etc.). Many are looking at another 40 years of life or more and at how to be sustainable physically and financially. They share information freely with others they recognize as being in their situation in life. Seniors have lived long enough to have dealt with many bureaucracies and a conservative medical establishment, and they trust people in their community to vet and share information.

They seek free resources from for instance university websites, the Public Library of Science open-access journals, government announcements, and their public library. Public libraries “are the biggest bargain in town,” said then-Chair Alan Kleiman of the ALA’s Library Service to an Aging Population Committee (McDonald, 2011, last paragraph). Kleiman says seniors are looking for information and connectivity. One-third of seniors live alone and seek connectedness along with pertinent information (Institute on Aging, 2013) on lifelong learning, entertainment, specialized tutorials so they can use new technology, meetups, etc. You could call this community the “enthusiasts for the second half of life.”

Hazel McCallion on Longevity at Zoomer Cover Unveiling



[**“Hurricane” Hazel McCallion on the cover of Zoomer magazine at age 98. She retired from a 30-year mayoral career at age 93.**](#)

Zoomers are a true information community because their social interaction is not what is primary. They share two of the four key angles of community approaches defined by Christen and Levinson (2003): affinity (membership based on common interests), and instrumental (membership based on shared desire to achieve specific goals). According to Fisher and Bishop, an information community is a “group of organizations and individuals who share a commonality and work together in an optimal way” (Fisher & Bishop, 2015, p. 26). Senior organizations and senior publications are members of this community as are the nursing homes and senior housing cooperatives that have regular library runs for residents, free workshops, and other programming dedicated to serving an active senior life.

Fisher and Bishop say that the pioneer researchers in information communities focus on the “needs and behaviors of groups of people who have a shared stake in mobilizing information resources” (Fisher & Bishop, 2015, p. 22), and that such communities include seekers, users, and providers, and that those roles can switch around (p. 22). They quote Durrance as saying these communities build and increase access to information resources. And information communities have these characteristics to varying degrees: collaboration among providers, forming around needs to access and use information and share it in multiple formats, exploit information-sharing with technology, transcend barriers, foster social connectedness. Some combination of these characteristics enhance the flow of information and social cohesiveness

(pp. 22-23). Zoomers share all these criteria.

While information can be seen as the great democratizer, I think attention and retention, and especially time itself, also are great levelers, and inform the power of information to make a meaningful life. Seniors are motivated to find and share information, but do they have the technological skills and the time to vet it? Even when affiliated groups do the vetting, zoomers still need time to read, think, evaluate, and share with others, and they do this as a community. One must understand the information community to understand what information is valuable to it (Veinot & Williams, 2012, p. 849). Meaningful information is sought with vigor and immediacy and group effort when the overall time horizon is shortening.

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[Michael Stephens](#)

September 20, 2019 at 4:41 pm —

I think you will find substantial LIS research related to the info behaviors and needs of seniors/zoomers. You might also investigate what Pew Research has done with studies of the aging US population. Might offer some useful stats/demographics, etc.