Studying Older Adults Perceptions on AI Through AI Lectures

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Abstract

In this extended abstract, through an ethnographic approach involving facilitating AI lectures and engaging in informal discussions, we study ways in which older adults in a living community demonstrated an understanding of and ability to think through the AI landscape. We found older adults provide insightful evaluations of AI based on their rich life experiences and knowledge, as well as understanding of societal systems. We argue that engaging older adults' perspectives should be part of our AI development practices.

1 Introduction and Approach

Older adults are positioned primarily as end-users and beneficiaries of AI technologies [1]. However, it is important for older adults to have voice in the design of these technologies, especially as AI is so integrated into daily life that older adults may be increasingly interacting with AI-powered products without realizing it [2].

The first author joined in planning an AI lecture series in a retirement community with a resident lead (the second author) and a staff member. Through ethnographic methods, we collected qualitative data including observation notes, audio recordings and pictures from community meetings, AI lectures, and informal dialogues with lecture attendees and community staff. The academic researchers were involved in identifying suitable technology equipment, organizing session content, and assisting in selecting themes related to AI, such as "AI in Medicine," "AI in the Military," and "AI in the Arts". Themes were selected based on the expressed interests of community residents.

2 Findings

We present instances where older adults' way of thinking about AI show the potential to not only inform development for AI applications for older adults, but for society broadly.

Personal Experiences as a Lens for AI Applications

Older adults' personal experiences provide a valuable reference point for understanding AI's impact, especially in areas like healthcare. For instance, participants reflected on how medical interactions decades ago were centered around "talking to a doctor." With public dialogue around AI participating in roles traditionally held by doctors - such as supporting the diagnostic process and supporting online healthcare services - participants drew from past experience to set expectations for how AI should interact with humans, particularly older patients. They highlighted the nuances that doctors once captured through active listening and the intimacy of in-person consultations, noting that "patients are trying to tell you the diagnosis." Despite these concerns, they acknowledged AI's potential in healthcare, especially its strengths in diagnostics and addressing complex medical conditions.

Rethinking AI's Future Through Societal Systems

The older adults that we observed demonstrated an understanding of societal systems supports that led them to think comprehensively about AI's future development. They drew on their past experiences across various societal domains For instance, when discussing potential issues surrounding AI, participants frequently advocated for the establishment of clearer and more standardized "rules" through legal frameworks to regulate AI's ethical and behavioral conduct. Furthermore, their discussions extended to the need for improvements in AI literacy through schooling: "we need to look at the education system." They emphasized that educating the public about the future of AI is ultimately linked to understanding the "essence and objectives of AI itself."

3 Discussion and Future Work

Our findings indicate that older adults' discussions around AI mirror important conversations already taking place in research and industry that are often overlooked in these dialogues. Future work can further unearth and elicit perspectives from older people to shape future AI technologies.

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References

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