Review of PhD Thesis

Candidate: Kinga H. Skorupska

Reviewer: Dr. Bran Knowles

Recommendation: ACCEPT

Review:

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this interdisciplinary thesis. The dissertation offers an original contribution to the literature on informatics as well as HCI and aging (developing a framework to inform the design of crowdsourcing tools that work for older adults), about which very little has been previously explored. It has the potential to make informatics more inclusive of individuals across the age spectrum, while also increasing its user base, thus making crowdsourcing more scalable. The student did an excellent job synthesizing a diverse body of literature across disciplines and writes with care about older adults. The student, further, has an impressive profile, having been lead or co-author on a number of A/A* publications and having a high number of citations of their work. This represents work worthy of the award of PhD.

I look forward to the student's answers to the following questions:

1. The final line of the abstract suggests that the power of the proposed framework is that it may lead to design of crowdsourcing experiences that "act as a gateway to empower [older adults] to use other ICT-based solutions". It is not clear that any evidence has been collected to support the argument that these experiences lead to greater use of ICT-based solutions; and an argument could be made that developing interactions which go around the ICT that is currently causing usability problems for older adults (e.g. smart-TV based tool instead of web-based) actually de-skills them in the use of dominant ICTs. In using these tools, what skills are older adults learning that they can apply to other technological engagements?

2. The older adults included in your studies are all over 65-years-old and are generally reasonably technologically literate. You have made a clear case for why these individuals can make a meaningful contribution to the activity of crowdsourcing (drawing on gerontology research as well as your own findings to highlight their particular strengths). But what specific challenges do your participants share in engaging with existing crowdsourcing? In other words, what specific challenges unify your participants that makes them sufficiently interesting or different to other users (say 50-year-olds, or 60-year-olds, for example) to warrant particular focus on this group? Does your older adult user group need greater differentiation (sub-groups within this broad category), and is a wider range of crowdsourcing solutions needed to address the needs of "older adults"?

3. Related to the above, does your participant recruitment exclude older adults who might have more complicated access/accessibility issues, more significant skills barriers, and/or stronger motivational barriers to engaging with crowdsourcing (e.g. potential moral objections)? How does your framework speak to the diversity of older adult capabilities and attitudes toward digital technologies? And further, is it possible that some of the positive responses from the older adults drawn from the Living Lab relate to the fact that these individuals have volunteered for regular participation in research and thus might simply enjoy participating in the study (more than liking the tool they are given during the study)?

4. There is repeated reference to the potential of a curb-cut effect, but little explanation of how you see these adaptations helping those outside of your chosen user group. Can you explain which aspects of your proposed tools would be useful to a wider set of users? Further, are there any aspects that you think would not work well for other users, and how would you propose individuals developing such tools account for these different user needs?

5. Which of the issues you are addressing with you crowdsourcing tools can be improved through more inclusive ICT design in general? How does your framework relate to existing principles for inclusive design? And finally, how do you expect others to use your framework going forward?

Congratulations on this work,

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